

Five Steps to Mental Health

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Main Scripture Text: Philippians 4:4–9, 11

“I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.”

PHILIPPIANS 4:11

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Introduction

Take your Bibles and turn, please, to Philippians chapter 4, and tonight I want to give you some verses that will literally transform your thought life if you will allow them to do so. As a matter of fact, this is God’s psychology, and I want to give you from the Word of God five steps to mental health. And, indeed, you may need it. We are going to have a check-up from the neck up tonight, and find out how to get our thinking right—to get our minds right. So many of us need a spiritual formula to deal with depression; to deal with anger; to deal with resentment; to deal with self-pity and worry and fear.

Now the scripture that I’m going to read to you tonight is not the scripture some theoretician, some professor from behind a desk who has read things and is telling them to someone else, has come up with, but these are the words of the Apostle Paul. And they are written from prison—from a slimy prison—but as you read it, you think he sounds like he’s writing from a luxurious hotel. You almost expect him to say at the end, “I wish you were here.” He’s in the Mamertine Prison and he is writing.

Now you say, “What does that have to do with me?” Well, there’s more than one kind of a prison. Iron bars make a prison; but there are other things that make a prison, too. And some of you are living in a dungeon of despair. Some are behind walls of resistance. Some are shackled with the chains of poor health. Some know the iron bars

of disappointment, the shackles of circumstances, the fetters of fear. There's more than one kind of prison, and what Paul has to say here is so incredibly relevant.

Now he's in prison and he can't get out; so he just decides, "Well, if I'm here, I might as well remodel the place." And he does it; but he does it on the inside, not on the outside. And so he says in verse 11 of this same chapter, "*I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.*" (Philippians 4:11)

All right, what are these five principles? Well, let's begin to read, and then we're going to come back and look at them one by one, beginning in verse 4: "*Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice. Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand. Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep*"—that literally means "guard"—"*your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you.*" (Philippians 4:4–9)

I. Rejoice in the Presence of the Lord

Step number one: Learn to rejoice in the presence of the Lord. Verses 4 and 5—look at them again: "*Rejoice...*"—now, notice, not just rejoice, but—"*Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice. Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand.*" (Philippians 4:4–5)

Now Paul was not in that prison by himself; he was in there with the Lord. So here's the thing: Rejoice in the presence of the Lord. Now that's an incredible thought. "*The Lord is at hand.*" Paul didn't mean, "His Second Coming is near"; he meant, "The Lord is here. The Lord is at hand. I am in this prison. But I'm here with Jesus. And I rejoice in the Lord." What an incredible thing for us to learn: that no matter where we are, how lonely the night, how dark the road, how dismal the prison, how big the problem, Jesus Christ is always there! And He has said, "*I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.*" (Hebrews 13:5)

That's the only way that you can make this make sense when he says, "*Rejoice in the Lord always.*" I mean, you don't rejoice in your circumstances; you don't rejoice that you've been put in a prison with vermin and deprivation and suffering and cold. No, it's the fact that nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Now this joy is to be continual, not sometimes. Look at it very clearly, very plainly:

“Rejoice in the Lord always.” (Philippians 4:4) That literally means “all of the time.” The joy of the Lord is to be continuous.

The joy of the Lord is a thermostat, not a thermometer. A thermometer registers conditions. A thermostat controls them. Happiness is related to the thermometer. If your hap is good, you're happy. If your hap is bad, you're unhappy. And your condition of happiness goes up and down with your circumstances. But joy remains constant, because Jesus is constant. You know what most of us need to learn to do? Practice the presence of God—I mean, to understand that He is always there, and in no matter what circumstance we find ourselves, not to become a thermometer, but to set the thermostat.

Now, listen to these verses. I'm going to give you some verses from the Old Testament and I want you to listen to them. Don't turn to them, because you'll be looking for it until I'm finished—Habakkuk. But Habakkuk chapter 3, verses 17 and 18—listen to what Habakkuk said. Now he's a man of God. He says, *“Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls:”—*that is, it's a time of economic depression and deprivation—*“yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation.”* (Habakkuk 3:17–18) And, friend, if you don't have any joy, it's because Jesus is not real to you. I don't care how sick you may be; I don't care what agony there may be: there is Jesus, and He is always there. You can set the thermostat.

Jesus Christ, when He was facing the cross, spoke of His joy. Luke chapter 10, verse 21: *“In that hour Jesus rejoiced in the spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight.”* (Luke 10:21) And just before He was crucified, He said to His disciples in John 15, verse 11, *“These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.”* (John 15:11) Listen to Psalm 16, verse 11: *“Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy.”* (Psalm 16:11)

Now that's what the Apostle Paul said: *“They have locked me in, but they can't lock Jesus out”—“Rejoice in the Lord always...The Lord is at hand.”* (Philippians 4:4–5) Now that's number one. If you want to have a good mental attitude, find joy in Jesus, not in circumstances. Circumstances change; He never changes. You can never be shut away from Him. Rejoice in the Lord always, because He's always with you. He will never leave you nor forsake you. Set the Lord before your face. Consider Him. Contemplate Him. Praise Him. Love Him. Enjoy Him. Don't rejoice in circumstances; rejoice in the Lord. Have you got that one?

II. Rely on the Power of God

All right, number two: Not only rejoice in the presence of the Lord—the Lord is at hand; but rely on the power of the Lord. Now, look, if you will, at the next verse. He says, “*Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.*” (Philippians 4:6) Now, what does that mean? It means, if you’ve got a problem, tell God about it. “*In every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving...*” Don’t worry about anything. Don’t be full of care about anything.

Do you know one of the most damaging emotions that can come to you is worry? I’ve often told you from this pulpit that worry will do the same thing to you mentally that sand will do to machinery. There are few forms of dissipation that hurt your body more than worry. And don’t look down your long nose at the man who overeats, or the man who smokes cigarettes, or the man who drinks alcohol or takes drugs, if you’re given over to worry, because worry is a form of dissipation. The word—the very word *worry*—means—it has the idea of—division; it has the idea of being pulled apart. Over here on the one hand is hope; and over here on the other hand is fear. And you’re just pulled between hope and fear.

And Jesus in Matthew chapter 6 emphatically warned us against worry. He said that worry is absolutely useless. He said, “*Which of you by taking [anxious] thought can add one cubit unto his stature?*” (Matthew 6:27) I mean, the very best thing you could say about worry is that it doesn’t do any good. Four times in that passage He says, “Take no thought.” And the word literally means “no anxious thought.” It’s not foresight, but foreboding—worrying about things that are out there in the future—that you don’t know what’s going to transpire. He says it does no good. It’s like a rocking chair: it gives you something to do, but it doesn’t get you anywhere. That’s what worry is like.

Behavioral psychologists have told us this about worry. Forty percent of what we worry about never happens; thirty percent has already gone past, and worry can’t change it; twelve percent is needless worry about health; ten percent of the things we worry about are miscellaneous matters that don’t deserve worry; only about eight percent of the things that remain could be counted worthy of worry if you were a worrier; but of those they could be divided into two categories: those you can do something about, and those you can’t do anything about. Now if you can do something about it, do it and quit worrying. If you can’t do anything about it, worry is not going to change it.

*For every evil under the sun
Either there’s a cure, or there is none.
If there be none, never mind it;
If there be one, seek till you find it.*

—AUTHOR UNKNOWN

Now, what does all this mean? It means Jesus said you can't make yourself taller by worry: "Which of you can add one cubit to his stature by worry?" (Matthew 6:27) Mark Twain said, "I'm an old man, and I've known many troubles, most of which never happened." Worry is useless; it's wasteful. Jesus said, "*Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.*" (Matthew 6:34) Worry doesn't take the sorrow out of tomorrow; it takes the joy out of today. Worry pulls tomorrow's clouds over today's sunshine. Worry doesn't help you to get ready for tomorrow, because God doesn't give you strength for tomorrow. "As your days are, so shall your strength be." (Deuteronomy 33:25)

So when you bring tomorrow's troubles into today, you overload today. And worry is the interest you pay on borrowed trouble. And when you get to tomorrow, you're not more ready when you get to tomorrow; you're less ready, because you get to tomorrow out of breath, because you're trying to live today's strength with tomorrow's troubles; and you're overloaded today, and you're worn out before you get to tomorrow. Worry is useless. Worry is wasteful. Worry is wicked. Jesus said this is the way the Gentiles act: "*After all these things do the Gentiles seek.*" (Matthew 6:32) You're acting like a pagan.

Now you say, "Fine, pastor, fine. You make me feel worse now. Tell me not to worry? Now I'm going to worry about that." But now, listen. He doesn't just say in a cavalier way, "Don't worry." He tells you exactly what to do. Look at it in verse 6: "*Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.*" (Philippians 4:6) Worry about nothing; pray about everything. You say, "Well, what do you know about it? You've never known any troubles." But, number two: I didn't write this; the Apostle Paul wrote it. It's written by divine inspiration.

Now the cure for worry, very simply, is prayer to that God who is right there with you, who will never leave you. It is prayer that is a place of power, provision, and peace. And I love these lines:

*I met God in the morning
When my day was at its best,
And His Presence came like sunrise
Like a glory in my breast.*

*All day long the Presence lingered,
All day long He stayed with me,
And we sailed in perfect calmness
O'er a very troubled sea.*

*Other ships were blown and battered,
Other ships were sore distressed,*

*But the winds that seemed to drive them
Brought to us a peace and rest.*

*Then I thought of other mornings
With a keen remorse of mind,
When I, too, had loosed the moorings
With the Presence left behind.*

*So I think I know the secret,
Learned from many a troubled way:
You must seek Him in the morning
If you want Him through the day.*

—RALPH CUSHMAN

Pray about everything; but unlock the morning with prayer. Refuse to worry. *“In every thing by prayer and supplication...”* (Philippians 4:6) If it’s big enough to concern you, it’s big enough to concern God. Don’t get the idea that there are some things that are too small to tell God about. Pray about it.

We have these missionaries here tonight. And my favorite story is of a missionary who met a voracious lion, and he prayed and asked God for deliverance. And God delivered him from the mouth and paw of that lion, and he gave God great praise. And that night when he tried to sleep, there was a mosquito in the room. It kept him awake all night long. And when he woke up with dark circles under his eyes, the Holy Spirit said to him, “You asked the Father to deliver you from that lion; but you thought you could handle that mosquito by yourself, didn’t you?”

Now, think about it. I mean, we think, “Well, you know, I need God for the big things.” You need God for everything—for everything! *“Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving...”* (Philippians 4:6) You say, “Well, I don’t want to bother Him about the little stuff.” Can you think of anything that’s big to God? It’s all little stuff to Him, and He’s concerned about that.

III. Reflect on the Provision of the Lord

Now, listen. How can you have a positive mental attitude? Rejoice in the presence of the Lord. Rely upon the protection of the Lord. Don’t worry. Bring God into it. Number three: Reflect on the provision of the Lord. Now he says when you’re asking God to help you to do it with thanksgiving. Look again, if you will, in verse 6: *“Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication”*—and here’s the little dynamite parenthetical phrase—*“with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.”* (Philippians 4:6)

Now if you ask God for more, and don't thank Him for what He's already done, I doubt you're going to get your prayers answered like you ought. Did you know that there's no higher expression of faith than thanksgiving, and worry is the highest expression of unbelief? Now, you think about it: thanksgiving is the highest expression of faith; worry is perhaps the greatest expression of unbelief. Refuse to worry. Tell God about it, and thank God for what He has done and for what He's already going to do. Now Paul is encouraging a spirit of thanksgiving when he's in a slimy dungeon. Why? Because of the blessing that he had. Sometimes we just have to get things in focus. We get to feeling sorry for ourselves and we fail to understand the blessings of God.

The word *think* and the word *thank* are related. Don't take things for granted; take them with gratitude. Psalm 68, verse 19—it ought to be on the dashboard of your car: *"Blessed be the Lord, who daily loadeth us with benefits, even the God of our salvation. Selah."* (Psalm 68:19) *Selah* means, "There: think about that." Lamentations 3, verses 22 and 23: *"It is of the LORD's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness."* (Lamentations 3:22–23)

Thank Him. If you are in a dungeon, thank Him for your spiritual blessings. If you are in a dungeon, thank Him for the simple blessings. I've learned this as I've gone through life: Unthankful people are always unhappy people. Some people, rather than being humbly grateful, are grumbly hateful. I think we've all met them. They are filled with bitterness and fear and negativism and selfishness and self-pity.

IV. Rest in the Peace of the Lord

Rejoice in the presence of the Lord. Rely on the power of the Lord. Reflect on the provision of the Lord. Number four: Rest in the peace of the Lord. Look, if you will, in verse 7: *"And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."* (Philippians 4:7) The peace of God is there to guard you and to protect you.

When Paul was in prison, he most likely was guarded by those Roman guards—day and night by soldiers. He was a very important prisoner. Paul looked around and he saw those soldiers guarding him. He said, "I've got something better than that guarding me: I've got the peace of God that is guarding me." It literally says here, *"And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep..."* Look at the word *keep*. It literally means "to garrison, to guard." He had the joy of the Lord to gladden him and the peace of God to guard him *"through Christ Jesus."* Again, "It's Christ who's here in this prison with me." What is the peace that he had? It's the peace of God, not the peace of circumstances.

Bible peace is not the subtraction of problems from life; it's the addition of power to

meet those problems. You don't keep this peace; this peace keeps you. It's peace that passes understanding. You can't get it from a bottle; you can't get it from a syringe; you can't get it from a psychiatrist, a psychologist, a well-meaning friend or a book; you can't even get it from a principle; you get it from God. Jesus said, "My peace I leave with you." (John 14:27) That's your legacy. It's peace that the world cannot give, and it's peace the world cannot take away. Find your peace in Him. *"Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee."* (Isaiah 26:3)

V. Reflect on the Purpose of God

Now, here's the fifth and final step of these five things that if you'll do them—not just hear them from the pulpit on Wednesday night, but if you'll do them—according to the Word of God, you will have that kind of healthy mental attitude that a Christian ought to have. Number five: Reflect on the purpose of God.

Now, what is the purpose of God? Well, look, if you will, in verse 8: *"Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things."* (Philippians 4:8) *You can choose your thoughts like you can choose your friends.*

Now we need to understand that we can be selective in what gets into our mind, what we allow into our mind. And you can allow filth and debauchery and negativism to come into your mind if you want to; but you can just say, "There's no room in my mind for you right now."

How are you going to think the right things? Well, let me put it another way. How are you not going to think the wrong things? By thinking the right things. I've told you many times that God has wonderfully made you where you can't think two thoughts at one time. So if you're thinking what you ought to be thinking, you won't be thinking what you ought not to be thinking. And this is the cure for "stinking thinking": if you will think on the right things. "Things that are true": he's not talking about facts, but truth. "Things that are honest": it literally means "honorable, venerable"; things that are just not crooked. "Things that are pure": don't be looking at pornography and all kinds of ungodly lascivious things. "Things that are lovely": God is a God who created so much beauty. It's amazing how people can be around great beauty and miss it.

I heard of a little boy who went out to see the Grand Canyon and an old preacher went out to see the Grand Canyon. The old preacher wrote back to his wife and said, "Today I've seen the handiwork of God; I've seen God as He put colors on His palette, and God as He took His fingers and sculptured a masterpiece," and he went on in grandiose words to describe the Grand Canyon. The little boy wrote back to his mother

and he said, “Guess what, Ma? Today I spit a mile.” You can be surrounded by beauty, and not see it. “Whatsoever things are lovely.”

And then he says, “Whatsoever things are of good report.” You can get a bad report and dwell on it; you can get a good report. You want good news? Pick it up and read it. I’ll tell you, you open the book of Philippians, you don’t smell the dungeon; you smell heaven—you smell heaven! This is written from a prison—from a prison! You almost wish you could be there with him. He’s in prison. He says in verse 11, “Hey, don’t feel sorry for me”—“*I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content,*” (Philippians 4:11) and he says, “If you will do this, you will have the peace of God in your heart.” Verse 9: “*Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do:*”—now here’s the promise—“*and the God of peace will be with you.*” (Philippians 4:9) You almost hear him saying, “And you, too,” amen?

Conclusion

All right, let’s pray. Father God, help us to learn that you are at hand; Lord, to rejoice in you, not in circumstances; Lord, to tell you about our problems and let you protect us. Heavenly Father, I just pray that you’ll help us to control our thought life, and, Lord, to choose those right thoughts to come into our heart and into our minds, and, Lord, that your peace will guard us, your joy will gladden us, and your Spirit will guide us.