

## Encouragement from Paul

The letter from Paul to the Philippians was written while he was in prison (probably in Rome), and addressed to the Christian congregation he had established in Philippi, Macedonia. Thinking that his execution was soon, but also hoping somehow to visit the Philippians again, Paul explains that he was imprisoned for preaching the gospel of Christ. He writes to explain that he welcomes death for Jesus' sake. Paul encourages the Philippian congregation (and future readers) to remain steadfast in their faith and to imitate the Christ, who "*emptied himself*" and "*became obedient unto death, even death on a cross.*"

Towards the end of Philippians, in chapter 4, Paul writes "*Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness 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.*" Remember that Paul is in a Roman prison. A prison with no lights, no plumbing, little to no food and water and he has the boldness to say "Rejoice in the Lord ALWAYS." He continues to say, "do not be anxious about anything."

During these last few days, while we are not being held in a Roman prison, most of us may feel trapped as if we are in a prison. We are being quarantined, kept away from friends, unable to play the sport that we love, and are slowly running out of things to entertain us (if we haven't run out all ready) all because of a virus that most of us don't understand. Paul's encouragement to all of us is first, to Rejoice. Rejoicing while we aren't happy and unsure of what each day will look like is difficult, but finding God's goodness in our daily lives helps us to rejoice. Paul also says, to not be anxious. For a lot of us, that's difficult, especially for the extroverts of the world. Thoughts of fear, "what ifs", or possibly not going on a trip/event fill our mind and we lose sight of God's faithfulness and joy. Paul gives us an answer on how to fight those thoughts off, and it's to pray. Pray for your thoughts and actions during this season of life we are in, and also pray for those around you that they also find God's goodness during this moment. Also pray for this country and its leaders, and for the people who may have COVID-19 and are hoping for recovery and healing.

Finally, Paul says in verse 7 "*And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*" I want you, especially over the next few weeks, to rest in the peaceful arms of our Savior. In these times it's going to be easy to forget about His peace and faithfulness, but I assure you it has never faded. Paul sat in that prison cell wrapped in God's love, peace, and faithfulness. I encourage you, at some point, to sit and read all of Philippians and what Paul shares, and know that God's goodness is all around us. No virus can ever take that away from us.

1. Write down or plug in your phone things, people, etc. that remind you of God's goodness. When you start to lose sight of it, look back to remind yourself.
2. What is something you can pray for to help limit your anxiousness?
3. In one sentence, what does God's peace mean to you?