

Promoting Unity and Love in the Church

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[0 : 0 0] So we're going to turn now to our Bible reading this morning, and this is our last visit to the book of Philippians. Edward has been leading us through Philippians over the summer months, but do turn to Philippians and chapter 4.

Philippians chapter 4, and we're reading there from verse 2. Philippians 4.

The Apostle Paul writes, I entreat Jodiah and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. 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.

Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I will say rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand.

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.

[1 : 2 1] And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, my brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is anything excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, let you think about these things.

What you have heard, what you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things and the God of peace will be with you.

I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity.

Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. 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. I can do all things through him who strengthens me. Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble.

[2 : 4 3] And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving except you only. Even in Thessalonica, you sent me help for my needs once and again.

Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit. I have received full payment and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God.

And my God will supply every need of yours, according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. To our God and Father be glory forever and ever.

Amen. Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me greet you. All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirits. Amen. And may God bless his word to us.

[3 : 58] Well, good morning, friends. Very good to see you all here. And good morning also to those who are tuning in from Queens Park and Central and perhaps elsewhere as well. Well, let's turn up Philippians chapter 4.

My title for this morning is Promoting Unity and Love in the Church. Philippians 4 and the passages verse 2 to the end of the chapter. If you can have the text open in front of you, I think you'll make a bit more sense of what I'm planning to say.

Well, now this final section of Philippians is one of the most delightful and encouraging passages in all of Paul's letters. And I do hope it will bring encouragement and joy to us this morning.

It's packed as tight as a tin of sardines. There's a lot in here and I won't be able to delve into quite every corner of it. But I want to draw out the main lines of Paul's thinking and see what implications there are for us.

And there are many implications. At verse 2 in chapter 4, Paul is beginning to wind down towards the end. We've had the meat of the letter in chapters 1, 2, and 3.

[5 : 06] And in chapter 4, he's drawing certain threads together in a more personal and intimate way. But it's powerful writing. And it has a lot to say about what goes on in Christian hearts below the surface, deep inside us.

He's dealing here with joy, anxiety, contentment, and the practical support that Christians give to each other. And with the love that binds Christians together.

But it's all very much related to the thrust of the earlier chapters of the letter. Paul's big concern throughout Philippians is to press the Christians there on the subject of their unity and their disunity.

Disunity was a real problem. And it was undermining the happiness and effectiveness of the church. Just look back to chapter 1, verse 27 for a moment. Chapter 1, verse 27.

Which you might say is the key verse of the whole letter. Let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ. So that whether I come to see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you're standing firm in one spirit.

[6 : 14] With one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel. And not frightened in anything by your opponents. And then look down a few verses to chapter 2, verse 2.

It's again the same theme of unity. Complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.

Do nothing from rivalry or conceit. But in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Now many of the church members at Philippi were well known to Paul personally.

It was his preaching at Philippi. The record comes to us in Acts chapter 16. It was Paul's visit there which had launched the church. About 12 years before Paul wrote this letter from prison in Rome.

He'd been back several times. He knew these people well and he loved them dearly. And his main purpose in writing this letter is to say, Stop being proud and jealous of each other.

[7 : 14] Stop your rivalries. And in humility learn to count each other as more significant than yourselves. And for this purpose follow the mindset of Jesus himself. And Paul opens up that mindset in chapter 2, verses 5 to 11.

Now when we get to chapter 4, verse 2, Paul is lovingly pressing home this message about unity. And he's adding various other sections of teaching which are all designed to promote unity and love in the church.

And the relevance of this to any church is obvious. A church that is lovingly united will be an effective church. Effective in getting the life-saving gospel out into the world.

But a disunited church becomes like a dysfunctional family. Where there's disunity, happiness and joy quickly disappear. But where there's unity, joy and love build upon each other and create a congregation in which Sunday becomes the best day of the week.

All right, off we go. I want us to look at Paul's teaching in chapter 4 under seven headings this morning. That sounds a bit forbidding, but we'll move at a good pace, I trust. First then, Paul teaches the church to resolve conflicts within the fellowship.

[8 : 31] Just look at verse 2. I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. Now friends, just imagine being in the shoes of either Euodia or Syntyche when this letter was first read out loud to the gathered congregation.

Because that's how they would have first heard it. Somebody, possibly Epaphroditus himself, who carried the letter from Rome to Philippi. He would have gathered the church together. There's something that Paul's written, we've got to hear it.

He would have stood up in the midst and he would have read this letter out loud. Euodia and Syntyche would have been gently smiling and nodding their heads approvingly.

Up to chapter 4 verse 1. When suddenly this bombshell lands on them in verse 2. I entreat Euodia, reads the reader, and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord.

Well, how quickly can a face blush? Those two faces, you can be sure, were blushing from forehead to collarbone in two seconds. They were named and they were shamed. Their disagreement is made public.

[9 : 38] Very embarrassing, but necessary. And then in verse 3, Paul brings somebody else into the picture. And yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women who have labored side by side with me in the gospel, together with Clement, etc.

Now the word translated companion there literally means yoke fellow. The idea is that two oxen are harnessed together under one yoke so they can pull the plow together.

Now we don't know who this yoke fellow was, but we can be certain, A, that it's somebody that Paul knew well, and B, that as soon as this man heard verse 3 read out, he would have known that he was the one that Paul was addressing.

And most of the church members would have known as well. So the reading out loud of verses 2 and 3 would have fixed the eyes of everybody on the two blushing women and on this senior man, and the whole church would instantly have known that he, the yoke fellow, now had the responsibility of helping Euodia and Syntyche to resolve their disagreement.

Isn't Paul shrewd and wise? He's exposing the problem, but at the same time he's providing the means of resolving it, and he's calling the attention of the whole church to the importance of getting this problem sorted out.

[10 : 58] Disunity and disagreement is not something that can be swept under the carpet. It needs to be addressed wisely and lovingly, and very often a senior and experienced Christian can be brought in to act as a mediator, and that's what Paul is doing here in verse 3.

Unity, unitedness in the fellowship is a top priority, and this letter of Philippians presses the point home. But the unity of any church is like a Ming vase, very precious but fragile.

And where unity in a church is damaged, it's usually for reasons expressed in chapter 2, verse 3. Just have a look at chapter 2, verse 3. Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.

This problem between Euodia and Syntyche was almost certainly not a theological disagreement, but something personal, rivalry, conceitedness.

She's being favored more than me. My nose is put out of joint. I'm being overlooked, that kind of thing. Very often when you dig down into a disagreement, you find that it's an issue of hurt pride.

[12 : 12] So Paul's message is let's guard our unity with great care, and let's pray that the Lord will develop in each one of us a determination not to take offense at the words or actions of others.

Taking offense causes far more problems than giving offense. Paul teaches us, chapter 2, verse 3 again, in humility to count others more significant than ourselves.

That's his prescription for unity. Now, a united congregation is not a congregation of clones. Our variedness is one of the joys of the Christian life.

It's a real joy. We have variety of ethnic background, variety of class, culture, ability, age, taste. You like frog's legs, I prefer roast beef.

Our variety means that each of us brings a distinctive contribution to the life and work of the church. That's the variety. Our unity consists in our agreement on the fundamentals of the Christian faith.

[13 : 15] Our commitment to proclaiming the gospel to the world. Our commitment to living out the ethics of the gospel in our daily life. And our commitment to loving and supporting each other in the midst of our joys and troubles.

So there's the first thing. Conflict in the fellowship must be resolved and unity deepened. Now, second, Paul teaches the church the discipline of rejoicing.

In verse 4. Rejoice in the Lord always, he says. And again, I will say it, rejoice. In verses 2 and 3, he's dealing with this specific problem involving two named individuals.

But in verses 4 to 9, he turns to the inner life of every Christian, the things that go on below the surface of our outward behavior. In verses 4 and 9, he is training us how to think and how to feel.

He's tutoring our emotional life. He's not assuming that we have no control over our emotions. On the contrary, he's teaching us to take control of those swings and surges of emotion that we experience all the time.

[14 : 28] So he's training us to be more emotionally stable and godly and more godly in our thought life, our thinking. So here's the first discipline. Rejoice in the Lord always.

Now, the critical phrase there in verse 4 is the phrase, in the Lord. Paul is not doing popular psychology here. He's not saying, take a positive attitude.

Always look on the bright side of life. Things aren't as bad as they could be. No, he's talking to the person who is in the Lord. His emphasis lies on those three words, in the Lord.

In Paul's thinking, there are only two categories of people in the world. Those who are in the Lord, in Christ, and those who are outside Christ. To be a Christian is to be in the Lord.

And it's because the Christian is in the Lord that the Christian is able to rejoice always, whatever his circumstances might be. Now, for an example of this, just look back to chapter 2, verses 17 and 18.

[15 : 33] 2, 17 and 18. Where Paul is rejoicing, he emphasizes his rejoicing, despite the fact that he might be just on the verge of being executed. So let me read, 2, 17.

Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, in other words, be killed, executed, I'm glad and rejoice with you all.

Likewise, you also should be glad and rejoice with me. So in the face of possible imminent execution, Paul is rejoicing because he is in the Lord.

Look on to chapter 3, verse 1. 3, 1. Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. So there may be, chapter 3, verse 2, dogs, evildoers, flesh mutilators at your heels.

You must look out for them. You must resist them. But still rejoice in the Lord. And chapter 4, verse 1, stand firm in the Lord. So Paul is saying that when we're Christians, we're in the Lord, and therefore it is always, always appropriate to rejoice.

[16 : 41] So that even if, like Paul, we're facing prison and possible imminent death, we can rejoice because he's our savior. He's promised to take us to be with him in eternity.

So our prospects of life on earth may look grim. Paul's prospects at this moment were pretty grim. We may be facing all sorts of problems here and now in this life.

But if we're in him, we're safe. Rejoice, therefore. Our life in this world is transient. But our life with him in the world to come is eternal.

So this is a discipline for our inner life. It's a command. Rejoice. We might want to say, but Lord, my life is so difficult. Can't I weep a bit?

Yes, of course you can. And nobody understands your tears as well as I do. But even while you're weeping, rejoice. Because of who I am and because of everything I've promised you.

[17 : 43] Now, third, Paul teaches the church to develop reasonableness. Verse 5. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone.

Now, this word translated reasonableness could equally well be translated gentleness or graciousness or forbearance. We have to suspect that Euodia and Syntyche had not been gracious or forbearing with each other.

So this verse 5 is part of Paul's appeal to the church to be united in love. When we lack this kind of gracious forbearance, we start insisting on having our own way.

Let me just give a couple of examples of this. I will not sing that hymn to that tune again. It's the wrong tune. Here's another.

We can't change the time of our meeting. It's always been at the same time. I shall be quite put out if we have to change. Now, I'm inventing situations here, more or less.

[18 : 46] But these are the kind of things that threaten happy relationships in the church. Usually, it's over things that are very trivial. Look back to chapter 2, verse 4. 2-4.

Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. It's not just about me and my personal likes and dislikes.

Paul is teaching us to care for the interests of others. So we learn to ask, what is going to suit my brother more? Or how can we help our sister to feel more at home, more part of what's going on?

Now, of course, Paul is not suggesting that we become soft on points of truth or doctrine. Paul never gives an inch on issues of truth and falsehood because he's protecting the churches from going astray.

The truth of the gospel must always be very strongly guarded. But in verse 5, Paul is talking about flexibility over the nuts and bolts of church life.

[19 : 46] Our personal preferences over things like food or music or how the chairs are arranged or the timings of meetings. Let's be more concerned to accommodate the needs of others than to please ourselves, even if some new arrangement makes life a bit more difficult for ourselves.

That's the essence of gentle forbearance. I learn to say, this perhaps suits me less well, but for the sake of others, I'll happily go along with the new arrangement because my personal comfort is less important than the benefit that will be enjoyed by a larger group.

Reasonableness. Now, fourth. Paul teaches the church, and in particular the Christian individual, how to cope with anxiety.

Let's pick this up from the end of verse 5. The Lord is at hand. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. I used to misunderstand verse 6.

[21 : 05] Do not be anxious about anything. I used to misunderstand it quite badly. I would look at that first phrase, don't be anxious about anything, and I thought that Paul had somehow discovered how to live a life that was completely free of all anxiety, as if he was saying, don't be anxious, be like me.

I, Paul, never have a moment's anxiety, and you can learn the secret of an anxiety-free life from me. But then I began to get to know Paul's letters rather better.

I began to read them, and it became increasingly clear to me that Paul was often anxious. In fact, there's a moment in this very letter where he speaks of his anxiety. Just look back to chapter 2, verses 27 and 28, where Paul is writing about Epaphroditus being seriously ill.

2.27. Paul had been worried sick by the serious illness that Epaphroditus was suffering, and it was going to relieve Paul's anxiety to be able to send Epaphroditus back to Philippi, a fit and well man.

Now, you'll find many examples throughout Paul's letters of his anxieties. Paul was not a tranquil man. In fact, his reason for writing each of his letters was some kind of anxiety about the church he was writing to.

[22 : 43] Anxiety goes hand in hand with real concern. Paul was concerned for the churches deeply. That's why he wrote these letters to them, because he was anxious lest they be corrupted by false teaching or weakened by ungodly behavior.

So in our verse 6 here, Paul is not saying, I'm never anxious. He's really saying, I'm often anxious, and I know that you are too, so let me tell you what to do with each anxiety as it comes to you.

And we'll come to that in just a moment. Just to stand back for it for a second. Isn't it true that behind all our anxieties, there is a deep underlying question?

The question is, what is going to become of me? I'm facing this problem. Is there a way through? How can I survive? In a developed society like ours in Britain, we have plenty of economic and social safety nets.

But even with all those safeguards, life is unpredictable and sometimes chaotic. But for the Philippians back then, it was much more so. Think of the threat of invading armies, which could pour in.

[23 : 58] Think of famines, real famines. Think of plagues, diseases far worse than COVID-19. Life was very precarious for them. Paul himself had often been beaten, shipwrecked, stoned, really, really hungry, exhausted.

He had faced all manner of anxieties. Anxiety is an inescapable part of human life. So what is Paul teaching us to do with our anxieties?

Verse 6. Don't be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.

In other words, bring to God anything and everything that is a source of anxiety. But equally, we need to notice the phrase, with thanksgiving.

And we might want to say, with thanksgiving? How can I be thankful to God when I'm so worried about my situation? Well, let me try to put into words the kind of prayer that you or I might pray at a time of great anxiety.

[25 : 06] Here's a kind of example prayer. My dear Father, you know my trouble. You know this thing that I'm finding so disturbing. You know that I can't see my way through it, and I can't see how it's ever going to end.

Have mercy upon me in this painful situation, and please bring a resolution to my problem. Give me broader shoulders to bear the load. Give me wisdom and a better perspective on the situation.

Help me to see how it all falls under your sovereign care for me. And thank you, Lord. Thank you that you're trustworthy. Thank you that you're kind.

Thank you that all things work together for good for those who are called according to your purpose. Thank you for the sure salvation and eternal life that you've promised me.

I leave my anxiety with you, and I pray these things in the name of Jesus, my Savior. Amen. Now, isn't that a verse 6 type of prayer?

[26 : 07] We bring the reason for our anxiety, the source of our anxiety, to the Lord. We ask him to help us through it, and we thank him for all his care and provision for us.

Now, what does he promise to those who pray like this? Well, verse 7 tells us, and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Now, look at this verse 7 carefully. It doesn't promise that our problem will be quickly solved. It's a promise that God's peace, a peace greater than we can fathom or understand, will guard or garrison our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Just picture yourself as a castle or a fortress. The castle that is you is under attack. The enemy is firing horrible missiles at you.

But because you've prayed, according to the instructions of verse 6, your castle is now guarded by a strong sentinel who walks around the walls continually and prevents the enemy's missiles from demolishing you.

[27 : 23] You're guarded by the peace of God. So the enemy missiles may keep on coming at you, but they won't be able to blow you to pieces. Your heart and your mind will be protected.

Verse 7 is not a promise, not a promise, that the painful thing will vanish. It's a promise that God's peace will guard us and garrison us even if the source of anxiety remains.

Those last three words of verse 7 reassure us of how safe a position we're in. We are in Christ Jesus. So let's regularly bring our anxieties to the Lord God and leave them with him.

I think it's a good thing to pray with Philippians 4, verses 6 and 7 open in front of us. Actually have your Bible open because reading these two verses regularly will be a real help to us.

Now fifth, and Paul is still talking here about what goes on in our minds. In verses 8 and 9, Paul is training our thought life.

[28 : 31] He's training our thought life. Other people can see our outward behavior, but they can't see what's going on inside here, what we're thinking about. So Paul gives us some striking advice here in verses 8 and 9.

This is a unique passage in Paul's letters. The main verb comes at the end of verse 8. Think about these things, he says.

So Paul is teaching us to develop our thought life in a way that God approves. He assumes, in verse 8, that we have considerable measure of control over what we think about.

So he's asking us to train our thought life to think about certain things, and by implication, not to think about things which are the reverse of what he writes about here.

So if we give free reign to our sinful nature, we will naturally revert to thinking about things which are the reverse of all that he mentions here. Now just look with me at the list in verse 8, and I want us to think about its opposites.

- [29 : 38] Because by nature, our minds will dwell on what is untrue, not on what is true, on what is dishonorable, what is unjust, what is impure, what is ugly, what has nothing to commend it, what lacks excellence, and what is worthy of condemnation.

We'll think of the words of Jesus. Out of the heart of man come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness.

That, friends, is the natural inborn pattern of our thinking. So Paul is saying, learn to reverse that tendency which can only defile us and re-gear your thinking.

Turn your minds away from all that corrupts you and learn to think about what is true and just and lovely. When we are in Christ, we are in the one who is himself true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent, and praiseworthy.

Even in this fallen and tarnished world, there remains much that is true and pure and lovely. So to give one or two examples, there is truth in painstaking scientific study.

- [31 : 02] There's beauty in music or art, not in all music and art, but in some. There can be integrity in politics. It's not always there, but it is sometimes. There can be much honorable practice in education, in medicine, in business.

Sport can be spoiled by a number of factors, but there's great beauty in seeing a disciplined and well-trained team performing at a high level. Think about these things Paul is saying.

He's not, I think, just talking about Bible truth and theological truth. He's talking about truth and beauty in human society and in the natural world. Truth and beauty wherever it's seen.

To practice thinking thoughts of this kind and to turn away from the thought life that corrupts us is going to help us to grow more like Jesus because God is the author of all that is true and lovely in the world.

And do you notice verse 9, remarkably, Paul brings himself into this picture. Verse 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.

- [32 : 12] So Paul is saying, I'm a pattern for you in this matter of renewed thinking. You know me. You've often heard me speak. You've observed how I think.

Follow my example. So Paul is lovingly commanding us to leave behind thought patterns which can only make us fearful or angry, bitter and upset, hating life and despising other people.

The thought life of verse 8 will expand our minds and bring us joy and self-discipline. And just look at the assurance at the end of verse 9. Practice these things and the God of peace will be with you.

Now friends, I want us to notice something lovely about verses 6 and 7 and 8 and 9. These four verses form two pairs. First, verses 6 and 7 and secondly, verses 8 and 9.

And each of these pairs of verses consists of a command followed by a promise. Paul's thinking is obey the command and the promise will be yours, will be fulfilled.

- [33 : 24] So in verses 6 and 7, the command is don't be anxious but pray and the promise follows and the peace of God will guard your hearts and minds.

In verses 8 and 9, the command is think about what is true and honorable and lovely and the promise follows and the God of peace will be with you. So we have the peace of God in verse 7 and the God of peace in verse 9.

Don't be anxious but pray and the peace of God will guard you. Think about what is true and lovely and the God of peace will be with you. So these four verses are teaching us how the natural turmoil and disturbance of our minds can be replaced by peace from God.

Number six. Paul teaches us the blessing of contentment. Now in verses 10 to 20, there's a great deal going on and I just don't have time to turn over every stone and see what's underneath.

But I do want us to see what Paul says here about contentment, particularly contentment in relation to money and other possessions because the two things are tied up here, contentment and gifts or money.

[34 : 44] Paul, remember, has been in prison for some time and the Philippians, knowing about his suffering, have sent Epaphroditus with gifts for him. You'll see those gifts are mentioned in verse 18.

I'm well supplied having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. There would have been money certainly, possibly some luxuries, dried fish, dried fruit maybe, perhaps a clean shirt or two, a bar of soap and a razor, that sort of thing.

And in verse 10, Paul expresses his joy at receiving this very tangible support. So verse 10, I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me.

Now he's not blaming them for taking a long time to send help. News could only travel very slowly back then and Paul could have been in prison for some months before the Philippians even heard that he was imprisoned.

So he's not blaming them and he's very thankful for their help. But, in verses 11 and 12, he says something remarkable about the state of his mind.

[35 : 49] Verse 11, not that I'm speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low and I know how to abound.

In any and every circumstance, I've learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

Now, that is a remarkable statement and it's here to teach us a very important lesson and that is that it's possible to be content whether we have plenty or hardly anything.

Now, Paul clearly didn't have absolutely nothing. I mean, he must have had at least a little bit of bread and water or else he'd be dead, wouldn't he? But he's telling us that contentment in life is not dependent on having pleasant accommodation, fine food, fine clothes and money to buy these things.

Nor does contentment require freedom. Here is Paul locked up in prison, chained to a soldier. He has virtually no money, hardly any food, no luxuries, no prospects.

[37 : 02] Possible freedom, but possible execution. How does he manage it? How is he not crawling up the wall in frustration? How is he not weeping and banging his head against the prison wall?

Well, he answers those questions in verse 13. The secret is this. I can do all things through him who strengthens me, which means I can do all the things that are required of me through him who strengthens me.

And that, of course, is the Lord Jesus. So without money, without decent food, without freedom to come and go, he is content. He has known times of plenty, times of abundance, as he tells us in verse 12, but in days of hunger and need, he is perfectly content.

He's not in a state of emotional collapse. He's rejoicing in the Lord. He's praying. He's writing a letter. Physically, he's trapped, but he's wonderfully content.

Now, friends, isn't there a great lesson for us here? We can sometimes feel trapped. Trapped in a job which is demanding but poorly paid. Perhaps trapped by unemployment.

[38 : 13] Trapped in a course of academic study that we're committed to but we're struggling to stay on board with. Perhaps trapped in a marriage that is painful where pleasures are few and difficulties are many.

Many people, including some Christians, can feel trapped by adverse circumstances. Well, let's follow Paul's example and rejoice that we are in the Lord even when we are in difficulty.

To belong to him and to be headed for eternal life is better than any amount of worldly comfort. These verses 10 to 13 are verses we can come back to again and again.

Contentment. We're now seventh and I'm moving towards the end of the chapter now. From verses 21 and 22 Paul teaches us something fundamental to unity and joy in the church and that is the importance of greeting each other.

These verses 21 and 2 are not just for the welcome teams who stand at the church door greeting us as we come in. They're here for everybody. Verse 21 Greet every saint in Christ Jesus.

[39 : 22] The brothers who are with me greet you. All the saints greet you especially those of Caesar's household. Now this greeting is not just a few superficial words.

Morning Charlie nice to see you and on you go. It's not that. It means surely acknowledging one another expressing our care for each other by talking together. Talking.

But notice a key word here in verse 21. It's the word every. Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. Saint of course simply means Christian. Greet everyone.

In other words don't leave anybody out because everybody needs to be acknowledged recognized and encouraged especially if they're new to church and they don't know many people.

In fact I suggest we do this this very morning in about five minutes time when the service is over. Let's greet each other. Go to somebody that you don't know or somebody you don't know well.

[40 : 21] Now I know this is difficult. We're all shy. We're all like little snails that don't like to poke their heads out of their shells in case they get hurt. I'm shy. I can tell you we're all like it.

But Paul for very good reasons says greet everyone. Don't leave anybody out. So here's a kind of sample of what might happen in five minutes. You go to somebody you've never seen before.

You're feeling a bit shy but you say hello I'm Jane Smith and I live in Pollock Shores. And she says oh I'm Felicity Ohta Machti and I live in Ohta Machti in Clackmannanshire.

Really you say I thought it was in Fife. Oh no but perhaps it is actually. One gets a bit forgetful with age. Anyway you're away aren't you? The ice is broken with words like that a new friendship begins.

Not every conversation runs quite like that. But let's dive in and see what happens. It's an adventure. Let's do it five minutes from now. The church the Lord's people is the great antidote to anxiety and loneliness.

[41 : 32] We need each other. We need to get to know each other. The strength of a church like this is that we get to know a lot of people pretty well over time. It's a great support network.

And as we greet each other and talk the unity of the congregation is developed and we're able to show love and kindness to more and more new people and we're strengthened to share the good news of salvation through Christ to more and more people and we're able to do it with growing confidence.

We lend confidence to each other. Well Paul packs a great deal into this last chapter and it's all designed to strengthen the bonds of love and trust in the church.

Resolving conflict the discipline of rejoicing developing reasonableness giving way over these secondary things turning anxiety into prayer training our thought life learning contentment in the midst of even great hardship and the love that grows from greeting every saint.

and so Paul ends with a simple prayer for the Philippians these people whom he loves. Verse 23 the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

[42 : 51] Well let's pray together. Dear God our Father how we thank you for all the practical wisdom that you gave to the Apostle Paul for all his understanding of human hearts and human nature and we do pray that you will help us to love him and his teaching and to learn to put it into practice.

help us we pray to guard and develop our unitedness and help us to be effective in holding out the word of life to many people so that they too may be saved and we ask it in Jesus name Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.