

I just want to thank everyone for all the pictures of broccoli I've been sent this week. I'd take a poll to see how many of you love broccoli, but I don't really want to know. It seems it is a well loved vegetable here at Carbondale. In fact, Tuesday, the staff went to lunch and they all ordered broccoli. We've eaten lunch together every week for almost 8 years now and I've never seen these people order broccoli. But, I happily ate my carrots surrounded by my broccoli loving co-workers. Cause unity.

Today we continue our look at Philippians 4:2-9. It was my opinion that these verses seemed to be a distracted mess. They don't build on one another, they don't share a common theme, they seem to just be a few things Paul wanted to be sure and tell them. But, as I said last week the more I looked at them the more I began to think that it wasn't so much that Paul was distracted as he was concerned that the Philippian church might be. So he clearly states in verse 5, **"Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near."** Philippians 4:5 This is where we ended last week and it's where we begin this week. Once again our bottom line is **Don't get distracted because the Lord is coming soon.** Last week, as you know, we looked at the distraction of disagreement. Euodia and Syntyche, both mature Christian women, leaders in the church, had disagreed about something and Paul urged them to come together again in the Lord. We said that unity among believers can only happen in the Lord and that it is important for our witness. This morning we want to look at 2 other distractions we all have probably dealt with before. But, the good news is that once again Paul gives us a solution to help us remain focused because indeed the Lord is coming soon.

Verse 6 gives us our first distraction for today. **"Do not be anxious about anything."** Philippians 4:6 Worry can get a person's mind completely unfocused and 100% distracted from the task at hand. Most every morning I get halfway down my street and think – did I put the garage door down? Cause I got to thinking about something else as I backed out and I was distracted and now I can't remember. So then I'm trying to look in the rear view mirror – knowing full well that I have never – not once – been able to actually see my house in the mirror from the spot in the road where I daily worry – did I put the door down – but I look anyway and then keep driving distractedly worrying until I turn at the stop sign and forget all about having worried about the door. I really like routine and this is my daily thought process.

Now to be clear – the worry and anxiety I’m talking about this morning is the type that is common to all of us. I am not addressing anxiety disorders nor am I making light of a very serious problem. We have so many incredible and Godly men and women in this church who work in mental health who believe in healing and therapy and medication for anxiety and I am thankful for the work that they do. I also believe in praying for healing and taking medicine at the same time. If you struggle with that level of anxiety please don’t do so alone – please reach out for prayer, support and if you need a referral to resources available in our city for counseling.

But, this type of distracted worry that I am addressing this morning is the kind that gets us thinking well, this world is just terrible and I don’t know what we’re gonna do about saving America from – insert existential threat here – or how we’re gonna ever reduce the national debt. We start worrying that life as we know it will never look the same and danger is out there and “someone” is out to get us. We worry ourselves into forgetting that this world was never our home to begin with and that this life is not all there is. We can worry to the point that Jesus coming back soon never enters the equation.

Now, Paul, was not simply saying – just stop worrying. It’s really easy. When you worry, just stop and don’t do that anymore. Nor was Paul writing telling them not to worry because his life was so worry free that he didn’t have a clue the types of things those in the Philippian church were facing. Paul was saying do not be anxious about anything while sitting in prison facing death. In chapter 1 he wrote, **“I will continue to rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance. I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body.”** Philippians 1:19-24

Paul wasn’t worried – if I live that’s great and I’ll keep working and helping churches like yours and if they kill me I’ll be with Jesus and that’s gonna be wonderful. So, rather than worry I’ll just

rejoice. Life or death situations are kind of a big deal. But, Paul wasn't worried because that was just a distraction from what really mattered – Jesus and Him being exalted in all he did in life and in death.

Paul later told the Philippians that the secret to not worrying was contentment. **“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 everything through him who gives me strength.”** **Philippians 4:11-13** Most people know that verse and think it's about athletic strength – I can run this race or excel in this sport or achieve in this way. But, it's clearly about eating. Paul could eat a lot of food or a little. Just kidding. Paul knew what it was to face serious hardships – the kind that have you worrying – how are we paying the bills, where are we going to get food to eat for rest of the month because the money has run out before the month. Being in seasons of “want” is cause for worry. Big things and yet Paul knew the Lord would strengthen him and provide for him. He'd seen it over and over and that's why Paul could declare – don't be anxious about anything – big or small.

Then Paul gives the solution. Pray. **“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”** **Philippians 4:6-7** Don't be anxious about anything – big or small but pray about everything – big or small. Too often we find ourselves so distracted by worry that we forget to pray. We tell everyone except God what's happening in our lives. In line at the grocery store we find ourselves telling someone – can you believe the headline on the magazine. I tell you I'm so worried about our kid's future. We post on social media – we need prayers – crisis, stress! We watch the news or get the headlines we think this is terrible – I can't handle this – I feel so helpless. The news this week from Afghanistan and Haiti was enough for anyone to feel anxious. And, sometimes I think we rewrite another scripture that Paul wrote – having worried all we can then we stand firm and then we remember to pray. But, prayer is not our last resort but our first priority. Don't worry and then pray. Just pray. About everything. The big things – like Afghanistan or surgery, the little things like staying focused at school – which is actually a

big thing if you're me. We bring everything to the Lord. Through prayer and petition. We pray – bring our requests to God, and we petition – we appeal to the highest authority. But, we do it with thanksgiving – because we know that our God hears us and cares about our needs. Paul had earlier in this book said that he prayed with joy and in chapter 1 he wrote that his prayer was they would have more love, more knowledge, more insight, and have discernment, and that they would be filled with the fruit of righteousness.

The ancient world were highly anxious people because it was a lot to worry about if their gods were going to be angry at them or what they needed to do to get their attention in order to help them. But, Paul reminds the church – we don't have to worry like that. We can appeal to the highest authority. Here's what Paul had already told us, **“God exalted [Jesus] to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”** **Philippians 2:9-11** Don't be anxious – because your God, to whom you bring your prayers, petitions and requests – is the highest authority and everything is subject to Him. Every sickness, disease, every threat, even death itself. There's nothing you're facing or up against, there's not a problem that stands before you, a worry that crosses your mind that Jesus is not greater than! Don't get distracted by worry and anxiety and forget to pray.

And, when we do the very peace of God comes to guard us and keep us. It guards our hearts and minds against further worry and doubt and stress. The peace that doesn't make sense except that it's so real and so good. It's so easy to get distracted from what really matters when we allow ourselves to get carried away by the worries of this world. This week myself and Pastor Brittany and Pastor Brian went to pray at Clinton West Elementary at the request of the principal and staff. I see stuff all the time on facebook about how prayer was taken out of the schools – and I know what they mean – but also it always makes me think you don't know any Christian teachers. We walked the halls and prayed over classrooms and each floor. It's been a crazy time for teachers and there is a lot of anxiety – they're worried about your kids and catching them up. We were asked to pray specifically for kids behind in reading. They teachers are anxious about how long they'll stay in person, anxiety about parents and school boards and

politics. On the last floor a group of teachers came and thanked us for praying and joined in the circle. And, as we prayed with them and for them – tears were shed by so many. As we brought our requests, made petitions, we prayed and then as promised – the peace of God came over that place. Peace that transcended all understanding – because all the same pressures were there – but peace ruled and it will guard the hearts and minds of those teachers and staff and the kids who walked into those rooms and the parents who dropped them off.

The Lord is near, His return is soon. There's peace that can be ours instead of anxiety. So don't get distracted by worry. Instead, pray. Pray about everything. Pray first, pray fervently, pray knowing that God hears you and cares for you.

The second thing this morning is don't get distracted by filling your mind with the wrong things. This is the verse I intended to preach on last week – you know before I got distracted by the worry and prayer thing and before I got distracted by the disagreement thing. This verse is full of what we should be thinking about but it's so easy to get distracted by the opposite of what Paul says. Here's both the distraction and the solution - we should fill our minds with these things, **“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...And the God of peace will be with you.” Philipians 4:8-9**

If you haven't had much peace lately it's entirely possible it's because you've been spending too much time and giving too much attention to the wrong things. A steady diet of cable news will leave you without peace – it's not a lovely place or full of noble characters and it's not praiseworthy. Hours of social media – most of that is not true or right or pure. Arguing with family members about what you've seen on cable news or shared on social media is not admirable. And, yet these are the things that consume us. We start conversations this way – did you see – fill in the news show or headline or article here. It's on our mind. Or we call or facetime someone to say did you hear about – and we gossip about others and spread information that is not true, right, noble, pure or lovely. What we put before us, what we meditate on, what we fill our minds with can rob us of peace or it can fill us with peace.

Sometimes we have to change the atmosphere around us. Paul was sitting in prison writing these words. He could have been bitter and upset, he could have written in an angry tone, but instead he over and over again says to rejoice. NIV has him using the word 8 times in a letter from prison. Paul understood the importance of thinking and meditating on the truth of God's word instead of the truth of his situation. He knew to remind himself of those who were of noble character in his life – the members of the Philippian church for starters. Paul found right and pure things to think of – the love his friends had shown him, the care they had given him. He focused his thoughts on things that were excellent and praiseworthy – and he focused his attention on the Lord. Because the Lord Jesus is all of those things. Paul wrote, **“I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.”** **Philippians 3:10-11** If you can't find anything else of value to think on then think about Jesus.

Last month Bek and I went on vacation and did a huge road trip. One day as we were driving we'd had a phone call that had riled me up. I was ranting pretty good and just really frustrated and upset and was not thinking very lovely or excellent thoughts. I was driving at the time so I told Bek we need some Jesus music on in this car because I need to calm down and refocus. That's what we did. We turned the car into a time of worship and praise and prayer because sometimes we have to change what we allow our minds to dwell on.

We can become so easily distracted by the things we think about and we need to daily reset – to think about the Lord – listen to worship music – the style that you love best. I love our worship team here at Carbondale and I love the music of the choir and orchestra – but if you don't – that's just broccoli – we don't have to agree. But, find the Jesus honoring and exalting music that will help set your mind on things that are praiseworthy and lovely and true. Daily meditate on God's word. Examples abound outside of this letter to the Philippians – to Joshua God said, **“Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.”** **Joshua 1:8** King David wrote of the goodness and the glory of God and the way that His laws are perfect, trustworthy, right and radiant. He said the Law of the Lord would give

joy and light. The words of the Lord were sweeter than honey and more precious than gold.

They warn us, instruct us, and reward us. Then he finishes that Psalm by saying, **“May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be pleasing in your sight.” Psalm 19:14**

Meditate on the word of the Lord – think about the Lord – it will be true and noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent and praiseworthy.

Think about the Lord, about His goodness, His faithfulness, His kindness, His love to us. Don’t get distracted by filling your mind with the things you hear and see around you. But, instead fill your mind with the things of the Lord.

However, in addition to this, it should be noted that Paul was writing to a church living in a pagan society. The danger was that they would become insular thinking there was nothing good outside of the church in the larger world around them. So Paul intentionally says each time – whatever is true, whatever is lovely. He qualifies each trait with the word whatever or the words if anything. It’s sort of like the old phrase don’t be so spiritually minded that you’re no earthly good. There is still good in our world. It’s the people who still take time to send a card with an encouraging word. It’s the folks in your life group who showed up with a meal to help you. It’s the people who actually return their carts at the grocery store and push them all the way into the cart in front of it and it restores your faith in humanity. There is still beauty all around us – art and music and mountains and oceans and sunsets. There are right and true things. There are people living in purity, there are truly lovely things – beautiful things happening all around us. Mister Rogers said in a crisis look for the helpers. Paul said in a bad world – find the good – and think on those things.

Then, finally, verse 9 said, **“Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me – put it into practice.” Philippians 4:9** Here’s what we’ve learned from Paul from this passage:

The Lord is coming soon – live in light of that

Don’t get distracted by disagreement – unity impacts our witness

Don’t get distracted by worry – pray instead

Don’t get distracted by filling your mind with the wrong things – find the good in the world and in the Word

Put it into practice. Pray about everything. Meditate on the truth of God's word. Daily change your thinking to reflect on the Lord. Don't get distracted by the noise or the worries of the world but think on these things and let God's peace fill your heart.

Let's pray.