

## TRAIN YOUR ATTITUDE

### Philippians 4:4-5

#### INTRODUCTION:

I do not always begin my sermon by reading my text but I want to do so today.

*<sup>4</sup> Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! <sup>5</sup> Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. <sup>6</sup> Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. <sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. <sup>8</sup> Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. <sup>9</sup> Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.*

This is the third Sunday in a row that I have used this text as the basis for my sermon. And I plan to use it again next Sunday as well. Each week, I have tried to lift up the text and turn it before you so that, like a precious gem, you can see the different facets of this jewel of a text.

On November 7<sup>th</sup>, I encouraged you to train your mind...to train the way you think.

- T – Talk to God
- H – Hold yourself accountable
- I – Imagine your best self
- N – Nurture the positive
- K – Keep on pressing on

Last Sunday, as part of the Just One Challenge, we began with Paul's admonition, "<sup>9</sup> Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice." Then, recognizing that preaching the Gospel was Paul's highest priority, we prayed for workers to go to the field. Then, during the decision hymn, Chelsea Lee came forward to say she would be that one to go to college, take specialized training and then work in the field of the Lord.

Today, we are going to look at what Paul says about training our attitude. That's a tall order, isn't it? It is often said that psychologists have concluded that personality is formed by the time a child is 5 years old. Think of it, before a child enters first grade, his personality is set. And, under this theory, it is taught that from that point on, an individual's personality will not alter. Unless there is some traumatic event, nothing will change it.

More recent psychological theory has revised that hypothesis. More recently, psycho-social researchers have decided that personality is formed by the time a child is two!

I believe that the psychologists have underestimated the transforming effect of the gospel, the transforming effect of conversion and the transforming effect of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer.

You see, a person can change...from the inside out. And specific to today's text, a presumptuous, demanding and ungrateful person can become a thankful person. A dissatisfied person can become content. A stressed-out and anxious person can become calm. And grinchers can become happy.

Attitudes can change. And Paul says they must...and they can. Such a radical reorientation might seem a bit daunting...unless we realize the blessings that will come from an attitude of gratitude.

**I. BE JOYFUL** (*<sup>4</sup> Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!*)

The old song says, "Count your many blessings...and it will surprise you what the Lord has done." In addition to surprising you, counting your blessings will cheer you up.

You see, grumpiness betrays an ungrateful spirit. If you do not believe you have been treated fairly, if you do not believe you have received your fair share of blessings, you will be sad, despondent, depressed and unpleasant. But if you make up your mind to be joyful, you can be. Take stock of what the Lord has done for you and before long, you will be rejoicing.

Note also that Paul tells the Philippians to rejoice in the Lord always. Always!! When the sun is shining and when it is not. When the toilet is flushing and when it is not. When the kids are behaving and when they are not. When your health is good and when it is not. "Rejoice in the Lord always," Paul said. Then, to reinforce his point, he added, "I will say it again: Rejoice!"

Christians, more than anyone else in the world, have reason to be joyful.

- When things are going well and the blessings are mounting up, Christians know Who has given the blessings.
- When things are going bad and the trials are piling high, Christians know to Whom to go for relief.
- And even when there is no relief, Christians know that this world is not home, that death is not final and that heaven awaits.

Christians have every reason to rejoice...always. After all, if we follow Jesus, we can expect that his attitude will become ours. In fact, in Philippians 2:5,

Paul told these same Philippian Christians that their attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus. Jesus had an attitude of Joy.

John 15 records that on the night Jesus was to be betrayed, arrested and mugged in the soldiers' barracks, he told his disciples that he was full of joy and wished they were as joyful as he was. He was the only one who knew what lay ahead of him over the next 24 hours, culminating in his agonizing death on the cross; yet he was talking about how much joy he had in his heart and that he would only wish the same for his closest followers.

An attitude of gratitude and a pattern of following Jesus will lead us to a life of rejoicing.

## II. **BE GENTLE** (<sup>5</sup> *Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.*)

Paul also says that we ought to be gentle and that our gentleness ought to show.

Do you remember that in Galatians 5, Paul listed gentleness as one facet of the fruit of the Spirit? When the Holy Spirit is in a person, the Spirit will cause that person's life to be different and one of the differences is that there will be gentleness.

Gentleness is not to be confused with being weak or being passive or being timid. It will lead a person to be submissive, to be vulnerable and to be selfless. But those qualities derive from the strength of a person's character, not his weakness.

Scrawny little kids are often bullies because they think they have to project scrappiness so people will not think they are weak. Sometimes it is called the Banty-Rooster Complex.

Billy Martin was a little scrawny baseball manager who worked for the Minnesota Twins and the New York Yankees, among others. Billy Martin was forever getting in fights in bars while he was a manager. He'd drink a little, someone would recognize him and mouth-off to him about his team or his managerial skills and pretty soon, the police would be called and Billy would be taken out in handcuffs, fingerprinted and booked and then bailed-out by his team.

I saw Billy Martin and Muhammed Ali on the same television show one time and the interviewer asked Ali if he had the same problem with people picking fights with him in bars. Ali looked astonished and said, "Are you kiddin'?" Who would pick a fight with a heavyweight champion? Can anyone really be THAT drunk???

Muhammed Ali didn't need to throw his weight around to prove he wasn't weak. He knew his strength. Christians can be gentle because they know the power of the Lord that is within them.

**III. BE PEACEFUL** (*<sup>6</sup> Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.* )

How many people here this morning would like to learn how to worry more?  
How many of you feel that your life would be improved if only you could spend more time worrying? None!

- Whether you know worry as an occasional visitor or a constant companion,
- whether you find it to be mildly uncomfortable or intensely painful,
- or whether you experience worry as a slight distraction or as a force that completely immobilizes you,

We all would like to worry less.

We tend to worry because life is difficult. We tend to worry because we are fearful of the future. We tend to worry because we cannot control all aspects of our lives. We tend to worry.

But Paul says we are to be at peace or peaceful. His expression is "do not be anxious." Anxiety looks around and frets; it looks ahead and worries. Gratitude looks up and worships; it looks back and gives thanks.

When we focus on what we have received, we are less apt to be anxious about what may lie ahead because we are reminded that we have a Father Who knows us, Who loves us, Who knows our future and Who controls our destiny. Jesus once said that the pagans worry because they don't know they have a Father but that worry is unworthy of children of God.

Cultivating the practice of thanksgiving reminds us of God's care and provision and that helps to banish worry. So give thanks and be at peace.

**IV. BE PRAYERFUL** (*<sup>6</sup> Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.*)

Do not worry about anything. Pray about everything. The two seem connected. We used to sing a song that said,

*"Why worry when you can pray?  
Trust Jesus, He'll lead the way,  
Don't be a doubting Thomas,  
Trust fully in His promise,  
Why worry, worry, when you can pray?"*

Worry and prayer are antithetical. If you have a loving father and know that you do, you can ask for your needs to be met and have confidence that they will be.

Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul encourages us to present our requests to God. God wants you to tell Him what is on your heart.

Sometimes people ask me if they should even bring the little things to God. Think about this, is there anything that is not a little thing to God. He who created the universe, who made stars, planets, black-holes and galaxies; He who designed the human body and gave it life; He who made the birds, the animals, the fish and the plants...do you think there is any request that you can make that will cause Him to say, "Whoa! I don't know about that one. That's a pretty tall order for me. That is really going to be a challenge." No, all of our requests are little things to God. And He cares about all of them.

And from exactly the same perspective, you have to acknowledge that nothing is too big to bring before God. No wonder Paul says we are to worry about nothing but pray about everything.

**V. BE GRATEFUL** (*<sup>6</sup> Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.*)

Paul not only tells us to pray, he tells us how to pray. He says we are to present our requests with thanksgiving in our hearts. Isn't it interesting that Paul said this in a letter he wrote while in prison. Even when he did not know if he would continue to be incarcerated, would be released or even executed, he was conscious of the need to pray with thanksgiving.

But it makes sense, doesn't it? If we are not mindful of the gifts God has given us and if we are not grateful for what He has already provided, why would He grant even more?

Christian prayer is not like a spoiled kid climbing up on Santa's lap to rattle off a Christmas list of selfish wishes. Christian prayer is punctuated with Thanksgiving.

For the Christian, thanksgiving is not just a holiday and not just a season; it the state of his mind and the condition of her heart.

And it is a good condition for the heart. Medical science has discovered that the healthiest human emotion is gratitude: not love but gratitude? Gratitude actually increases our immunities - it makes us more resistant to stress and less susceptible to illness. People who are grateful are happy people! However, people who are ungrateful are miserable because nothing makes them happy - they are never satisfied - nothing is ever good enough. So, if we cultivate an attitude of gratitude, of being thankful in everything, it will reduce the stress in our lives, add years to our lives and life to our years.

Bobby McFerrin should have sung, "Don't Worry; Be Grateful."

**CONCLUSION:**

David Steindl-Rast points out that in our English language there is no such thing as being half-full of thanks or half-full of gratitude: we are either thankFUL or grateFUL.

Especially at this season, we should be full of thanks and full of gratitude. No other attitude is worthy of a child of God and one who knows that his Father has given him every blessing he has ever received.

A boy returned from a party at his friend's. His mother asked him if he had thanked the other boy's parents. "No," he replied. "The little girl in front of me told Johnny's mother thank you, and she said 'don't mention it'.... so I didn't." God never said, "Don't mention it." In fact He said we should mention it...often. We should give thanks with a grateful heart.

**INVITATION:**        *#170 – "Give Thanks"*