

*Preached at Belleville Congregational Church, Newburyport, Mass.  
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Every now and then, you need a cheerleader – someone to remind you of who you are, who can urge you on. Sometimes, you need someone else to hold the carrot out in front of your nose, shine the light on the dark path up ahead, and give you a bit of a shove into an often-fearsome world.

I think we can all agree that Paul was the supreme cheerleader of Christ and his followers. And, in our Epistle today, he does just that for the Christians at Philippi. Had he been living today, he may have found gainful employment, if not as an evangelist or a pastor, then as a job consultant, a life coach, or a personal trainer.

In the notes on this passage from the *Interpreter's Bible*, the commentator reminds us that, for Paul, *"The Philippians were the convincing proof that he had 'not run in vain.' They were also his chief cause for rejoicing. The thought of them filled him with gladness, as if he were sitting at a feast instead of lying in prison."*

Remembering from where Paul writes this letter helps us better understand his motivation in cheering on the Philippians, in reminding them of the best they could be. Divisions or disagreements, such as whatever was happening between Euodia and Syntyche (and, of course, we have no idea what that was), would have, understandably, gnawed at Paul. How can these people who are so good be so...human? Come on, people, get with it. Forgive, talk, reconcile.

Paul had a sense that time was short. He was quite sure Christ would come again soon. It was imperative, therefore, that this community, which had been such a joy for him in their adherence to the faith, continue to be focused on the purpose and goal of their lives – commitment to the gospel of Jesus Christ. And so Paul, ever the zealot, cheers them on with a few reminders of how they are to "keep on keeping on."

The first of these reminders is this: **"Rejoice in the Lord always."**

Now here's an interesting thing: The Greek for "rejoice" was *also* used to say "good-bye." These Christians, facing what Paul believed was the end time, were to find joy in their life in Christ, even as they were saying good-bye to life as they knew it. So, the first word is **"Rejoice."**

Second, **“Do not worry about anything.”**

In other words, act boldly, don't micromanage your life because, in just a little while, it will all be changed, permanently. “Do not worry about anything.” Give all that you have to give, now. It reminds me of Jesus' admonition to not store things in our barns. The time is *now*, so live now, love now, be happy now – but always in faithfulness and service to Christ. **“Do not worry about anything.”**

Third, he tells, them: **“Pray honestly.”**

I suspect that many Christians are afraid to pray. We don't want to treat God like some sugar daddy, so we hesitate to ask for “things” because it seems so greedy. Other Christians aren't convinced about this thing called prayer. We aren't sure that it works, that it's meaningful, or that it's *real*. And, truth be told, some of us just don't believe in it, period.

But, Paul believes differently. His life and his ministry have been deeply and profoundly infused with a power beyond his capability. He trusts, with his whole being, that there *is* purpose and meaning in prayer. If he charges his flock to “not worry about anything,” that “anything” includes their prayer life. *“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.”* **Pray honestly.**

Fourth, **find lots of ways to say thank you.**

Most clergy, teachers, and other caregivers can tell you: burnout is real. Paul, prevented from his passion of spreading the gospel by his confinement in prison, has time on his hands to think about his life – where he messed up, where he succeeded, and the great cloud of witnesses to whom he is and will be eternally grateful. The Philippians are his “joy and crown.” And the word he uses for crown doesn't mean one made of gold, like something the King of England would wear, but one like those pictured on ancient Olympians, made of leaves and branches and given to those who win a race. Paul is grateful to the Philippians because they have shown concern for him, and because their behavior has made him feel victorious. In their faithfulness he has seen his life's work bear fruit. Everyone should be so blessed. **Find lots of ways to say thank you.**

His fifth and final word is this: **“Carry on.”**

This faithful group knows what is expected of them and how to do it. “Carry on,” Paul tells them. “Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me.” Most of us like to think that, after we die, someone will carry on the values and commitments to which we gave our lives. I’ve always imagined that that’s why grandparents like to have grandchildren. It’s physical proof that some part of them will keep flowing on into the future. Paul is no different, though he sees that what is being carried on is not *his* to claim, but *God’s*. **Carry on.**

Everyone needs a cheerleader sometimes, a life coach. So, here it is from Paul to us, with love and passion:

- **rejoice in God always,**
- **do not worry about anything,**
- **pray honestly,**
- **say thank you often,**
- **carry on.**

Oh, and one more thing, **“The God of peace be with you all.”**