

PREPARING FOR PEACE, PHIL4:2-9

Letters from Prison #8

◆Intro: Let me tell you a little about Eunice and Sylvia. (I've changes their names just a bit to protect the guilty.) Niecey and Sil were childhood friends, children of charter members of Community Church, which prided itself on being open, friendly and different from First Church of the Iceberg across town. Niecey, now grown, has been the worship planner at the church for nine years running. Silvia is actually now the outreach director. They are both little balls of fire. But they are also like porcupines in the Canadian cold; huddle too close and you get poked.

◆Their pastor is on sabbatical because there was no pandemic at the time, and he has written a letter back to the church which one of the elders is reading to the congregation while the offering is being collected. In his letter he... He didn't just call out Eunice and Silvia did he?! Oh my, by name no less!

Eunice's daughter rolls her eyes. Silvias husband slides a little lower in his seat. A few necks are hot with embarrassment, because well, two women fighting... (show pict)



◆Now from our text we don't know what Euodia and Syntyche were arguing about in Philippi. Probably one of them broke the woman's code:

- ◆Never loan out one friend's tunic-wrap to other friends of yours.
- ◆Don't date your friend's ex.

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◆ Always tell your friend when she has manna in her teeth, or her veil is crooked.

◆ Alas, one of these things may have happened, I suppose.

Whatever the case these two ladies, co-workers, named in the text along with other prominent leaders... had issues. Now as Thomas Brookes once said, "for wolves to worry lambs is no wonder, but for lambs to worry one another, this is unnatural and monstrous." Conflict among lambs? It doesn't fit, so Paul addresses the Father's sheep in Philippi about it. Our text is for anyone who has ever said things like "can't live with `em, can't live without `em." or anyone in the room who has ever had a vicious fight with someone they were just recently kissing, or anyone whose ever been hurt by someone they really want to like. How do we bring back the joy?

◆ **1. Seek Harmony with others.** In a symphony you don't play all the same note, or the same instrument to have harmony. You do however need common ground. The same key helps a lot, as does the same sheet music. But there are plenty of differences that go together beautifully. Want this.

◆ Oneness ought to be more important to us than the issue at hand because conflict is one of enemies of joy. Seek common ground not battleground. As long as we are in conflict with someone we have a hard time enjoying life, or being pleasant. For example,

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◆ *"Better to live on a corner of the roof than share a house with a quarrelsome wife." Proverbs 25:24, NIV.*

◆ That goes for husbands too, ya know. Now in his letter Paul urges unity, not uniformity but unity. He says, "I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord. Yes, and I ask you, loyal yokefellow, help these women..." This is a community situation. Paul wants others in the church to help work it out, instead of posting about it on Facebook. You should know that the term "agree" does not mean they have to have all the same opinions and thoughts.

◆ In 2Cor. 13:11 the same term is translated "be of one mind."

◆ In Romans 15:5 It's translated "a spirit of unity".

◆ In Romans 12:16 We render it "Live in harmony".

◆ Ooo, does that mean that maybe republicans and democrats could actually go to the same church? Extroverts and introverts? Black people and white people? Paul is talking about an attitude of wanting harmony. Wanting to get along even if it's not all your way. A lot of folks live with the Goldilocks Syndrome: that's when happiness eludes us because we demand perfection in an imperfect world. Nothing is ever just right, so we don't enjoy the ordinary days that are a little, quite a bit, or even mostly right.

◆ What kind of person are you being in your church and community? Do you prefer harmony over your choice? Is your intent to eventually get everything to operate in all the ways you

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want them to? Here's God's direction on it: to avoid conflict practice gentleness(v5). Gentleness is the character not of having no opinion, or desire. Gentleness is how you share it and how much of it you demand; namely softly, kindly. The Church should be known for the characteristic of gentleness. Yet we have often contributed instead to helping the world think that Christians are miserable people, partly because often when we speak up it's complaint, or disagreement. There is place for standing up for truth and morality, but how you do it, and whether you balance it with good messages makes all the difference.

◆ Experts say that 36% of communication is tone! Did you know that? 57% is body language. That leaves only 7% for the actual words. [Try saying "What's for dinner?" like you're shocked. Try saying "what's for dinner?" like you're supper excited. Try saying it like you're only mildly interested."] But we hide behind our words alone don't we? All I said was "You're not wearing that, are you?" Or, "All I said was "What?" Everyone knows when a woman says "what?" it's not that she didn't hear you. She's merely giving you a change to change what you said. Not gonna lie to ya. While I was typing this paragraph I texted home with "When would you like to have lunch?" It was 12 noon. The reply came back "whenever". I went home at 12:30. She was halfway through lunch.

◆ "When we're you planning on coming home?"

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- ◆“You said “whenever”? ie, anytime you show up, I stop and have lunch with you.”
- ◆“That means now, or less than 5 minutes from now!”
- ◆I thought, “Sheesh God, way to rub in the lesson.”
- ◆How do you talk to your kids? What do your emails to leadership sound like? Are you giving away a piece of your mind you can’t afford to lose? When someone raises their voice do you raise yours higher? When your government breaks down do you destroy other people’s property? Conflict is a joy stealer. Do you want peace? Agree with one another. “Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.”
- ◆**2. Seek Rejoicing, twice as much as anything else.** The Word commands us (it’s not a mere invitation) to rejoice (v4). Like a good mom, Paul even repeats himself, doesn’t he? Rejoice, I will say it again in case you didn’t hear me or weren’t listening, cuz I can see you’re not paying attention; Rejoice! This is part of the Christians duty and calling! Be happy! Rejoicing is looking for what’s good and praiseworthy, and delightful and noble, and excellent all around you and delighting in it. It’s being happy about good and beauty and it flows naturally into thanksgiving. See, thanksgiving is connecting what you rejoice about to a someone. So they’re very much linked. Rejoice, give thanks. Why? Because complaint and bitterness are enemies of joy.

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◆The computer of your brain outputs whatever you input so input all the rejoicing you can. That's where the things of verse 8-9 come in: 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. Does watching a lot of killing and horror fit with that list? How about daydreams about illicit affairs? Ask yourself what the message of your music is, because you are reinforcing in your mind the material you fill it with. When it's dinner time can you notice what's there, or do you only notice what's missing?

◆"No fries? Man, how many times do I have to say it?"

◆What if you said, "Wow, burgers, fruit, beer, and you honey! What more could a man want, ...besides fries I mean... But hey thank the Lord we can eat this in air-conditioned comfort, right?"

◆Rejoice, I will say it again, rejoice. Twice as much as the rest, rejoice. Look around you for it. Name it. Sing it. Thank God for it out loud and see if you don't have more joy.

◆**3. Seek God in prayer.** Want to have more joy and peace in your life? Pray more. Pray all the time. Pray when you drive, when you lie down, when you mow, -all the time. I know what you're thinking; How does prayer fit in to keeping joy? Like this: Prayer is a recognition that there is a God who is in charge far beyond my own ability. It's is turning to him in trust and need.

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◆**A.** That makes prayer the perfect antidote for anxiety and worry. And Anxiety is another enemy of joy. One doctor estimates that 92% of what we worry about is imagined, and never happens. (Dr. Walter Calvery). Others have put it, worry is wasting today's time to clutter up tomorrow's opportunities with yesterday's trouble. Worry and anxiety are what happens when we feel like we have to be god of our own life, and discover we can't.

◆Prayer is the perfect answer to worry. Worry is ruminating. Ruminating is when cows keep belching it up and chewing it again and again. If you're good at worrying, you'd be great at being a prayer warrior. But you gotta pray like you worry. Nobody worries like:

◆"Oh my it might rain. Oh my it might rain. Oh my it might rain." No, we expound, and interpret, and forecast possible scenarios. So praying like that won't do it.

◆"Oh my it might rain. If I left my car windows down my biology notes and books will get wet. If I lose my paper I'll have to write that thing all over from scratch. That means I'll miss my favorite show tonight or... get an F. Im gonna feel bad about that F." -That's worry. You gotta learn to pray like you worry.

◆"God it looks like it's going to rain. Are you going to let it rain? Im nervous God. I left my windows down. What should I do. I just hate it when I lose things. Did I mention

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that biology class. Lord show me how I can get through that class. Yeah, you're right, I probably should be studying tonight... Lord is there something else? Then comes a voice from heaven, "Don't worry. You're parked in the garage."

◆B. How else do we pray? "About everything." "Oh I can't pray about getting a good sale on Bud Light. I'm pretty sure God is anti-beer. You can only pray about sickness, world peace, and obvious immorality." Not so. Is your cat finicky? Talk to God about it. Did you lose your watch? Ask God if he wants to tell you where it is. Are you feeling uneasy about the show you're binge watching? Tell God why? Do you really hope those flowers stay alive until the party? You guessed it...

◆C. One of the reasons that people do pray, but also continue to worry is that we don't progress in talking with God about more and more things. Or that we do not progress is additional forms of prayer: supplication/ supply -may be where most people stop. Paul uses four very different words for prayer: longings, needs, thanks, askings.

◆"*Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.*" Jeremiah 33:3, NIV.

◆"*and call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honour me.*" Psalms 50:15, NIV.

◆**Conclusion:** Seek/want harmony. Seek to rejoice. Seek God and all the good with him. If we constantly focus on all the wrong in the world, sorrow and anger will be our default. Children

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who grow up seeing the church as a morose, super-critical place where so many things are not in line with what their parents want -usually turn their backs on the church in their own quest for happiness.

◆ God commands rejoicing to be our default. But take careful note of a constant refrain in Paul's language.

◆ v2 agree with each other *the Lord*.

◆ v4 rejoice *in the Lord*

◆ v7 peace...will guard your minds *in Christ Jesus*

◆ *Listen friends, it is Christ that saves us from sin. It is Jesus that rose from being dead. It is the Lord that will enable us to agree, to rejoice, to even see the good and beautiful. It can't really be done without a relationship with him. And he is near (v5) Chose him, confess to him, accept him as your God. All goodness resides in his presence alone!*

◆ Of all people, God-followers ought be the happiest ones around! Boston Pastor Octavius Winslow (1800s), once said, "The child of God is from necessity, a joyful man. His sins are forgiven, he's soul is justified, his person is adopted, his trials are blessings, his conflicts are victories, his death is immortality, his future is a heaven of inconceivable , unthought of, untold and endless blessedness -with such a God, such a Savior, and such a hope, is he not, ought he not, to be a joyful man?"

◆ Ps.81