

anxious for
NOTHING

week 01: rejoice



Good morning Citylight! My name's Doug, and I serve as an elder for our church. You know, I think there's a reason why Apple brought in 12.1 billion dollars last year just from the sales of AirPods alone. 12.1 billion dollars for little earbuds that stick in your ears and play music or podcasts. I think Apple made that much off earbuds because deep down inside we like life better with a soundtrack.

Have you ever been the person at the stop light singing at the top of your lungs, and then look over and the car next to you saw it all? We're driving through town, and we like it better with a soundtrack. It's why athletes warm up with headphones. It's why when I was in middle school, I'd pull out my boom box, turn it to 92.9 KNIN, and listen closely, waiting for that song, the song I wanted to be the soundtrack of my life.

And since I set the standard for cool in my middle school, the song I waited for was Motown Philly, Boyz 2 Men. I spent way too many hours in my room, radio on, finger poised on the record button, just hoping, praying, begging God to tell the DJ to play Motown Philly. And when they did, I recorded it and played it, singing at the top of my lungs, looking out my bedroom window, and wishing in my middle school soul that it was the soundtrack of my life. Then I'd get to the end of the song, stop, rewind, go back to the beginning, and start it all over.

But let me go a little deeper for a moment. The reason Apple made 12.1 billion dollars off AirPods, and the reason why athletes warm up with headphones, and the reason why I mastered the Motown mix tape in middle school, wasn't just because life's better with a soundtrack. It's because we don't really like the soundtrack already playing in our minds, so

we'll spend \$300 on AirPods or wait for hours before we press record on the boom box so we can hear a better soundtrack. We don't like the soundtrack that's on loop in our own minds, so we do what it takes to get a better one.

I know that got philosophical a bit, but are you tracking? Here's a question - what's the soundtrack that's on repeat in your soul? Not the soundtrack you wish you could live life to. But what's the soundtrack that's just there, inside you, repeating in your soul?

This morning we start a 4-week sermon series looking at the soundtracks of our souls, specifically the soundtrack of anxiety, and we're turning to Philippians 4 to hear a better one.

We're calling the series Anxious for Nothing, taken straight out of Philippians 4:6. In the ESV it says: *Do not be anxious about anything.* But in the NASB, an even more word-for-word translation, it says: *Be anxious for nothing.* And my job this morning is to help us admit that for most of us - and I do mean most of us - there's anxiety lurking and lingering in the soundtracks of our souls. We try to drown it out or ignore it, but it's there. And then we'll turn to Philippians 4 to start building a playlist of a better soundtrack, a Jesus soundtrack.

So let's get after it, starting with the tough part first - admitting that **anxiety influences the soundtrack of our soul.** Basic statistics can tell us this:

- * Stress related sicknesses and diseases cost our nation \$300 billion every year in medical bills - that's 25 times more than Apple made on those AirPods;
- * Psychologist Robert Leahy says, "The average child today exhibits the same level of anxiety as the average psychiatric patient in the 1950s."
- * About one-third of middle and high school students experience an anxiety disorder.
- * 54% of college students admit they "felt overwhelming anxiety" in the past year.
- * And about 31% of US adults experience an anxiety disorder.

With numbers like that, it's safe to say that anxiety influences our homes, entertainment, relationships, jobs, and churches.

But beyond statistics, Scripture also speaks into anxiety and fear. The most repeated command in the Bible - from start to finish - is: Fear not.

- * When God spoke to Abram in a vision, he said: *Fear not, Abram, I am your shield.* Genesis 15:1
- * When God's people stared into the Red Sea and the Egyptian army approached behind them, *Moses said to the people, "Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the Lord."* Exodus 14:3
- * Isaiah 41:10: *Fear not, for I am with you.*
- * Luke 12:32: *Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you his kingdom.*
- * Jesus says in Revelation 1:17-18: *Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore.*

There's an estimated 300+ more "fear notes" in the Bible.

It's as though God knows fear and anxiety are rolling around in our minds, sometimes picking up steam and dominating our lives, other times fading to the background but still there. So God speaks into our fears and anxieties over and over and over again.

Statistics and God's word tell us that the soundtrack of anxiety is there. And, let's be honest, our own life experience tells us. I'd dare say that all of us have at some time or another struggle with anxiety. And now's probably a good time to define anxiety. When Philippians 4 talks about anxiety, and when Jesus talks about anxiety, they're talking about our state of being when we're troubled by what's outside our control. **Anxiety is our state of being - emotionally, mentally, and physically - when we're troubled by what's outside our control.**

For example, in Matthew 6:34, Jesus says: *Do not be anxious about tomorrow. Tomorrow. The future. It's outside our control, beyond our ability to dictate how it goes. Tomorrow could go great. Or tomorrow could go terribly. When tomorrow troubles us today, that's anxiety. When anything outside our control - like our ability to be healthy, keep a job, be perfect parents or straight-A students or well-liked at school or well-liked on social media... when we're troubled by anything outside our control - which is pretty much most of life, as Jesus put it in Matthew 6:25 - that's anxiety.*

So anxiety isn't a deal where you either have it or you don't. Anxiety disorders might be that way; but anxiety is often more like a spectrum. On one end are the times when we're not worried, not troubled by what's outside our control; and on the other end are the times when our emotions, thoughts, and bodies are dominated by what's outside our control. Our worries and troubles eat away at our souls, we can't think clearly, and we lose grip on reality.

Let me be personal. Some of my earliest moments of anxiety would happen when I'd get home from school and be the only one there. Mom and Dad were still at work. My brother was probably hanging out with friends. And I was home alone. Usually I'd watch a couple episodes of *Saved by the Bell* to distract myself, but then 4pm would come, *Saved by the Bell* was gone, and I was still alone. My mind would start to think, "What if they don't come home? What if Dad gets in a wreck on his way home from work? What if something happens to Mom? What if I never see them again? Would I know how to get a job and pay the bills myself? Would I move in with Grandma?" And those thoughts would snowball on top of each other until finally I heard the garage door open and one of my parents walk in, and I'd pretend like I was just chilling the whole time waiting for them.

Do you see how anxiety was the soundtrack playing in my soul? I may have wanted to be Zach Morris and let *Saved by the Bell* be the soundtrack that drowned out my anxiety, but the real soundtrack in my soul was, "What if? What if? What if?" Anxiety.

More recently, anxiety showed up right before our church was planted. God had been faithful to gather a growing team of people committed to the mission of multiplying disciples and churches in Council Bluffs. We'd all pitched in and made financial commitments to our church plant. And we were about to close on our first building for our church. And a week before the closing date, our architect told us we needed to do some expansive updates and repairs to meet some city code. And the costs of those updates was way more than we could afford as a church.

I remember walking to that building - the old Peterson Elementary School in mid-south CB - looking in through the glass doors and thinking, "I guess this isn't gonna work out." And then my mind raced. "I've already left my job back at Citylight Omaha, my family's already bought a house here in Council Bluffs, Whitney's pregnant. If we don't get this building, what if our church plant fades away? What if people lose trust in their leaders and leave the church? What if I can't find another job and I'm not able to provide for my family? What if my kids get bitter at the church because of this? What if this was never meant to be? What if God really didn't call us to this and I was just chasing a man-made dream?" My anxiety took me from the presenting problem - a really big one it seemed at the time - into things I couldn't control, down into the dark recesses of the soundtrack of anxiety in my soul, causing me to question God himself, God's willingness to provide basic needs for my children, and God's call on my life.

And sometimes the soundtrack of anxiety can mess with us even when we don't realize it. Do you ever have outsized reactions to things in life? Something happens and you respond way beyond normal? You blow up and your anger soars til even you're surprised. Your mind races and you can't sleep well for nights just because a friend mentioned something to you. You check and double check and triple check your bank account every hour or two even though you know there's no new purchases. Most likely, there's anxiety in the soundtrack of your soul, hiding away, but sneaking out in outsized behaviors.

Are you beginning to see how anxiety influences your life? Are you beginning to see why God speaks to fear and anxiety so many times in his book? Are you able to hear some of the soundtrack of your soul? The what-ifs, regrets, fears, racing thoughts, sleepless nights, outsized reactions. Anxiety.

Now, what do we do with it? The stats, the Bible, and our experience tell us it's there, but what do we do with it? Well, I think we do with it what earbuds do. They play a better soundtrack, better songs. And Philippians 4 builds us a playlist of better songs. Let me highlight two: **Jesus is Lord**, and **Jesus is near**. Jesus is Lord, and Jesus is near.

Look at Philippians 4:4: *Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.* Now when we first hear that verse, especially in the context of struggles with anxiety, it can almost be anxiety-inducing. It's like this meme.

When someone says 'don't be anxious' and your anxiety is cured



Obviously, it's sarcastic. Just because someone tells us to not be anxious doesn't mean we'll magically and suddenly not be anxious. And just because the Bible commands us to rejoice always doesn't mean we magically and suddenly rejoice instead of worry.

And I don't think Paul - the writer of Philippians - is detached from real life at all here. If there's anyone who had reason for anxiety, it was Paul. He was in prison, waiting to find out if he'd be killed for his faith or not, being gossiped about from celebrity preachers, and concerned for close friends who were arguing with each other. Paul's not aloof. He's not detached. He's very well aware that life has hard days, hard nights, hard iron bars keeping him in prison, hard relationships that fall apart and betray you. And yet, he writes: *Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say rejoice.*

Which is why I think the emphasis we need to see here are the three words: *in the Lord*. Rejoice in the Lord. In other words, let your joy grow out of the soil of the lordship of Jesus Christ - not the soil of circumstances, not the soil of popularity, not the soil of good jobs and good health. Let your joy grow out of the soil of the lordship of Jesus Christ.

One of the biggest and most nasty lies of anxiety is this: You are in control. Or, you have to control this. Or, you better not lose control of this because what if...? Control is wrapped all around and into our anxieties. And the truth of Philippians 4 that bursts the bubble of control is: you're not in control. Rejoice, you're not lord. Jesus is Lord. Let your joy grow out of the soil of the lordship of Jesus Christ.

The lordship of Jesus shows up big in our lives and then in a thousand small ways for the rest of our lives. Let me explain. The lordship of Jesus first shows up big in our lives. We're doing life on our own - thinking our own thoughts, figuring out our own problems, doing life our own way. Whether it feels like it or not, the Bible calls that sin. Sin isn't just doing bad things; it's doing life without God. And many of us have spent years doing life that way. Some of you might be there now.

But then somehow we're drawn to Jesus. We remember childhood memories or Sunday school teachers who talked about Jesus. Maybe he's worth a shot since everyone else has let you down. Maybe being a good person isn't satisfying you. Or the drugs and alcohol and porn don't satisfy. Whatever it is, we realize that life on our own isn't cutting it, sin doesn't satisfy, and Jesus draws us to himself. We turn to him in faith; He forgives us freely

and fully; He saves us from our sin. But when it comes to Jesus, you never get just a Savior. He's Savior, and He's Lord. The lordship of Jesus shows up big in our lives.

And then it plays out in a thousand small ways. The lordship of Jesus shows up in our relationships, and we start peeling away our bitterness and putting on forgiveness. The lordship of Jesus shows up in our finances, and we peel away our hoarding and put on generosity. The lordship of Jesus shows up in our conversations, and we peel away biting words and put on building-up words. This process of the lordship of Jesus showing up in a thousand ways is also the process of Jesus freeing us from anxiety. It's his way of letting us know we're not in control; He is. We're not lord. Jesus is Lord. And his lordship is a good gift, freeing us from the illusion of control that fosters anxiety in our hearts.

The first song on the playlist of the Jesus soundtrack is Jesus is Lord. The second song is this: **Jesus is near**. Jesus isn't a lord who sits far away on a throne and makes demands of his people but never draws near to them. Jesus is a Lord who draws near to us, is a part of our lives, engaged with us. Look at this sentence in Philippians 4:5: *The Lord is at hand*. Simply put, the Lord is near.

Our house has some big windows that face out from our kitchen and dining room to our driveway. And sometimes when I'm pulling in the driveway, our younger kiddos will look out and see me pulling in. Then when I walk inside, they come running to greet me. Huge hugs, smile on their faces, and they announce to the whole house, "Dad's home! Dad's home! Dad's here!"

The heart of Philippians 4:4 is Jesus is Lord - ruler, king, boss. He's the one in control. But the heart of Philippians 4:5 is Jesus is near. "Jesus is here! Jesus is here! Jesus is near."

The heart of Jesus is to be near to you. This is what Revelation 3:20 is getting at when Jesus says, "*Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, (catch the language of nearness here) I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.*" It's what Jesus says in John 14:23: *If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.*" Nearness. Jesus is at hand, pursuing depth of relationship, nearness of intimacy with us.

The lordship of Jesus and the nearness of Jesus are meant to go hand in hand. Psalm 25:14 says it this way: *The friendship of the LORD is for those who fear him*. The friendship of God is for who fear him and worship him as LORD. Or, the lordship of Jesus fosters an awareness of the nearness of Jesus. The more we know Jesus as Lord, the more we know him as friend, bringing freedom from our anxieties, bringing strength to our fight against anxiety, bringing hope in our ongoing battle against anxiety.

Let's bring this home to your most recent anxious thought. What was your most recent "what if?" Your most recent outsized reaction or racing thought? The soundtrack of anxiety

would want to turn up the volume to that and trouble your emotions, thoughts, and body more and more. But Jesus is Lord would say: let go of the illusion of control. You're not in control. You don't have to carry this or force this or make it all perfect. And you can say to yourself: I am not lord. Jesus is Lord.

And Jesus is near would say: he's here. He's not far away, keeping a safe distance. The one in control is near. He's holding you, loving you, hearing you. So you can say to yourself: I'm not alone. I have a Lord, and I have a friend named Jesus, with me in this.

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week 02: pray



Good morning friends! My name's Erick, and I'm excited to get into God's word with you this morning! Today, I'm particularly excited because our passage is intended to be an encouragement. The English Standard Version is the translation we use around here. It gives this section of scripture the heading: *Exhortation, Encouragement, and Prayer*.

1st Encouragement - Rejoice

It's meant to spur us on to keep following Jesus. It's encouragement and motivation. It's fuel for when the tank feels low. Let's trace out the encouragement. Verse 4 begins, *Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.*

Rejoice in the Lord. He gives joy. When He was born the angel lit up the sky and said, "*bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.*" And how often can you find joy in the Lord? Always. That doesn't mean that times are never hard for Christians. It doesn't mean you'll never shed another tear or feel another pit in your stomach - it just means that the reason we find joy in Jesus is always there. It never ends or stops. Jesus died to defeat Satan sin and death. And He rose from the grave to invite everyone who believes in Him to follow Him out of Satan's grip, sin's stronghold, and death's domain. We always have that truth!

2nd Encouragement - The Lord is at hand

Verse 5 is just as encouraging, *Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand....*

What kind of reasonableness is this? Here's the line of thought. If you're rejoicing always, that will look unreasonable to a lot of people. The world is going crazy, how can you rejoice? There's not enough money in the bank, how can you rejoice? That diagnosis is the opposite of what you wanted, how can you rejoice? Your marriage isn't anything like what you dreamed it would be, how can you rejoice? Again - I'm not saying that we never shed another tear, or admit our own brokenness and pain. Christians cry and hurt and suffer and die. That's true. But they also always have a well of joy to drink from.

2 Corinthians 6:8-10 describes this double edged experience: *We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold, we live; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything.*

There's a double-edged sense to this life that includes being "sorrowful yet always rejoicing." That seems unreasonable doesn't it?! How do we live that kind of life? The second encouragement in this passage reminds us, "The Lord is at hand." It means Jesus is near. He's coming back soon. Romans 16:20 says it this way: *The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.*

Jesus is coming back soon and it will be the final crushing blow to our enemy and the source of all our anxiety. That's a sustaining sort of truth. It's the sort of truth that gets us through hard times. My wife and I decided to get memberships to Planet Fitness this year. It's the first time I've tried working out in a decade. Last week I was running on the treadmill. My goal is to run a 10 minute mile. That means I've got to set the treadmill speed at 6 miles per hour. That's not breakneck speed. For a runner, it's basically a light jog — but it's definitely faster than my little legs are used to moving! So last week I'm on the treadmill and I decided I'd go 6 mph for 2 1/2 minutes, then 4 mph for 2 1/2 minutes then back up to 6 for another 2 1/2 minutes and back down to 4 for the final 2 1/2 minutes. The plan seemed good in my mind - "10 minutes and then I'm done, easy!" But in reality, it was killer!

That second 6mph run got me. My thighs were burning. I was breathing hard enough I could taste my breath. Anybody else ever get that? It's a weird signal that I'm pushing myself. My heart was pumping. I wanted to quit. But Ron was on the treadmill next to me and he knew my goal, so I had to push through. You know what I did to get to the finish line? I watched the timer on the treadmill. For some people, that's a terrible strategy. It makes you feel like the time goes too slowly. But for me, it's motivating. I think to myself, "Look how far you've made it! With each tick of that timer, you're one second closer to shutting this thing off! You can keep going a little longer. The end is coming soon!" And you know what? I got to 10 minutes.

Knowing the end is near is motivation to reach the finish line. That's the sort of encouragement we get here in Philipians — "The Lord is at hand!" Jesus is near! He's coming back soon! He's going to crush Satan, cleanse this world of sin, and put death to

death forever! In light of that, “sorrowful, yet always rejoicing” is reasonable. We acknowledge the hardships, challenges, suffering, pain, loss, and sadness we feel today. It’s the heart racing, lungs pumping, thighs burning stage of the race. But we also “rejoice in the Lord always” because we know He’s coming soon!

3rd Encouragement - Pray and the peace of God will guard

The encouragement continues in verses 6 & 7. That’s where we’re going to spend the rest of our time today. Let’s keep tracking with the thought line here. We’re supposed to rejoice in the Lord always. How do we do that? Well, the Lord is at hand so everything that causes us anxiety will end soon. That’s why Philippians says “do not be anxious about anything.” But what do we do until Jesus comes for us and takes us home? How do we keep our eyes set on Him who is our reason for rejoicing, when life gets hard and we feel anxious?

Philippians helps us out. It tells us to pray. Here are verses 6 & 7: *Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanks- giving 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.*

Philippians tells us to pray. I’m not saying that prayer is a magic cure for anxiety that always ends it immediately. Both scripture and real life experience tell us that it doesn’t always happen that way. The Bible tells us that Jesus prayed in the wilderness for 40 days while Satan tempted Him. It tells us that Anna prayed for decades in the temple before she saw Jesus there. God’s people prayed for generations before they saw the temple rebuilt. The instruction to pray isn’t a promise that an answer or relief will come immediately.

But there is a promise connected to prayer in these verses. Did you catch it? Let me read it to you again: *Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanks- giving 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.*

The promise is that when we pray, *the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.* Your heart and mind — the very places where anxiety wants to make it’s home — are guarded by the peace of God when we pray. That’s an encouraging promise! We could think about it like this: **when anxiety talks to you, don’t talk back. Talk to God instead.**

And Philippians gives us some direction on how to pray — how to talk to God, how to change the conversation. It says: *...in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.*

Pastor John Piper gave what I think is a helpful framework to understand what this verse is saying. He said **prayer** is the general activity. It’s us talking to God. **Supplication** is the type of prayer. It’s making your need known or presenting your request to God. Finally,

thanksgiving is our attitude as we pray. We don't pray to God making demands of Him like He serves us. We don't pray to God thinking we're entitled to have Him answer exactly when and how we want Him to. We pray with thanksgiving. We pray with thankfulness remembering what He saved us from — a life lost in sin and darkness now and eternal separation from God in hell forever. We pray with thankfulness remembering what He saves us to — His Holy Spirit indwelling us and empowering us now, and eternal life with Him in heaven forever.

There's a challenge in preaching a sermon like this — we can fall off the horse on two sides. On one side, there's a chance we can trivialize anxiety "Just pray with thankfulness and it'll all go away." On the other side, there's a chance we can trivialize God's power, "Prayer doesn't really bring the peace of God to guard our hearts and minds. We know more about how anxiety works today than they did when the Bible was written." Both errors are dismissive in their own ways. I think the best way to honor both the reality of anxiety and the power of God today is to look at a couple case studies of prayer in action in scripture. They're times when the anxiety struggle is real, and so is the peace of God's defense through prayer.

First, let's look at a woman named Hannah. She was married to a man named Elkanah who had a second wife named Peninnah. Peninnah had kids with Elkanah, but Hannah couldn't. 1 Samuel 1:6 says: *And her rival used to provoke her grievously to irritate her, because the LORD had closed her womb.*

The reality of childlessness was painful for Hannah, but Peninnah's bullying made it unbearable. The pain was deep. One day when Hannah was at the temple. 1 Samuel 1:10-13: *She was deeply distressed and prayed to the LORD and wept bitterly. And she vowed a vow and said, "O LORD of hosts, if you will indeed look on the affliction of your servant and remember me and not forget your servant, but will give to your servant a son, then I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life, and no razor shall touch his head." As she continued praying before the LORD, Eli observed her mouth. Hannah was speaking in her heart; only her lips moved, and her voice was not heard.*

You can feel the weight she was carrying can't you? Deep distress. Bitter weeping. So much pain that as she sobbed her lips moved, but only her heart could speak. Her struggle was real. And as the anxiety spoke to her, she spoke to God. She made her request. "Remember me God. Don't forget me here. I'm afflicted. I'm hurting. I'm empty. I'm broken. If you will give me a son, I'll give him back to you." That's an honest cry, isn't it? For years she'd felt this pain. For years she'd prayed. Here she was praying again making her requests to God. Eli the priest saw her lips moving but no words being spoken and thought she was drunk.

She told him she wasn't. *But Hannah answered, "No, my lord, I am a woman troubled in spirit. I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I have been pouring out my soul before the LORD.*

Do not regard your servant as a worthless woman, for all along I have been speaking out of my great anxiety and vexation” (1 Samuel 1:15-16).

There’s our word - anxiety. And what was her anxiety telling her? “You’re worthless.” We know that because she asks Eli to not regard her as a worthless woman. She feels worthless each time Peninnah points out her problems. She feels worthless when her husband seems to wish away the struggle saying, “You got me and I’m better than 10 sons.” Not helpful right!? She feels worthless when the priest sees her crying through her prayers and thinks she’s drunk. Her anxiety is telling her that everyone must think she’s worthless. That’s the loop we get into when anxiety talks to us and we talk back.

Anxiety: “You’re worthless.”

Hannah: “Am I?”

Anxiety: “Of course, everybody sees it. Penny points it out every day. And your husband wish- es you’d give it up and just be satisfied with him. Your troubles are such a burden you’re good for nothing.”

Hannah: “Are you sure?”

Anxiety: “Of course! Even the priest agrees!”

Talking back to anxiety gets real convincing real fast. But anxiety wasn’t telling the truth. And to hear a different story, Hannah talked to God in prayer. She made her requests. And when Eli the priest interrupted her prayer, he didn’t confirm what her anxiety was telling her. Instead this is what he said, *Then Eli answered, “Go in peace, and the God of Israel grant your petition that you have made to him.” And she said, “Let your servant find favor in your eyes.” Then the woman went her way and ate, and her face was no longer sad (1 Samuel 1:17-18).*

Eli says, “Go in peace,” and she walks away no longer overcome with sadness! It feels like this story is following a Philippians 4 outline!

1. Be anxious about nothing.
2. Pray in everything.
3. The peace of God will guard your heart and mind.

Hannah was anxious. She didn’t talk back to the anxiety; instead she went to God in prayer and supplication. And she left the temple with peace. God hadn’t answered her prayers yet. The desires of her heart weren’t met yet. But God had heard her prayers, the priest had offered her God’s peace, and even shared her desire for God to grant her requests. Turns out that could’ve been a prophetic statement because God did answer her prayer and give

her a son, but she didn't yet know that would happen. Her peace came from her prayer not her pregnancy. God was with her before her prayers were answered.

Friends, that's Philippians 4. We rejoice because Jesus is at hand! He's coming soon! He'll soon put an end to everything that causes us anxiety. Until that day, prayer and supplication with thanksgiving is our shield against anxiety's attack. Through it, the peace of God guards our hearts and minds.

Let me give you one more case study. This one comes from the book of Micah. Micah is an Old Testament prophet who is lamenting all the ways the world has failed him.

Listen to his words in Micah 7:1: *Woe is me! For I have become as when the summer fruit has been gathered, as when the grapes have been gleaned: there is no cluster to eat, no first-ripe fig that my soul desires.* He's been picked bare and there's nothing left to give.

Verse 2: *The godly has perished from the earth, and there is no one upright among mankind; they all lie in wait for blood, and each hunts the other with a net.* Humanity has failed him.

Verses 3-4: *Their hands are on what is evil, to do it well; the prince and the judge ask for a bribe, and the great man utters the evil desire of his soul; thus they weave it together. The best of them is like a brier, the most upright of them a thorn hedge. The day of your watchmen, of your punishment, has come; now their confusion is at hand.* His leaders have failed him.

Verse 5: *Put no trust in a neighbor; have no confidence in a friend.* His friends and neighbors have failed him. *...guard the doors of your mouth from her who lies in your arms; for the son treats the father with contempt, the daughter rises up against her mother, the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; a man's enemies are the men of his own house.* His own family has failed him.

You can see why he begins "Woe is me!" Everyone seems to be against each other everywhere — out in public, in his own neighborhood, and even in his own home. He can't find a safe place or refuge from his troubles.

We wouldn't blame Micah for ending his lament the same way he began, "Woe is me!" But that's not what he does! He surprises us. Look at what he says: *But as for me, I will look to the LORD; I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me. Rejoice not over me, O my enemy; when I fall, I shall rise; when I sit in darkness, the LORD will be a light to me* (Micah 7:7-8).

He sets his eyes on the Lord. He determines to lift his eyes up out of the weeds. He wants to see God! Why? Because God saves. Micah calls him, "The God of my salvation." God is the One who will one day put an end all his reasons for anxiety. So while Micah waits for that day to come, he prays. I love his prayer confidence "My God will hear me!"

And finally we get the other side of the “sorrowful yet rejoicing” picture. Micah’s troubles may be the headline of the day, but a new day is coming with a new headline. Micah moves from “Woe is me” in verse 1 to verse 8 “Rejoice not over me, O my enemy; when I fall, I shall rise; when I sit in darkness, the LORD will be a light to me.” He doesn’t say that he’ll never fall. He doesn’t say that there won’t ever be another dark day. Those days happen. But even on the darkest days, the Lord is a light. Even on the loneliest days, the Lord hears our prayers. And we can rejoice even on our lowest days because today we are waiting for the God of our salvation, but we won’t wait forever. Our Lord is at hand!

Anxiety is real. I don’t make light of that because the Bible doesn’t make light of it. But the power of God is real too. Philippians says: *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.*

anxious for
NOTHING

week 03: think



Good morning Citylight! My name's Doug, and I serve as an elder for our church. I'm so thankful for how God works through the volunteers of our church. From hospitality team to worship team, greeting, security, Citylight Kids, and more. Each Sunday over 30 volunteers come together to serve our church. They love you, Citylight, and they love Jesus by serving you. So awesome.

Speaking of awesome, a couple summers back, you all blessed my family with an extended sabbatical, a time for us to rest and be renewed. We took advantage of that time and went to the Pacific Northwest. As we drove there, with each passing state, it felt like our world changed a little, until we drove through Oregon, into Washington, and it's like we were taken to a whole new world.

New mountains to look at - different from the majestic bluffs back home, different from the Rockies. New hills and valleys with vineyards and drylands and less grain. We walked some trails that took us deeper into this new world, and with each twist and turn, we got a glimpse of new plants, new trees, new little creatures crawling on those plants and trees. One trail walked us through towering, mossy trees, and crashing waterfalls; we half-expected an E-Wok to walk out and greet us at any moment. We played in a mountain stream and discovered a world of rocks just below the surface of the water - rocks to collect, rocks to throw and skip, rocks to crash back into the water to make a huge splash.

There were new neighbors around the cabin we rented. New animals to watch out for. New cities to visit. New food to eat. We were taken into a whole new world.

You ever had that experience? Maybe it was the first time you watched Star Wars. Maybe when you heard the first song from your now-favorite band and you've got all their lyrics memorized. Maybe it was when you met him or her on the first date. When you first picked up a guitar, watched a Dude Perfect video, started a new job. A whole new world opened up.

With each of these new worlds, there's something that took us there, right? Our van took us to the Pacific Northwest. A movie screen took you to Tattooine. Your headphones took you into your music, a novel took you into Narnia. And Aladdin took Jasmine to a whole new world. Something or someone takes us to our new worlds.

This morning we continue our series intended to help us battle anxiety, and I believe God wants to bring us into a whole new world (I know that sounds cheesy, but hang with me), and the way He wants to take us there is through our thoughts, our thinking. Philippians 4 is loaded with weapons for the fight against anxiety: joy - rejoicing in the Lord; prayer - talking to the Lord; and now thoughts - thinking on the Lord.

Look at verse 8: *Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.* Here's how we'll break it down this morning:

1. This is important.
2. There's a whole world of good thinking.
3. It takes work.

First, **this is important.** In the battle of anxiety, how we think and what we think is important. We've said that anxiety is our state of being - mentally, emotionally, and physically - when we're troubled by what's outside our control. Jesus tells his followers, "Don't be anxious about tomorrow." Tomorrow's outside our control. It could go great. It could go terribly. But either way we can't control it. And when what's beyond our control bothers or troubles or pesters or plagues us, that's anxiety.

Paul joins with Jesus when in Philippians 4:6 he writes: *Do not be anxious about anything.* And as Paul's thinking along these non-anxious lines, he starts verse 8 with *Finally*. Now, we've got to do something with that *Finally*. Because it isn't the final word. In fact, there's 14 more verses to go in his letter to these Philippians. And he covers another 2 or 3 subjects. Furthermore, this isn't Paul's first *Finally* in this letter. He did it back at the midpoint in 3:1: *Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord.*

So either Paul's like a Baptist preacher who tells us multiple times, "I'll close with this" (and I can make that joke since I grew up Baptist)...or Paul's using this *Finally* word for another reason. When Paul writes *Finally*, it's his way of saying, "Listen up, what I'm about to say is important."

It's like a coach who stops practice, brings the team together, and says, "Alright, I'm only gonna say this once, and you better hear it loud and clear," and then says something he just said a couple weeks ago in practice. You've heard it before, but coach's point is still made: this is important!

In this case, Coach Paul is calling all of us together and saying, "Alright, Citylight, I'm only going to say this once, and you better hear it loud and clear: your thinking matters in this battle against anxiety!" Your thoughts, thinking, and mind make a massive difference when it comes to anxiety.

Have you ever paused to consider just how much thinking we do in a day? It's staggering. The millisecond moments when images fly by us as we drive down the road - thought, thought, thought. Brain processing, brain processing. And at the same time we're developing coherent thoughts that last longer - our mind internally whirring and working to put letters into words into sentences into conversations or emails or texts or posts. All the while, there's the soundtrack of our souls singing in the background on repeat, memories triggering responses, smells reminding us of experiences.

And that's if we never pick up our phone or turn on a screen or look at a billboard. But if you mix in the phone, a screen, the news, a billboard, our thoughts go from ridiculously fast to impossibly complex. The most conservative studies say that we have at least 6,200 thoughts each day. Everything from, "I'm looking forward to that donut when I get to church," to, "How long will this sermon go?" or, "I wish I could see my dad again someday," or, "What's my purpose in life?" 6,200 thoughts. And the culmination of those thoughts and all the brain neurons firing and dots connecting and the words, beliefs, worldview, and decisions that flow out of it, add up to what the Bible calls the mind.

When Paul says, "Finally...think on these things," he's saying our mind, our thinking is important. And it's not just Coach Paul who says this.

- * Jesus says in Matthew 22:37: *You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your mind.*
- * King David prays: *Test me, O Lord, and try me; test my heart and my mind* (Psalm 26:2).
- * The prophet Isaiah says: *You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you* (Isaiah 26:3).
- * James adds in: *If anyone lacks wisdom, let him ask God. ...Don't be a double- minded man* (1:5, 8).
- * Peter keeps the train of thought going: *...prepare your minds for action, and be sober- minded* (1:13).

Our mind, our thoughts are important. Second, **there's a whole world of good thinking.** In God's created world, true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, and commendable thoughts are

not rare. They aren't hiding or difficult to find. They're abundant, abounding, around every corner, in every moment. There's a whole world of good, life-giving thinking.

Paul uses repetition to help convince us of this. Hear it: *Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable....* Whatever! There's so much of it. Whatever! Go explore it. Whatever! Have as much as you like.

Let's say you're about to be a new mom, and as soon as you discover you're pregnant, a whole new world opens up to you. A world of cute baby pajamas, dozens of different co-sleepers and bassinets and cribs, a thousand different designs just for baby socks. Suddenly the 62 aisles of baby food and supplies and strollers at Target become relevant to you, and you explore them. And in the whole new world of baby stuff there's a whole new world of just baby monitors. So many options to choose from! Do you go with the classic audio-only monitor? Do you get an audio-and-video monitor set? Or which app do you download to your phone to track your baby's breathing and vitals? Which brand? Motorola, Vtech, Owlet, Nanit. There's so many options!

And then along comes a friend who's been through the baby years and you tell her about all these options, and with joy and grace and wisdom she tells you, "Whatever you choose will be wonderful." That's the way Paul uses *whatever* here.

Or let's say you pull a golden ticket and get a free tour of the Hershey's chocolate factory in Hershey, PA. And as you walk through the factory, you're amazed at all their brands of candy. The lovely, commendable goodness of Reese's Pieces, Twizzler, Rolo, the classic Hershey Kisses! Or maybe you go the healthy route and opt for their Skinny Pop popcorn. Or the Lily's Organic chocolate bars, the Cookies and Creme, White Chocolate Style, Stevia-Sweetened, No Sugar Added Chocolate bar. (I've spent some time with that one.)

And all this deliciousness is before you, and you ask an employee of Hershey's, "Can I have some?" And she says, "Whatever you want." That's the way Paul uses *whatever* here.

Citylight, there's a whole world of true thoughts! I know the confusion of mass media and social media and alternative media makes that hard to believe. The pain caused by authority figures in your past makes that hard to believe. But lean into to Paul's *whatever*. There's a whole world of true thoughts to think. Go explore the truthfulness of God, hike the trails of his truth, swim the deeps of his truth. And when you ask, "Can I have some?" He replies, "Whatever you want."

There's a whole world of honorable thoughts. I know the lies that people spoke to you to manipulate you make that hard to believe. The cutting words of bullies or gossiping words of coworkers make that hard to believe. But lean into Paul's *whatever*. There's a whole world of honorable thoughts. The honor of God. He's revered and noble and exalted and

valiant. He's worth all our worship and wonder and honor. Behold his glory and when you ask, "What do I focus on, God?" He replies, "Whatever you want."

There's a whole world of pure thoughts. I know the imprinted images of pornography from your first exposure to that evil makes it hard to believe. The intruding thoughts of impending doom make that hard to believe. But lean into Paul's *whatever*. There's a whole world of pure thoughts. Like gold refined in a furnace and then handed to you with no blemishes, God's mind is pure. Explore his purity, his focus, his refusal to lie, his commitment to holiness. Oh, the utter relief of God's purity and holiness. And as you think on his purity, you might ask, "What do I learn first?" and He replies, "Whatever you want."

There's a whole world of lovely thoughts. I know anxiety already pushes back and says there's only scary thoughts. I know the darkness of depression can make it feel like lovely is a pipe dream. But lean into Paul's *whatever*. There's a whole world of lovely thoughts. How lovely is your dwelling place, O LORD! Gaze upon the beauty of the Lord. Those who look to him are radiant and will never be put to shame. God is lovely and makes our thoughts lovely.

We could go on. This is the sense of Philippians 4:8. There's a whole world of good, life-giving thoughts to explore and behold and enjoy and think.

Now, because of the age we live in, I need to bring a little clarity here. Paul's not promoting the power of positive thinking. Much of positive thinking today - I tread carefully - is centered on self and anchored in making up your own world of positivity. Paul's inviting us into something better. Taken in the context of his letter to the Philippians, we know that we're not the center of what's true. We're not the ones worthy of praise. In fact, in Philippians 3, after Paul lists his achievements - which would make anyone with a double doctorate and million dollar bank account feel lazy - he follows it up with: *I count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ (3:8)*.

So Paul's not calling us into a whole new world of me-centered, self-esteem thoughts. He's calling us into something so much better: Christ-centered, God-esteem thoughts. Jesus is true. Jesus is honorable. Jesus is just. Jesus is pure. Jesus is lovely. Jesus is commendable. He's excellent and worthy of praise. Think on how infinitely and endlessly good Jesus is. And in so doing, we discover just how loved we are by God, how He makes us honorable and pure, right and excellent.

So we know our thoughts are important. And maybe we're beginning to believe that there really is a whole world of good, Jesus-centered thoughts. Now, finally, let's close with acknowledging **this will take work**. This will take work. No garden magically produces vividly-colored veggies on accident. No athlete accidentally wins a Super Bowl. And no mind lazily stumbles into thinking truly good, life-giving thoughts. It takes work.

In fact, make sure your Bible's open, go back to Philippians 4:8, and with thick lines underline the word *think*. *Think about these things*. Underline it, and then write next to it: active verb. To think is an active - not passive - verb. That means in the battle against anxiety, more and more, as God gives us strength and courage, we don't let our thoughts happen to us; we make our thoughts happen. We're not passive with our thoughts, letting them run wild and control us. We're active with our thoughts.

Here's where we get super practical. How are we going to think good thoughts centered on Jesus? Two steps:

1. Plant good thoughts; and
2. Capture intruding thoughts.

Plant good thoughts. There's a host of ways to do this and most of them won't take an extra minute of your time, but all of them will require a change in how you already use your time. It takes work. For example: we can plant good thoughts by reading the Bible. All of the Bible is God's thoughts, so as we read it, we're taking in God's good thoughts. But reading the Bible probably means less time spent scrolling the ESPN app or Instagram.

We can plant good thoughts by managing what our ears hear. What do your Spotify playlists tell you about the thoughts you're planting in your mind? What do your radio presets tell you about the thoughts you're planting in your mind? Are they Jesus-centered? We can plant good thoughts by changing our listening habits, which probably means less time spent listening to other stuff.

The opportunities abound. We can plant good thoughts by memorizing Scripture, listening to biblical sermons, reading books that reflect the goodness and beauty of God, studying history through a God lense, sitting at a window in your house and watching nature for 10 minutes straight with no phone near you, going for a walk, attending a Bible study, asking a friend in City Group to go through a Bible reading plan with you. The options are endless. Which one should you take? Whatever you prefer.

Plant good thoughts. And **capture intruding thoughts**. No matter how many seeds of good thoughts we plant, there are still those pesky, punk thoughts that intrude. Those anxious thoughts that forecast a general sense of gloom and doom that we can't quite name. Those anxious thoughts that start small but eventually become a conspiracy theory against a close friend we haven't seen in a while. Lustful thoughts, deceiving thoughts, prideful thoughts. They're intruders.

2 Corinthians 10:5 helps so much here. Paul writes: *Take every thought captive to obey Christ*. It's militant, police language here. There are thoughts that don't deserve mercy. There are thoughts that only deserve handcuffs, arrest, and prison 'til they obey Jesus or get out of your mind.

Note: Paul doesn't say, "Invite those thoughts to dinner." He says, "Take them captive." He doesn't say, "Send them a friendly text with lots of funny GIFs and emojis to see if that helps." He says, "Capture them. Arrest them. Wrestle them down to the ground until they cry Uncle Jesus!"

I don't know about your thought life, but in mine, the intruding thoughts don't walk up and say, "You know what? I'm an intruder. But I'm here to turn myself in." Usually the intruding thoughts are hit-and-runs. They take a swipe at me, then hide in the corner; then another swipe and another swipe, and each swipe gets a little bigger and a little bolder until eventually what was an intruding thought becomes my whole mental and emotional state of being. The intruder sits down at the kitchen table of my mind and eats the sandwich he just deceived me into making for him. Punk!

What I need to do is capture that thought on the first swipe. What *we* need to do is capture our thoughts on the first swipe. And make them obey Christ.

Most of the time that means naming the intruding thought and then taking it to the authority at the center of our thoughts: Jesus. It might go like this (and often saying it out loud helps). "Listen, anxious thought, you're not my ruler. You're not true or pure or excellent. So you're arrested. You must submit to Jesus. And in place of you, I speak to myself: Jesus is true. Jesus is pure. Jesus is excellent. Jesus is better than your lies." And then turn it to prayer, "Jesus, I want you. I give all my thoughts to you, Jesus. I think on you. You are true. You are pure." And go explore the world of Jesus' loveliness, planting more and more good, Jesus-centered thoughts.

You tracking? This is real life, but not rocket science. It has the potential to change our lives if we can buy into the importance and power of thinking into the world of Jesus-centered goodness.

anxious for
NOTHING

week 04: practice



Good morning friends! My name's Erick, and I'm excited to get into God's word with you this morning! We've spent this series looking at Philippians 4:4-9. It's written as an encouragement for God's people. Rejoice in the Lord! The Lord is at hand! Don't be anxious about anything, but in everything pray and the peace of God will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus! It's really good stuff!

But you know what comes just before these encouraging verses? A disagreement. Conflict. Stress. Anxiety. We don't know the nitty-gritty details, we just see two people in a disagreement. Look at verse 2: *I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord.*

Euodia and Syntyche aren't on the same page. They're not getting along. They can't find common ground. They're not in agreement and it's intense enough that news of their conflict made it all the way to Paul's prison cell in Rome. So in this incredible letter containing timeless, beautiful, gospel truths, penned by one of the most influential missionary church planters ever to walk this globe, there's ink used instructing these two ladies to agree in the Lord. Neither one of them are mentioned anywhere else in the Bible. Their lasting legacy is being part of a conflict they couldn't sort out on their own.

If you're anything like me, you read this, get honest with yourself for a minute and realize you've been in that spot too. Have you ever been in conflict that you just can't seem to resolve yourself? The conflict is intense enough that word starts spreading. You start to get anxious about it. But you still can't find a way forward. My guess is that most everyone has experienced at least a taste of this sort of thing in the last few years. Covid conflict, political conflict and racial conflict all seemed to rule the day at some point or another. At work, at

the grocery store, at family gatherings, at home, even at church disagreement, conflict and anxiety seemed to seep in everywhere leaving no safe place to hide. The details of our lives and their's are different, but the human condition isn't. We're in the same boat. Conflict, disagreements, stress and anxiety are just as real for us today as they were for them in their day.

That means the encouragement in Philippians 4:4-9 is just as relevant to us now as it was to the Philippian church 2,000 years ago. God's people can rejoice always because Jesus is Lord and Jesus is near! Disagreements and anxiety don't win the day, Jesus does! Because of that, Philippians can continue with verses 6-7: *Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanks- giving 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.*

When we pray the peace of God gets active in our lives. It guards us. Imagine Paul writing this letter from prison under the watchful eye of a Roman guard. The guard is a constant presence in Paul's life. He's stationed next to him. And nobody is getting to Paul without the guard allowing it. And Paul thinks, "That's what the peace of God is like in prayer. It guards our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus!"

And when the peace of God gets active in our lives, we get active too. One pastor said, "The peace of God doesn't produce passivity." I love that! Verses 8 and 9 tell us how to get active. Verse 8 says, "think about these things." Verse 9 says, "practice these things." So the peace of God impacts how we think and practice. Here's verse 8: *Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.*

When disagreements and conflict and anxiety flare up what do we do? We actively think on the things of God. Whatever we can find that's true or honorable or just or pure — we're looking for it and grab- bing on tightly. We actively set our minds on God things! And that brings us to our verse for today. Philippians 4:9: *What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.*

I asked my City Group to read this verse and tell me what they thought of it. The initial response was, "That's a bold statement!" And they're right! The author Paul is encouraging the whole church to follow his example. But I don't think is an example of a Bible-times influencer just trying to build his brand. This isn't an arrogant or self-righteous statement. Instead, this is a man who knows the peace of God in this anxious world, encouraging others to pursue the God of peace too. Let me show you what I mean.

Paul lists four things we are supposed to practice: what you have *learned, received, heard* and *seen* in me". We practice what we've learned, received, heard and seen. This is a list of ways we know things. In other words, Paul is telling us to put what we know into practice.

Let's look at each of the items in the list.

Philippians tells us to practice the things we've learned. We get an idea of what Paul means by that word in the verses that follow today's passage, Philippians 4:11-13: *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.*

Paul learned how to be content in whatever situation he found himself in. In the lowest times when he's locked in a prison cell or when he's beaten for the sake of the gospel or when other Christians are intentionally making his life harder, Paul can be content. In the abounding times when new churches are planted, new leaders are sent out, or hundreds of people hear the gospel, Paul can be content. How did he learn the secret of facing plenty and hunger and abundance and need? He experienced Christ strengthening him in real life as he faced each of those situations. He learned to find contentment in Jesus rather than anxiety in circumstances through the school of real life as a Christian.

Have you had an experience like that? Back in 2011 the Missouri River was flooding. My wife and I lived on the cul-de-sac at the west end of 2nd Avenue, less than a half mile from the river. We had a two year old and a new baby. We were informed that if the levee broke near our house, we'd have about 10 minutes before there was 8 or 10 feet of water in our house. Our property, our home, our future, even our lives felt at risk. I remember being so stressed out that I couldn't think about anything else. It was constant, unrelenting anxiety and I couldn't do anything about it.

One night, I went for a walk on the pedestrian bridge. I stood over the river that threatened my home and my family and my life and looked on in awe. It was wider and higher than I'd ever seen it. The current was rushing down the channel. I watched sticks and limbs that got caught in it race under the bridge and quickly out of sight. It was literally a force of nature ready to be unleashed. And as I stood there in awe of the flood waters contained for the moment by the levees on each bank, a verse came to mind.

Psalm 29:10: The LORD sits enthroned over the flood; the LORD sits enthroned as king forever.

I learned something about God that night on the bridge that I couldn't learn the same way sitting in a seat listening to a sermon on the Psalm. As powerful as the flood waters were... they ran under the throne of God. They couldn't overtake Him! And what started as a night looking down at the river in awe, ended looking up in awe at the Forever King whose throne

isn't threatened by any other power. Floods come and go, but the Lord sits on His throne forever!

Somehow in the half hour or so I spent on that walk, I learned something about God that challenged everything that was causing my anxiety and shifted my heart to a place of peace. My circumstances didn't change, and wouldn't for weeks — but learning the truth of Psalm 29:10 on that bridge changed my perspective on those circumstances.

I think that's what Paul is talking about when he tells us to practice what we've learned. It's not just a list of "do this" and "don't do that" life instructions, though there are some of those. **Practicing what we've learned means living like what God has proven to us about Himself is really true.** Paul is simply encouraging the church to do the same thing he has done himself.

Next one. **What you have learned and *received* ... practice these things.** Practice what you've received. What does that mean? Look at a couple passages. The first is Galatians 1:11-12: *For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel. For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.*

I'll just make this point. Paul didn't invent his own gospel message. He didn't learn it from another guy who made it up either. He received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. He received it. It was given to him or passed on to him. Hang on to that and let me show you another passage. 1 Corinthians 15:1-4: *Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures....*

So here's what happened. Paul received the gospel when Jesus revealed it to him. Then he preached that gospel, delivering to others, so that they could receive it too. This is the kind of knowledge that's passed on.

It makes me think about getting to know Sarah when we were in college. I learned she loved chocolate by watching what kinds of desert she picked out in the cafeteria. But I received the knowledge that her favorite dessert is revel bars from the Better Homes and Gardens cook book when her mom told about it. I learned the first through life experience, I received the second by knowledge that was passed on to me.

Here's the point I want to make on this one: Christians don't originate the things we know and practice. We don't make up or create or invent or innovate Christian faith and life. Instead, we practice what we've received. That might sound old-fashioned. In today's world

the best advice you can give often sounds something like, “live your own truth” or “find your own way” not “practice what you’ve received”. In today’s world thinking new thoughts and innovating new technologies is all the rage, not practicing a way of life that’s been revealed and received for a couple thousand years.

Friends, Paul puts the gospel in this “knowing by receiving” category. The gospel is the truth “that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures....” It’s the truth that’s been the unshakable and unbreakable foundation for God’s people to stand on no matter what we face. It’s the truth that saves us from sin and death. It’s the truth that God has revealed to His people and preserved and passed on for thousands of years.

It’s endured war and peace, plenty and famine, persecution and favor. It’s flourished across different cultures and centuries. Receiving a truth like that is incredible! It means we don’t have to lay the foundation for our own lives hoping it doesn’t crack underneath us — we can receive God’s unshakable, foundational gospel truth and stand on it. We don’t have to pick from a buffet of truth options and hope that what we put on our plate gets us through life ok.

We can receive live-giving, sin-forgiving, eternally-lasting gospel truth and have assurance that we’re saved from the sin that entangles and condemns! **Practicing what we’ve received means reckoning the good news of the passed on and revealed gospel as truth and standing on it as the foundation of your life.**

So we practice what we’ve learned and received. They’re the first two ways of knowing. *Learned* is knowledge gained from life experience. *Received* is knowledge gained from accepting what’s been passed on to you. **Finally the list ends with *heard and seen*.** Clearly these are different things. You hear with your ears and see with your eyes. Hearing operates through sound waves and sight through light waves. But they’re both sensory functions. Hearing and seeing are ways of observing the world around you. Since they function together in that sense, I’m going to group them together here.

I’d say *heard and seen* is knowledge gained from observation. Let me show you how Paul uses this idea earlier in Philippians in 1:29-30: *For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.*

Paul is telling the people in the Philippian church that they aren’t facing disagreement, opposition, or suffering alone, or for the first time. Jesus is good, but this life is still hard! So how do they get through? Where do they find the peace of God in the chaos and anxiety of life?

Paul says they're experiencing the same conflict that they saw and heard he had experienced. They watched Paul defend the faith against angry opponents, and pray in every circumstance, and get thrown in prison for what he believed. And they heard how he explained the gospel using the Old Testament when he talked to the Jews, and how he explained the gospel to the Greeks in Athens using their altar to the unknown god, and how he worshipped and sang even in his prison cell and God was with him there. They had heard and seen Paul as they observed his Christian life.

In that sense, I do think Paul was a first century influencer! He's telling the Philippian believers, "What you have heard and seen in me, practice these things!" He says it another way in 1 Corinthians 11:1: *Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.*

So Paul's telling the church, "When you look at my life and see ways I'm living in accord with the truth you've learned and received about Jesus, then follow my example!" He doesn't limit the imitation thing to himself. He also writes in Philippians 3:17: *Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us.*

So anyone living a Jesus-loving, God-honoring life can be an example like Paul was. So for us today, how do we practice what we've heard and seen? Maybe you're in a disagreement like Euodia and Syntyche. You just can't find a way forward. You could look at examples of disagreements Paul had in scripture. In Philippians 1, there are rival preachers using the gospel as a way to make life harder for him. I don't know how that worked exactly, but that's what was happening. In that case, Paul simply rejoiced that the gospel was being preached. He took himself out of the equation and rejoiced in something bigger than himself.

But in Galatians 2 Paul has a disagreement with Peter and decides to speak up and enter into it. If you're in a disagreement, you could study those examples and others to see and hear how a godly dude handled himself and then imitate him.

Or maybe you're struck by the generosity of Jesus in the gospel. He gave His own life for us. He gives us His love and grace without end. He calls us His friends and welcomes us into His kingdom. And maybe you feel a mix of conviction and inspiration to reflect Jesus' generosity in greater ways in your own life. One way to do that is to look around and listen for ways other Christians do it. Identify generous people and watch how they operate. Listen to how they speak and think. And then imitate those things.

Practicing what we've heard and seen means we watch and listen for people who are honoring God with their lives and we put into practice the things we observe.

I'll close the way our verse closes: *...and the God of peace will be with you* (Philippians 4:9). There's no doubt we live in anxious times. We started out this series with Scripture, stats, and stories that prove it.

Of all the encouragement in these verses, this last one might be the greatest. "The God of peace will be with you." When you feel anxious, often rejoicing is the last thing you want to do. Praying is hard. Redirecting your thoughts to godly things feels like a kitten trying to redirect a runaway train. And finding the clarity of thought to piece together what you've learned, received, heard and seen so that you can change your actions is overwhelming.

Friend, in those moments all is not lost. If you've given your life to Jesus, the God of peace is with you.