

Focus for week 4: Chapter 4

Three questions:

- 1) Chapter 4: 4-7 is the “star” here. Have you read or heard these verses before? In what context did you hear them? Were they used appropriately? What do you make of “the Lord is near,” verse 5?
- 2) “Finally” in verse 8 signals a turn to the end. He has addressed the disagreement in the church (verse 2) and given a “capstone” at verse 7. And so verse 8 turns us toward the finish line. Verses 8-9 are another exhortation toward excellence. The NRSV uses the term “if there is anything worthy of praise.” What does that term mean to Paul, here in Philippians? What should it mean for us, in 2024?
- 3) Or, maybe 4:13 is the “star.” We see “Phil. 4:13” written on athlete’s sneakers. We see it on bumper stickers and on calendars; we see it cross-stitched and celebrated in works of art. Why do you think it is famous? The confidence? The surety? Something else? Do people accurately interpret it?

Three Insights:

- 1) M. Eugene Boring offers this comment on the dispute between Euodia and Syntyche referred to in verse 2: “Previous generations of interpreters unconsciously assumed church leadership to be all male, so that the dispute between Euodia and Syntyche was simply a minor personal disagreement between two women. We now see that Paul considers them leaders in the church, and thus with major potential for creating disunity. His appeal to them is on the model of the pre-existent Christ, Paul’s coworkers Timothy and Epaphroditus, and Paul himself, to exercise their leadership in the proper direction and maintain the unity of the congregation.”
- 2) Rejoicing and joy: they show up repeatedly (vv. 1:4, 1:18, 1:19, 1:25, 2:2, 2:17, 2:18, 2:29, 3:1, and 4:4). Theologian Daniel Migliore writes on the joy found in Philippians: “In the spirit of Paul’s ‘rejoice in the Lord,’ Jonathan Edwards, preaching on the excellencies of God, contends that God is no killjoy. On the contrary, God wills that human life flourish. Indeed, God wants us to enjoy the fullness of life that God eternally possesses. The question is only what makes for true and lasting joy. Edwards’s words: ‘How great must be the happiness of the enjoyment of him? The happiness of society, and the enjoyment of entire friends, is one of the highest sort of pleasures, next to the pleasures of religion; if that be so sweet, how inexpressibly sweet and delightful must it be to enjoy this excellent being.’” Edwards envisions heaven as the ever-expanding joy of the saints, whose knowledge and love of God, and of all things in God, increases to all eternity.” Migliore also thinks 4:4 and its following verses push us towards the Westminster Shorter Catechism and its first question: Q: “What is the chief end of man [sic]?” A: “Man’s [sic] chief end is to glorify God, and enjoy him [sic] forever.”

- 3) On 4:1-13 N.T. Wright offers: “As with the previous section about Epaphroditus (2:25-30), we gain here a window on Paul as a very human Christian, facing difficulties and troubles, and having to learn the hard way to cope with them. No instant or easy solutions for him. No casual ‘leave-it-all-to-God’ approach, ignoring the real problems of Christian living and Christian ministry. No: the steady schoolwork God had set him, of finding out the secret of having plenty or having nothing. And this is the secret, as well as everything for Paul: the God he knew in Jesus the Messiah enabled him to face everything with a strength that came from outside. That’s a promise for anyone and everyone who is prepared to go to the same school and learn the same lesson.”

Links for further experience:

- 1) Because of the repeated use of the word “rejoice” there are dozens and dozens of hymns which cross reference Philippians 4. One of my favorite in terms of its versatility is “How Can I Keep From Singing.” Here are two very different settings. The first is a video of a large Mennonite choir singing an arrangement of the traditional setting: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cw-ycev482k> (Google: How Can I Keep From Singing – Shenandoah Christian Music Camp). The second is an audio recording only, and it is a blues version by the American vocalist Eva Cassidy: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0QAIUPwfj6o>. (Google: Eva Cassidy: How Can I Keep From Singing).
- 2) There is a good companion video series from Lynn Cohick through Denver Seminary. To watch the video, go to YouTube and search: “What is the Meaning of Philippians 4:13 Lynn Cohick.” Or you can click on this link: https://www.google.com/search?q=philippians+4:13&source=lmns&tbn=vid&bih=744&biw=1509&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjFktux6pSEAxWgOlkFHd57DD8Q_AUoBHoECAEQBA#fpstate=ive&vld=cid:7f7684df,vid:ARTyZix0vwM,st:0