



MOMENTS TO PONDER
UNVEILING JOY:
EXPLORING THE BOOK OF PHILIPPIANS

Episode 94: With Thanksgiving (Phil. 4:2-9)

Hi Friends! Welcome to Moments to Ponder. This is a podcast designed to help you spend a few moments in God's Word wherever you are and take away something to ponder.

We live in a loud, busy world that can make it hard to find the time to get into God's word and I'm grateful for these moments we have to ponder the book of Philippians in the series that I've titled, Unveiling Joy. I'm Betsy Marvin and this is episode 94.

(music fades)

As I record this, we have just celebrated Thanksgiving. The history of this holiday is interesting. Just over 400 years ago, in 1621, the pilgrims had a 3-day feast with the Wampanoag people as a way to say thank you for their help. The early colonists had many thanksgiving days – days set aside of prayer and thankfulness for safe journeys, abundant harvests, military victories.

In 1789, George Washington proclaimed the 1st Thanksgiving day to be celebrated on Thursday, November 26th as a day of national pride and gratitude. This was continued by the presidents that followed. But, it wasn't until 1863 that it became a national holiday. In the midst of the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln called the nation to a day of thanks – a day of peace on the last Thursday in November.

In 1939, during the great depression, President Roosevelt moved this holiday to one week earlier hoping that the extended shopping season for Christmas would help retail sales. Yet, this led to conflict and by 1941 he set the date as the 4th Thursday in November – which still stands today.

Why give you that little history lesson? I find the background of this holiday fascinating. An entire country set aside a day to be thankful, even in the midst of a civil war. Sadly, I think many have lost it's true meaning – a day of prayer and

gratitude to God – and have turned it into a day of overindulging on food and football. Don't get me wrong I love food and football, but I do wish that prayer and thankfulness still ruled the day.

In our verses today, thanksgiving is key. In fact, as I've studied these verses I've come to realize that thanksgiving is what bridges the elements that Paul speaks of – but I'm getting ahead of myself.

We begin with verses 2 and 3 in chapter 4.

I plead with Euodia (yoo-od-EE'-ah) and I plead with Syntyche (soon-tou'-hay) to be of the same mind in the Lord. 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. Phil. 4:2-3

These verses remind us that this is, above all, a letter written to a group of people that Paul knew well. I wonder how Euodia (yoo-od-EE'-ah) and Syntyche (soon-tou'-hay) reacted when they heard their names read to the church. It's a pretty big move by Paul. But, I think the ladies may have already known this was coming. When we look back at chapter 2:1-4...and think of this situation, you'll find it reads differently with these ladies in mind:

Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion,² then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind.³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves,⁴ not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. Phil. 2:1-4

This may give us more of an idea of what is going on, but conflict happens. Thankfully Paul left the reason for the dispute out of his letter, probably because those he was writing to already knew, yet he gives the ultimate conflict management speech here- be humble, think of others, and love each other.

So often when I've heard this passage taught, the focus is on the fact that the women are in conflict, but every church will have conflict. I think there is something more important here - these women were so important to Paul's work

that he needed them to resolve things so they could continue their work. If we look across the New Testament, we see women like Phoebe, Priscilla, Junia, Nympha, and Lydia were also critical to Paul's work. He calls them co-workers, contending at his side –equality in the mission. After asking for mediation for these women and reminding them they are followers of Jesus, Paul continues with:

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! ⁵ Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Phil. 4:4-5

Rejoice! It's as if Paul is telling them – remember your joy. Get past the issue and get back to your joy. Then, he has an interesting sentence. "Let your gentleness be evident to all." It seems out of place. Your names are in the book of life. Rejoice. Then, be gentle.

I remember a conversation once where the idea of gentleness was unwelcome...it translated as weak in their mind. But Paul's word in the Greek is *epieikeia* (ep-ee-l-kace') which actually means – moderation, suitable, fair, equitable. When we think of it in this context, we see that Paul is saying rejoice – come back to your joy and live in moderation being fair and equitable.

Our Bibles separate these sections of chapter 4, but I feel like these verses were written in regards to the conflict between the women. Maybe something had become excessive, or unfair in such a way that they needed to be reminded to come back to the joy of the Lord and be gentle with each other. Reminding them – the Lord is near – you don't have time for squabbles, Jesus is coming back.

This leads us to some verses that many of you know well;

*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. Phil. 4:6-7*

Were the women anxious, unsettled? Is Paul calling these women and the church back to prayer and peace?

He begins with the command. Do not be anxious about anything...I know many people that dismiss this command believing it to be impossible because, the

thinking is, we will always worry about something, especially those we love. I get that. Yet, anxiety and worry are the result of a lack of control. Because something isn't in our control, we worry. We can't control other drivers, so we worry when our kids drive. We can't control the weather, so we worry about what tomorrow will be like. We worry about 5 years from now, when we have absolutely no idea what will happen between now and then – we just know we want to control it. And, when we feel out of control, we get anxious.

Paul's audience understood anxiety. In their world of gods and goddesses that did things on a whim, people of the 1st century lived in a constant anxiety about pleasing them. They never knew when a god or goddess would come against them, be displeased, and mess up their lives. They also had an emperor that seems to change on a dime – they couldn't control what he would do – thus more anxiety. They had no control.

Paul reminds them, and us, that we don't need to be anxious because we know the One who is in control. But, when situations arise, can you trust God to work even when you don't understand it? The 1st century people were used to not understanding their gods – what would have been important to them would have been the character of God. God is faithful and just, sovereign and holy, loving and full of grace – He is trustworthy. As creator God, he is the one to bring your prayers, your requests to - the One that is over all and in all remembering his character and sacrifice.

He goes on to say, in every situation – pray with thanksgiving. For me, this is the foundation for this whole set of verses let me show you what I see here.

If you were to write each statement of verses 6 and 7 out. and fold them in half, aligning the final part of these verses with the first part, I think you'll see this.

The words, do not be anxious line up with the words, guard your heart and mind in Christ Jesus. Just as a guard protects and defends against an enemy, our hearts and minds are protected in Jesus. When we keep our minds and hearts on him, we will stand stronger against the worry and anxiety that rise up in us remembering in whom we place our trust.

The words, In every situation line up with, the peace of God beyond understanding. I realize that there are truly hard situations, times of beautiful and times of hurt. Yet, there is a peace that comes from God that isn't dependent

on situations, it's beyond our understanding but it is something we can experience. It's that place where we realize that our inner peace and joy is based on who we are in Christ, not on what happens around us. Again, I can't understand it, but I know what it feels like.

Prayer and petitions lines up with requests, these are one in the same, bringing requests to God through prayer.

And in the middle of it all the words, with thanksgiving. When I first realized this, it was like the puzzle fell into place. All these years, the key to not being anxious and finding peace has been right here – gratitude.

There has been a lot of research lately on gratitude due to the high amount of anxiety, depression, and loneliness being experienced by so many. Before I continue, I do know that there are levels of depression and anxiety that require therapy and medication. It is definitely a need for many.

Research has found that gratitude helps people refocus on what they have instead of what they lack, cultivating a mindset that shifts your focus from yourself to others. In fact, one study found that a regular gratitude practice can improve your immune system, reduce stress and anxiety, increase feel-good hormones, and even rewire your brain, making you a naturally more grateful person. Sound familiar.

In Romans 12:2a (NLT) *Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think.*

Gratitude changes the way we think/ A Gratitude Mindset involves regularly making the shift from expectation to appreciation and thankfulness. I think that is a big part of the process. It shifts we approach life. Paul knew this without all the research, when we live from appreciation and thankfulness instead of expectation, we are able to live into what comes rather than the expectation that life should be puppies and rainbows with God.

Gratitude remind keeps our minds on Jesus and others.

Thankfulness helps us see the good in our lives and remember who it has come from. In short, gratitude renews our minds.

In fact, Paul continues the thought with how we should think as we guard your hearts and minds in Christ. He continues in verses 8 and 9.

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. Phil. 4:2-9 (NIV)

It's so easy to get caught up in the perspective of the media around us. All the unholy, vicious, ugly, impure, unjust, and untrue things that the media uses, influences us more than we know. It's hard to keep our minds on what is true when truth seems to change. Paul would say this list represents the fruit and food of a mind that is guarded by the peace of God. When we put these good things into our mind, they *stay* in our mind and then come forth from us.

2 Cor. 10:5 (NLT)- *We destroy every proud obstacle that keeps people from knowing God. We capture their rebellious thoughts and teach them to obey Christ.*

A grateful heart has a hard time being proud in an egotistical way, so when we capture our thoughts, with thanksgiving, and teach them to obey Christ, it helps us renew our minds. The foundational piece of this is gratitude and prayer.

Way back before pilgrims or presidents, God showed the way to peace...gratitude and trust. I am glad we have a thanksgiving day as a country, but if we are to be truly transformed, we need to change the way we think. This begins with practicing gratitude – everyday.

Let's do it right now. First, take a good deep breath.

What are you grateful for right now?

Lord, thank you for breath, for life.

Thank you for the hot coffee and warm blanket this morning as I snuggle in my chair to write this podcast.

Thank you for the people in my life that I love and love me.

Thank you for the gift of seasons.

Thank you for sabbath days and rest.

I encourage you, if you don't already, to keep a gratitude journal. Just note a couple things each day that you can be thankful for. As you do this, you'll notice that your mind will begin to shift as you look at life with more appreciation and less with anxiety as you trust the One who is ultimately in control and loves you.

Dear One, may your heart be full of gratitude as you notice the big and small ways that God is showing you He loves you today. May you know that the peace of God comes from the God of Peace, it's beyond understanding, but it is real and available. May you discover the wonder and joy that a grateful heart brings.

You are loved.

Amen.