

Sunday Update
11th October 2020

Philippians 4:1-9

Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends! 2 I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. 3 Yes, and I ask you, my true companion, help these women since they have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life. 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.

At the beginning of the Covid lockdown, away back in March, I came across these words from Psalm 94: “When I said, ‘my foot is slipping’, your love, O Lord, supported me.” It seemed to me then that these words just summed up our situation. It felt as if our collective feet were slipping and we needed someone or something to support us. The Psalm reminded us that the love of God would be the support that we so badly needed. We still struggle, and from time to time, my feet still feel as if they are slipping because of the fears and anxieties and sadness that is produced by Covid and the restrictions it “inspires”.

By contrast, in Philippians 4, Paul is writing to encourage the Christians in Philippi to “stand firm”. He has been writing to thank his friends for a gift that they have sent him, money that they collected and then sent to him, probably in the visit of Epaphroditus. He has conveyed his thanks and reminded them of how great Jesus is and now he wants to encourage them to stand firm in their faith. There might be some evidence that their feet were slipping and now he wants to encourage them and give them the resources to stand firm in their faith. Things were not always going well in Philippi:

- there was evidence that the Christians were facing opposition from outside the church, there were “enemies of the cross” (3:18) around about them, making life hard for them;
- two of the women who had contended with Paul for the gospel have now fallen out with each other, and that has distressed Paul (4:2);
- Paul himself is in prison, in chains for the gospel and his future is uncertain and now some others are going through the same struggle and he is concerned for them (1:29,30).

How can they stand firm in the midst of all of these difficult things?

“Standing firm” is proving to be hard! There are days when life is fine and we’re content with the way things are; everything seems OK and we’re navigating our way through Covid and the strictures it is placing on us. But there are other days when it does feel as if our feet are slipping and things are getting too much for us. It might even be a small thing, insignificant in the grand scheme of things, but that is the trigger for us to bring our fears and anxieties to the surface again. What do we do then? How do we stand firm?

Paul has two resources for us. One is prayer and the other is all about the way we think and what we think about, our values and the things we love. I’m going to write about prayer here and talk about the way we think in the Zoom service on Sunday morning, which you can visit “live” or watch later on YouTube. He invites us to think about all sorts of good things, good qualities, as a way of walking in

the Lord's ways and standing firm with Jesus as Lord. The result of both of these resources is "the peace of God".

For now, prayer is the first of these two resources. *"Do not be anxious about anything but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God."* (4:6) "Don't worry; pray; God's peace will protect you": it sounds so simple and so effective, doesn't it? Anyone who has been a Christian for any length of time and has developed the habit of prayer, will tell you that prayer is rarely that simple and is often much more complex than that. And yet... I have several pieces of medication to take because of my underlying medical condition. None of that medication is to cure a disease; none of that medication makes me feel better for taking it. Yet if I stop taking it, my condition will become worse; I am taking this medication to improve the quality of my life now and in years to come and for years to come, we hope. The habit of prayer helps us to stand firm; our fee slip more when we give up on this habit.

There are 3 ways of describing prayer. The first is the word "prayer" itself. This word describes the frame of mind of the person who prays, someone who engages with God in the right spirit. Prayer is not about a form of words to say, that if we get the right form of words, like a magic spell, then everything is sorted. Prayer needs to engage the heart and the mind, an expression of the spirit that is in us, a spirit that trusts God and depends on Him for everything. Then Paul talks about "petition", a word that seems to describe the act of asking, making requests, spelling specific things out to God for His attention. Prayer is about the spirit in us, but it needs to take specific form, concrete form, in making particular requests for ourselves or for others. We pray for people who are sick; we pray for our own feelings of anxiety; we pray for the church and for our society, and so on. We teach children to pray: "God bless mummy and daddy..." but as we grow up these prayers need to become more mature in the way we ask them, a reflection of what is on our minds and in our hearts. The third prayer is "thanksgiving": we said last week, that saying "thank you" needs to be part of the tapestry of our prayers, to thank God for His endless love, or His power to sustain us, or for family, friends and church. Whatever it may be, saying "thank you" needs to be part of that tapestry of prayer, sustaining us by what we see of what God is like and what God has done.

Standing firm is important. When we stand firm in our faith, we show the grace of God – we are who we are by the grace of God. When we stand firm, we show our own resilience. When we stand firm in our faith we show to the world that Jesus is Lord and how important that is to us. God promises to help us stand firm – without His grace we can't do it – and prayer is one of the resources He gives to us. His peace surrounds us as our bodyguard, protecting us, watching over us, whether we recognise it or not. Find time to pray; make space to pray; let prayer help us stand firm in our faith in the face of everything that makes us sad, anxious and afraid.

Prayer: Father, we thank You that You know us, that You know everything that makes us anxious, or sad, or afraid. Thank You for the gift of prayer, by which we can express the fears of our hearts and minds and that You listen to us. Thank You for Your peace, like a bodyguard watching over us, surrounding us, helping us to stand firm while many things around us are hard. Lord, help us to make time and space to pray.

Day by day, dear Lord of you

Three things I pray:

To see you more clearly,

To love you more dearly,

To follow you more nearly,

Day by day.

Please take time during the week to pray for the people referred to in these topics:

- For our mental health and well-being: what does the future hold? When does it change? How many things we have lost and have been denied to us? How do we cope with all of that? What can we resurrect from the dust of Covid, in our life, in society, in church? Will we always be sad? Can we find something to be glad about, and rejoice in God who loves us endlessly?
- Pray for those our children and young people: those at school and struggling with the lingering effects of lockdown earlier this year; for students who are caught in the Covid situation and the universities in the way they handle this situation.
- People who are weak and vulnerable today, those who mourn, those who are sick, those who are isolated and lonely; those in hospital; those who are still shielding; pray for people you know by name.
- For effects of lockdown again, new measures and their impact; pray that they work to curb spread of Covid, let numbers go down again and people be safe; let our society be open again and let us be free from fear and anxiety.
- NHS staff, care home staff, those caring in the community – God keep them safe.
- For the way we and others behave with regard to Covid, to be careful and not reckless; for people to be wise in the way we behave, to observe social distancing and to take notice of people who may be weaker and more vulnerable.
- Those still working from home – what does the future look like? Is this the way they will do their work from now on? Others deeply wishing they were back in an office; some facing a long prospect of this continuing into 2021; may they be healthy in body, mind and spirit.
- People whose hearts and minds are feeling “shut-in”; some still furloughed, others having lost their job and feeling a lack of purpose in life; for whom the physical lockdown is affecting their mental health and sense of well-being and freedom. For victims of domestic violence, with nowhere to escape to.
- For the virus to go away completely; pray that science will find a vaccine.
- For church in our community and elsewhere – help us to care for people in need, to find ways of caring for people who are in need; for those churches who have re-opened their buildings to do so safely and carefully.
- Our community, caring for vulnerable people, helping those in need, for resilience and strength.
- Our political leaders, trying to make difficult decisions in the right way.
- For one another, sustaining our faith when there is nothing of the outward life of the church.

Here are some links to hymns you might know and love; go and have a listen.

Crown Him with many crowns https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YuMh_ept-Js

Behold the lamb (communion hymn) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ACHPwx7EGQA>

(this is a new hymn; it may help us as we think about communion today)

When peace like a river

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nKPvBV4xqVw&list=RDnKPvBV4xqVw&index=1>

Be Thou my vision <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YxvXGgSIRcs>

Just as I am <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CxA0TFe3-Uo>

Remember the prayer e-mail line at prayerjgpc@gmail.com

Some other resources:

- Each Sunday at 10.30am, we will have a short time together using Zoom; a link has been sent out in the e-mail with this update which should enable you to join in.
- This reflection is available on our own church website under the “sermons” tab and there is an archive of sermon material there for you to read and links to the video reflections – www.jgpc.org.uk

- If you have a smartphone, the Bible2020 app will give you a short bible reading each day (from the Scottish Bible Society)
- Scripture Union daily bible readings can be found at <https://content.scriptureunion.org.uk/wordlive>
- The Church of Scotland website has prayers and reflections from the Moderator and details of lots of on-line streamed church services - <https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/>
- Claremont Church in East Kilbride are making services available over a phone line: here are the contact details which you can share with people who are not on line: **Sunday Services @ 10:30 - same details every week** 020 3937 2973; PIN: 352 598 857#

DAILY BIBLE STUDY MATERIALS - New issues of “**Every Day with Jesus**” Booklet for September and October 2020 are now available. Please contact Ian Aitken who will be delighted to arrange copies. Other Bible Study materials are also available with Michael Merriman. **Let the Bible feed you.**

Communion: This Sunday’s service will end with a celebration of communion. As we have done before, you will need to bring some bread and some wine or juice or water to drink, so that we can share communion “together” across the Zoom service.

Shoeboxes – we’ve said already that we won’t be making shoeboxes up this year; the way in which we do it is just not possible given the Covid restrictions. However, we would encourage you to donate the money you might have spent on shoebox material to Blythswood and Jean Dewar is happy to act as the channel for your donations, either in cash or by cheque. You can also donate online at <https://blythswood.org/donate-to-shoe-box-appeal/> Margaret Black in Balerno is sending some shoeboxes and Tillie Boulogne has some leaflets, though you would really need to make up a whole box by yourself.

Church Wednesday – we’re going to begin a new series of Church Wednesday, a conversation about the Bible. If you have not joined us before but would like to join in on Zoom, then let Jim know and he will send you the link before Wednesday.

Peace of mind

These resources are designed to help you explore the Bible as a family together at home while we can't go to church. Be as creative as you want to be and enjoy spending time with each other and with God.

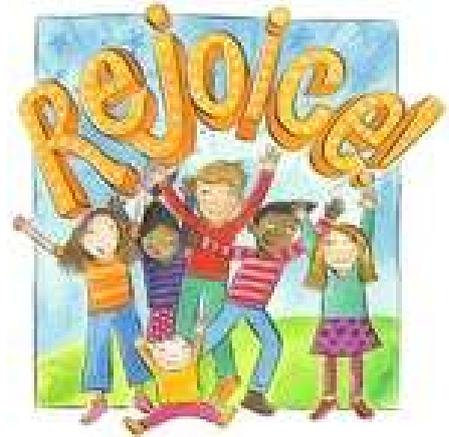
Prepare yourself...

Lord God, faithful and loving,
we do not always feel like rejoicing.
Even as we gather to worship you,
our minds are sometimes distracted
and elsewhere,
weighed down by the burdens of our
lives.

Help us, in this moment, to find it
within our hearts
to REJOICE in your constancy and
loving care for us.

People of God, let us rejoice.

Amen.



Question...



What places, people or activities help you to have peace?

Praise together...



God wants us to break free from the things that worry us and celebrate what he has done for us. He wants to give us peace. This song is a reminder to do that. *Bring it all to me*, Fischy music:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yHpILBIMjxk>

Read the Bible...

Today's verses are found in Philippians 4:1-9. You can read them in a Bible or find them here: <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Philippians%204%3A1-9&version=NIRV>

You could try reading the verses in different versions to see if it adds to your understanding of the passage.





Talk together...

Paul ends his letter to the church in Philippi telling them to rejoice and not to worry but to bring everything to God in prayer. He might never see them again but he is full of encouragement for them.

- When was the last time you wrote a letter to someone? What was it about?
- What do you worry about?
- What can you do if you're worried or anxious about something?

Paul says instead of worrying, make a conscious decision to REJOICE!

- What makes you want to rejoice? What can we celebrate?
- What do you think we need to do to follow Paul's advice?

We should rejoice over all that God gives us, has done for us and that he is always with us. Look for anything that is worthy of praise and celebrate it!



Play together...

Inflate some balloons and try to keep them in the air for as long as possible. Each time you hit it up say something you can be thankful for.

To make it more of a challenge only use one hand, or sit/stand frozen in one place, or use your head to bat the balloon.

Do something...

Each day this week, write a note of encouragement and place it where someone else will find it – at home, school, work, or somewhere outside. Or be intentional and write an encouraging letter for someone you care about then give it to them.

Make and pray together...

Make some playdough together (recipe below) and then make a model of something that worries you. Put all the models together into a basket or bowl. Pray for each other, asking God to help you with your worries. Repeat the activity but this time with something that makes you rejoice!

Playdough recipe:

- 2 cups plain flour (256g)
- 2 tbsp vegetable oil
- ½ cup salt (150g)
- 2 tbsp cream of tartar
- 1-1½ cups boiling water (237-355ml)
- food colouring (gel works best)

Mix the flour, salt, cream of tartar and oil in a bowl. Add food colouring to the water and stir.

Add the water to the flour mix little by little and stir continuously until it becomes a sticky dough. (You might not need all the water)

Allow to cool then remove from bowl and knead until the stickiness has gone. Keep going until it's the right consistency! Add a touch more flour if it's too sticky.

This can be stored in an airtight container for at least 6 months in the fridge.

