

Victory of the Lamb – Thanksgiving Eve Service – Philippians 4:4-7 –

Pastor Ben Sadler – November 23, 2022

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! ⁵ Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. ⁶ Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:4-7)

This week marks the start of **It's the most wonderful time of the year!** At least that's what the song says. And for many reasons, it is the most wonderful time of the year. This week we are celebrating Thanksgiving. And then we will start getting ready for Christmas, the celebration of the birth of our Savior. Here are a few things that make this the most wonderful time of the year:

Parties Most likely you will get together with family or friends tomorrow and then, over the course of the next few weeks, you will get together again with family and friends.

Food This time of year we get to make and eat some of our favorite foods. Turkey, stuffing, pies, Christmas cookies.

Gifts Some of you have the tradition of going shopping on Black Friday.

Special events Some of you might go to your kids Christmas concerts or maybe other events or concerts.

These are some of the things that make this the most wonderful time of the year. But each of these blessings comes with a difficulty or cross to bear.

Parties- Family dynamics You might have a party or attend a party for Thanksgiving or Christmas, but you also have to face the difficulty of your particular family dynamic. Maybe last time you got together with your family there was a blow up. Or maybe you have very different values than some of your family members.

Food- Self-control I love all the food during this season, especially the sugary stuff. And it is fine to enjoy it. But I usually enjoy it for thirty straight days. So there is the difficulty of having self-control.

Gifts- overspending It is such a blessing to be able to buy gifts for family and friends. But as we are shopping it's really easy to buy extra things for ourselves. And so you might have the difficulty and challenge of overspending.

Special Events- Busyness It's great to go to concerts and performances and parties and gatherings. But there can just be so much to do that we get overwhelmed and stressed.

When you look at all the challenges and difficulties that come with the blessings, we might say that this is **It's the most worried-filled time of the year.**

But that is why it is so important that we stop and really discuss the spiritual and emotional blessings of thanksgiving.

And so let's dive into our text from Philippians 4. Paul says, **Do not be anxious about anything...** Now if we look at this verse in isolation, it seems like one of the most insensitive things a person could say. Imagine you went to see a therapist and you told her, "You know, I'm just feeling very anxious this time of the year. There is just so much going on in my life and family." And imagine if the therapist said, "Stop it. Just don't be anxious anymore."

All by itself, that's what this verse seems to be saying. But Paul is not that insensitive. He knows what it feels like to be under stress and have real challenges. I want to read to you something the things that he had recently experienced.

I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. ²⁴ Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. ²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, ²⁶ I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers. ²⁷ I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. ²⁸ Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. (2 Corinthians 11:23-28)

Paul knows what it feels like to be worried and afraid and face challenging situations. And so when he tells to not be anxious about anything, it is coming from a place of compassion. He knows what it is like.

Paul doesn't just say, "Don't be anxious." He gives us tools when we feel afraid. He says, **. ⁶ Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, _____, present your requests to God. (Philippians 4:6)** Paul says we can do something with our worry and fear. He said, "In every situation" so whatever you are going through, whether you just burned the turkey or you over-spent or you are about to see that family member that has very different political views than you, in every one of those situations, with prayer and petition, presenting your requests to God.

So every challenge you face, bring it to God. Lift up the big issues and the so-called small issues to God. Bring them all to him. Let this season be one of constant prayer and petition.

But you notice that I left a blank in the verse. And that blank is the true secret of mental health. It is essential to our faith. Paul says, **⁶ Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with THANKSGIVING, present your requests to God.**

All the prayers that we offer up to God are to be seasoned with thanksgiving. Thanksgiving is butter and gravy of every prayer. It is the marshmallow on your sweet potatoes. **Season all your prayers with thanksgiving**

Why is this so important? Thanksgiving is one of the most powerful things you can do for your mental and spiritual health. It is almost impossible to be thankful and worried, thankful and sad, thankful and hopeless. Thankfulness seems to tsunami every other emotion.

That's why this holiday is so vital. We are to spend a whole day thanking God for all the good things that he has given us. As Christians, thanksgiving is not just a general, secular holiday to stop and reflect on the good things that are going on. On this holiday, we go to God, who we believe is the giver of all gifts.

We pray with the Psalmist: The eyes of all look to you, oh Lord, and you give them their food at the proper time. You open your hands and satisfy the desires of every living thing!

And so we say thank you to God for our food and thank you to God for our family and thank you to God for our homes and our jobs. And most of all, even when all those things seem to be waning, we can say thank you to God for his love and forgiveness for us in Jesus Christ.

Now this is not just some kind of spiritual gimmick. Being thankful will not take away any of your anxious or sad feelings. But when we bring all our concerns to the Lord with thanksgiving, Paul says that we will experience peace. He says, **the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:7)**

When we bring everything to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in prayer and when all our prayers are seasoned with thanksgiving, Paul says we will experience the peace of God. And that's really what we want this time of the year. Parties, food, gifts, events are all wonderful, but our deepest desire is actually peace.

And so I have a challenge for you all this year. **Celebrate Thanksgiving through Christmas.** Don't let Thanksgiving just be a one day thing you tomorrow. Let thanksgiving be a daily practice all through out the year so that your worried is turned into worship and you fear is turned into peace.

The holiday season is just over 30 days. What about for these next thirty days you make it your goal to be thankful for at least one thing per day. You could put a sheet of paper on your refrigerator with 30 blanks. Then, maybe by yourself, or even as a family, you write down one new thing you are thankful for each day. You tell God and to your family you are thankful for your home or your job, your health or your pet. Whatever it is, you write down something that you are thankful for.

This is the most wonderful and most challenging time of the year. We are pulled in so many different directions. There are so many expectations. There are so many things to worry about. That's why we need Thanksgiving. We need a holiday to put it all in perspective, to fix our minds and hearts on what really matters. Regardless of the challenges you face, make this the most thankful time of the year by celebrating Thanksgiving through Christmas. Amen.