

## **Upside Living in a Downside Economy; an attitude of gratitude!**

November 22, 2009

Philippians 4:4-7

We live in a time of high anxiety. There is a lot of worry out there, isn't there. I must confess, there have been weeks that I have taken a holiday from watching the 6:00 news. Sort of a mental health holiday. It is not exactly putting your head in the sand, but so much of the news is things that you can't do anything about...a tragic bus crash on a highway in Colorado...it is terrible, but it has nothing to do with me in San Jose and I can't do anything about it. It just makes us sad. So there are times when I just take a week off and watch some re-run of Law N Order or Bones where the bad guys get caught and I feel better! We often feel helpless when confronted by the issues of the world, the things that make us anxious and worried. Especially when we think about the economy. We really can't do much about our 401 K or our IRA, we can look for advice and move things around, but most of it is just speculation...who's guess turns out to be right will only be known in hind sight.

What do we do? The Apostle Paul had a receipt for handling stress and anxiety. He knew a lot about them. He had a very stressful life. He was handling a large number of churches, many of whom were just starting out and full of questions, new Christians from a lot of pagan backgrounds...and there were the Romans and Jewish leaders who often persecuted the church. Paul writes the letter from a Roman prison cell, while chained to a roman guard. Yet it is full of Joy! We read it earlier, but here is what he says again:

*“Rejoice in the Lord always, again I say Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends*

*all understanding, will guard your minds and your hearts in Christ Jesus.”*

So here is Paul’s receipt for not worrying.

First, Rejoice in the Lord. The Psalms tell us that the Joy of the Lord is our strength. Jesus said that he came that his joy might be in us and that our Joy might be made full or complete. There is a joy that comes from knowing Christ fully that the world can not take away or touch. A joy that is deep within us. A joy that comes from being fully and completely loved. When we know ourselves to be loved completely, we are joyful or happy within. It is like that feeling you get when you are first in love...like you’re walking on air, like the birds suddenly appear...every time, you are near (oops, a song is breaking forth). We need to Rejoice.

And to know that we are not alone. The Lord is near. This can mean two things. Most scholars believe Paul is referring to the Lord’s return. But it can also refer to Christ’s being near to us. That Christ is near to us all the time. The Lord is near. He is with us. Jesus promised to be with us, and to never desert us or abandon us. Regardless of how hard it gets...of how dark the path, we do not walk it alone. Christ goes with us. We never go it alone. Never. He is with us always, even to the end of the age. That gives us comfort and strength.

Then we come to Paul’s advice about prayer. He says to not be anxious...to not worry. Worry is a hard habit to break, isn’t it. We want to know how things are going to work out...we want to know the future. We want to see what is going to happen and when...and be assured that things will work out the way we want them too. That is the key...the way we want them too. We need to stop worrying...to do our homework, to work as hard as we can and leave the rest to God. Worry tires us out. It drains the energy out of us. It prevents us from resting well, we fret and toss and turn and such. We take the stone of the problem and turn it over and over and over until it is well polished.

Instead we are invited to Pray in everything. In prayers and petitions..these are synonyms to describe alternatives to anxiety. Instead of worrying, we should talk to God directly, honestly, clearly about the situation...how we feel about it, what we fear, what we hope and desire, and turn it over to God. Entrust it to God. You will feel better, really. Some people keep a prayer journal, where they write down a worry page, things that they worry about. One it they write out their worries and then they talk them over with God and lift them up to God, giving God these things to worry about. When they are tempted to worry about them again, they remember that they are instead in God's hands. The next time they pray they can talk them over with God again...reiterate their fears, ask how things are going...The surprising thing is that things get crossed off that list. Perhaps it should not be so surprising after all. Give it a try...

Paul adds With Thanksgiving to our petitions and prayers. It is important that we see the positive in our lives, even in the hard times. We must take time to see the good along side the bad, to see the blessings in our lives, even if you can only count a few of them and to thank God for them. Once you create a habit of giving thanks for blessings, you will begin to see more and more of them. It changes your field of vision. Instead of seeing all the bad, you will begin to notice the good as well.

It helps you keep perspective. When you are down, it is easy to lose perspective and see the world as all dark and gray and miss the colors that are blooming all around you. Sometimes the blessing is unexpected, like a person who turns out to be a great friend in a crisis. Other times it is expected...and appreciated—like the church helping out in times of need or providing support around a funeral. Or the family gathering at a time of loss. Or the unknown strength to get through this..God gives us what we need to get through and he will not abandon us nor desert us. As Paul said about his own illness, “when I am weakest, then Christ is strongest”.

We must have an attitude of gratitude, looking beyond what's wrong in our lives and what we don't have, as large as that may be at the moment, to what we do have, and be thankful for it. This must be the constant demeanor of the Christian, to live without anxiety...to live trusting completely in God through Jesus Christ.

One experiment is to find 20 things you are thankful for. Then find 20 more. The 1<sup>st</sup> 20 are easy. The second 20 are harder. The 3<sup>rd</sup> 20, they are harder yet...now your really getting deep into grateful land. When we do this, we are active in prayer...and something happens!

We receive God's peace. A peace that transcends all understanding. The peace of God is unique. It is not worldly peace. It is not defined as the absence of conflict, it is not dependent upon the actions of other parties involved...This peace is greater than the insecurities of ourselves or others. It is not my peace, or our peace or your peace, it is God's peace and is dependent upon God. It is a tranquility of soul and life that starts within and works itself out. It is seen wholeistically. It means to be made complete, full, lacking in nothing. To be secure and content, satisfied and complete. It is based on the Old Testament word Shalom.

This peace transcends understanding. It can't be dissected, it must be experienced.

This peace sets a guard on our minds and our hearts. To protect our heart...the seat of our emotion...our feelings. Where we love, where we reach out, where we trust and where we get deeply hurt. This peace as we pray about everything and give thanks, our heart becomes protected from harm in Christ Jesus.

And it guards our minds. It protects what we think, what we know...what we believe. That we might think clearly and our emotions, that we be the Church, loving the lost and caring for those in need...knowing our priorities from Jesus himself.

And for this we give grateful praise. We thank God that we have peace that surpasses human understanding that guards us in Christ Jesus. Even in difficult and anxious times, we are set on a solid foundation...one of peace and contentment. We are grateful and full of thanksgiving!

Rejoice in the Lord, again is say Rejoice!