

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church  
Paul Gunn, Pastor

ACQUIRABLE ASPIRATIONS

Philippians 4:1-13

March 8, 2020

For public use: See non-copyright comments at the end of the message.

I have three points to my message today.

- Verses so simple, yet so difficult to live out.
- A list of meditations for followers of Jesus.
- Christian meditation leads to contentment.

**SCRIPTURE:** Philippians 4:1-3

*Therefore, my beloved and longed-for brethren, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, beloved.*

*<sup>2</sup> I implore Euodia and I implore Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. <sup>3</sup> And I urge you also, true companion [or your scripture might say ‘yokefellow’] help these women who labored with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the Book of Life.*

**INTRODUCTION:** In the beginning of the final chapter of Philippians, Paul makes an appeal to unity. There is a lot of speculation about the names mentioned above but the most forthright statement is to say we really don’t know anything about them other than Paul held them in high regard. They were people who labored with him in his desire to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I want to point out to you what one Christian writer said. The ancient Olympics were well known at this time and three statements of Paul’s leads us to believe he alluded to the Olympics in this section:

- In verse 1, he speaks of a crown. This could be garland, which was a sign of victory. Paul had run a race of struggle and he called the people his crown.
- In verse 3, he mentions the women who labored with him. The Greek work for “labored” means to strive as a team that works together in a competition.

- In verse 3, he also mentions the Book of Life, which may parallel a book with the names of Olympic contenders and winners. We know the Book of Life is mentioned in about a dozen verses throughout the Bible.

Several times in his writings, Paul illustrated his lessons with sports.

## **SO SIMPLE TO SAY, YET SO DIFFICULT LIVE OUT**

The following verses are so straightforward they really don't need any explanation.

**SCRIPTURE:** Philippians 4:4-7

*Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!*

That's a simple truth...but oh so difficult at times.

<sup>5</sup> *Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand.*

That's a simple truth...but oh so difficult at times.

<sup>6</sup> *Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication [which simply means 'humble pleading'], with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God;<sup>7</sup> and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.*

That's a simple truth...but oh so difficult at times.

**EXPLANATION:** It's interesting. Right after he tells people to rejoice and be gentle, Paul deals with anxiety. There is a lesson for us right here. Do you believe people are more anxious today than yesterday? I believe so. Do you know that today's young people suffer from anxiety much more than previous generations?

Before you react and say, "I know what the answer is – a good swift kick," I want you to consider my words. Anxiety is not a trait of lazy people who need motivation. I've encountered many, many young military men and women, as well as college students and young people working in trade jobs, who suffer from anxiety. It is truly an epidemic and affects people of all ages.

I believe a possible root of anxiety is simply trying to do too much or trying to please too many people. It's called lack of focus which results in an unpeaceful lifestyle.

Let's look at verse six again. Put your finger over the first part that mentions being anxious and start with *in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God*. This is a good plan whether a person is anxious or not.

Verses 6 and 7 are really about focus, aren't they? Let's break it down:

- *Be anxious for nothing* - That's a tall order if we are anxious, isn't it? It's like when someone tells you to calm down.
- *but in everything by prayer and humble pleading* - Notice the tone is not demanding. Ever heard prayers that make demands of God?
- *with thanksgiving* - Notice the progression, prayer and humble pleading with thanksgiving. What would we give thanks about? Here are some possibilities:
  - How about thanksgiving that we can pray directly to him with Jesus as our intermediary? We don't have to go to any other source to get a prayer through to the Lord.
  - How about thanksgiving for all he has done for us?
  - How about thanksgiving, in advance, for whatever the outcome of our request?
  - Now that you know the right attitude by which to pray, you can...
- *let your requests be made known to God;*
- *and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.*
  - Literally, the English word "guard" comes from a Greek word which means to protect a city from hostility and to keep people from leaving a besieged city. That's a pretty firm image, isn't it?
  - Metaphorically, this word is used several times in scriptures. Here the word "guard" connotes the idea of in-close connection with Christ, by watching and guarding for the attainment of something.

**APPLICATION:** I encourage you to learn and live out this verse before you instruct others with it. If someone shares a problem with you and you merely quote

this verse without the humble tone that surrounds it, you might just make someone angry.

## **A LIST OF MEDITATIONS FOR FOLLOWERS OF JESUS**

Christian meditation is misunderstood because it's become confused with eastern mysticism. In eastern mysticism, a person tries to empty his or her mind of all things. That's the complete opposite of Christian meditation. When the Bible uses the word meditation, it means "meditate on a thing, with a view to obtaining it". Instead of emptying one's mind, in Christian meditation we seek to fill our minds with all the things mentioned in verse 8. Read with me:

**SCRIPTURE:** Philippians 4:8-9

*Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy - meditate on these things. <sup>9</sup> The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.*

If we fill our mind with these things, what has to go? The opposite of the things listed... because there won't be room for them. Meditation in this sense is a discipline all Christians should practice.

**ILLUSTRATION:** A long time ago, I visited a man in a rest home with a friend. The man was crusty, angry about seemingly everything. He had been a truck driver, and his body was just worn out. He had sores that wouldn't heal. He said his trucking company had not treated him right. He said his family had abandoned him. He was pitifully angry. But, for some reason, he liked to see us. One day, my friend wrote Philippians 4, verses 8 and 9 on a poster and she mounted it to the wall by his bed. He was grateful that someone cared and did something for him. His focal point when he looked up from his bed was the wall. I've wondered if that scripture changed his spiritual focus. I certainly hope so.

## **CHRISTIAN MEDITATION LEADS TO CONTENTMENT**

**SCRIPTURE:** Philippians 4:10-13

*I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. <sup>11</sup> I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. <sup>12</sup> I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. <sup>13</sup> I can do all this through him who gives me strength.*

**ILLUSTRATION:** This past week, we saw tragedy like we've not seen in a long time. The tornado that swept through Davidson and Wilson counties and continued east for a long while left many homeless and took the lives of several people. My family knew Jim and Donna Eaton in Mt Juliet. Their bodies were found in bed. Apparently, they were asleep when the tornado came. They had a large storm shelter in their basement, the only thing left standing. They never knew the storm was coming.

Several of you have met John Kennedy, the man who has done a lot of painting for us. I saw John at the home of the people who died helping the family dig through the rubble. Only later did I learn that his home was a complete loss and was about to be demolished. He seemed perfectly content and glad that he and his family were alive. His wife sent out a Facebook notice thanking everyone for reaching out, assuring them they had a place to stay and plenty of gift cards for food.

**APPLICATION:** Contentment is all about perspective. Following the tornado, we all became a bit more content with what we have.

Paul learned the true meaning of contentment. He learned the secret, he says. What exactly is the secret? I believe the secret of contentment has to be realizing that if we are obedient to the Lord, we can rely on him for everything. All situations are temporary, everything will pass, and this life is only preparation for the next. If we really embraced that, it would give us a different perspective on things.

At times Paul had lots; at times he had very little. Some of you have given me money to pass along to others, and I know from observation the most generous people are the most content.

**EXPLANATION:** Paul was a tent-maker by trade. Some believe he did that for continued income but we don't know for sure. I believe as he became more committed to traveling as an itinerant minister, he had less time to make tents, and people like the Philippian church supported him. We know he was shipwrecked. We know he was in jail on several occasions. We know he talked with kings and servants. Paul had learned how to be content whatever the situation.

No doubt learning to meditate on the things listed in chapter 4, verse 8 will lead to contentment. Why? Because filling your mind with those things will not leave room for negative things.

Paul's contentment reached the point where he if he died: OK. If he lived: OK.

**APPLICATION:** If you feel like you have to have what others have, you'll struggle with contentment, because as soon as you get whatever it was, you'll be looking for the next thing.

Philippians 4:1-13 are good verses for us to focus on, to ponder, and to meditate upon. They are certainly relevant for life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We can look at these verses and see where we need improvement. I know I can. I am sure you can, too.

The title of this message is Acquirable Aspirations. While we may not master them, we should aspire to live out these verses. Without knowing that Paul wrote all this when he was in jail, one would think that he was writing from some comfortable location. He was so full of the Lord, I believe he had acquired the aspirations he laid out.

**ILLUSTRATION:** A few years ago, Hazel Jernigan told me on a Sunday morning that the day would be her last here. She had cancer. I walked over and asked Terry to sing her favorite song. As I studied Philippians chapter 4 preparing for this message, she came to my mind as a person who had disciplined herself to live out these verses. For a long time, she could not have people to her home, but she could talk on the phone when she felt like it. Toward the end of her life, she said she could have visitors, and so Bill and I went there one day. When we left, I told Bill I

had never experienced a visit like that. We went to encourage her, but we were the ones encouraged. She knew Jesus and was grateful for her walk with him.

**CONCLUSION:** For our altar call today, I want to ask, are you a follower of Jesus?

**SCRIPTURE:** Romans 10:9-10

*... if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. <sup>10</sup> For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.*

I do not believe anyone is born into this world as a Christian. We don't see that in the Bible. But we can be born again. Jesus talked of being born again.

To be saved, you must let go of your pride. Let go of your list of righteous acts as some type of way to make peace with God. Realize you are a sinner and in need of a Savior.

To preachers, teachers, students, and anyone else reading or using this message: I have posted this for all to use as you see fit. There is no need to cite me as the source. You are free to delete sections, add your own, or do whatever you want. There is no copyright. My request is that you do not copyright or sell my work. I am sharing my preaching notes in good faith with you because I know the challenges of putting together a lesson, especially when your week gets consumed with other things. Use it and enjoy!

I use the NIV translation of scripture because of its conversational nature. Feel free to go to Bible Gateway and copy and paste whichever translation you want to use. This transcript has been edited to an outline format that improves readability and therefore may not exactly follow the video edition.

Find me at [www.thbc.com](http://www.thbc.com). Click on sermons or YouTube channel: Pastor Paul Gunn  
Thanks to Jennifer Anderson for her editing assistance.

Sincerely, Paul Gunn  
Tusculum Hills Baptist Church  
Nashville, Tennessee  
USA