

Broomfield



PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH MINISTRY OF THE WORD

Volume 3 Issue 7

February 23, 2004

Communing with Christ

The Steadfast Christian, Part 6

In Christian circles, the name *Daniel* is synonymous with a lion's den. This is because in 539 BC, after Cyrus and Darius conquered the Babylonians, Daniel was made a commissioner of the Persian Empire with the job of working with two other men in overseeing the entire kingdom. Because Daniel distinguished himself on account of the grace of God working in his life, Cyrus and Darius planned to place the prophet in charge of his entire kingdom.¹

However, two other commissioners, realizing their precarious situation, sought to use Daniel's religion against him² and thus manipulated the king to sign a decree requiring everyone in the kingdom to worship an image of Cyrus.³ Daniel would consider no such practice. On the day Cyrus signed the decree, he went to his upper room, got on his knees, and worshipped the Lord. It was because of Daniel's refusal to worship Cyrus that Daniel was cast into a lion's den to be eaten.⁴

Now the usual way of viewing this account in Scripture is to laud Daniel for the courage that he evidenced in standing for God when a gun was placed to his head. Yet in reality, what Daniel did really was no big deal! In fact, the text reads as such.

Daniel 6:10, "Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime."

Why was Daniel's prayer "no big deal?"

Think with me. Daniel was taken into captivity as a youth in 605 B.C. The account of Daniel and the lion's den occurred somewhere in the vicinity of 535 B.C. This means that the prayer and worship that Daniel offered on the day that Cyrus signed the decree was something he had been doing for seventy years!

¹ Compare Daniel 6:3

² Compare Daniel 6:5

³ Compare Daniel 6:7-9

⁴ Compare Daniel 6:16

There was no drama in Daniel's actions. This was an act that was the culmination of seventy years of faithful service unto the Lord.

The passage that we are examining, Philippians 4 instructs us in disciplines of steadfast Christianity that must be characteristic of our lives. It is tempting to examine Philippians 4, take good notes, and then file away what we learn for the day that we find ourselves embroiled in conflict. However if the disciplines of this passage do not become a characteristic of your life today they won't be that which characterizes your life when the trial comes tomorrow.

The Call to Commune with Christ

Philippians 4:6, "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God."

This is a passage that has been quoted so often that its significance has been diminished if not lost. The exhortation here stated in the positive simply is this: "but in everything... let your requests be made known to God."

Paul is calling upon Euodias, Syntyche, and all God's people to draw near to God in the midst of trial and difficulty. It is when the difficult times come that we need to go to God with our burdens. It is when the world has set itself against you that you need to go to God with your cares. It is when conflict comes that you need to go to God with the concerns of your life. It is when you are falsely accused that you need to go to God with your victories and defeats. It is when your heart has been trampled upon — as was Euodias' and Syntyche's — that you need to pain and sorrows to Christ.

Why?

Peter said it this way, "He cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7).

Such is the nature of the God whom we have come to know. He is intimately involved and concerned about His people.

Isaiah: God Acts for His Children

Isaiah wrote at a time when God's people had rejected the Lord and had gone after other gods. They had forgotten who their God was. They desired a religion of experience. And they had chosen to follow the gods of the nations. Consequently, Isaiah effectively said in this prophecy, "While you have forsaken God, realize WHO the God is that you have forsaken!" And then he spends 66 chapters of his book revealing the nature and character of God.

It is in this context that Isaiah wrote chapter 64.

Isaiah 64:4, "For since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, beside thee, what he hath prepared for him that waiteth for him."

Unlike the gods of the Canaanites, the Lord is one who delights in communing with His people. God hears the prayers of His people. And God has compassion on the weak and helpless.

Isaiah concludes that though your days are rough and you live in constant turmoil and have been persecuted for righteousness sake; nevertheless, wait upon the Lord. Do not grow weary of trusting God. And do not reject your God, but patiently endure. Because God ever and always acts on behalf of His children!

Peter: God Acts for His Children

This was the message of Peter as well.

1 Peter 5:6-7, “Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.”

This was written to a persecuted and troubled church. Circumstances are a poor judge of the character of God. Though the time is evil and your days rough, nevertheless through it all GOD CARES FOR YOU. This is the nature of the Lord whom you have come to know, serve, and love.

Our God is a transcendent God; yet He also is our Savior. He cares about you, and thus calls you His children, sheep, sons and daughters, friends, and bride.

Paul: God Acts for His Children

And this was the message Paul gave to the Philippians. In Philippians 4:1 Paul called them the beloved. This is a title of endearment that God uses for the Christian. And because Euodias and Syntyche knew the beauty of the Lord, they were to be ANXIOUS FOR NOTHING, BUT LET THEIR REQUESTS BE MADE KNOWN TO GOD!

In this context, notice three very important qualifications to Paul's exhortation.

Replace Worry

The first qualification is that that we must replace worry with communing with Christ.

Philippians 4:6, “**Be careful⁵ for nothing**; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.”

He the term *careful* or *anxious* expresses a strong feeling for someone or something, often to the point of being burdened. It was used positively of Timothy in Philippians 2:20 as he was “concerned for [the Philippians’] welfare.” In this case it is a negative command. Paul exhorts the Philippians and us to stop worrying. We are to stop being unduly concerned about the things of this life!

This is a rather tall order for, family of God, we love to worry! In fact most of us use this as our life verse.

Delusions 3:4: “Why pray when you can worry.”

The reason we love to worry is that worry in its most essential form is the futile attempt at maintaining control when our circumstances are beyond our control.

⁵ μεριμναω merimnao

In fact the first temptation man encountered was the possibility of “becoming like God” (Genesis 3:5). From that time in the Garden of Eden we haven't given up that lust. In fact, every time we find ourselves burdened by worry we simply are participating in the passion that led to the fall.

Paul says, be anxious for nothing! And instead of being anxious let your requests be made known to God.

Communing a Characteristic of Life

Philippians 4:6, “Be careful for nothing; **but in every thing** by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.”

Paul means by the term “in everything” that whether it is good or bad, easy or hard, in time of plenty or want, that we must cultivate a relationship with the Lord where we go to Him and share our concerns — where we commune!

It is not enough for us in times of ease to have a quiet time or lengthen our prayers a tad. Our passion and focus must be that we commune with God at all times! Whether our path be easy or hard, we cultivate a walk with Christ such that we are always going to Him and fellowshiping with Him! Samuel Rutherford put it this way: “Look for crosses, and while it is fair weather mend the sails of the ship.”⁶

Let us labor to cultivate a relationship with God in which we go to Him. Let us cast all our anxiety upon Him. Let us commune with Him.

Prayer Replaces Going to Man

Paul in Philippians 4:5-6 is speaking by way of a pun. In verse 5 he says, “let your forbearing spirit be known to all men.” In verse 6 he says, “let your requests be made known to God.” The implication here is obvious. While it is most natural to go to man with our requests, we must not do that. Rather, with man we must be forbearing. When it comes to our relationship with God, we must pour out our hearts!

This is how we can cultivate a heart that seeks to commune with the Lord, we must do so by weaning our hearts from the security of man.

Now don't misunderstand what is being taught. The issue here is not that we become islands all to ourselves. We are not independent and in need of no one in the body. This would violate the principle of fellowship to which Paul has called the Philippians throughout this epistle.⁷

The issue is this: when the pressure is on and life has become a burden, to whom or to what will you flee? What is your support network? What is your basis of strength? God would have us rebel against the inclination to go to man and develop and cultivate a relationship with God such that **HE IS THE FIRST ONE WE GO TO!**

Now in this context, notice the intimacy of this command.

⁶ Letters of Samuel Rutherford, XXX, page 92

⁷ Compare Philippians 1:27-30

Philippians 4:6, “Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving **let your requests**⁸ be made known unto God.”

Requests, in this context, references specific items of concern. While the temptation exists to put on “God speak” when it comes to our prayer life, and thus approach God with flowery words and trite statements, God doesn't want our poetry- HE WANTS OUR HEART!

The call is to go to God with that which genuinely burdens you. God wants you to tell Him what weighs heavy on your mind. He wants us to commune! He wants us to come with all our wants as we approach our God! He wants us to give him ourselves! He desires that we sit long at His feet.

You say, “This is difficult.” “My walk with God so often seems so dry. Is there anyway to cultivate a life of communion with the Lord?”

The Conduit of Communing

Philippians 4:6, “Be careful for nothing; **but in every thing by prayer**⁹ and supplication with **thanksgiving** let your requests be made known unto God.”

This is such an important addition to the exhortation here. The cure for worry, the key to deep and abiding fellowship with God, and the path to a life of communion is not apathy or inactivity. It is a positive acting upon something. Notice the flow of the text.

Verse 6a, “Do not be anxious.” Verse 6b, “But through these means — these vehicles — let your requests be made known to God.”

It is not enough to not be worried. Rather, we must act.

And what must we do?

When we put the words together that Paul uses here they convey the idea of the cultivation of a life of dependence upon God. This is done by prayer. Prayer literally means that we are to ask.

In the Scriptures there are many different words rendered prayer. The term here is προσευχη (proseuche). Another term is ευχη (euche), a prayer which expresses a wish or vow.¹⁰ Another term is δεσις (deesis). It is used of entreaty or supplications. It primarily references and attitude of petition.¹¹ In fact, this is the word rendered supplications used next in our text. Another term is εντευξις (enteuxis) is a prayer used when petitioning a superior.¹²

Now the term rendered *prayer*¹³ in Philippians 4:6 references devotion; it expresses a God-ward look of dependence and communion. It is depending upon God to do what He says He is going to do.

⁸ αιτημα aitema

⁹ προσευχη proseuche

¹⁰ Compare Romans 9:3, and Acts 18:18

¹¹ Compare 1 Peter 3:12, and 1 John 5:16

¹² Compare 1 Timothy 4:5

¹³ προσευχη proseuche

Why Did Christ Pray

When a man comes to a Biblical view of God's sovereignty, one of the first questions which arises is this: "If God is sovereign, why pray?" Yet, how much more difficult the question becomes when we think of prayer in relation to Christ. "If God is sovereign — AND CHRIST IS GOD — why did Christ pray?"

Matthew 26:36-39, "Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, and saith unto the disciples, Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder. And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy. Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me. And he went a little further, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt."

The reason why Christ prayed, and primarily why we ought to pray, is because *prayer* is not simply requesting. Rather, it primarily is an act of dependence upon and communion with God!

We pray because we need the Lord. We pray because this is the vehicle by which we sit at His feet. We pray because prayer is the means of communing with God. In fact, this text goes on. Following the account of Matthew 26:36-29 Christ exhorts His disciples.

Matthew 26:41, "Watch and pray, that¹⁴ ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

The reason that the disciples were to watch and prayer is this: "the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."

Why Pray to a Sovereign God

Based on what we've seen, we're really asking, "If God is sovereign, why depend upon Him?" When viewed this way, the answer is quite simple: We should pray because God IS sovereign!

Prayer primarily speaks of a relationship of dependence upon God which consequently expresses itself in dialoging with the Lord — or as the text reads:

Philippians 4:6, "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing **by prayer and supplication**¹⁵ with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God."

The term supplication speaks of making personal and particular requests of the Lord. Thus we see that supplication always flows from devotion.

When a man flees to God for refuge, his prayer life is NOT vague or general. RATHER, it becomes quite specific and intense! Now when this becomes a characteristic of our lives — when we depend upon Him such that we entrust our smallest concerns to Him — a certain attitude is cultivated.

An Attitude of Thanksgiving

Philippians 4:6, "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication **with**

¹⁴ ἵνα μή hina me

¹⁵ δεησις deesis

thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.”

As the child of God cultivates a God-ward look of dependence and devotion he places before the Lord his supplications. Now regardless of what God does with the concerns given to Him, the Christian responds with gratitude for he knows that his sovereign Lord knows all his needs.¹⁶

In Christ, he has received everything pertaining to life and godliness.¹⁷ There never will be a trial placed before him that will be beyond what he will be able to endure in Christ.¹⁸ Everything that God ordains in the Christian's life will be for his ultimate good.¹⁹ Every difficulty experienced in Christ will lead to his being perfected, confirmed, strengthened, and established.²⁰ God holds him up such that he eventually will triumph.²¹ Eventually in Christ this and every trial shall pass away.²²

And thus, even in Paul's darkest hours, gratitude was not far from his lips. For he always was mindful of the exalted privilege that God gave him in salvation! Thus to be used as a whipping post for the Lord was glorious — if that is what God had called him to!

As we step back from this passage we see that Paul is emphasizing the means whereby we walk with God. We walk with God through the valley of the shadow of death. We ever and always go to God as our source of support and strength. We commune with God!

It is through the cultivation of a life of dependence upon God whereby we offer to Him our grateful supplications! This is the key: The CULTIVATION of a life of dependence upon God.

God's Grace is Sufficient

In order to cultivate a life of dependence we must endeavor to come to a greater understanding of the character and nature of God. We must see our own sinfulness and weakness. We must see the grace of God which sent Christ to die for our sin. We must allow God's providences to have its way in our lives!

Now it clearly is the latter means of cultivating a life of dependence upon God that is in reference in our text.

The contest is that of Euodias and Syntyche in conflict.²³ The church in Philippi was suffering.²⁴ Thus essentially Paul said, allow the difficulty to have its way in weaning you from the praises of men. Rather than repining or complaining, let your requests be made known to God!

This is beautifully exemplified in Paul. Paul never courted trial or difficulty. In fact, early in his walk with God he found himself struggling under great difficulty. And so he went to the Lord in prayer on no less than three separate occasions — begging for the trial to end. But then God opened his eyes to a most glorious truth, life on this earth is not about happiness, fun, ease, doing great things for the Lord, or

¹⁶ Compare Matthew 6:32 and Luke 12:30

¹⁷ Compare 2 Peter 1:3-4

¹⁸ Compare 1 Corinthians 10:13

¹⁹ Compare Romans 8:28

²⁰ Compare 1 Peter 5:10

²¹ Compare Philippians 1:6

²² Compare 2 Corinthians 4:17 and 1 Peter 5:10

²³ Compare Philippians 2:2-3

²⁴ Compare Philippians 1:30

sharing the gospel. Rather, life is about nothing less than Christ.²⁵ Life is knowing Christ. Life is walking with Christ. Life is communing with Christ.

And thus, if Christ is in the fire, then we could be in no better place in the entire world than in the fire with Him.

2 Corinthians 12:9, “And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.”

What therefore ought we to be as a people of God? To what should we aspire in this life? How do we cultivate a life of dependence and devotion upon the Lord?

We ought to strive to be nothing more than a burning bush — remember when Moses stood before it?

The burning bush was constantly suffering the flame. Nevertheless it not only wasn't consumed! But it was the very dwelling place of God!

And so family of God, do not shrink back from trial and difficulty. Allow these to be the very means whereby your heart is kept from this world. You are brought to your knees. You come to the end of yourself. And thus commune with the Lord!

This was the exhortation that Paul gave to a church divided. This was the mindset/world view to which Euodias and Syntyche were exhorted. This is the calling that rests upon each and everyone of our lives!

Commune with God by cultivating a life of devotion to Him!

Subscription Information

A subscription to the *Broomfield Presbyterian Church Ministry of the Word* is on a free basis. To subscribe or unsubscribe send a post card to *Broomfield Presbyterian Church Ministry of the Word*®, Post Office Box 691, Windsor, Colorado 80550. Or you may send your request by email to [Nels Nelson](mailto:Nels.Nelson@broomfielddopc.org). *The Broomfield Presbyterian Church Ministry of the Word* is published regularly.

VISIT US WHEN IN Broomfield, COLORADO

Feel free to visit Broomfield Presbyterian Church when in Broomfield, Colorado. Broomfield Presbyterian Church is located at Kohl Elementary School, 10th Street and Kohl, Broomfield, Colorado. The telephone number of the church is 303-469-6912. The worship services are at 9:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. each Sunday. Broomfield Presbyterian Church is a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

All our sermons can be accessed via the World Wide Web. The recording of this sermon can be found is found at the [Broomfield Presbyterian Church website](http://broomfielddopc.org).

The address for all sermons at Broomfield can be found out as follows: <http://broomfielddopc.org/sermonaudio.com>

About the Preacher

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on February 23, 2004. Greg is the preacher at Broomfield Presbyterian Church.

²⁵ Compare Philippians 1:21