

# ***Under Pressure***

## ***Press On – In the Peace of Christ***

### **October 22, 2023**

**Overarching Theme:** 2023 – Living the Dream

#### **Instructions:**

When using this material as teacher, feel free to pick and choose the point you want to emphasize in the lesson. The format of the curriculum is designed to have an abundance of information in which to refer as desired.

**Core Point:** 2023 can be a year of living the dream of faithful discipleship as we take a next step forward in following Jesus Christ.

#### **Reflect on this Scripture: Philippians 4:1-9**

*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. I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion, help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.*

*Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, beloved, 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. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.*

#### **Commentary:**

Nothing is known about Euodia, Syntyche, or Clement, except that they “struggled beside” Paul for the gospel. All that we know is that these leaders are at odds in the midst of the high pressure Philippian environment and Paul exhorts them to be of the same mind in the Lord (c.f. Philippians 2:5). He continues his word of encouragement with a double emphasis on rejoicing (Philippians 4:4). This is remarkable coming from an imprisoned

man. This means his vision of “joy” and “rejoicing” is neither superficial nor short-lived: it is a kind firmly anchored “in the Lord” for the long haul, despite obstacles.

Similarly striking is Paul’s ensuing emphasis on gentleness, lack of worry, prayer, thanksgiving, and peace (Philippians 4:5-7) — even though his incarceration would give ample reason for anger and anxiety. Paul encourages “gentleness” toward all people and all manner of prayer — with thanksgiving — toward God. Finally, the brief sentence “The Lord is near” (Philippians 4:5b) stands amid these exhortations as a word of encouragement, emphasizing the certainty of believers’ forthcoming vindication at Christ’s return.

That the peace of God “will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus” plays on Paul’s situation as a guarded prisoner of Rome. To describe this peace as “surpass[ing] all understanding” not only means defying all human reason (see Ephesians 3:19-20). It also alludes to the distinctive difference and superiority that characterize divine peace in comparison to human counterparts (compare to John 14:27).

“Finally,” Paul encourages believers to “think about” things that exemplify specific virtues: things that are true, honorable, just, pure, pleasing, commendable, excellent, and praiseworthy (Philippians 4:8). The verb “think about” means “take account of.” This implies an intentional inventory-taking of where the Philippians have experienced such things in Paul and elsewhere. Not only does Paul speak of a peace that “surpasses all understanding,” but he associates peace with God’s very nature: “the God of peace”. For Paul, God’s peace is not an optional add-on, but part of the experience of authentic faith and spirituality. In living this out, “the God of peace will be with you” (Philippians 4:9).

-adapted from online commentary by Troy Troftgruben

### **Questions to Ponder for Accountability in the Group:**

1. In the midst of life pressures and conflicts, what would it be to be of the same mind in the Lord? Is it about 100% agreement or more like the kind of humility that can enable one to disagree graciously? How can we model that quality in our divisive world today?
2. In 4:4 Paul writes, “Rejoice in the Lord always.” Even in prison? Even under pressure? How is this possible in unfavorable circumstances?

3. Review verse 6. In the midst of pressures that can lead to anxiety, what does Paul counsel?
4. Re-read verse 8. Of these blessings that Paul encouraged the Philippians to take inventory of, which do you need to focus on most today? Discuss with your group.
5. In verse 9 Paul describes God as the "God of Peace." Consider this descriptor in light of the needs of the world today. How can we better embody the message of the "God of Peace?"

### **Activity for the Life of a Disciple:**

1. Remember to find encouragement for the day by reading the daily devotional from FUMCC.
2. Ponder and pray on this scripture this week: Philippians 4:8-9  
*"Finally, beloved, 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. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you."*