

## The God of Peace

Philippians 4: 2-9

### Introduction

Good morning, my name is John Laisy. I'm a partner here at City Life Church, and I've been invited to speak here today as we continue our study in the Book of Philippians this summer.

Our pastor and primary teaching elder, Jonathan Dodson, will be wrapping up a 3-month sabbatical in a few weeks, and if you're visiting, we welcome you, and we're so glad you're here with us today.

I'd like to start out by telling you just a little about me. I've been a committed follower of Jesus Christ since 1979, when at age 23 I surrendered my life to Him. I met my wife Ellen in our church's single's group, and we've been married for 35 years. We have 3 grown daughters, 2 of whom are married, and we have 4 beautiful, intelligent, exceptional grandchildren (with 1 more on the way).

In case you haven't noticed, we don't quite fit the norm in the demographics of City Life Church! We're probably older than many of your parents, and reality really hit one day, when we realized that we have grandchildren that are older than any of the kids in our City Group!

But we love the people of City Life Church and we love Austin! We've been here in Austin for 7 years, and we're excited about what God is doing in City Life Church and in Austin.

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But enough about me. We've been reading through and studying the New Testament book of Philippians, which is the God-inspired letter that the Apostle Paul wrote 2,000 years ago to the church in the city of Philippi. So inspiring, and so full of rich truths! Today, we will be continuing on in Chapter 4, and we'll see how God is a God of peace:

1. Peace, as a fruit of the Holy Spirit,
  2. Peace, that God the Son, Jesus, can bring in the midst of the storms of life, and
  3. Peace, a place that we can dwell, in as we abide in the love of God the Father.
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### Opening Prayer

But before we start in, let's pray together...

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## 1. Peace, a fruit of the Holy Spirit

We're reading through and studying this inspiring book of Philippians, and we come to Chapter 4, verses 2 and 3:

I entreat Euodia 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.  
(Philippians 4:2-3)

So over the past few weeks we've heard all these beautiful, timeless words of Paul to the Philippians, words that Christians throughout history have memorized and meditated on.

And then at the beginning of Chapter 4 comes this public admonishment, this rebuke even, of two members of the Philippian church, where Paul 'calls out' these two women in front of the whole church!

'I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord'. Okay, show of hands, how many you have memorized that verse?

So why is it in here? Why, after all these awesome, inspirational, words? After these timeless gems of apostolic wisdom?

Because it was important that these two live in community and work with one another, for the sake of the Gospel! God was telling Euodia, and God was telling Syntyche, to be at peace with one another and to be in unity!

So what does that mean to us? God is telling us as well, though Paul, to be at peace with one another and to be in unity! He has called US to live in community and work with one another, for the sake of the Gospel! He wants me, He wants you, to be at peace with the people in your City Group, with your Christian brothers and sisters, with your annoying Christian co-worker, even with that unreasonable Christian boss of yours!

Ellen and I have been around for a while, so we've been a part of several churches, some big, some tiny. We've been in Shepherding Groups, Cell Groups, Micro Groups, house churches. We've known all kinds of Christians: Evangelicals, Charismatics, Pentecostals, born-again Roman Catholics, Messianic Jews.

As this crazy, mixed-up, world-wide "body of Christ", we Christians all have (or rather need to have) the same ultimate purpose, we need to have the same goal, we should be driven by the same passion: to share the love and truth of Christ, to share the Gospel, to share the hope of our King and His Kingdom.

We need to set aside our personal preferences, our pet peeves, our comparing, our self-centeredness. We need to look at the big picture, to have the view that we are part of what Jonathan Dodson calls the 'cosmic plan' that God has for Austin, for His Kingdom. Shutting down or avoiding someone in our City Group or in our church that we don't really like or that maybe even annoys us is not an option.

Peace doesn't mean ignoring difference or avoiding conflict. Euodia and Syntyche probably had to have a hard and awkward conversation after hearing this letter.

Sometimes we do need to confront...

Jesus said (and it's recorded in Matthew 18):

"If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother."

It's not easy, it's not fun, I've had to do it (thankfully not that many times), but sometimes it's just something we need to do.

But you know what? We all have quirks, face it, we're all just a little weird! Sometimes we have minor differences, and most often, we just need to have unconditional love for people.

And why is that?

- Because we are to (verse 2) 'agree in the Lord', focus on what we agree on, on what we believe, the truth that we find in God's Word.
- Because we are to (verse 3) 'labor side by side', to focus on what God wants to do through us, through our City Group, through City Life Church, in Austin, and in this world.
- Because 'in the Gospel' (verse 3), and 'for the Gospel', we are called to make Christ known to our city.

The Prince of Peace, Jesus, said:

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God. (Matthew 5:9)

And Paul wrote, in his letter to the church in Rome,

If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. (Romans 12:18)

So how do we do it? By trying harder? No, that only goes so far. We need to ask God for the release of the Holy Spirit in our lives. We need to tell God, 'I can't do it on my own, I want to yield myself, I want to let the Holy Spirit lead me'. Tell God, 'I want to be a man of peace, a woman of peace, a peacemaker in my family, in my home, at work, in my City Group', for the sake of the Gospel.

Again from Paul, this time in his letter to the church in Galatia,

...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control... (Galatians 5:22-23)

If we focus on Jesus, 'agree in the Lord', commit to 'work side by side', 'for the Gospel', and submit ourselves to the Holy Spirit, we will have love for, be at peace with, our brothers and sisters in Christ.

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## 2. Peace, through Jesus

So as much as we're to be in unity, as much as we're to be at peace with our brothers and sisters in Christ, there's another kind of peace that God talks about in Philippians 4, the peace that He provides in the storms of life.

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness (gentleness) 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. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.  
Philippians 4:4-7

So what does it mean in verse 4, to 'Rejoice in the Lord always'?

Moses, the man that God chose to lead His people out of Egypt, knew, and taught it to the Israelites:

And you shall rejoice in all the good that the Lord your God has given to you and to your house...  
(Deuteronomy 26:11)

And in verse 5, what does 'The Lord is at hand' mean?

David, known as a 'man after God's own heart', knew. He knew, because he knew the Lord:

"The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth." (Psalm 145:18)

What about verse 6, 'do not be anxious about anything'? Does that mean it's a sin to be anxious, to worry?

No, because even Jesus, who was without sin, was anxious when He was facing the time of His death:

And being in agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground. (Luke 22:44)

And in verse 7, what is 'the peace of God'?

Jesus' disciples knew, because they really knew Him, and He gave it to them:

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. (John 14:27)

When you get to the point in life where you have this much grey hair (or rather, this little grey hair), you've experienced some storms. I know I have:

- I've been laid off from my job, three times; once 35 years ago when I was wanting to propose to Ellen, once when she and I were expecting our first child, and once again when I was in my early 50's, in the prime of my career
- I stood by while they wheeled Ellen into C-section surgery, three times
- I had to examine my heart, and second-guess myself, and process a lot of guilt, after hearing about the untimely and tragic death of my oldest brother

But for me, my faith and my peace were tested most three years ago, in 2014...

In April 2014 I went for my routine physical exam. My primary doctor noticed some irregularities in my breathing, and recommended I go see a specialist. Now who here wants to go see "the specialist"?!?!

So I went to a respiratory specialist, had some tests, and was then sent for a CT scan of my chest and abdomen.

I went back to work, my regular routine, with a followup appointment scheduled with the doctor on a Wednesday, to go over my CT scan. I remember clear as day, it was Monday afternoon that week, and the scheduler from the doctor's office called. "The doctor wondered if you could come in tomorrow instead of Wednesday?" Tomorrow? What? Did the doctor get an important golf game scheduled for Wednesday? I have meetings, I have deadlines for work! So I said, 'no, I'm sorry, I can't make it tomorrow, I need to do Wednesday, or move it out to next week or whatever'. The scheduler said ok, and hung up.

Five minutes later my phone rings again, and this time it's the doctor. He says, 'I really need you to come in tomorrow, and you might want to bring your wife or a family member with you.'

Now that got my attention. So Ellen and I went the next day, and the doctor says straight out, 'you have a goose-egg size tumor in your chest, it's pressing in on your left bronchial tube and almost completely blocking off the air flow to your left lung. It's cancer, and it's malignant.' Matter of fact, just like that.

Ellen and I are in shock! How could I have cancer? How could he say it's malignant? To be honest, we were angry! I hadn't even had a biopsy. But the doctor said by the look and shape of the tumor in the CT scan that he knew it was malignant. Then he said, "Go ahead and wait out in the waiting room and we'll discuss the next steps in a few minutes".

It's times like this when "the rubber meets the road". It's times like this when your faith is tested. It's times like this when you find out if you're able to say, "I'm not going to be anxious, I'm going pray through this, I'm going to trust God to get me through this."

Jesus said,

'In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.' (John 16:33)

We are loved by God, we are His children, but we are going to have the same problems, the same challenges, the same heartaches that everyone else in the world has. But we also have a way, through Jesus, the Prince of Peace, to have peace in the midst of the storms that come in this life.

THESE are the times we need to cry out to God, as it says in verse 6, 'in everything by prayer and supplication'.

Prayer? We all know what that means, right? To talk to God, to ask Him for help.

Supplication? Not a word we use every day. "Supplication" is defined as "the action of asking or begging for something earnestly or humbly."

That means it's okay, no, it's important, for you to earnestly cry out to God, when your child is sick, or when your heart is breaking, or when it feels like your world is spinning out of control.

THESE are the times we pray, 'with thanksgiving'.

Thanksgiving, that one day in November when Americans thank God (or another something?) for our "blessings", right? No...

Giving thanks, to God, means that when we pray, every day, every time we pray, we are to thank God, as we remember the times when God has shown His faithfulness in the past.

THESE are the times, as it says in verse 6, that we need to 'let our requests be known to God'.

Our requests? For a Harley Davidson?

I don't think that's what it means!

In one of the letters written by the Apostle John, he said:

And this is the confidence that we have toward Him, that if we ask anything according to His will He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of Him. (1 John 5:14-15)

And it is His will that we have provision for life, it is His will that our children are safe, it is His will that we be whole, it is His will that we have peace, knowing that He is with us.

When I found out I had cancer, I had lots of people praying for me...

- My faithful wife Ellen
- Our 3 daughters and their families
- Christian friends and co-workers here in Austin
- Family and old friends back in Ohio

THESE are the times that we also need community...our friends, our Christian brothers and sisters, our City Group...to stand with us, to pray with us, to pray for us, because sometimes we just don't have the strength to pray anymore.

So what happened to me, after I heard that I had cancer?

- I got the peace of God,
- The peace that I got surpassed all my understanding,
- And Jesus guarded my heart and my mind, from fear,
- And from the lies of the Enemy, Satan, who kept whispering in my ear: 'you're going to die, way before your time'

I can't really explain it,

I'm not a super-saint,

I'm not Paul, or Martin Luther, or Billy Graham;

But I have seen God's faithfulness in my life,

And when you 'pray with thanksgiving', remembering what He has done for you in the past, there is hope, there is strength, and there is peace, peace that you just can't explain.

I know there are people in City Life Church who have faced some storms in the last year or so:

- Some have had a young child break an arm, get a concussion, or end up in the ER because of an allergic reaction,
- Some have needed a job, or a need job change, or have faced an unwanted job change,
- There are some who have faced serious challenges in their marriages, even divorce.

When you're trusting God, looking to Jesus, praying to Father God, and thanking Him for His faithfulness,

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He will guard your heart, He will guard your mind, and He will give you 'peace that surpasses understanding', that you cannot explain.

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### 3. Peace, as we abide

So there are storms that come in life...they surely will...there are moments and circumstances when we need to cry out for peace. But we can also abide in a place of God's true, perfect, eternal peace.

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

Philippians 4: 8-9

Do you have a place you like to go, to find peace? The mountains? The beach? A walk in the woods, or a boat ride on the lake?

When Paul wrote these words, about how 'the God of peace will be with you', he was locked up in a Roman prison. And these Roman prisons weren't exactly the Ritz Carleton!

So where and how did Paul find true peace? He worshipped Jesus in the midst of the challenges he faced, and he put his trust in God.

Where is your place of peace?

So back to my story...

I was scheduled for an outpatient procedure to prop open my left bronchial tube and for a biopsy. So on a Friday morning in June, Ellen and I went into the hospital, and we were to be home by afternoon. All routine, just the next step in the doctors' determination of what to do about my tumor.

I woke up Sunday night, in the Intensive Care Unit. My left bronchial tube was almost completely blocked by the tumor, there had been complications with the procedure, and I had had internal bleeding that took 2 days to get stopped. When you wake up in the ICU after a "routine" procedure, it gets you thinking about this life, and what's to come.

A few weeks later I went back to the hospital for surgery. The surgeon removed the tumor; he had hoped to work around my left lung, but it was way too risky. I woke up from surgery with a 12" long incision across my back, minus 1 lung and minus 1 tumor.

So now my heart is over here to the left, where my lung used to be,

- I walk with a little lean to the left (not really!)
- I have this really cool scar across my back,
- But my cancer was contained and slow growing. And praise God I didn't need chemo or radiation, and there's been no indication of any more cancer.

I love life, I love adventure, I want to live life to the fullest. I want to see my grandchildren graduate from college and get married and have babies. But I can honestly tell you that at those times when I was all alone in the hospital and thinking about what was happening to me, I wasn't afraid of what was

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ahead. I knew that I was in God's hands. And I wasn't afraid of dying, because I knew that Jesus paid the price for all my sin, and that I would be spending eternity with God in heaven.

I've been through some hard seasons in my life:

- There was a time as a young husband I thought, 'what did I get myself into, I just keep messing up, I'm never going to get this right'.
- There were many times over many years, as a father I wondered, 'Am I doing this right? How are my daughters going to turn out'?
- There have been many times in my career, where I thought, 'what am I doing in this job, I think I'm losing my mind'.
- I've had my moments since learning that I had cancer, feeling sorry for myself, wondering about what's ahead for me.

Some of you have been living through hard seasons:

- Maybe you're single, you want to be married someday, and you don't understand why God hasn't brought that person to you.
- Maybe you're married, and want to have children, and they haven't come, and you wonder, 'where is God', and if He has heard your cries and seen your tears.
- Maybe you have two or three kids under age 5 (that seems to be pretty common around here!) and sometimes you think 'I'm always exhausted' and that even sometimes you think, 'I'm losing it'.
- Maybe you have a chronic health condition, and you've prayed, and been prayed for, hundreds of times, maybe thousands of times, and the healing hasn't come.

No matter your situation, no matter how long your difficulty, no matter what ugliness or despair or hopelessness you've been in for days, or weeks, or years even, God is there, God is bigger, God is in control, God is sovereign.

One of my favorite verses in the Bible is from Psalm 91:

He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty. (Psalm 91:1)

But back to Philippians 4:8:

- whatever is true...genuine, honest, real, right, authentic
- whatever is honorable... deserving of respect or high regard... decent, ethical, honest, noble, righteous, upright, upstanding
- whatever is just... guided by truth, reason, and fairness; being in conformity with what is morally upright or good
- whatever is pure... unmixed, free from contamination
- whatever is lovely... of a great moral or spiritual beauty
- whatever is commendable... admirable, worthy of praise

Paul is not talking about beaches or mountains or sunsets here, he's talking about Jesus, the Son of God:

- Jesus is true... Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me". (John 14:6)
- Jesus is honorable... "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!" (Revelation 5:12)
- Jesus is just...If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)

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- Jesus is pure...And everyone who thus hopes in Him purifies himself, as He is pure. (1 John 3:3)
- Jesus is lovely... And being made perfect, He became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him (Hebrews 5:9)
- Jesus is commendable...“Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.” (Revelation 4:11)

And then continuing on in verse 8:

- if there is any excellence,
- if there is anything worthy of praise,
- think about these things

Remember when Paul spoke of Jesus in Philippians 2?

... though he was in the form of God, (He) did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so 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 2:5-11

- Jesus is excellent
- Jesus is worthy of praise

And what does ‘think about these things’ mean? It means think about Jesus, who He is, and what He has done:

- Hebrews 3:1-2 -- ...Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession, who was faithful to him who appointed him...
- Hebrew 12:2 -- ...Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.
- Hebrews 12:24 -- ...Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant...
- Hebrews 13: 20 -- ...Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep...

And ‘practice these things’? What are we to practice? This is what Paul taught:

- ...take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ... (2 Corinthians 10:5)
- ...pray without ceasing... (1 Thessalonians 5:17)
- ...take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day... (Ephesians 6:13)
- ...walk by faith, not by sight... (2 Corinthians 5:7)
- ...walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God... (Ephesians 5:2)

And what happens? ‘the God of peace will be with you’.

We need to lift up our heads, lift up our eyes, raise our perspective, take our thoughts captive, and look to this wonderful, mysterious, multifaceted God: God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, for the strength to face the trials of this life.

God is our strength  
God is our help  
God is our fortress  
God is our refuge  
God is our high tower

Is anything too difficult for Him?

I'm human, we're all human, we will have doubts and fears. But we can live, we can abide, knowing that God is bigger than any challenge that we face. We can be at peace in this life, if we focus on God, and trust that He is our refuge and our stronghold.

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## Conclusion

There's a peace, there is unity and love, that we can have in our relationships. It's the peace available to us as a fruit of the Holy Spirit. Let's commit to yielding ourselves to the Holy Spirit and being peacemakers.

There's a peace we can have when the storms of life come, and they will come. It's the peace of Jesus, when we call out to God, and Jesus comes alongside of us. Let's remember to call out to Jesus, 'with thanksgiving', remembering, and reminding one another, what God has done for us in the past, in our times of fear and stress and pain.

And there's a place of peace we can abide in, knowing that God knows us, God is our refuge, God is our fortress. It's a place where we can live, a place where we can dwell—not a physical place, but a place in our hearts and minds and spirits. Let's seek to be a people who know God intimately and know we can trust Him for the long haul.

If you're listening today and you don't see the Holy Spirit's presence in your life, the love, joy, peace, patience and kindness, please come down at the end of our gathering here this morning, there will be people down front to my left (your right) that will pray with you.

If you don't know Jesus, as Lord and Savior, or as the One who will be there when you need something or someone to hold on to when you're hit by a storm, I invite you to come down for prayer.

And if you're thinking:

- I'm not abiding in a place of peace,
- I know God, but I feel so distant from Him,
- My struggle has gone on for so long, I don't know if I can hold on much longer,

Please come down for prayer, or talk to your City Group leader, or to me, or one of our elders. God is real, God is good, God is our peace.

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## Closing Prayer

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