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Today at Magdalen Road we finished our series in Philippians. The passage, 4v4-end was both dense (in terms of lots of ideas and application) and also very challenging. As you go through the chapter in homegroups perhaps encourage each person at the end to leave with 1 idea or thing to work on.

In the passage Paul both 'commands' us to rejoice (v4-8), as well as showing us his example of rejoicing (v9-20). It's a passage that seems to deal with a number of objections with, or hurdles to, us rejoicing. Paul is getting inside our heads!

v4-8: the rejoice 'command'

Paul's command at the beginning of this final section gives us the template for each of the subsequent 3 hurdles he outlines from v5-8. Namely a 'command' but then a Christ focussed reason each time. Hence our rejoicing is not simply to be general rejoicing, but rather rejoicing 'in the Lord'.

Next, Paul calls for gentleness (presumably in the face of opposition) because 'the Lord is near'. Paul reminds them both that they are not alone, but also that He has seen their troubles and will bring justice in his time.

After gentleness comes anxiety. Ours is an anxious age and many suffer from anxiety which makes this a difficult couple of verses for some. Paul is not 'super-human' but rather urges us, in the midst of troubles to take our difficulties to The Lord. He can give us a supernatural peace, from himself, to help us in our anxiety.

We considered some of the reasons people get anxious, and how sometimes at root, anxiety is a symptom of 'misplaced trust'. We often get anxious because foundationally we trust in things or people or self rather than in the Lord. That seems to be why Paul urges them to take their concerns to the Lord in prayer. He can help us in our anxiety.

The final hurdle that flows from the previous, is Paul's urging to think about noble and pure (etc) things. He seems to be re-defining what their culture considered to be admirable and noble etc (many of the words in v8 are only found here in the NT, however were common as admired concepts in the First Century world). In the context of the letter, Paul seems to be encouraging the Philippians to think about Christ as the truly noble etc one. And so

think and live like that in the midst of an opposing cynical world.

v9-20: the rejoice 'example'

Next, Paul lets us in on his example and ability to rejoice. He's not just commanding them to do something he's not learnt to do. The focus of these verses is Paul's financial partnership with the Philippians.

Despite being thankful for them, Paul reminds them he does not need them! He's learnt to be content - another huge challenge in our culture of discontent. Whether he has lots or little, whether cupboards full or empty, whether hungry or full. Paul knows contentment from the Lord. How? V13. Through the Lord who gives him strength. Note the context for this verse - it's not a motivational verse for being successful or fruitful, it's about the Lord making him content.

Paul doesn't need their money though he is thankful for their support of him - from the beginning to the present. He sees their giving (v18) as part of their sacrifice and worship - using Old Testament type terms, he is also convinced (v19) that God can provide their needs through the riches of His grace to them in Christ. When the Lord has made us content so we can have an ability to give generously as we know he provides.

Here are some possible questions to help apply these challenging verses - as always feel free to adapt as needed for your group.

+ v4-8 the rejoice command

What commands does Paul outline in v4-8? What motivations or reasons does he give for each one?

Why do you think ours is a culture where anxiety is rife? (For an interesting study on anxiety around the world and over the years have a look here:

<http://m.fastcompany.com/3016661/what-countries-are-most-anxious-about-around-the-world>).

According to Paul what is the answer to anxiety? Is it as simple as that? Why? Why not? Why do you think Paul urges us to think about certain things? How does Christ fulfil these? How easy do you find it to do this?

+ v9-20 the rejoice example

What example does Paul zoom in on as he gives us his example of how he's learnt to rejoice? Why is this example so challenging?

What does it mean to be content? Are you content? Why / why not?

What does it mean to be content when in plenty?

How has Paul learnt contentment?

How does Paul describe their giving in v18? Do you see your giving in this way? Why / why not?

What does v19 mean? How does that change our perspective on money and giving? Do you believe this?!

Each take 1 or perhaps 2 things away to keep praying about and working through. Share and pray about these for each other.