# Bible Study — Philippians 4:1-9

NB: Feel free to skip some questions if short on time. Ask your own application questions if the ones here ‘miss the mark’ for your group.

**Launch**: When do you find it most challenging to continue to follow Jesus? What helps you in those times?

1. **Read Phil 4:1.** This suggests that the summary of what has come before is the idea of ‘standing firm’. In what ways has 3:12-21 encouraged the readers to stand firm?

Forget the past (13,) press on towards the goal of glory in Christ (12-14), follow godly examples (17), be alert to those who live as enemies of the cross of Jesus (18-19), realise that Christ is not finished with us yet! (21)

Phil 3:12-21 gives a broad picture of how to stand firm in the Lord. Phil 4:2-9 seems to give more practical application for the Philippians of how to do this – which also helps us to think through how we stand firm.

1. **Read Phil 4:2-3.** What seems to be the problem here? Paul seems very gentle in dealing with the issue (cf Gal 1:6-9). What things can we learn from this situation?

We are not free to believe anything we like about Jesus. But we do have freedom to think differently about many other things (style of service, songs, frequency of communion, as well as other lifestyle choices such as what we spend money on etc). We need to make sure our differences don’t cause divisions. We should major on our unity (in the Lord), having an orientation and goal that is centred on the Lord Jesus.

Some disagreements among members need to help of others to bring resolution (even among senior, godly, ministry-minded members). So be prepared to get involved and don’t just accept that ‘those two are having a quarrel’!

1. **Read Philippians 4:4-5.** What do you think Paul means by calling them to ‘rejoice in the Lord’?(It might also help to work out what it *doesn’t* mean!).

Note: Joy has been a major theme in the letter; (E.g. 1:4-5, 15-18, 18b-19, 2:1-2, 17-18). Remember the context – Paul is chained in prison awaiting trial for his life, he has few co-workers close who truly share in his work, Epaphroditus almost died while helping Paul, the Philippians were facing opposition for being Christians.

“Joy” here cannot be merely the experience of feeling happy (which usually comes because of some outward circumstance). Joy in the Lord refers to a deep, settled confidence and assurance that Jesus is Lord, that he is in control and will put all wrongs to right and we will be seen to have been right for trusting him. This joy is grounded ‘in the Lord’ (I.e. what he has accomplished and who he is). So it does not rely on our outward circumstances. And it might also have expressions of sombre reflection, quiet confidence (imaging the “joy” of a believer at another believer’s funeral), or cheerful singing as you wonder at our Saviour. There will, however, come a day when our joy will be completely overt, happy, exultant in both conviction and outward display – when Jesus returns.

1. **Read Phil 4:5.** *“Gentleness” means not putting yourself first, not being abrasive, even in the face of opposition. This would seem to many as simply ‘weakness’.* Why is this an expression of “standing firm in the Lord”?

How does the Lord’s ‘nearness’ also help us stand firm?

It cannot be mere weakness because that is how Jesus himself was, 2:5-11, and by his gentleness won salvation for all people.

Christians can afford to be gentle because they know Christ is in control and will ultimately vindicate them, even when they have been opposed. We stand firm in the Lord this way because we show we rely on him not our own assertiveness. We also honour him “to all” because they will see that we rely on Jesus.

The Lord being near can be understood in two ways (both in view here I think!): 1) He is coming soon and these momentary troubles will be ended (cf. 3:20-21). 2) He is with us, even in suffering and is able to comfort us through it (e.g. Matt 28:20). Both encourage us to persevere. This also helps looking forward to the next commands on anxiety/prayer.

1. **Read Phil 4:6-7.** What is it about anxiety that would stop us standing firm in the Lord? What difference does prayer make?

Anxiety is fear that we are not in control (and by implication, neither is God!) It undermines our trust in his loving provision of all that we need. Prayer realigns our heads and hearts to God’s sovereignty, it is an expression of humble trust, it frees us from trying to gain control over the things we have no control over, and it is powerful and effective (see James 5:16) – God is mighty to do anything that we ask!

(Note that it’s good to acknowledge that there is such a thing as ‘irrational anxiety’ which is a medical condition and for which medication can be a necessary help. But this is different to ‘everyday’ anxieties).

1. What is promised in verse 7? What isn’t promised? How do you respond to this?

God’s peace guarding our hearts, a wonderful gift in the face of troubling circumstances and anxiety. But it is **not** promising that we’ll get everything we ask for.

This is the only time the phrase ‘peace of God’ is used in the NT, although we get the ‘peace of Christ’ in Col 3:15. This must be more than just an ‘inner feeling’ ­– it comes from the reality that God makes us at peace, through Jesus, and that God is victor and that Jesus reigns and is in control. Yet, these truths should affect out ‘inner feelings’ also. There is a sense in which we can share God’s peace in the way that God doesn’t worry about anything because he is sovereign.

1. **Read Phil 4:8-9.** Can you think of practical ways you can obey these commands (to “think” and to “put into practice”)?

How does seeing Jesus as the most true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, and praiseworthy person, also help us to put this into practise?

Finish by praying together, especially mindful of what we have considered about standing firm together.

# Bible Study — Philippians 4:1-9

**Launch**: When do you find it most challenging to continue to follow Jesus? What helps you in those times?

1. **Read Phil 4:1.** This suggests that the summary of what has come before is the idea of ‘standing firm’. In what ways has 3:12-21 encouraged the readers to stand firm?

Phil 3:12-21 gives a broad picture of how to stand firm in the Lord. Phil 4:2-9 seems to give more practical application for the Philippians of how to do this – which also helps us to think through how we stand firm.

1. **Read Phil 4:2-3.** What seems to be the problem here? Paul seems very gentle in dealing with the issue (cf Gal 1:6-9). What things can we learn from this situation?
2. **Read Phil 4:4-5.** What do you think Paul means by calling them to ‘rejoice in the Lord’?(It might also help to work out what it *doesn’t* mean!).

Note: Joy has been a major theme in the letter; (E.g. 1:4-5, 15-18, 18b-19, 2:1-2, 17-18). Remember the context – Paul is chained in prison awaiting trial for his life, he has few co-workers close who truly share in his work, Epaphroditus almost died while helping Paul, the Philippians were facing opposition for being Christians.

1. **Read Phil 4:5.** *“Gentleness” means not putting yourself first, not being abrasive, even in the face of opposition. This would seem to many as simply ‘weakness’.* Why is this an expression of “standing firm in the Lord”?

How does the Lord’s ‘nearness’ also help us stand firm?

1. **Read Phil 4:6-7.** What is it about anxiety that would stop us standing firm in the Lord? What difference does prayer make?
2. What is promised in verse 7? What isn’t promised? How do you respond to this?

1. **Read Phil 4:8-9.** Can you think of practical ways you can obey these commands (to “think” and to “put into practice”)?

How does seeing Jesus as the most true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, and praiseworthy person, also help us to put this into practise?

Finish by praying together, especially mindful of what we have considered about standing firm together.