

our faith and trust in God increases so that we can encourage others by telling them how God has worked in our life. Through controlling what enters into our mind, we begin to experience continual joy and peace in our life. In other words, we get exactly what every one desires, but seek to obtain through money, fame and possessions. Consider how God might transform those things that are provoking anxiety in your life into opportunities for good.

Saturday, December 24, 2011

Daily theme: God provides models to encourage the Christian.

Questions

Read Philippians 4:9

1. How is it helpful to have a model?
2. What do you consider to be the most important examples to take from Paul's life?

Consider

What Paul wrote here was not theory; it was how he lived his life. He lived in continual joy and peace. He had no fear of death (Philippians 1:21). He lived with continual contentment with the circumstances of his life (Philippians 4:10-13). Paul's life revealed that it was possible to live in this manner. His example encouraged the Philippians who might question the possibility of living in this manner. Paul modeled rejoicing in the Lord always, when he and Silas sang praises to God after they were beaten and placed in a Philippian jail (Acts 16:25). If we examine the life of Paul, we see that he was a man of joy. He was a man who listened to the Holy Spirit and waited for the Lord's timing (Acts 16:7-9). He was a man who encouraged others by what God had revealed to him (Acts 27:21-24), as when he encouraged his shipmates with the words of the angel. As we've already seen he was a man of peace, joy and contentment. In the years since Paul, God has raised up others who have followed his example and become an example for others. The call for us is that we would not only be those who follow good examples, but also become examples for others to follow. Who are the good examples of joy, peace and contentment in your life? How can you maximize time spent with them?

Praise and prayer lead to life transformation.

Philippians 4:4-9

Sermon Series: Christmas 2011

Devotional Notes December 19-24, 2011

Monday, December 19, 2011

Daily theme: Joy is a basic characteristic of the Christian.

Questions

Read Philippians 4:4

1. Why would Paul repeat his command to rejoice?
2. What are the practical implications of always rejoicing in the Lord?

Consider

Considering Paul's situation, as well the conflict that was taking place in the Philippian church, Paul's command for them to rejoice is powerful. Paul was in prison awaiting his trial (Philippians 1:12-13), two women were in conflict in Philippi (Philippians 4:2-3), but Paul encouraged the church to rejoice. They may have wondered why. However joy is the natural by-product of our relationship with Jesus. When the disciples experienced the power to cast out demons and heal, Jesus told them to rejoice because they had eternal life (Luke 10:20). Our joy comes not from what we do, but from what Jesus has done for us. As we practice praise and worship, joy results in our life. In the Old Testament there were various Hebrew words that are all translated as "praise". These words remind us how important praise and worship were to the Hebrews and is for the Christian. "Yada" refers to extending our hands in worship. "Zamar" portrays worship as playing a musical instrument. "Tehilla" means to speak or sing praise. "Halal" gives the idea of celebration. "Toda" often refers to a choir. "Shabab" refers to speaking loudly. These are just a few of the words from Scripture that help to understand how we are to praise God and rejoice in him. When we praise God and rejoice over who God is, then the natural by-product is joy. The word "rejoice" implies joy coming from our relationship with Jesus. The Christian who practices praise will exhibit joy in his life. What might have caused discouragement does not have a chance to take hold in his life because of the joy present in his life. In what ways could you expand your worship of Jesus past the once a week worship service of the church?

Tuesday, December 20, 2011

Daily theme: The Christian can be gentle, because Jesus is near.

Questions

Read Philippians 4:5

1. What did Paul mean by "the Lord is near"?
2. How does Jesus' nearness connect with being gentle?

Consider

Many consider Paul's statement that the Lord is near to mean that the return of Jesus is close at hand. However it fits better in the context that Jesus is close to the believer, as in the presence of the Holy Spirit. This would be in line with what James wrote when he told believers to draw near to God and he would draw near to them (James 4:8). Jesus is present in our life in the person of the Holy Spirit. The fact that Jesus is close by gives the Christian a sense of security no matter what the circumstances might be. Christians are called to look to children as models for the kingdom of God (Matthew 18:1-3; 19:14). When in the presence of their father, they live in security. Children are an illustration of how we are to live in the presence of our heavenly Father. With a sense of security, the Christian can be gentle with all. He has no need to defend himself, because Jesus will defend him. He has no reason to strive against anyone, because Jesus will provide for everything he needs. His mind and being are in perfect peace because his trust is in God (Isaiah 26:3). Therefore, the Christian can live with great joy and gentleness because of the relationship he enjoys with Jesus. Reflect on how Jesus' nearness to you has given you gentleness.

Wednesday, December 21, 2011

Daily theme: Anxiety has no place in the Christian's life.

Questions

Read Philippians 4:6

1. In what way does anxiety contradict what it means to be a Christian?
2. How can prayer combat anxiety?

Consider

Because of what Jesus has done for him anxiety is a contradiction in the life of a Christian. Any Christian who experiences anxiety needs to go back and practice what Paul instructed the Philippians, rejoice and practice gentleness. Anyone living in joy will have no reason to be anxious. A Christian has every reason to be filled with joy, since Jesus has conquered death. He has eternal life revealed by the promises of God and the presence of the Holy Spirit. However, there will occasionally be situations that overwhelm the joy and gentleness and produce anxiety. In those cases, Paul also gave instruction. In those situations the Christian is to bring whatever is causing the anxiety before the Lord. King Hezekiah provides us with an example. When the Assyrians surrounded Jerusalem and threatened to destroy it, Hezekiah took their letter into the temple and laid it out before the Lord. Then he proceeded to tell the Lord what was in the letter and how he needed help. The Lord responded by destroying the Assyrian army. Any anxiety that Hezekiah had was destroyed when the Lord destroyed the Assyrians. (Isaiah 37) As believers we can always go to the Father and tell him all that is disturbing us and know that he will defend us. We are not to ignore the difficulties in life, but we are to bring them before our Father who can do something about them.

Thursday, December 22, 2011

Daily theme: Peace surpasses anxiety.

Questions

Read Philippians 4:7

1. How is the peace of God different from the typical understanding of peace?
2. How does peace surpass our understanding?

Consider

We typically define peace as absence of conflict. For example right now we want peace in the Middle East, in other words, we want the soldiers to go home and the shooting to stop. However, when Paul spoke of peace he meant something more comprehensive than the absence of shooting. He refers to a sense of well-being, wholeness and tranquility that comes over our being regardless of the circumstances in which we find ourselves. This peace surpasses our understanding, because it exists separately from our circumstances. We think peace must be linked to our circumstances, but Paul could be in perfect peace even though he was in prison and his enemies were out preaching the gospel in order to make life even more difficult for him. Paul could be at peace because of his relationship with Jesus. Isaiah spoke of peace in a person's life because his thoughts were focused on God (Isaiah 26:3). The peace of God is not dependent upon our understanding, but comes through our trusting relationship with the Father through Jesus. As we experience the peace of Jesus in our spirits, anxiety no longer has any place in our life. How can we be anxious when the God of the universe has taken up our cause? The peace of God in our life removes any reason for anxiety to exist.

Friday, December 23, 2011

Daily theme: The Christian meditates on those things that reflect God.

Questions

Read Philippians 4:8

1. Why is it important to evaluate what we think about?
2. What positive results can happen in our life by following Paul's instruction in verse 8?

Consider

If you think about it virtually all of our anxiety comes because we are thinking in a certain manner. We have forgotten the promises of God and focused on problems in our life, many of which are "what if this happens" problems. They are not problems that we currently face, but problems that we might face if something happens. However, when we focus our thoughts and limit our thoughts to only those things that come from God, there is no possibility for anxiety to arise in our spirit. As we learn to worship God continually and evaluate all of our thoughts bringing them into alignment with the heart of God, we will increasingly experience the peace of God in our lives. Then we begin to view our problems in a completely different light. We will begin to see them as opportunities to see the power of God expressed in our lives. As we see God's power released in our life,