

**FIVE FORKS BRETHREN IN CHRIST CHURCH**  
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**SCRIPTURE:** *Philippians 4:4-9*

**DATE:** *May 17<sup>th</sup>, 2020*

**LOCATION:** *Auditorium Live Stream (Bill)*

**SERMON:** *I Will Say it Again: Rejoice! (The Lord is Near.)*

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*(Acknowledgement to Tim Keller and his sermon on "Overcoming Anxiety".)*

Good morning Five Forks Church, I'm glad for this opportunity to worship Jesus with you this morning.

I also want to welcome any of you who are visiting, and so if this is your first time and you are wondering what we're about here at Five Forks, I would simply say that we are a group of Jesus followers. We have many ministries within this church and we are actively involved throughout our local communities, and the reason for all that we do is because we are followers of Jesus.

I began following Jesus in my early 20's...not long after I started attending Five Forks. And in the first few months of my journey I was meeting once a week with a man named Buck Besecker...he became a mentor and a friend.

Because my meetings with Buck took place many years ago, a lot of what we talked about has grown hazy over time. But there was this one time that we met and Buck shared a passage with me, and that passage – that day - has remained as clear as can be in my mind ever since.

Here's the passage, from Philippians chapter 4...

**Philippians 4:4-7 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: 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 hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.**

In my mind I can still see Buck sitting behind his desk reading those words to me...I remember him pumping his fist for emphasis: *“Rejoice in the Lord always, I will say it again: Rejoice!”*

It was the first verse that I remember actually looking to apply to my life. I had read bits and pieces from the Bible as a kid growing up, but they were just words on a page. The Bible always seemed a bit overwhelming, but Buck was encouraging me to take this one little piece and look to put it into practice.

Every time I come across this passage, whether I read it or hear it, my mind goes back to that day in Buck’s office where he challenged me to rejoice in the Lord, to find joy in the Lord, and by doing so, find His peace.

This passage is very relevant, as Paul wrote these words living in relative isolation, unable to leave the confines of where he was living. He would soon be going on trial, his life at this point would have been considered high risk. And yet in this passage Paul says we’re *not to be anxious about anything*. But as I talk to people and follow the news, there is no doubt that for a lot of people, it’s difficult not to be anxious and not to worry. We’re concerned about our health and the health of those we love.

These concerns are common to all of us, but beyond that, there are some of you who would be identified as “high risk” and you are taking every precaution to not expose yourself to the virus...and the isolation may be taking a toll. Some of you who are parents of young children have been scrambling trying to find child care. Some of you who are teachers find that you suddenly have to adapt on the fly and figure out how to teach effectively when not in the classroom.

Some of you are on the front lines, I have a number of friends who work in nursing homes and hospitals, working directly with COVID-19 patients. The stories I have heard...the heavy, protective gear you must wear which causes you to become soaked with sweat...how you get

cleaned up, the bleach is so strong that it gives you headaches that last until the following day. The physical toll, the emotional toll of putting your life at risk is mind-boggling.

And so as a church of Jesus followers we want to be compassionate in caring for and supporting each other...even for those of you who feel as if not much has changed for you personally, none of us are exempt from the fallout...because life is very, very different right now. And many of us may find ourselves feeling anxious in varying degrees.

And so what we have here is just what we need...*the* classic passage in the Scriptures when it comes to finding and maintaining joy and peace, not just when life is smooth, but during extremely challenging times. What Paul has written here is not fluff, it's relevant to all of us. And so here's where we're going to be headed this morning:

I'd like to begin by having you think about **Your Expectations**...what you've come to expect out of life. And then I'd like for you to think about how you find and maintain **Your Joy**...and then, a similar question, how you find and maintain **Your Peace**. And then, in light of what Jesus reveals to you this morning, I'd like for you to consider what **Your Next Step** will be.

So...to get started...

## 1. YOUR EXPECTATIONS

C.S. Lewis once said, "*Expectations are everything.*" Lewis is saying that our expectations have a lot to do with how we respond to whatever comes our way.

I love meteor showers. I'll read in the news that on such and such a night, if you are up at 3am and look to the east, there's a good chance that you'll see "20 or more" meteors – shooting stars - over the course of an hour.

I think, "*Okay, I'm game*"....and so I'll set my alarm for 3:00, then throw on some heavier clothes, go outside and turn off all the outdoor lights, get out my lawn chair and lay it out flat, lay down on it and stare up into the sky with high expectations.

And for the first few times, I usually came away extremely disappointed because my expectations were rarely met. And so I lowered my expectations and went into these events not expecting much of a show. And so if it turns out to be something special, I go back to bed with my expectations exceeded. And if it turns out not to amount to much of anything, well, it's pretty much what I expected.

How we respond to the events that unfold in our lives will often be impacted by our expectations going in. So, what are some of your expectations?

As followers of Jesus, we have come to expect some challenges, some difficulties, some trials throughout the course of our lives, do we not? Jesus told His followers...

**John 16:33 “In this world you will have trouble.”**

And so we expect parenting to be especially challenging when our children are going through adolescence...we expect to be dealing with various health concerns throughout the course of our lives...we expect some amount of stress, even conflict on the job. In this world we will have trouble, just as Jesus said.

But our expectations aren't limited to things that challenge us...you and I counter those expectations with the expectation that we will also experience many good things...good times.

Sometimes, these are just little pleasures. For instance, around this time of year when the days grow longer and warmer, many of us expect to be watching or perhaps playing baseball. Happens every summer. It's as American as apple pie.

And, around this time of year many of us are thinking about summer vacation, perhaps a week spent at the beach. But here it is the middle of May and there is no baseball and vacations are up in the air. Just little things, but things we were expecting to happen.

Perhaps some of you recently became engaged, and you set a wedding date for this spring or this summer with the expectation that on your wedding day you would be surrounded by lots of family and friends. An expectation that may not come to pass.

For those of you who are seniors in high school your expectations included a prom...and seniors in high school *and* college were expecting a graduation ceremony like previous ceremonies. Expectations that have been put on hold or that will be different than you anticipated.

And so what you do with all of this? Some of our expectations have been thrown for a loop, and so how do you, as a follower of Jesus, find and maintain...

## **2. YOUR JOY**

Paul wrote to the Philippians...Buck said to me...and now I say to you...

### **Philippians 4:4-8 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!**

A lot of people when they think of rejoicing, they envision some outward expression of excitement or exuberance...but one of the best descriptions I've heard for joy is a sense of buoyancy.

Are you familiar with that word, do you know what it means to be buoyant? It means to be lifted up and to rise above...wherever you find yourself, whatever is unfolding all around you...rather than being pulled down, pulled under, the joy you have "in the Lord" helps you to rise above and remain on top of whatever is taking place all around you.

There's a passage in 2 Corinthians where Paul is saying "*Hey gang, we're down but we're not out!*" He's exhorting this group of Jesus followers in the city of Corinth, writing..

### **II Corinthians 4:8 We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair...**

Yes, this is not what we expected. But we're going to rise above it. We're not going to be pulled under. It's not going to crush us. We're not going to be in despair. Yes, there may be frustration, and perhaps grief, and sadness...there will be times -not just now but throughout your life - when you will not be happy and nobody would expect you to be.

But joy is not the same as happiness. Happiness is what we feel when life is going our way. But joy is something much deeper than that.

David said to the Lord,

**Psalm 4:7 You have filled my heart with greater joy than when their grain and new wine abound.**

Everybody is happy when the stock market is up...when those who have invested in corn and wine fields find that the harvest is abundant. But David is saying that there is something greater than that, saying to God, *“You have filled my heart with greater joy...”*

Joy is much deeper than happiness, it's **knowing that deep down, you have the only thing that really matters.** I've been saying this to myself a lot lately. As this virus began to unfold, introducing so much uncertainty to my life, I kept reminding myself that no matter what happens I have Jesus...and He's the only thing that really matters, and He can't be taken from me.

But it doesn't just begin and end with that awareness. Let's take another look at our Scripture text:

**Philippians 4:4-5 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.**

The Lord is near. And we rejoice in Him when we come to recognize Him as the source of many of life's pleasures.

C.S. Lewis once said that **(a follower of Jesus) “allows his mind to run up the sunbeam to the sun.”**

In other words, we don't just look at a sunbeam and say “How beautiful!” Lewis says we allow our mind to run up that sunbeam to its source...to the sun itself.

And the point is, when we experience something pleasurable, something that blesses us, we don't just take in the pleasure...we rejoice in the One who is it's source.

It's May, and while we may not have baseball, we do have strawberries. The only fruit with seeds on the outside rather than the inside...about 200 of these little seeds. And just about everyone who lives in and around this area will take pleasure in the full flavor of a locally grown strawberry.

But we don't just say, "*Mmm - good!*" We allow our mind to run up the sunbeam to the sun...from the strawberry and all of the other good food we get to eat...to the One who is the Provider. As followers of Jesus, we will...

**Philippians 4:4a Rejoice in the Lord always.**

The Lord *is* near.

A few weeks ago I was talking to a friend from our church family who like myself, enjoys walking outdoors. We talked about how unsettled things had become, so many concerns, so many questions. But then we talked about our walks, and spoke of "How the sky is still blue, and the grass is turning green, and the trees are starting to flower."

And we don't just say, "How beautiful!" We allow our minds to run up the sunbeam to the sun, and rejoice because there are many things around us that remind us of God's faithfulness and power.

Over these past few weeks I've seen more families taking walks together, families biking together...a few weeks ago I had someone in the worship team tell me how her husband got up with her at 5am that Sunday morning to walk with her...what I see and what I hear is giving me an opportunity to rejoice in the One who has created us to be relational.

**Philippians 4:4b I will say it again: Rejoice!**

Yes, I wish there was baseball to follow and I wish that right now I was making plans to head for the beach. I wish that my mom and Karen's mom and dad could go where they want whenever they want and I wish that I could visit my Dad in the nursing home where he now lives.

But in spite of the fact that some of my expectations may not come to pass any time soon, I believe the Lord is good, and I will rejoice in Him and the many ways that He continues to show Himself to me.

And my prayer is that you will do the same.

Next question, same as with joy: In the midst of difficult circumstances, how do you – as a follower of Jesus - find and maintain...

### 3. YOUR PEACE

Notice the first thing we are told is this:

**Philippians 4:6a Do not be anxious about anything...**

Okay...so how do we go about it?

Well, the Greek word for **anxious** here is *mer-im-nah*. The implication is that your thoughts are divided...your mind is on overload. There's another place in the Scriptures – Luke 10 - where this word *mer-im-nah* is found, it's where Jesus drops in on Martha, who is a friend and follower of Jesus.

Once Jesus arrives, Martha is running all over the place because of all the preparations that have to be made. The Scriptures describe her as "distracted." Get the picture? Ever experience anything like this? A lot to be done, and one moment you're fixed on this, but then something comes up over here and grabs your attention...and then something else that needs done comes to mind and you head off in that direction. Your mind is on overload.

Mer-im-nah.

Now Martha has a sister, Mary, and she is there as well...and when Jesus sits down, Mary sits as well, down near His feet, gives Jesus her full attention. And so Martha, feeling as if she's being pulled in 100 different directions, begins to get upset with Mary.

And it's interesting what Jesus does here. He looks at Martha and says..."Martha, Martha..."

**Luke 10:41-42a** "...you are worried and upset about many things..."

The Greek word for **worried** here is *mer-im-nah*. And so here is Martha, she loves Jesus, she follows Jesus and He is right here in front of her. But she has allowed herself to become distracted...worried...mer-im-na...by what?

By what Jesus calls "many things." Jesus is one of them...but just one of many.

Jesus says, "*Martha, look at Mary. She's chosen the one thing that is needed. You've got many things pulling at you, demanding your attention...and I'm one of them...but you will remain anxious, until you come to the point where I am not one of many things...but the One Thing.*"

As followers of Jesus, I think it's safe to say that some of us have been experiencing exactly what Martha was feeling, being pulled in many different directions...and some of this our own doings... many things vying for our attention...and yes, Jesus is one of them.

But I wonder if you remember that last year we took a few Sundays to talk about some of our Core Values, things that important to us here at Five Forks as we look to be a group of Jesus followers...and one of those Core Values was "Living a Simple Lifestyle".

While this clearly isn't true for everyone, some of you have shared with me how simple your life has become over these past two months as you're no longer running yourself ragged going here, there, everywhere. Perhaps out of this will come the opportunity to spend more time with Jesus, and make sure you are seeing Him as the One Thing, rather than one of many things.

If you and I can do this, then like Mary, we will sit at His feet and listen to Him...and talk to Him...more often and more intimately than ever before. And as we do, there is something found in today's Scripture text that is very important if we hope to experience the peace of God

We're told...

**Philippians 4:6-7 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.** And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

As we talk with Jesus, bringing Him our prayers, our petitions, our requests, He takes them to the Father...and before we know how our requests will be answered, do you see what we are to do? We are to give thanks...we're giving thanks to God before the answer even comes.

Why is this important?

Because *if* you and I are able to thank God - regardless of how He answers our requests – we are saying that *"I am confident that You will bring about not what I think is best, but what You know is best. God, I'm thanking you even now, because I trust You."* And this depth of confidence in God – confident that He is in control of our lives – this allows us to experience a peace that is meaningful and deep.

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You know, when I sat in Buck's office nearly 40 years ago, and he read this passage to me, he was challenging me not just to become familiar with this passage of Scripture, but to take "the next step" and actually put it into practice. To rejoice in the Lord always and to experience His peace.

It didn't take me long to discover that when it comes to following Jesus, there is always "a next step" to take. Because Jesus never calls any of us to remain right where we are at.

And so in light of this Scripture passage that we've looked at this morning, what do you see as...

#### **4. YOUR NEXT STEP**

Obviously it will not be the same for all of us, because we are all at different places in our walk with Jesus. And so let me just suggest a couple of possibilities.

Earlier I spoke about this joy, this buoyancy that some have because no matter what life is throwing at them, deep down, they know that they have the *only* thing that really matters. And maybe you realize you don't have that. You don't have Jesus. And so for you, **your next step is to become a follower of Jesus.**

Don't overlook what God – through the Scriptures - want you to know...

**Philippians 4:5b The Lord is near.**

The Lord is near. He is near to *you*, and Jesus extends a personal invitation to all who are not following Him, saying...

**Matthew 11:28 “Come to me, all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”**

Jesus is inviting you to come to Him...it's your next step...you just need to take it. And as we have said many times before here at Five Forks, we encourage anyone who takes that first step in following Jesus, to contact one of the pastors to let us know.

Brady will be posting my email address over in the chat portion on the right hand side of your screen, so please let me know if you've made a decision to follow Jesus, because it is so important that we have the opportunity to walk with you as you take your first, second, third steps...just as Buck came along and walked with me. We would love to have you become a part of this group of Jesus followers here at Five Forks.

Now for those of you who are already taken that first step of following Jesus, one of these next steps might apply to you, or maybe all of them will.

Some of you are following Jesus, but you realize that you've not been doing much rejoicing in Him, and so **your next step is to allow your mind to run up the sunbeam to the sun.** Don't overlook the fact that the Lord is near, and in spite of the pandemic, there are blessings unfolding all around us. Recognize and rejoice in the One who is the source of these blessings.

For some of you who are followers of Jesus, perhaps as you pray **your next step is to intentionally give thanks to God whatever the answer.** A few weeks ago someone in our congregation sent the staff a card that contained words of encouragement...but then hand written, these three simple words: *"God's got this."*

Yes He does.

And maybe what He's looking to accomplish in your life is a renewed confidence, a renewed awareness of the fact that He can be trusted. And what a difference this will make in helping you to experience His peace.

And finally, over the course of these past 2 months I find asking myself what Jesus is looking to bring about in my life at this time? And I keep coming back to the fact that He's giving me – giving all of us - a chance to see that simplifying our lives isn't such a bad thing. I can find my mind on overload, distracted by many things.

And so if you're like me...maybe **your next step is to identify specific things that have distracted you and have kept you from experiencing His presence and His peace.** And to not re-introduce these back into your life when things begin to settle.

Four different possibilities when it comes to *your next step*. Of course the next step that Jesus has for you to take may not be any of these...and that's okay...the one thing I know is that to do nothing – to take no step – is not one of the options that He has for *any* of us. So as we go to prayer, let's each of us ask Him to help us discern what our next step is, and look to Him to help us take it.