

“When was the last time you felt happy?” // Philippians 4:2–9 // Secret to the Good Life # 9¹

Commissioning

You look up here right now and see one church plant, right? There is actually a chain of multiplication going on ...

- Five years ago Peter Park was the DDC pastor; he planted in Southeast Asia, and Rich took his place.
- Now, Rich is planting and DDC is still there under Rick's leadership.
- And also, get this. Last week, Peter planted their first church.

What began as one thing (the Downtown Durham campus) is now four things: DDC, two churches in SE Asia, Oasis in Charlotte). All total, this fall over 1,000 people will be worshiping because of DDC's multiplication.

So, Summit Church, we feel the tension, the hard. But look at me: We are just beginning to see the beautiful.

Rich ... Oasis team ... We see it in you. We know you. We love you. We bless you. We send you. And we expect to see you continue to multiply and send.

Pray

Announcement

Good to see everyone ... would love for you to pray for me at Student Camp this week. I'll be joining nearly 1,000 students and leaders over two weeks of high school Student Camp. I don't even need to tell you what to pray for. You instinctively know.

Seriously, pray for the speakers ... Col 2:6–7 ... pray for the leaders/counselors in the cabins who are doing the heavy lifting.

Introduction

Now, if you have your Bibles, open them to Philippians chapter 4 and let's all stand for the reading of God's Word:

¹ Sources consulted: Tim Mackie, [“The Book of Philippians Summary”](#), November 15, 2016; *Philippians for You*, Stephen J. Lawson; Kyle Idleman, [“MOVE with Joy”](#), February 22, 2026, Southeast Christian Church; Tim Keller, [“Peace in Church and Heart”](#), August 20, 1995, Redeemer Presbyterian; Tony Merida, [“Shepherding a Church's Heart”](#), May 6, 2014, Imago Dei Church; Craig Groeschel, [“When You've Had Enough”](#), August 5, 2019, Life Church; Alistair Begg, [“Love, Joy, Peace”](#), July 12, 1998, Truth for Life website. And others as noted throughout.

2 I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. 3 Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.

4 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. 5 Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; 6 do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

8 Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. 9 What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

11 ...I have learned, in whatever situation I am, to be content. 12 I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. 13 I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

Leader: *This is the Word of God for the people of God.*

Congregation: *Thanks be to God.*

“When was the last time you felt happy?”

That was the name of an article I read this week, written by a woman recovering from depression. She said this was the question her therapist posed to her toward the end of her counseling sessions, after she assumed she’d fully recovered.

“I was thrown by the question,” she said. “I sat on her couch and mentally trawled through 30 years of memories to try to find the point where I last felt that serene, stable, elusive positivity that we call ‘happiness’. ‘Oh no,’ I thought. ‘Don’t make me say it,’ but finally I had to ... ‘*I can’t remember*’

the last time I felt happy.’ “And suddenly,” she said, “my claim that I was on the road to recovery sounded utterly foolish. I cried, and she passed me a little box of tissues and then wrote something down.”²

The writer said this realization hit her harder than her original diagnosis of depression had. You see, her life at this point was going *fine*. She was functioning: paying the bills. Going to work. Showing up for friends. Laughing at the right moments. From the outside, life looked normal. But she still couldn’t remember the last time she felt *happy*.

I’ve had similar conversations with so many people over the years. If I stopped the message right now and asked YOU, “*When was the last time you were genuinely happy?*”—how quickly would an answer come to your mind? And maybe the answer would come easily—if so, praise God. But every one of us knows the difficulty of trying to find and hold onto happiness.

Life seems to be a cycle of identifying some new thing we think will give us that serene state of euphoria—some achievement, a new relationship, a new possession—and when we get it, it gives us a little bump for a little while, but then soon enough we return to our baseline level of unhappiness.

Psychologists even have a term for this: They call it the **hedonic treadmill**: You’re treading along this baseline level of unhappiness—this is normal life—and then you finally get that thing you’ve been craving for so long: the long-awaited promotion, the marriage, kids, kids out of the house, your son gets married—and there’s a temporary euphoria, and the treadmill speeds up and you’re a little happier, but pretty soon you return to that same baseline level of happiness or unhappiness you started with.

In fact, there’s an amazing study that psychologists did a few years ago comparing lottery winners with people who had experienced catastrophic injuries. Of course, the lottery winners had a surge of happiness, and those with injuries a surge of sadness. But get this: After time passed, BOTH groups drifted back surprisingly close to the baseline level they started at.

Are. You. Happy? Studies suggest this is a problem only getting worse in our society despite all the books and podcasts devoted to THE GOOD LIFE. In the last 10 years, the United States has fallen from **11th to 24th** on the World Happiness Report, and this has mostly been driven by Gen Z. The rate of young adults today who classify themselves as perennially unhappy has doubled since 2017.

I think all this makes Paul’s statement in Philippians 4 so jolting to us: **Vs 11**: *I have learned, in whatever situation I am, to be content.* (Or, in this context, you could read that “how to be happy.” In this context, Paul would use happy and content interchangeably.)

- **(Vs 12)**: When I’m brought low, he says (brought low through bad health, strained relationships, you didn’t get the promotion; or, for Paul—you end up in a prison cell), I can be happy.
- And when I abound (that is, when I’m killing it at my job, everyone’s singing my praises, the money is pouring in and all I can do is win, win, win, no matter what ...) I can be content there too.

²<https://www.moodscope.com/blog/when-was-the-last-time-you-felt-happy/>

- Studies show WE don't even know how to hold onto happiness in this abounding stage! And Paul says he can be happy even when he's in the "low" stage. His hedonic treadmill "runs" at happiness.

How? Notice back in vs 4 that this claim he makes about himself—that he can be happy and joyful in all circumstances—he turns into a command for you and me: **vs 4 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.**

This same kind of happiness Paul had, we can have too. So let me ask an obvious question: ***Was Paul just one of those annoying, unrealistically optimistic people***—always finding the bright side; always putting a positive spin on everything? [*\(Pic of Paul in prison with signs\)*](#): Was this what Paul's prison cell would have looked like?

Listen, some of you won't like this—but I say this as a committed **optimist**—my wife would say a sometimes annoying optimist: Psychologists have studied optimists for decades and concluded that optimistic people are, in general, less accurate in their perception of reality; they overestimate their chances of success, they underestimate risks, and they remember the past as better than it was. (Listen: That's the world I live in, and I'm happy to be there. You keep your dark cloud out of it.)

But is that all Paul was? Just a cheery, chipper optimist?

I don't think so. I mean, Paul seems to be really clear-eyed about his pain. Paul knew intimately tears of bereavement and abandonment and disappointment, and nothing in here talks about expectations of a sunny tomorrow.

In fact, it's the over-the-topness of Paul's words here that stand out:

- Vs 4: "Rejoice in the Lord ***always***" (not sometimes).
- Vs 5: "Let your reasonableness (or gentleness, your easygoing nature—we'll talk about that word more in a minute) ***be known to everyone***" (everybody at all times).
- Vs 6: "Do not be anxious about ***anything***" (nothing in your life should cause you anxiety).

I'll be honest, just reading that makes me uncomfortable, because I know the kind of pain some of you are carrying right now, and the thought of telling you this as you sit in a hospital room, or by a graveside, or on the other side of a terrible divorce—"It's OK, don't worry, be happy! Hakuna Matata!"

Either Paul is hopelessly, delusionally out of touch with reality, or he's figured out something we haven't. And that's what I want to show you.

Notice, back in **vs 11**, Paul says it's something he's *learned*: "I've **learned** to be happy in whatever state I am." Happiness was not a feature of his personality. It's something he's learned, and the good news is that it's something you can learn too.

And so this passage, maybe more than any other in Philippians, gives us the secret to the good life. My friend Kyle Idleman, another pastor up in Kentucky, says Paul in this passage identifies a handful of joy-thieves and shows us how to get rid of them. I'm gonna use a couple of Kyle's and add a couple of my own to the list. The first and biggest joy thief in your life, Paul says, is:

1. Amnesia (vs 5)

5 "Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand."

First, let's press into exactly what Paul is saying here, because the wording can be confusing. You see, the word we translate as "reasonableness" is a hard word to translate from Greek. The Greek word is (ep-ee-eye-kace/"epieikes") and it just doesn't have a good English equivalent, so it gets translated a bunch of different ways. The ESV says "reasonableness," the NIV says "gentleness," the CSB says "graciousness"; some translations say "moderation" or a "mild spirit"; my favorite is "a radical evenness of temper." Scholars say the word almost carries the connotation of being laid-back.

Paul is basically telling people to chill out and not be so uptight.³

Of course, it's always helpful to know the context into which Paul is speaking and, in this case, Paul opens the chapter addressing two women in the church who weren't getting along, Euodia and Syntyche—or as I like to call them, "Odious and Stinky" because, quite frankly, their attitudes stunk.

(And by the way, if I could just point out something really quickly: Paul takes time to address these women because he knows how vitally important their ministry is to the health of the church. They are personal friends and fellow laborers with him, and their health in this church is vitally important to him. Paul knows that for the church in Philippi to thrive, they need these female leaders to thrive.)

And let me just say, I feel the exact same about female leaders in our church. There are so many women at our church who co-labor with me in the gospel, and their leadership here is invaluable. Some of them you know, but many you don't: Dr. Christy Thornton, who works on our discipleship team. Future Dr. Janetta Oni, who runs our creative team. Worship leaders like Molly Vidovich and Mia Lazar and Coeisha Walton. Student directors like Hannah Spragins and Abby Johnson. In fact, I even hesitate to mention some of their names because I know that for every one I mention, I'm leaving out 10. But I thank God for them, and so should you, and I want them to thrive.)

³ Paul is saying, "Don't be so uptight about everything working out in your favor," or "Don't put so much weight on always winning." John Stott summarizes this word more practically as "the humble patience that does not insist on its own rights." Gordon Fee says it is "the disposition that puts the interests of others ahead of one's own legitimate claims."

But back to Odious and Stinky (which are just my temporary names for them until they get stuff worked out). Paul never tells us what their beef was, because his counsel to them goes deeper than their beef. He tells them whatever their beef is, not to take themselves or winning this little battle or being vindicated so seriously—instead, they should be gentle, mild, gracious, radically even-tempered.

Why? Because **the Lord is at hand**. His return is soon. And when he comes, well, earthly vindication in this little squabble is going to seem rather trivial, right? Now, hear me: Paul is not saying they shouldn't explain their case, or that justice doesn't matter—just that if things don't go their way, they shouldn't act like it is the end of the world. Earthly vindication is rather trivial in light of eternity. **The Lord is at hand.**

I lost my phone this past weekend. I was standing on the back of a ski boat, trying to throw the rope to somebody in the water, and I had my phone in this hand and the ski rope in my right hand (because I was also trying to control the music, of course), and in the process of throwing the ski rope I clipped my phone, and watched it, as if in slow-motion, go spinning through the air ... NOOOOO ... and it plopped right in the water. And of course, it's got my license and all my credit cards attached to it, and I see it slowly sinking down, disappearing into the water like Leonardo DiCaprio after Rose wouldn't share her door with him. So I said to the guy in the water I was throwing the ski rope to, "My phone, my phone!" because he was right there by where the phone had gone in! But he couldn't understand what I was saying, and by the time I realized he couldn't understand me, I'd wasted those precious few seconds that the phone was still visible, and so at this point, the phone was GONE! So I immediately looked over at the depth finder on the boat, because there are some places at Lake Gaston where it's only 10–15 feet deep, and I thought, "Maybe I can dive down and retrieve it," but the depth finder said "61 feet," and I knew that was a little beyond my range.

Now, that's annoying, right? Everybody hates losing their phones. Phones are expensive to replace—but let's just say that just before going out skiing, I'd found out that a rich uncle I never even knew had left me \$10 billion of inheritance. But when I drop my phone, I start losing my mind about how this is going to cost me several hundred dollars, and I start yelling at the guy in the water, saying, "Why couldn't you just grab my phone, you idiot?" and you'd probably say, "Bro, chill out. Don't take this so seriously. A few hundred dollars? You've got \$10 billion waiting on you back at the dock. Act like it. Ep-ee-eye-case."

Paul is saying something similar here. It's not that your pain or inconvenience are not real. It's just that ... **the Lord is at hand**.

- So you got slighted? Big deal. The ultimate Judge is at the door. His approval is the one that really matters.
- So you're missing out on some of life's pleasures. Big deal, the Lord of eternity is nearby, coming soon, and in his presence is the fullness of joy and at his right hand are pleasures forevermore!

So, **vs. 5** "Let your **ep-ie-i-keis** (i.e., your laid-back, reasonable, gentle, moderate disposition) be known to everyone." Why? Because you know the Lord is right there, and he's the real reward.

It means that you don't take anything on earth, positive or negative, that seriously, because you know it's not ultimate.

- **Tim Keller** says, “This verse means, positively, when you get a raise at work you say, ‘Ok heart, don’t get too excited about this—don’t be too excited about money, because money is just temporary and you ought to be able to leave it. And when the money is not there, you ought to be able to do without it.’”⁴
- As **John Newton**, the writer of “Amazing Grace” says, “If you understand the grace of God, it makes the worst times bearable, and the best times leavable.”

In fact, before I move on, let me show you one other place Paul applies this exact same concept, because Paul applies it to an area a lot of people blame for their unhappiness: their singleness or their unhappy marriage:

Listen to this: 1 Corinthians 7:29–31, “This is what I mean, brothers: the appointed time has grown very short (in other words, the Lord is at hand, just what Paul is saying in Phil 4. SO ...). From now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none, [30] and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no goods, [31] and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away.”

“Let those who have wives live as though they had none.” This sounds like terrible marriage advice, or the theme verse of a bunch of deadbeat men headed off to Vegas for the weekend.

What Paul means, however, is that whatever earthly marital situation you are in—married, unmarried, unhappily married; mourning, not mourning; happy circumstances, unhappy circumstances—it’s all light and momentary! The time is short, the Lord is at hand. Your pain? It’s temporary. You’re unhappily single? It’s just temporary. You’re stuck in an unfulfilling marriage? Same thing.

There are a lot of Christians who are in marital situations, maybe through no fault of their own, that are not ideal. They are widowed, divorced, or they just never found the right person. Or, what happens if you get married to someone who loves God and they just change? I’ve seen that happen to lots of people. You marry them and they are one person, but then they change. Maybe they quit following Jesus, or they lose all interest in church, and now you’re stuck in a terribly unfulfilling marriage. I’m not trying to trivialize it, but Paul says, “It’s OK: Just endure it, and realize that none of these states carry on into eternity. They’re all temporary. If you’re physically healthy, it’s temporary. If you’re chronically sick, that’s temporary too. If you’re single and feel like the day to find “the one” has passed you by, don’t despair! Everything in this life is light and momentary compared to eternity.” “Let your radical evenness of temper be known to all” because the Lord is at hand.

This is one of the reasons I really chafe at the idea of bucket lists. That’s not just a lighthearted jab for me. I mean, there’s nothing wrong with making a list of things you want to do as you get older, but the whole concept behind a true bucket list is that there’s a set of joys you can only experience now, on earth, and you better experience them before you kick the bucket, because otherwise you’ll never have the chance to experience them again. And that can be kind of fun when we’re talking about going skydiving in Hawaii, but when there are people who despair about never getting married, or never knowing the joy of having children, or never being healthy or walking again—they need to think the opposite

⁴ Tim Keller, mp3 sermon on Philippians 4.

of how we think in a bucket list. Everything down here is child's play to what God has for us next. And I don't want my silly talk about a bucket list to make the people who are truly in pain despair that life has passed them by. Whatever you miss out on or experience is not that important, because whatever you miss out on here is amply made up for, and multiplied, in the life to come.

The secret to happiness, Paul says, is realizing that nothing down here is ultimate and remembering that the Lord is at hand.

"Amnesia" about the shortness of life and the coming of Jesus is our first joy thief. The second is closely related; in fact, it's really just an application of the first, so it will be quick:

2. Acrimony (vv 2–3)

Remember that Paul was addressing a specific situation involving two quarrelling women, and Paul doesn't attempt to resolve their beef. He aims deeper than the problem. He says, "The Lord is at hand," and watch this, **vs 3**: "help these women ... whose names are in the book of life." He reminds them, "Ladies ... your names are in the book of life. Jesus is for you. He's bringing you a kingdom beyond your wildest imaginations. If you end up on the short side of justice, on the wrong end of a gossip circle, he'll take care of that." In light of that, STINKY, the damage ODIIOUS did to you is not THAT bad.

The treasure I have in Jesus means I don't have to take other slights, other disappointments, other reputational dings, so heavily. One of the things God has really been working on in my life is my personal need to be vindicated. I like to be in the right, y'all; there, I said it, and I like other people to know that I'm in the right. (I've told you, I've lost arguments before but then I immediately rerun that argument in my head, and I win it. I've lost lots of arguments; I've never lost a rerun, not one time.) I think this need comes out of an insecurity about my reputation; I want people to think of me as smart and competent and right. And so I'm sensitive about narratives told about me in which I'm not presented in those ways.

And I bring that need to be vindicated into my marriage sometimes. If my wife and I have an issue, it's not enough even for her to go along with my opinion on something; I need her to acknowledge that I'm right. That my actions were reasonable. You say, "I feel sorry for Veronica." Yeah, I'm sure you're super easy to be married to too.

I've had to ask myself, "What is this need of mine to always have earthly validation?" Isn't it, at its root, an unbelief in a present God who is close at hand and in whom I have ultimate treasure? Doesn't my need to be vindicated by you show that I either don't believe in God's ultimate vindication of me, or that I don't put that much weight on it?

So what if these people have a lower opinion of me? The Lord is at hand. So what if this situation didn't work out for me—the wrong story got told; the wrong person got the credit; the wrong person got rewarded? That's OK; the Lord is at hand. Sometimes, God has to add an Odious to your Stinky to teach you this—so you'll say, "HEY, MY NAME IS WRITTEN IN THE LAMB'S BOOK OF LIFE. HE'S FOR ME! IN HIM I HAVE THE ABSOLUTE

APPROVAL OF THE ONLY ONE WHOSE OPINION REALLY MATTERS. THE JUDGE OF ALL THE EARTH IS ON MY SIDE. WHAT MORE DO I REALLY NEED HERE?”

The cure for bitterness is embracing that an all-wise, all-loving Judge is close at hand; one who has written YOUR name in his book—the only list that actually matters, his list—and is working all things for your good.

So, Joy Thief #1: Amnesia. Joy thief #2: Acrimony. Joy thief #3:

3. Anxiety (vs 6–7)

Anxiety steals joy because it fills you with fear about a future you can’t control. You know there is no way to know what might happen next, and there’s so much you can’t control.

I have a friend who describes his battle with anxiety as a low-grade hum that follows him wherever he goes. No matter what good is happening, there’s always a low-grade fear humming in the back of his head that the other shoe is about to drop. The phone will ring and bring bad news. Something’s gonna go wrong with one of the kids. There’s bad news coming from work. Anybody ever feel that way?

Paul says: **6 do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.**

This verse encourages me and shames me all at the same time. Don’t be anxious about ... (money things; material things?) Don’t be anxious about ...) ANYTHING. There is literally nothing in our lives that should cause us anxiety.

By the way, get your mind around the fact that it is PAUL who is saying this—Paul, who doesn’t know if he’s going to live or die tomorrow. Every night when he goes to sleep, he doesn’t know if he’s going to get woken up in the middle of the night by a hooded executioner coming to take him to be beheaded. Paul has also told us he’s concerned about false teachers who are infiltrating the churches he’s planted, corrupting their doctrine and turning them against him, and he’s in prison hundreds of miles away and can’t do anything about it. This is the one telling us: *Don’t be anxious about anything.*

Do you know what my favorite aspect of this verse is? The fact that it’s a command. I’m literally commanded not to be anxious. It’s not a reward; it’s not some achievement; it’s a command. To be anxious about anything is to be disobedient. And here’s why that’s my favorite aspect of this

verse: The command only makes sense if it comes coupled with a promise that God will handle whatever it is making me anxious, right? Otherwise, the command would be cruel.

- o I mean, if we're **headed to lunch together and you say**, "Oh no, I don't have my wallet on me." And I'm like, "Where is it?" And you say, "I lost it in the lake!" And I say, "Oh, happens to the best of us! But don't worry about it," the only way that's not a cruel joke is if I plan to pay for lunch. Right? I mean, if the **bill comes** and I pay for my half and then look at you and say, "Well, this is awkward FOR YOU! Guess you'll have to work something out with the waiter: stay and do dishes or something." And you say, "But you told me not to worry!" And I say, "Oh ... well, **I didn't mean I was going to pay for things**. I just wanted you to have a sense of peace and calm as we dined together," that would be a cruel joke.

The only way it makes sense for God to tell us "Don't be anxious about anything" is if he promises to handle anything making us anxious.

- o So Paul says: **Instead of being anxious, "in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God."**
- o And the key words in that sentence are **"with thanksgiving."**
 - o **Thanking God is a way of expressing trust that God will handle it.** You see, it's impossible to thank God for something if you're not confident he's going to handle it. It's possible to pray and worry; it's not possible to thank and worry.
 - o You see, I point this out because I **used to have a problem while praying—I'd pray for stuff** out of a sense of duty: Good Christians pray about their problems—but I wouldn't really put trust in God as I was praying. My prayer time was basically "anxiety hour with Jesus," or as a friend of mine calls it, *"worrying in the direction of the ceiling."* I would tell Jesus about my problems but not trust him with them.

The **kind of prayer Paul** is talking about here does more than inform God about our problems; it lays our problems at Jesus' feet and leaves them there. You thank him for the answer you are confident he'll give.

Try this: When you pray, after telling Jesus what you're worried about, say, **"I TRUST you with this. THANK you for how you've promised to respond!"** (Pull out your phone and take a pic of this, and use it this week). Listen: ***It's not praying about your problems that removes anxiety; it's trusting God with your problems that does.***

- **I read this secular strategy for coping for anxiety called** "The 15-minute strategy." Basically, this strategy says, set aside a special 15-minute block in the day during which you'll allow yourself to worry about stuff. And when you feel anxiety coming on at other times, say to yourself, "I'm not going to worry about it now, but I'm going to spend some focused time worrying about this later." And that way, anxiety doesn't wreck your day, but you're also not blowing off your problems either.
- It's a pretty good strategy, but here's the Christian version of that: Call that 15-minute period your "prayer time." For 15 minutes, worry out loud with Jesus about your problems, but end it by saying, "And Jesus, I trust you with these things *because you commanded me to cast these burdens on you and not to worry about them*. And now I thank you for how you'll handle them."

He wouldn't give you the command if it wasn't coupled with an unbreakable promise that he'll handle whatever you're anxious about.

I promise you, if you do this, it will make a huge difference in your life. Look at vs 7. Paul says, if you pray this way, **7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.**

- That word **"guard"** is a military word, and it's an interesting word for Paul to use right there because there was literally, when Paul wrote this, a Roman guard standing over him, ready to punish him if he stepped out of line.
- Paul says, "Bigger than that Roman guard, however, is another Guard: an all-powerful Savior committed to my good who says that no weapon formed against me will prosper, and anything my enemy intends for evil, he will override for good. So that big, scary Roman guard can't do anything because of the even bigger, more powerful heavenly Guard standing over him, who's always on my side."

Paul was like, "Look, I don't know if tomorrow I'll get out of prison. I hope so; I'm praying for that. What I do know is that tonight my heavenly Guard stands over me; he never falls asleep, and he'll be there tomorrow and every day after that too."

BTW, ~~Jesus gives his own version of this promise in Matthew 6. 4x in that chapter he commands us not to worry because he knows worry and anxiety are such a huge problem for us and in his final charge to us not to worry, he says this:~~ **Therefore don't worry about tomorrow, because...** (tomorrow everything's gonna be awesome; because I promise no bad things will happen and everything will come up sunshine and roses). No, **Therefore don't worry about tomorrow, because... each day will have trouble of its own.** I think, "Well, **that's exactly what I was worried about with tomorrow! That it would have trouble!**" And Jesus says, "Yeah, it might. **But guess what else will be present tomorrow? ME.** And I'll never leave you or forsake you; I'll always give you the strength to endure and I'm always working for your good. And I will not let one single thing touch you that is not part of my incredibly beautiful, no-wrath plan to bring blessing into and through your life."

That brings us to Paul's last joy-thief: Amnesia; Acrimony; Anxiety

4. Your Algorithm (vs 8)

8 Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

Paul gives some advice that is surprisingly prescient, ahead of his time: The secret to inner joy, he says, is how you think. And how you think is determined by patterns you lay down over a lifetime. Practice right thinking, and in a time of anxiety and stress, you'll think the right way.

Medical scientists now know that when we repeatedly think a certain way, our brain literally hardwires itself to think that way. The nerve fibers responsible for a particular thought pattern get wrapped in a fatty insulating substance called **myelin**, and myelin allows electrical signals to travel faster and more efficiently through synapses, making those patterns of thinking increasingly automatic.

- It's like a stream of water running across a field. Pour water out on a flat piece of land, and it will run in all directions. Do it long enough, however, and it will establish little ruts, and then after that, all future water follows those ruts, deepening them and strengthening them.
- The same thing happens with your thoughts, your heart, and your mind. A repeated pattern of thinking creates a mental rut wrapped in a very literal myelin that future thoughts naturally follow.

And Paul wrote this in a day before social media. Paul had no idea that one day there would be a trillion-dollar industry literally devoted to creating negative myelin ruts.

- People who monetize our social media platforms put negative things in front of us because they know we're more likely to click on things that are upsetting rather than uplifting. Every time we click "like," it creates a digital pathway, which in turn reinforces a neural pathway in us. It puts another small layer of myelin there.
- **I need you to let this set heavily upon you:** You and I are being disciplined several hours a day by algorithms that are the complete opposite of Philippians 4:8.
 - Researchers have been studying **anxiety levels in America** for decades, and it just skyrocketed in 2012 when social media and smart phones became common.
 - It's like Pastor Kyle says: We scroll through 45 minutes of bad news, political arguments, and clips of strangers screaming at each other in the Costco parking lot. Then we close the app and later think, "Why do I feel so anxious?" It is like eating gas station sushi every day and then wondering why our stomach feels weird.

You want to change your happiness quotient (i.e., your default speed on the hedonic treadmill)? *CHANGE YOUR ALGORITHM.*

Make your first thoughts every morning Jesus' thoughts. Read his Word and fill your mind with his promises. (Use our Daily Revival app.) Listen to Christian music throughout the day. Put verses up around your room and your workplace. Memorize verses so they are always dancing about in your head. *CHANGE YOUR ALGORITHM*, and you'll change your baseline happiness quotient.

CONCLUSION / VAMP

In this passage Paul is not encouraging some glib, shallow, optimistic, power-of-positive-thinking type of happiness life hack. The joy Paul espouses here is a defiant declaration in the face of pain. The kind of **JOY** Paul commands here **doesn't pretend your pain isn't real. It declares your pain isn't final.**

I've quoted Pastor Kyle a couple of times, so let me close with a story he tells: "Recently," he says, "I sat with a woman whose 54-year-old husband had been diagnosed with early onset dementia. They'd been planning their empty nest years to be full of travel, grandchildren, and growing old

together, until one doctor's appointment upended everything. She was grieving, scared, and angry, but underneath the grief was a defiant spirit of joy. Later she texted me, 'I've decided something. I'm going to enjoy every day I have with him. Every single day. I'm not going to spend the time I have left dreading what's coming. I'm going to be present. I'm going to laugh with him while he can still laugh. I'm going to dance with him in the kitchen. I'm going to thank God for every good moment. Even more so because I know the moments are numbered.'

She decided that because she knows that because of Jesus, dementia may be able to steal her husband's memory, but it can't steal her joy.

Joy is not found in your circumstances. Joy isn't an "it" that you find, it's a "Who" who found you. And unlike everything else in life, HE will never walk away from you.

Happiness comes and goes with your circumstances, but Jesus won't. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. He doesn't leave when life falls apart. He doesn't pack his bags when the diagnosis comes back negative. He doesn't disappear when the marriage is strained or the future is uncertain.

Paul wrote these defiant words from a prison cell. Some of you will hear this in a hospital waiting room. Or a lawyer's office. Or in an empty bedroom after a child has moved away, or in a cubicle where you feel overlooked and forgotten.

If that's where you are today, I want to invite you to practice DEFIANT JOY. Joy not because your circumstances are good, but because your Savior is.

Look your circumstances in the eye and say, "You don't get the last word."

Say,

- My circumstances do not determine God's character.
- My diagnosis does not define my future.
- My marriage may be unraveling, but God's faithfulness is not.
- My anxiety is loud, but my Lord's promises are louder.
- My grief is deep, but it is not forever!

My world may feel like it's shaking, but my Savior is solid; there may be a Roman soldier inches away from me breathing out threats, but there's a heavenly Guard behind him promising, "I will never leave you or forsake you; nothing can separate you from my love, and whatever your enemy intends for evil, I will use for good."

Joy isn't pretending everything is okay. Joy is knowing that even when everything isn't okay ... **Jesus still is.** Joy isn't an "it"; it's a "who." I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

Stand up! Summit Church, the altars are open; some of you need to come down here and find Jesus as your hope.

And maybe you've never begun a relationship with Jesus. You can do that today. Take the hand of one of our prayer team members at the side, and tell them you want to give your life to Jesus.

As our worship teams come, you can pray at your seat, of course, but some of you need to come and find relief from your anxiety in Jesus.

Response Song - "My Only Hope"

Chorus: My only hope in life or death is Jesus' blood and righteousness. I lift my eyes, I put my trust in you alone.