

Focus on Philippians 4:1–9

WHAT is important to know?

— From “Exegetical Perspective,” Annette Weissenrieder

Synergōn [coworker] and *synēlthēsan* [struggle along with] have one thing in common: they express an active participation of the coworkers in the mission. Cooperation in the mission signifies an active fight, no quiet or passive participation. The choice of agonistic language deepens this background further: participants in a competition never fight only for themselves or for their family, but are always nominated as envoys of a city. Their service is to be interpreted as a service for the city. Paul’s encouragement is clear: nobody fights alone; we always fight together.

WHERE is God in these words?

— From “Theological Perspective,” David B. Burrell

What difference does becoming a follower of Jesus make to one’s daily life? A follower familiar with the Gospels would, of course, readily cite Matthew 25, the charter of the Christian life, yet Paul is even more specific: “help these women, [Euodia and Syntyche], for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life” (v. 3). So followers of Jesus are enjoined to assist one another “in the gospel,” that is, to encourage each other to follow in the footsteps of Jesus as outlined in Matthew 25.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From “Pastoral Perspective,” Jill Y. Crainshaw

Seasons of identity exploration and maturing hold the potential to remind communities of the profound extraordinariness of what seems merely ordinary. Keep on with your everyday works of gentleness and prayerful living, Paul counsels the Philippians (v. 4). Bake a loaf of bread for the woman down the street whose husband just died, Paul might say. Take a bag of groceries to the food closet. Visit a church member in the nursing home. Seemingly ordinary acts bear extraordinary gifts of God’s love. Ordinary Time teaches communities about the persistent, everyday powerful, promises of God’s grace in Christ.

NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

— From “Homiletical Perspective,”

Nathan Eddy

It comes naturally to Paul that prayer should be intimately associated with joy in the Lord. Prayer here is relationship with God, not a technique. By perceiving and rejoicing in a living, unexpected presence in the world even in difficult situations, one lets go of being one’s own savior. Instead of worrying about “anything,” the Philippians are to bring “everything” to God (v. 6). The “anythings” and “everything” of life can be sources of endless worry—or the stuff of prayer. Either way they are important. Like joy, prayer is not an escape but a practice of regarding the same painful situation from another angle, one still open to multiple resolutions that God permits us to consider.

Make a Joyful Inventory

Paul commissions individuals and communities in Philippians 4:8 with a list of qualities or virtues to think of—and then immediately follows the list with “keep on doing the things” Paul has set before them. Thus, living joyfully and faithfully involves not only what we think, but also how those thoughts permeate our actions.

Use the list Paul provides in verse 8 as a starting point for your “joyful inventory.” Space is provided after each quality Paul identifies, in order for you to reflect on that quality in terms of: (1) the joy it can bring to life; and (2) a specific way you will practice that quality in your everyday living.

“Whatever is true”—What joy can truth bring, and where might you live out the call to be truthful?

“Whatever is honorable”—The Greek word translated as “honorable” carries the connotation of someone of character. What joy can dependability of character bring, and what does the challenge to be a person of character call you to practice?

“Whatever is just”—What joy is there in justice (equitability in relationship), and what does justice beckon you to do?

“Whatever is pure”—The Greek word translated as “pure” derives from the root of “holy” (that which is set apart for God). What joy might there be in “purity” that reflects such “Godward” purpose, and what practice(s) might purity take in your life in terms of being set apart for God—or set apart from that which separates you from God or faithful community?

“Whatever is pleasing”—The Greek word translated as “pleasing” has *philos* (“love”) as part of its root. What joy comes from that which is pleasing or lovely in life, and how might you practice its virtue?

“Whatever is commendable”—The Greek word translated as “commendable” carries the sense of “well spoken of.” What joy may be found in that which is commendable, and how might you embody this quality of character?

Whatever is true . . .
Whatever is honorable . . .
Whatever is just . . .
Whatever is honorable . . .
Whatever is pure . . .
Whatever is commendable . . .

