



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

The Finish Line Tells Us How to Run

Relentless Joy, Philippians 4:1-9

David Wood | April 19, 2020

Let me tell you a little bit about what last Sunday looked like for me and my family in our home. It was one of the most unique Easter Sundays we've ever experienced. We stayed home all day, which was not something we normally do, which is usually being with extended family, enjoying food made by aunts and uncles. But we didn't take part in that this year. We stayed home and cooked our own Easter ham.

Instead of worshiping with our church family in our church building, we worshiped with our church family from our living room, probably like many of you did as well. One other thing that was unique about last Sunday was that my family and I had time to go on a bike ride—an Easter Sunday bike ride. After tuning into the 11:00 worship service, we had lunch, put Calvin down for a nap, then I took the girls, Piper and Haddie, out for a bike ride.

Haddie is four and she likes to ride in my bike trailer. Piper is six, so she likes to ride out ahead of me, leading the way. She'll get to an intersection and then waits to find out, "Are we going to turn right, are we going to turn left, or are we going to go straight?"

We had been riding our bikes every few days as the weather allowed. We'd have some 80-degree days, then some days with snow. We were just happy that we were able to go out on bike rides. But recently we've had a problem. We can't go to our favorite bike ride destinations because they're closed. These include some of our favorite parks, where we liked to swing on the swings and slide down the slides. We can't visit some of our neighbors and give them high fives or hugs and see how they're doing. And we can't go to some of our favorite restaurants for a frozen sweet treat.

So we've been trying to figure out what destinations we can go to. Last Sunday, I thought of a different place. As we left the house, the girls asked, "Where are we going?" I told them it was going to be a surprise. As we were riding along, Piper got a little tired, so she hopped in the trailer as well and we hung her bike off the back of it.

Then they started to ask, "Dad, where are we going? Dad, where are we going? Dad, where are we going?" It's the way little girls are. So I finally told them we were going to downtown Aurora to River Edge Park. It's a beautiful outdoor amphitheater that has no one in it these days. After they heard that, they settled down for the ride.

I think this experience is similar to our Christian life. A lot of times we can lose our way. We can forget what our destination is. What are things going to look like at the end? It's easy to become anxious and unsettled when we lose sight of our ultimate destination, which is an eternity in heaven with God.

Maybe you're feeling that way right now. Maybe you're sitting at home experiencing conflict with your family you've never had before because you've never been together this long. Maybe anxiety is rising up in you as you learn more and more about the rising numbers of coronavirus cases in our world. You may be struggling to believe God is really good in the midst of all of this.

As we look at Philippians 4 today, the apostle Paul has some great encouragement for Christians as we press on toward our destination. We're going to see that the finish line tells us how to run. We know the finish line is heaven and we know we're going there, and that tells us how to run the race of the Christian life.



1. Heaven-minded Christians should agree in the Lord.

Today we'll see in our passage that the apostle Paul gives us three very clear ways heaven-minded Christians should live. First, heaven-minded Christians should agree in the Lord.

When I was growing up, my parents used to quote my grandfather, Bob Schaeffer. I have a lot of great memories of him. He was a fun-loving guy and I loved it when he was silly. One saying I particularly remember came up often because he had three daughters. When conflicts would arise, he would say to them—sometimes playfully and sometimes seriously—“Girls, try to get along.” Now we quote that same phrase at family birthday parties there on the farm. “Girls, try to get along.” Opening presents on Christmas morning we would hear it again, “Girls, try to get along.” I'm sure no doubt on their trip out to see the Grand Canyon years ago, they heard, “Girls, try to get along.”

I find myself saying the same thing with my own kids these days and Paul has a similar message for us. To a couple of fellow believers he loves, he says, “Girls, try to get along.” Let's see what Paul has for us in Philippians 4:1:

Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved.

Before I go further, I want to clarify what Paul is encouraging us to do. He has just finished telling us we are citizens of heaven. Last week Pastor Tim encouraged us with the fact that we should not just be living as citizens of earth, but we should also **recognize that we are citizens of heaven**. We belong there and that's where we're headed. Even our bodies will be transformed to prepare for an eternity there with God.

Before that, Paul told us to press on toward the goal. Pastor Steve told us about that and encouraged us to **keep our eyes fixed on the finish line**, the prize that lies ahead of us—eternity with Jesus in heaven. This is available for all who have come to Him in repentance and faith.

Now Paul tells us that because we are headed to heaven, we should **stand firm**. We should live out our faith every day. Our heavenly destination has real implications for how we should be living now. The finish line tells us how to run. In verses two and three, Paul continues by telling us how our destination impacts our relationships, beginning with our relationships with others.

²I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. ³Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.

We're not sure what the conflict was, but we know that Euodia and Syntyche weren't getting along. They had a difference of opinion about something and Paul wanted them to be reconciled.

Here are some details about what agreeing in the Lord looks like.

Agreeing can be hard.

These were women who had worked together, but they couldn't find unity. Paul uses the same Greek phrase here that he did in Philippians 2:2 where he says, “*Be of the same mind.*” He wants us to agree with one another. But that's often easier said than done.

Agreeing can require outside help.

We're not sure whether these women had tried to work things out themselves, but Paul realized they needed a mediator to help them work through their differences. That's sometimes the case in our lives as well. We might need an elder, a mentor or a small group leader—or sometimes even a professional counselor—to help us work through conflicts we're experiencing. Paul says, “*I ask you also, true companion, help these women.*” Agreeing in the gospel can be hard and sometimes it's going to require help.

Agreeing can hasten the gospel.

This is the good news. Agreeing with other believers can help advance the gospel. When Euodia and Syntyche were laboring side by side for the gospel of Jesus, no doubt they made an impact on the Kingdom of God. They served with other believers, using their efforts to spread the gospel and God used them in huge ways.

Paul gives us another little reminder that heaven is our destination when he says, “Your names are written in the book of life.” What is the book of life? It's something mentioned throughout Scripture, but especially in Revelation. It's God's record of those who belong to Him. It's another reminder to keep our eyes on the finish line.

Agreeing with others can be hard, it can require help and it can hasten the gospel. But what does that mean for us? What does that mean in our lives? My encouragement is to let your identity in Christ—who you are as a believer—help you to overcome any conflict or disagreement you have with other believers. This includes things like social media disagreements. Those should take a back seat. When

we're arguing on Facebook or Twitter, that should take a back seat to agreeing in the Lord. Very strong opinions should take a back seat. Even those things you feel so strongly about should take a back seat to agreeing in the Lord.

One big issue these days is political disagreement. This should take a back seat so we can agree with the Lord. People are asking questions like, "Should the country be shut down? Should the country be opened up again? Which party has the best plan to carry us through this?" Political disagreements take a back seat to agreeing in the Lord.

Romans 12:18 says this very clearly: *"If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all."* As you're living at home, as you're running into conflict with family members, or people you're not around but you're in communication with, look for ways to agree in the Lord. If you need some help, find help. Find someone who can mediate to help you work through that conflict. The finish line of heaven tells us how to run.

2. Heaven-minded Christians find peace in God.

First Paul tells us that heaven-minded Christians should agree in the Lord and next, we see that heaven-minded Christians find peace in God.

I heard a fictitious story this past week about a king who offered a prize to the artist in his kingdom who could paint the best picture to illustrate peace. Many artists tried to illustrate peace in the best way possible. Finally, it came down to two finalists. There were two pictures and the king was going to choose between them. One was a picture of a calm lake. It was a perfect mirror for the peaceful mountains in the background. Overhead there were fluffy white clouds in the sky. Everyone thought, "This is a perfect picture of peace."

Then they went to the second picture which was a painting of mountains as well, but the mountains were rugged and bare. Above them was an angry gray sky with rain coming down and lightning flashing in the background. Down the side of the mountain tumbled a foaming waterfall. This did not appear to be a peaceful place at all. But then when the king looked closer, he saw that behind the waterfall was a mother bird sitting on the nest she had made for her babies. He noticed that there in the middle of the tumultuous scene the mother was able to have peace. He chose the second picture, because peace is not only a place where there is no trouble or hardship, peace can be seen in the midst of a storm. Peace transcends the struggles around us.

Let me tell you that Jesus Christ is the Prince of peace. Peace can be found through God alone. Let's take a look at what the apostle Paul says we should do if we want to experience peace in the midst of our own storms. Turn again to Philippians 4.

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. ⁵ Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; ⁶ do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Paul tells us how our finish line of heaven should affect our relationships—we already talked about that—and here he's going to tell us how the finish line of heaven should affect our hearts and emotions—what's going on inside our souls. Paul says we should find our peace in God.

Peace from God follows rejoicing.

There are three main things about peace from God I want to tell you about this morning. First, peace from God follows rejoicing. Paul challenges us to rejoice in the Lord always. He certainly knew better than any of us the challenges that come in the Christian life. He had dealt with so many, yet he tells us to rejoice twice.

Paul wants us to understand the importance of rejoicing. Just like that little mother bird in the painting who didn't depend on her circumstances to experience peace or joy, Paul tells us that deep contentment in the Lord is always available for us based on our trust in the sovereign living God. Peace from God follows rejoicing.

Peace from God follows reasonableness.

The second thing I want you to see is that peace from God also follows reasonableness, meaning we're operating logically and responding with sound judgment. Paul recognizes that as we interact with other Christians, our emotions can get the best of us. We can get worked up about things, but he tells us to be reasonable in spite of those things.

It's easy to be carried away with struggles and think, "It's too much. I can't handle it anymore. I'm done." It's also easy to take a self-centered approach and just think about your own needs and not the needs of those around you. Reasonableness is critical in Christian community. We need to live, recognizing the impact our response to adversity has on those observing our Christian testimony.

Paul then gives us another great reminder. All along the way we have hints to remember the finish line. In verse seven he says, *"The Lord is at hand."* Keep in mind that Jesus is coming back, then He will judge us and hold us responsible for our deeds. Those of us who are believers in Jesus Christ—who have repented of our sin and turned to Him in faith for salvation from our sins—we know we will not receive punishment from God for those things because Jesus bore our guilt and shame on the cross. But He will hold us responsible for every careless deed. Our finish line tells us how to run the race.

Peace from God follows prayer requests.

Peace from God allows rejoicing, it follows reasonableness and third, peace from God follows prayer requests. Here we find ourselves at an indispensable verse that is so appropriate for the day we're living in. In this age of uncertainty, God has brought us to a verse that I believe is a lifeline for us.

Anxiety is not a joke. Anxiety has gripped many of us with fear in our circumstances. It has taken root in some of our hearts and has made fear of the future our master. Many of my close loved ones have fought against anxiety for years, so I'm not a stranger to the feeling of dread and hopelessness that comes with anxiety. Anxiety can cause us to imagine the worst possible outcome. What possibly could go wrong is what we imagine, then we experience the emotional toll of those fears in our present time. That's a really scary place to be. But we're not alone and fear is not our master. Emily, my wife, comes back to this promise time and time again, because it gives us hope in fearful times.

Let us not forget that Paul no stranger to this either; he has dealt with anxiety himself. In Philippians 2:28, Paul says he was eager to send Epaphroditus so that he *"may be less anxious."* Paul has been around the block in terms of experiencing anxiety. His command in Philippians 4:6 is clear: *"Do not be anxious about anything."* That's a really tall order for someone who's had anxiety clouding his entire world from the truth of Who God is.

Thankfully, Paul doesn't just leave us there. He tells us what we should do instead: *"Let your requests be made known to God"* which we do this through calling out to God in prayer. Paul calls us to participate in supplication which means bringing an appeal or a petition before God. You can talk to God about the virus. You can talk to God about what scares you most during these times. You can talk to God about potential job loss or your bank account balance. You can tell Him about your health issues or your strained relationships. You can talk to Him about all these things.

But is it just our requests that we bring before the Lord? No. Paul goes on to say we should be mindful of and thankful for everything God has already done in our lives. This is the posture we're to take. *"I'm tempted to be anxious, but God is my Master, not fear."* We should think, *"I'm bringing my requests before God because I know He is the One Who can do something about the things I fear and the problems I have."* We need to be thankful for what He has already done, even as we ask Him to continue to take care of us.

How does God promise to respond to us? Paul says in verse seven that if thankfulness is our response, *"The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."* The peace of God will guard your thoughts, your heart and your emotions.

Friends, anxiety can feel like a death sentence. It can feel as though there's no hope going forward. But the God of peace is here to guard us. The lies of the evil one have no place in our hearts or minds when God is protecting us. Rejoicing, reasonableness and requests through prayer all lead to the peace of God.

So how can we live this out in our lives? How does this get practical for us? When we're looking at our financial situation, *"Let your requests be made known to God."* Maybe you are facing unemployment. Maybe you're not sure how you're going to make ends meet this week. Maybe you keep peeking at the stock market all day or you get that sinking feeling when you look at your retirement account. I want to encourage you to let your requests be made known to God. Ask Him to give you His peace. When you're interacting in community, let your reasonableness be known to everyone. And when you're facing troubles of all kinds, look for ways to rejoice.

We have one song left at the end of this service and maybe you need to stand up right there in your living room and sing it out, *"How great our God is."* Rejoice. Praise Him for Who He is and what He has done. Let me assure you that you can experience God's peace. He offers it to all of us if we will turn to Him. We can have peace from the Prince of Peace, even in the midst of storms around us.

3. Heaven-minded Christians think about praiseworthy things.

The finish line of heaven gives us the right perspective. We know how to run because God is in control. As I've said, heaven-minded Christians should agree in the Lord and they find peace in God, and third, heaven-minded Christians think about praiseworthy things.

During these past few weeks there has been a lot of bad news giving us a lot of bad things to think about. There are sad stories about the spread of the virus. There's news about the financial struggles across the world. There's uncertainty as to what the future holds and when this whole thing will wrap up. But one thing I've noticed is that people are looking for good news and hope and wholesome things to share.

I don't know if you've seen this, but the actor John Krasinski started a YouTube channel and has made at least three episodes of a homemade news station called "Some Good News." I think his kids made the little logo that sits behind him, "SGN." John celebrates some of the good news things we have seen in our world. He sees parents finding creative ways to teach their kids at home. He celebrates companies and individuals putting together, manufacturing and transporting personal protective equipment to those taking care of the sick.

Another moment I thought was pretty cool was when he surprises a nine-year-old girl who was excited to see the Broadway show "Hamilton," but she wasn't able to because it closed down. He was video chatting with her, then gradually people from the cast of Hamilton started to join the Zoom call and sang one of her favorite songs for her.

The whole point of his show is to encourage and uplift people in the face of a hard time in our country and our world. As Christians, we are encouraged to do the same thing. We're not to just pretend everything is fine and dandy. We're not to act like ostriches and put our heads in the sand, ignoring whatever else is going on around us. We're still aware of the seriousness of things today.

But Paul gives us the antidote to anxiety to help our minds fight against it. He says the heaven-minded Christian is to think about praiseworthy things. Let's take a look again at Philippians 4, starting in verse eight:

⁸ Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. ⁹ What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

Let me tell you three things about praiseworthy thoughts.

Praiseworthy thoughts are possible.

First, it is possible for us as followers of Christ to have praiseworthy thoughts. Paul isn't giving us an impossible task. This is what walking as a Christian in faith really looks like. If you're a Christian, you have the Holy Spirit dwelling inside you, so you are capable of the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5: 22-23) that are related to your thinking, specifically, the experience of joy, peace and self-control. We are to fill our minds with the things that will inspire worship of God and service to others. There's an element of this that extends to the kinds of books, television shows and movies that we fill our minds with. If we're filling our minds with the kind of content that does not honor God—that's not pure and commendable—it's going to be really hard to honor God with our thoughts.

Praiseworthy thoughts should be practiced.

Not only are praiseworthy thoughts possible, but Paul also tells us they should be practiced. We see in verse nine how some of the Philippians had experienced great spiritual mentorship from Paul. He set the pace in his lifestyle and in his priorities. He didn't just give them lectures or truths or theology. No, he lived it out, showing them what it looks like in real life by using his life as a model. His challenge for the Philippians—and for us—is that we would practice these praiseworthy thoughts.

Praiseworthy thoughts make us feel God's presence.

Praiseworthy thoughts are possible, they should be practiced and they make us feel God's presence. This is kind of a twist for us because we've talked about the peace of God, but now Paul intensifies what we can expect as Christians by thinking praiseworthy thoughts. He tells us not only will we have the peace of God, but we will also have the God of peace. The God of peace Himself will be with us! This is not just in the way He's everywhere in the world, but His presence will be with us in a special way.

J. Ryan Lister, the author of a book called [The Presence of God](#), writes this:

The Bible emphasizes God's manifest presence, not only His omnipresence. There's a difference between saying "God is everywhere" and saying "God is here." We talk about God's presence being inescapable and that He is everywhere present, but it seems Scripture is more concerned with His presence manifested in relationship and redemption.

When we fill our minds with praiseworthy thoughts and put into practice what God is teaching us, Paul says there is a special way we are going to experience God's presence. How do we live that out? How do we think praiseworthy thoughts?

My first encouragement to you would be to fill your mind with truth about God. Find Scripture that gives truth about God you can cling to, even in your most desperate moments. I was on a prayer call with the area pastors this past week and as we were praying together, one of the leaders said his hope and peace are not in what he knows about the coronavirus, but his hope and peace are in what he knows about his God.

My second encouragement to you would be to open up your thought life with fellow believers. If you're in a small group, open up about your struggles and the things you're having trouble getting over. Maybe you need to find another person to talk with, whether that's a spiritual mentor, your spouse or perhaps a member of your small group. If you're not in a small group, I'd encourage you to join one. This is a perfect time to do that. It's so indispensable to have Christian community in these times. Spend time with someone you trust, opening up about what is going on in your mind. Invite some accountability so they can speak truth into your life.

My third encouragement is to ask God to bring His peace into your life and fill your mind with things that are true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent and worthy of praise.

If you'd like a great resource that contains truths about God you can cling to during this COVID-19 pandemic, the book I'd recommend is one I've been reading by one of my favorite authors—John Piper. He wrote a book just in the last few weeks called Coronavirus and Christ. It was just published and is available online for free in a number of digital formats. The first half of this book is an encouragement, speaking of the God Who reigns over the coronavirus. The second half is about what God is doing in the midst of this pandemic.

However you do it, fill your mind with praiseworthy thoughts and experience the presence of God in new ways. Heaven-minded Christians think about praiseworthy things.

As I wrap up today, I want to finish the story about my bike ride with my daughters last week. I told you we went to River Edge Park in downtown Aurora, but that wasn't our final destination. We enjoyed the journey together. We had a great time with lots of laughter and great memories. But I didn't tell you about ultimate destination we had on our trip. Near the end of the bike ride, I started to hear things like, "Dad, we're thirsty. We ran out of water." By then I really began to feel the extra weight in that trailer in my legs. My muscles were being strained and I was getting tired. On my way up one of the final hills, which was very steep, I started to think, "Wow, I'm going to have to stop for a while. I don't know if I can continue up this hill because this is hard." However, I was able to press on. Do you know why? Because my final destination was home. We were going home. We were going to the place where our loved ones were. We were going to the place where we belonged. We were going home.

And Christians, we are going home. Heaven is our home. That's where our citizenship is. We belong there. That's our finish line. And we look forward to the day when we will experience God's manifest presence with us for the rest of eternity. We will enjoy being with Him. Keep in mind that heaven is our home. The finish line tells us how to run.

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All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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