A story is told in the 19th century: a wealthy art collector
offered a massive prize for the artist
who could paint the best depiction of "Peace."
Artists submitted beautiful canvases of calm oceans,
quiet meadows, and sleeping children.
But the winning painting shocked everyone.

It showed a violent, crashing waterfall during a raging storm.
Lightning cracked across a dark sky.
But if you looked closely at the cliffside,
a tiny bush was growing out of a crack
in the rock right behind the roaring water.
Tucked inside that bush,
a mother bird was sitting calmly on her nest,
completely at rest.

This is the exact peace Paul writes about in Philippians 4.
He isn't writing from a quiet beach;
he is writing from Roman imprisonment.
Paul found and wants us to find that real peace
is not the absence of a storm;
it is the presence of God guarding
your heart right in the middle of it.

The first word in chapter 4—
(so that, so then, therefore)—
connects chapter 4 to chapter 3.
In chapter 3, Paul spoke primarily about his own situation.
In chapter 4, he begins to speak
to the Philippian church situation.
Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved. 4:1

These are tender words longed for—joy—beloved.
They reflect Paul's deep affection
for the Philippian Christians, perhaps his deepest
affection for any of the churches that he has founded.
Then verse 2 tells us that there is a problem—
I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord.4:2
Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion, help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel. 4:3

Now Paul is careful not to take sides.
He pleads with these women individually
to move past their conflict so that they
might see things the same way—
and work together in harmony.
But this verse also reveals that conflict
existed in the first-century church—
and that Paul wanted to resolve it
so the Philippian Christians could focus
their full energies on promoting the gospel.

Christians today need to understand that too.
Most churches experience conflict of one sort or another.
We need to deal with our conflict in a positive way
so that we can be single-minded in our Christian work.
And how do we do that?
How do we think on these things?

It isn't enough to resolve conflict
by insisting that one person "give in."
And it is not enough to take a vote
so that one person wins and the other loses.
Paul calls these women to "**think the same way in the Lord.**"
Just like he has been saying to the Philippians
in the previous chapters…
like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind" (2:2)
the same mind as in Christ Jesus.
And he closed Chapter 3 with Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, think this way" (3:15)

If the Lord is at the forefront of each of our minds,
we will find ourselves facing in the same direction—
advocating for the same thing.
If the Lord rules their hearts,
they will find it much easier to deal gracefully
with the differing ideas that surface
when they get together, Paul is saying.

I feel like during my time here,
that has always been one of our hallmarks and strengths.
To never let our differences and disaffiliations
get in the way of staying the course

and stay focused on the Savior. Always.
And Paul tells us always to do something else…
Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. 4:4

"Always" is a hard word.
In many ways, it's an inhuman word. Always.
Who says that?
How do we guarantee "always" in a temporary kind of world?
Who knows what might be next?
The great songsmith Irving Berlin
(you know, who penned the number 1 song of all time, White Christmas)
also wrote: "**I'll be loving you Always** / with a love that's true Always / when the things you've planned / need a helping hand / I will understand Always."

Or maybe, more in my generation, how about Jon Bon Jovi?
"And I will love you, baby - Always / And I'll be there forever and a day - Always / I'll be there till the stars don't shine / Till the heavens burst and / The words don't rhyme

But, Berlin or Bon Jovi, always is still a big word.
For a while, we can handle that.
But who has the capacity to say "always"?
Not me. And maybe not you too.
Take that word out, and this is a nice
little passage about being happy,
finding your joy, walking on the sunny side of life.

"Rejoice in the Lord."
Well, of course! Who would say no to that?
"Again, I say rejoice."
Sure, keep reminding me; I get it.
I also need to be reminded of the source of this joy:
Where is that joy found? **"Rejoice in the Lord."**
Certainly, I can do that.
I have done that.
You have done that.
I can remember a time when there was joy in the Lord.

However, I don't know about you,
but oftentimes, joy feels like a luxury. An add-on.
An I'll-get-to-that-if-I-ever-have-free-time kind of thing.
But you know what I forget all too quickly?

That joy isn't a luxury or a distraction.
Joy is vital. We can't do this thing called life without it.
And more importantly,
we don't have to manufacture it.
Joy is a gift, an act of grace in our lives
that points us back to God.
Joy sustains us with life, hope, resilience,
and perseverance, even in the most impossible circumstances.

And then, Paul says, let that joy spill out.
That joy in the Lord is not just for you,
not just so that you get a boost,
a lift, a skip in your step.
Let it come out. **"Let your gentleness be known to everyone."**

Gentleness is probably not the best word
to convey what Paul is getting at here.
"Patience," or "forbearance," are better.
Eugene Peterson's The Message says,
"Make it as clear as you can to all you meet that you're on their side, working with them and not against them."
I like that. Let all the world know that you'll meet them half-way."

It's about hospitality and welcome.
It's about the fact that we aren't the judge;
we don't point fingers; we don't accuse;
we dropped our stones long ago,
ever since Jesus told us that
only the sinless can throw them.
We aren't looking to pick fights, to call names.
What we have to share is joy—joy in the Lord.
"Let your gentleness be known to everyone."
Who? Everyone? Paul almost slipped in a sideways "always".

Then Paul goes from preaching to meddlin…
Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 4:6
Don't worry about anything.
Yeah, ok, thanks, Paul. But no thanks.
I mean, how in the world are we going to do that?
It's one thing to know we aren't

supposed to worry, but how do we stop?
And then, because we can't stop,
we end up worrying about worrying.
But did you notice something here?
There is a comma and not a period.
"Do not worry about anything, comma.
"Don't worry," says Paul, but get on your knees.
Don't worry, but pour it out.
Don't worry, but beg and plead and pound
on the doorways of heaven,
even as you know—not hope, not assume, but know—
that you are heard and that answers are
already all around you when you open
your eyes again and put one foot in front of the other.
Don't worry because you don't have time to worry,
you are so busy bending God's divine ear.

Have you ever been on an airplane when turbulence happens?
I mean sudden, terrifying mid-air turbulence.
Fasten your seat belts; things are going to get a little bumpy.
On a medical mission trip to Honduras
from Brentwood, I learned what that was like.
Except in this case, it happens on every trip
flying into the Honduran capital airport.

Landings there are one of the most
challenging in the world.
To land, the pilot tells us we have to do a steep,
last-minute 45-degree turn
over mountainous terrain and land on a short runway.
And brake really hard. But it will be ok.
So after we are all praying and questioning our life choices,
the pilot's steady voice comes on after the landing,
and an immediate calm washes over the passengers.
In those moments, we were trading our anxious spiraling
And what if's for the peace of God through mindful prayer.

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. 4:7

Don't worry, because from somewhere

comes this sense that maybe, just maybe,
you and I are not alone in the universe—
this sense that maybe we do have a place, a home, an identity.
And from somewhere, who knows where, God,
it must be, comes a peace that even on your
best days you can't define or even describe.
It just passes all understanding,
or our understanding anyway.
And where does it come from?

Choose joy. Rejoice in the Lord. Always.
It all comes back to that.
It's not rejoice in the Lord, when it is convenient.
Rejoice in the Lord, when we've got the time,
when we're in the mood,
when the world hasn't taken yet
another sideswipe at our confidence.
Rejoice in the Lord when I've run out of excuses not to.
Rejoice in the Lord ... Always.

And how do we do that always…
Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.4:8

Does anyone know what this is?
It is an engine air filter for a 2024 Hyundai Tucson Hybrid.
It replaces the one already under Susan's hood.
This filter works by letting the good, clean elements
pass through while trapping the dirt, debris,
and toxins that could ruin the engine.
If the filter fails, the system fails.

Now here is the other important filter in our car.
This is the cabin air filter.
This one goes inside and keeps the inside of our car clean,
filtering out the things that can make us sick.
Verse 8 is God's blueprint for a spiritual and mental filter.
Paul lists for us six specific "grid lines" for our thoughts: (there is a slide each one)
whatever is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, and commendable.
When a toxic or anxious thought hits our minds,

we shouldn't let it through.
We have to run it through the Philippians 4:8 filter first.

Think on these things ,
dwell on these things,
meditate on these things,
take your cue from these things,
be obsessed with these things.
Look at the list:
True, honorable, just, pure, pleasing,
commendable, excellent, praiseworthy.
What is that? Who is that?

The directive implies confidence that
there is enough of this out there to fill us up —
and not only fill us up, but give us joy—
real joy, in the Lord joy. Always joy.
Go find the one you love,
the one who loves you, focus on that, and you will know joy.

And who is that? Paul says, "Go find Christ in the world." . Always.
Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice
What would it look like for you to go out and find that kind of joy this week?
What things do you need to think on in your life?