

## **TRAIN YOUR HEART** **Philippians 4:4-9**

### **INTRODUCTION:**

Healthcare professionals are always telling us that it is important to eat heart-healthy diets and engage in heart-healthy exercise. They seem to think our hearts are pretty important for physical health.

God seems to think that our hearts are pretty important for spiritual health, too. Anxiety is one of those things that will damage both our physical heart and our spiritual heart.

In America, we have Thanksgiving Day, a holiday that was created to remind us to be grateful for all the blessings we have received from God. The day has its historic roots in the gratitude of the pilgrims who had survived a long and hard winter. The terrible statistics of this first winter are as follows:

- In the month of December, six people died.
- In January there were eight deaths.
- In February there were 17 fatalities.
- And in March, 13 died.
- Frequently two or three died on the same day. Four entire families were taken, and there was only one family that didn't lose at least one member.
- Of 18 married women, 13 died. Only three of 13 children perished. This seems to indicate that mothers were probably giving their share of food to the children.
- Pilgrim leaders feared the Indians, even though none had been seen (at least up close) since the early days of their arrival. They did all they could to hide the magnitude of their human losses. Burial services were conducted after dark. Graves were leveled and planted with corn to conceal them.
- 42 of the original 102 immigrants died during the first winter. 10 more died over the next few months leaving only 53 people alive to mark the one year anniversary of their arrival in this new world.

And yet, in November of 1621, these 53 surviving pilgrims gave thanks for God's protection and providence. So profound was their thanksgiving that they observed three full days of feasting and worship to express their gratitude to Almighty God.

Surely we would all agree that we have far more reasons to give thanks than did those first pilgrims.

- Even with an unacceptable unemployment rate of 9.6%, that means that more than 90% of Americans have jobs. We should give thanks.

- Even though our troops are stationed on foreign soil and in harm's way, we are not fighting a war in our own land.
- Even though we are battling terrorists who are trying to plant bombs on airplanes, all of the Thanksgiving flights arrived safely at their destinations.
- Most of us had plenty to eat on Thursday and a warm dry place to sleep on Thursday night.

We are, indeed, a blessed people. But rather than spend three days in grateful worship of our mighty God, we spend a few minutes saying grace before our meal, settle in to be entertained by parades and football games and then go on a mad shopping frenzy that starts earlier and gets crazier every year. And we act as if we have nothing and must go snatch up the discounted goods so we can survive.

A lack of gratitude is poisoning our hearts. A lack of contentment is hardening our hearts. And a lack of serenity is destroying our hearts – both physically and spiritually.

We need to take the Great Physician's cure for our anxious hearts. Paul wrote about that in Philippians 4:4-9.

*<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.*

Let's look at God's cure for our anxious hearts and our discontented souls.

#### **I. The Peace of God Will Be Standing Sentry Over You (Phil. 4:6-7)**

*<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.*

When Paul writes about the peace of God guarding our hearts and minds, he is using a military term that means that God' peace stands sentry over our hearts and minds, guarding us and shielding us from attack by the Evil One.

This peace of which Paul writes is expressed by the Greek word εἰρήνη (ai-rain-ay) which is the equivalent of the Hebrew term שָׁלוֹם (shalom). Shalom means more than a mere absence of war. It means a total sense of completeness, soundness, welfare and peace. Biblically, shalom is God's gift to humanity; it is never the consequence of man's invention or human manipulation.

In Luke 2:14, when the angels appeared to the shepherds, their message included a declaration of glory to God in the highest and the coming of peace on earth to men. The instrument of God's glory and man's shalom was Jesus...and he still is.

Now if the peace of God stands sentry over our hearts and minds, from what is that peace protecting us? The peace of God protects us from anxiety, from doubt, from uncertainty and from the Enemy, himself. The peace of God keeps us from sinking under the weight of our cares...and from sinning under the weight of our cares.

Paul does give some prerequisites for experiencing this sentinel peace. He tells us that we are by prayers and petitions, with thanksgiving, to present our requests to God. By definition, thanksgiving looks back and takes stock. If, when we pray, we look back and remember with thanks, we will realize:

1. that God has done some things we have asked of Him.
2. that God has not done some things we asked of Him and we now realize that it is a good thing He did not. As we mature, we realize that one of the greatest blessings of life is the blessing of unanswered prayer – because sometimes we ask amiss.
3. that God has answered some prayers in ways we had not even considered. In Ephesians 3:20, Paul refers to God as "*him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us.*" I am certainly grateful that God is not limited by what I could think to ask or what I could imagine Him doing. And when I present my prayers and petitions to Him with that backward gaze of thanksgiving, I am reminded that He has often answered my prayers in ways that I would not have considered.

Asking God by prayers and petitions with thanksgiving gives us a tremendous peace because that act of thanksgiving refreshes our memories about how God has been standing watch over us.

## II. **The God of Peace Will Be Present Permanently With You (Phil. 4:9)**

<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.*

Did you catch that turn of phrase? In Philippians 4:7, Paul wrote about the peace of God standing sentry over you and in Philippians 4:9 he wrote about the God of peace being with you. The peace of God and the God of peace. God's peace is promised and God's presence is assured.

Again, there is a prerequisite: we are to put into practice what we have learned or received or heard from or seen in the life of the great apostle. We cannot anticipate and expect to experience peace if we are unwilling to do those things which we have been told will lead to peace.

During Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, when the throngs of people were shouting antiphonal praise saying "blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord" and "peace in heaven and glory in the highest" Jesus said, *"If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace."*

We should know what will bring us peace – it is to do what we've been told to do. If we disobey Him, we cannot expect the God of peace to be with us. In a sense, the real question is, are we going to be with Him where He is and doing what He is doing?

Now I want you to think of the assurance that the God of peace will be with us. It has often been said that it brings great calm to know that the God who is with us and who cares for us never sleeps and He never slumbers. Since He is going to be awake all night anyway, we can cast our cares upon Him and take our rest. There is no sense in both of us staying awake under their burden.

That is more than a comforting saying: it is a comforting truth. When you are engaged in obeying the will of the Lord and doing the work of the Lord, the God of peace will be with you.

John Broadus has said that worry is the friction of life. It wears us down; wears us out; wears us away. But if worry is the friction of life, God's presence is the emollient, the salve, the balm to our souls.

Sir Arthur Helps, at one time private secretary to Queen Victoria of England, is the author of a work titled *Friends in Council*. One of his essays was on "The Kingdom of Worry". Helps wrote, "Worry reigns over more human beings than any other potentate." We wear our lives away with useless, fatiguing worry.

But there is a remedy. There is a solution. Dethrone worry as king over your life and enthrone the God of peace.

My friends, in many ways I am a visitor among you. I was not born in this county. I did not go to school in this community. I did not grow up in this church. I am a visitor among you and will eventually leave you. I pray that it is not soon but unless the Lord returns before my departure, one day I will leave you – by death, retirement or termination – I know not. Every minister has been a visitor among you and none came to stay.

But the God of peace can be with you. His presence can be your permanent partner; your constant companion. Oh, what an assurance – what a blessed assurance!

### **CONCLUSION:**

We all want peace; everyone does. Politicians promise it. Soldiers defend it. Beauty queens speak of it. Greeting cards wish for it. But only God gives it: PEACE. The old adage is:

**KNOW GOD, KNOW PEACE  
NO GOD, NO PEACE**

We may be prone to dismiss those words as trite. But they are not trite, they are tried...and true.

Yes, last week was Thanksgiving. This week is the beginning of Advent. But standing between yesterday and tomorrow is Today. The only day we can really live is today. Yesterday has passed and cannot be relived. Tomorrow is but a promise and cannot yet be filled. Today is the realm within which we must live.

I've stood by flower strewn caskets with grieving families. Some have looked back with sorrow and regret. Some have looked ahead with hope and assurance. The difference is always how their loved one lived his Today. Intuitively, we know: if Jesus is not Lord of your Today, he cannot be King of your Tomorrow, or of your eternity. Now is the hour of salvation.

Far away in the depths of my spirit today  
Rolls a melody sweeter than psalm;  
In celestial strains it unceasingly falls  
O'er my soul like an infinite calm.  
*Peace, peace, wonderful peace,  
Coming down from the Father above!  
Sweep over my spirit forever, I pray  
In fathomless billows of love!*

11/28/10

What a treasure I have in this wonderful peace,  
Buried deep in the heart of my soul,  
So secure that no power can mine it away,  
While the years of eternity roll!

I am resting today in this wonderful peace,  
Resting sweetly in Jesus' control;  
For I'm kept from all danger by night and by day,  
And His glory is flooding my soul!

Ah, soul! are you here without comfort and rest,  
Marching down the rough pathway of time?  
Make Jesus your Friend ere the shadows grow dark;  
O accept of this peace so sublime!

**INVITATION:**       #743 – *“Wonderful Peace”*