

Philippians 4:4-9

4 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! 5 Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. 6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

8 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. 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.

Give it to God

If you'll remember when we started this sermon series working our way through the letter to the Philippians, we learned that Paul wrote this particular letter to the people of Philippi *while he was in prison*. It's amazing that a person could be shackled, yet still ministering to people through letters like this one we've been studying the 2 last months. Paul was able to hold on to faith and hope while not knowing what his future might hold, and not only that...he was able to write and encourage those to keep faith and hope alive who *were not in prison*. I mean, wow. It takes strong character to encourage people who are in a better off place than you are, right? And yet he writes things like, "Rejoice in the Lord *always...*" and "*Do not be anxious about anything.*"

And today, these verses are some of the most familiar to us from the Bible. Sentences like these are lovely to have around on plaques and decor in our homes or nice sayings for the front of greeting cards, but when we remember

where Paul was when he was writing these sentences we realize that these are not just simple niceties.

A few years ago I heard about the story of Ms. Corrie Ten Boom. Do you know who she is? I got to know Corrie through reading her autobiographical book called *The Hiding Place*, a story that has forever changed me. Corrie grew up in the Netherlands and lived through the Nazi invasion. As Christians in a desperately difficult and ugly time of our world's history, Corrie, her sister Betsie, and their father created a hiding place in their home for Jews to hide away from Nazi soldiers. The unfolding of that story is quite amazing, but unfortunately, Corrie and her family were found out and hauled off to prison and concentration camps, eventually ending up at Ravensbruck, one of the infamously most horrendous places for victims to go.

When I was reading these verses from Philippians 4 this week, I was reminded of one of the parts of Corrie and Betsie's story that really impressed upon me. When the sisters arrived at Ravensbruck and were introduced to the massive bunk room all the women packed into for sleeping, they weaved through the tiny aisles, climbed up into their bunk they shared with many other women, that was only cushioned with old, rancid straw. And as they lay down to sleep, Corrie felt something bite her. She and her sister quickly got up and out of the bunk and into some light and then saw that both of them, and really the whole massive room, was covered in fleas. And with this awful realization, Corrie's

sister Betsie responded with...prayer. Seriously. I'd like to read a section of Corrie's book *The Hiding Place* for us this morning. It's a large section, but the story is riveting.

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In the next chapter of the book, Corrie's sister Betsie actually finds out the fleas were indeed a blessing in disguise because the guards and enforcers at the concentration camp wouldn't dare go into where the women slept for fear of the flea infested room. And because of this, Corrie and Betsie were able to pray with and minister to the other women and introduce so many of the prisoners to the love of Jesus. Thanks be to God!

That just amazes me. While living in disgusting, horrific, and terrifying conditions, these sisters were able to hold on to faith and hope in Jesus, literally doing what the Apostle Paul tells us, and putting into practice the words from scripture by "rejoicing always." And actually today's scripture reading from Philippians goes on for a few more verses. Paul says this in Philippians 4:12-13, *"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."*

Paul in prison, Corrie and Betsie in concentration camps, and so many others throughout the ages who have kept faith and hope in the hardest of circumstances. What are you facing today? Maybe you're facing a family feud that feels like it will never end. Maybe you're facing anxiety and depression, not knowing how to get up in the morning to start another day. Maybe you're facing physical challenges that are keeping you from your normal, everyday activities. Maybe you're facing troubles at your job with your boss or your fellow coworkers. What are you facing?

I know that for me on a normal day, sometimes it's hard to keep holding on to faith and hope, to be content in every circumstance, to not be anxious about anything, and to actually attain that "peace that passes understanding." This sort of thing takes practice, giving situations over to God one at a time, until like Corrie's sister Betsie, immediately and instinctively facing a problem with prayer and actually rejoicing always. So how can you and I practice at giving situations over to God?

I, myself, have bouts of anxiety when I'll play out a worry of mine over and over in my head. If your thoughts have ever been like that before, you know how exhausting and pointless that feels. Years ago, when I was in one of my worry bouts, my dad helped me with an idea that he calls "The God Box." We found a box - and it can be any box, a cereal box, a tissue box, a really beautiful wooden box that you have on a shelf - but my dad and I found a box and he had me write

my worry down on a piece of paper. Then he explained to me that when I decided to put that piece of paper into the “God Box,” I was physically handing over my worries to the Lord. I no longer would need to carry those worries and every time I’d begin to feel anxious about my worry again, I could remember that I put it in the “God Box.” God would have my worry. And I’ll tell ya what, it really does help! Being able to do something physical that reflects the decision I’m making not to worry, helps my body tell my mind that God is holding the problem and I’m not alone.

So I invite you to make your own “God Box” this week. Like I said, it can be any box or really any container that you can fit small pieces of paper into. And once you’ve decided on a God Box, I invite you to write out the things that cause you anxiety and give them to our God. This isn’t some magical formula, of course, but I hope this tool helps you like it has helped me.

It’s good to have Bible verses like the ones from our scripture as decor on the walls of our home and wonderful to send cards with these words to people who need encouragement, but that’s not enough. What if we believed these words so much that we actually did what Paul is telling us to do by rejoicing *always* and *not being anxious about anything*. These verses need to be written on the walls of our heart and inside our very souls so that God might be glorified through our lives when people look at us and see the peace that passes

understanding, even in the most difficult of situations. What are you facing? Give it to God.

Let's pray –

God, we echo the prayer of Betsie Ten Boom, "Show us. Show us how."
Lord, show us how to give over our worries to you. Show us how to have that peace that passes understanding. We want to honor and glorify you with all our lives and yet as we live in an anxious world, we carry so many anxieties. Show us how to face the anxiety and show us how to allow you to carry the burden. And give us that peace that only you can give. Amen.