



Central Peninsula Church

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Philippians 4:4-7
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Four Verses for the Rest of Your Life

SERIES: Philippians: A People and A Place Transformed by the Gospel

Good morning CPC. I'm preaching for the next few weeks. Some of you have already figured this out, but one way you can tell if I'm preaching is by the presence of this big book here on the pulpit. Have you noticed this before? Here's why I use this book, and explaining this to you is going to involve a bit of mockery.

As a pastor here at CPC, I see it as part of my job description to make fun of my fellow pastors. I believe that pastors can easily be tempted towards taking themselves too seriously because we work with problems and conflict so much of the week, and so, as often as possible, I take on the responsibility, I make the sacrifice, I take the lead, in making fun of Mark Mitchell, Rob Hall, and Jerome Madigan.

This is one of my favorite parts of my job. And I don't do this alone. I always make sure to team up with another pastor. The rules are the same as they were in junior high: when making fun of people it's best to use the buddy system. Each week, Rob and I will team up and make fun of Jerome—we tell him that he doesn't really work, that all he does is sing songs all day. Once I'm done making fun of Jerome, I switch buddies and Jerome and I begin to make fun of Rob because all day long from our offices, all we hear is Rob's voice; he just talks and talks all day long, and when he's not talking he's either crying or sweating.

And when we're done making fun of Rob, us three young guys, the three amigos, Rob, Jerome, and myself, we come together and have just a great time making fun of our spiritual father, Mark Mitchell. We do most of this behind Mark's back since our offices are all together, and Father Mitchell's office is way over on the other side of the church. Now, in case any of you are concerned about this, about learning that your pastors have a habit of mocking each other. You need to know that we do this because we really like each other, we like working together, we love each other—we just love each other so much that we want to play an aggressive role in keeping each other humble.

So, the reason this big book appears on the pulpit whenever I preach has everything to do with how I make fun of the guy who uses this pulpit the most and the guy who's just beginning to use this pulpit. See, I'm taller than both Mark and Rob. This pulpit is a good height for Mark and Rob, but it's too short for me so I use this book

to raise the height of my notes. But the funny thing is, if you stand Mark and I next to each other, I'm only about an inch taller than him. I don't know if you've noticed, but Mark shrinks when he preaches. Is it okay if I impersonate Mark for a minute? This is what Mark looks like when he preaches...This is why whenever Mark's not around the three amigos call Mark "the hunchback of CPC."

That's Mark Mitchell. Rob Hall's a different story. You might not see it when we're standing next to each other, but I have a picture that proves that I'm over a foot taller than Rob. We call Rob the Energizer Bunny of CPC, or sometimes we just call him "bunny." Rob doesn't really use this pulpit when he preaches because he can't stand still. When he's up here, Bunny, I mean Rob, just keeps going and going and sweating and crying.

And me, well, I'm not going to impersonate myself because I don't really know what I do up here when I preach. And I don't really know what the other guys say to make fun of me because I'm bigger than them and they're intimidated by me, or at least Jerome is, so they never say it to my face!

Moving on. Exactly one year ago today, the first Sunday of October in 2006, I began a sermon series on the book of Philippians. Since then a few nations have risen and fallen, the iPhone has been invented, and I've become a father. A lot has happened as these sermons have come at us in four-week chunks over the course of this last year. During these next three weeks we'll finish this sermon series, we'll finish Philippians, and I think we'll see that the apostle Paul has saved some of his best material for last.

If you're new to CPC and you haven't been here for this journey through Philippians or if you have been here and you've simply grown too old to remember the ground we've covered so far, let me begin this morning by giving you a two minute summary of what we've discovered as a church in our study of this incredible book of the Bible.

Last October we began this series by looking at Acts chapter 16, which tells the story of how the apostle Paul, a murderer and a racist who had been radically transformed by Jesus, first came to the big, bustling, pagan city of Philippi in about 50 A.D. and planted a church in the center of that city with three transformed

lives. First we met Lydia. Remember her, the wealthy business woman, the Hillsborough-type woman who was empty inside, yet still full of questions about God? Lydia's life was transformed as Paul sat with her by a river and taught the Bible to her. Next there came the slave girl, the young girl who was oppressed by injustice and possessed by a demon. But this girl's life was transformed, not through a Bible study, but through a radical encounter with the power of God. Some of us here come from similar backgrounds. Then the third, and again, very different kind of person whose life was changed by the gospel was the Roman jailer—the blue collar guy, the practical guy, the South City guy. This guy was changed not through a Bible study and not through a big experience, but through asking a “how to” question: “what must I do to be saved?” The apostle Paul answered this man's question, he was saved, and with these three very different transformed lives Paul established a small church in the city of Philippi, a city not all that different from the Peninsula.

Ten years after that first visit to Philippi, probably about the year 60–61 A.D., that small church in Philippi had grown to be a much larger church. From a dark and dirty jail cell in Rome, 800 miles away from Philippi, Paul wrote a letter of encouragement and counsel to these urban Christians living in Philippi.

And what a letter he wrote! I trust you've all benefited from pouring over this letter. It's only four chapters long, but it's so rich and relevant to our lives today. Beginning in chapter 1 we heard Paul's prayer of thanks and affection for the Philippians. We read his moving report about his status in prison and his confidence in God's plan, and we listened to his teaching about the power of the gospel and the reality that “to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” In chapter 2 we examined Paul's moving poem about the humility of Christ, we explored what it means to work out our salvation as God works in us, and we encountered Timothy and Epaphroditus, two heroes who served the church in Philippi. In chapter 3 we listened in on Paul's autobiography, his testimony of how Jesus both changed his life in the past and was continuing to change his life in the present, and we were touched by the call to live as citizens of heaven. And now, a few verses into chapter 4, we come to today's text, an incredible text—four verses that would've been absolutely radical to these Christians living in Philippi and that remain absolutely radical for you and me and how we live our lives all these years later on the Peninsula.

These four verses have played a radical role in my own life. It was during the most difficult, anxiety-saturated season of life that I've yet passed through.

Eight years ago, the summer of 2000, when I had just graduated from college, I was recovering from two major knee surgeries, I had a job that was killing me, my mom was on what I thought could be her death bed with very advanced breast cancer, and I was shaken up from discovering and carrying up out of a lake the dead body of a guy my age, a 21 year old. It was in the midst of that kind of anxiety that I wrote out a list of 20 resolutions to live my life by. Eight years later, I still read and pray over these resolutions once a week, including resolution #4: “Resolved to not be anxious, but to obey Philippians 4:4-7,” today's four verses.

Philippians 4:4-7 is our text this morning. And I believe that as we explore this passage God will work change in many of your lives even as I preach this morning. I believe God will work change in many of your lives throughout this week as you reflect upon this sermon, *and* I believe that this is a sermon, these are four verses, for the rest of your life. It will take you and it will take me the rest of our lives to apply this passage.

“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious 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” (Philippians 4:4–7).

I. What kind of life is commanded in Philippians 4:4-7?

There's three questions I want us to ask of this passage today. First question: what kind of a life is commanded in Philippians 4:4-7, what does this text demand of us, what does it call us to do?

These four short verses are built upon five big commands. So that's where we'll start this morning, looking at these five commands.

In verse 4, the first command, Paul says “rejoice.” If you're new to Christianity, new to the Bible, this might surprise you to learn that the Bible commands Christians to be joyful. That's just not the perception most of us have of Christianity. Many of us perceive Christians like John Steinbeck described the Christian wife in his novel, *East of Eden*, “a tight hard little woman humorless as a chicken. She had a dour Presbyterian mind and a code of morals that pinned down and beat the brains out of nearly everything that was pleasant to do.” We think of Christianity like biographer Ellen Glasgow thought of her Christian

father, “in his long life he never committed a pleasure.” Yet Psalm 16 says of God, “you have made known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forever more.”

Joy language appears in the Bible over 500 times. And here, the clear command from the apostle Paul to the Philippians and to us is to “rejoice,” to have joy. Notice what this verse doesn’t say. It doesn’t say rejoice sometimes. It doesn’t say rejoice when things are going well and you’re having a pretty good day. It doesn’t say rejoice if you’re the kind of person with a personality type or disposition that’s more prone towards happiness. It doesn’t say rejoice when you feel like it, or rejoice often. It says rejoice “always.” Do you see how radical this is? Paul’s not talking about happiness—happiness is based on what “happens” to you, so it can’t be an always thing. But, joy, rejoicing, is different. It’s deeper. It’s better. It’s stronger. And this little word “always” takes this command to a whole new level.

I’ve been thinking about this all week. What would it look like for me to rejoice always? I think this would look different in my life than it would look in your life. A life of rejoicing always, a life of deep gladness, looks different in each of us depending upon what our personality is like and how we’re wired. What would it look like for you to obey this command and rejoice always? How would your life look different than it looks now?

This thing called joy is apparently so important to Paul and so important to what it means to be a Christian and be a part of a Christian community that’s seeking to impact its surrounding community and culture that Paul repeats himself. In the same sentence Paul repeats himself, he says, “again I will say, rejoice.” That’s two commands: rejoice, rejoice. Do you know of any other place in Scripture where a command is repeated back to back like this? I don’t. So, those are our first two commands: rejoice, rejoice—always live a life of joy, of deep gladness that runs deeper than happiness, deeper than what happens to you.

Command number three, verse 5, Paul says, “let your reasonableness be known to everyone.” This is a difficult command to translate from the Greek. That’s why some of your translations say “let your reasonableness be known,” some say “let your gentleness be known,” some say “let your patience be known,” and others say “let your tolerance be known.” The best way I know how to get the idea of this command across in English is to put it this way, “don’t take yourself too seriously and let everybody see that you don’t take yourself too seriously.” The command is for there to be a reasonable, gentle, patient, tolerant touch to your life that marks you as a person who takes the Lord seriously, but doesn’t take yourself too seriously.

Next, verse 6, the fourth command: “do not be anxious.” Don’t worry. Anxiety and worry were a way of life in 1st century Philippi—you worried about where your next meal would come from, about whether or not you and your loved ones would catch the latest plague and disease sweeping through town; you got so anxious that you offered sacrifices to the local gods and idols in hopes that everything would turn out okay. It’s into this kind of a world that Jesus came and spoke startling words, Matthew 6, “do not be anxious about your life...do not be anxious about tomorrow.” Paul’s simply repeating a command of Jesus, and yet he adds another little word that lifts this command to a whole new level: “anything.” Do not be anxious about “anything,” Paul says. Paul doesn’t say, don’t be anxious about most things, but you can still hold on to those three or four things you tend to worry about the most. No, the command is: do not be anxious about anything. That’s a different way of doing life.

As verse 6 continues we have the fifth and final command of the passage: “let your requests be made known to God.” And again we have a little phrase here that super-sizes this command, “in everything.” The command is to have that significant, that intimate of a relationship with God, that you come to him with everything. This would’ve been an entirely new concept in the 1st century Roman world, that you could have this close of a relationship with the God of the universe. It’s incredible.

Then comes verse 7, the final verse of the passage. Here’s the promise, the result. If you obey verses 4-6, you get verse 7, “and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds.” Philippi wasn’t just your typical city. Philippi was a Roman colony that was guarded 24 hours a day by a garrison of Roman soldiers. If you lived in Philippi, when your head hit your pillow each night, you slept in peace, you felt safe, because a whole garrison of soldiers circled your house, your city, and guarded you from danger. That’s the image behind verse 7. God sends a garrison of peace to guard you—to guard your heart and your mind so that you can go to sleep each night and you can wake up each morning, experiencing a peace that surpasses understanding.

Now, if you’ve followed me so far, I think you’ll all agree that Philippians 4:4-7 offers us a great life. This stuff sounds really good to me—this joyful, worry-free life. Other than some of the commands about the marriage bed in the Song of Solomon, these have got to be my favorite commands: rejoice, relax, don’t be anxious, talk to God about any

problems you might have and he'll guard you with peace. I want this kind of a life. Do you want this kind of life—a joyful, worry-free life?

Everybody wants this kind of a life. You want this kind of a life, I want this kind of a life, but do any of us have it? Are any of us here joyful always? Is Paul serious about this command, is he being realistic, is it even possible to have joy no matter our circumstances? The bestselling drugs in America, the most popular prescriptions, are antidepressants. Just this last year, over 227 million antidepressant prescriptions were filled in America. We're not joyful, we're depressed. And what about anxiety? Anti-anxiety medications are also among the most popularly prescribed drugs in America. Many have called our age "the age of anxiety." So isn't verse 6 setting the bar a little too high? Is it even possible to not be anxious about anything—even that relationship, even our finances, even the workload on our shoulders, even those two or three things we seem to always feel so insecure about? What about you, what do you get anxious about, what do you worry about? We want the joy, the peace, the worry-free life, but most of us don't seem to have it.

A few weeks ago I received a great email about this topic from a guy who's been a part of our church for a number of years now. I got permission from him to read his email to you. See if you relate to this:

Justin,

I hear that you are preaching on joy in a couple of weeks.

This may make no sense to you. I may be the only one with this situation. In fact I hope I'm the only one. But just in case there are others, I have a request. In your sermon, would you consider being compassionate on those, like me, who have long sought God's joy, and yet it remains elusive? I tend to dread sermons on joy, not because I disagree with the content, but because it feels like "rubbing it in."

Here's where I'm coming from. I had a tormented, miserable childhood. When I was 17 I became a Christian. That was 25 years ago. For the first year or two I was much happier. But then I slipped back into the same emotional darkness that characterized my childhood. I never stopped seeking the Lord. I have gone to church every Sunday. I have been in a small group most of the time. I even led a couple of small groups. I read the Word every day. I have read the Word from cover to cover several times. I pray every day. I have listened to countless sermons on KFOX, and on tape. I have read many Christian books. I have asked God dozens of times to give me his joy. I have spent years in Christian

counseling, with three different counselors. Most of these things have encouraged me - but it is temporary and I go back to being miserable...joy is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit, I have asked God for it, I have done pretty much everything I thought I was supposed to do, all these people have tried to help me, and yet I still don't have joy - has God rejected me?

And then I see many other people that had horrible childhoods also, or had terrible things happen to them, but God eventually gives them healing and joy. That's really great. But how come not me?

I'm certainly sinful, and I make no excuses, but I don't think I'm more sinful than average...I don't know what the deal is.

At the center of that email stands the question, "But how come not me?" How come I don't have the Philippians 4:4-7 life? That's the question I want us to explore next, both because I think my friend's not alone in asking it and this text demands that we ask it. The first question we asked is what kind of a life is commanded in Philippians 4:4-7? Answer: a joyful, worry-free life. Now we ask a deeper question of the text: why don't we have this kind of a life?

II. Why don't we have the Philippians 4:4-7 life?

That's our second of three questions today: why don't we have the Philippians 4:4-7 life? There's exactly one sermon that I remember from the church I grew up in in the Sacramento area, from Pastor Smith. It was a sermon that I heard on these four verses when I was a teenager and the tag line of that sermon was, "don't worry about anything, but pray about everything." Why, even if we've tried our best to not worry about anything and pray about everything, does, just like the email said, the joyful life remain "elusive"?

I think our text answers this question. The answer to this question is a one-word answer, but I need to lead us to it slowly. The reason you and I don't have the joyful, worry-free life isn't merely because we're committing the sin of joylessness and worry. The problem's deeper than that. Our sin goes deeper than that. One of the most helpful truths I've ever been taught is that there's such a thing as the sin beneath the sin. Follow me on this. The sins that you and I struggle with, whether that's anxiety, greed, lust, or whatever, these tend to be caused by a larger sin issue, an idol, that our life is wrapped around, by a

deeper, engine-room-sin that drives the sin that shows up on the surface of our lives.

I mentioned earlier that during my most anxious season of life I was recovering from knee surgery. The story there is that during my senior year of college my knees were giving me problems, giving me pain, and so I had a major surgery performed on both of my knees in order to fix the problem. I had what's called a lateral release surgery. Both of my kneecaps were being tugged too far to the outside of my leg, so I had to have four inches of muscle tissue cut away from each kneecap in order to re-center my kneecaps. But, my knees weren't really the problem. There was a problem beneath the problem. Even though I underwent this major surgery on my knees, my knees wouldn't work the way they were supposed to until I addressed this underlying problem: my feet. My knee pain was caused by my feet. The arches of my feet are fairly high and my whole life and athletic career I had never done anything to support my arches, with insoles or orthotics or anything like that. Because my feet didn't have a firm foundation, it affected my knees—over time my knees became so stressed and strained and out of joint that they required surgery. My knees were messed up, but my problem wasn't really my knees; my problem ran deeper, all the way down to my feet.

If you don't have the joyful, worry-free life that Philippians 4:4-7 talks about, your problem isn't so much your lack of joy and your addiction to anxiety, your problem is deeper. It runs all the way down to your feet. The deeper problem, the idol, the engine-room-sin that drives it all is, here's the one word answer: CONTROL. We don't have the Philippians 4 life because we want to control our life. We think we have the power and the wisdom and the resources to control our own lives, to be the lord of our lives. Knee surgery doesn't fix a deeper foot problem and "don't worry about anything, but pray about everything," doesn't fix a deeper control problem.

The first sin ever committed, Adam and Eve's sin, was the sin of control. Adam and Eve were given paradise, they were given what most men envision as a perfect life: a beautiful garden, wild animals, delicious fruit, a fulfilling job, and a woman who really likes you and doesn't wear any clothes. The garden of Eden was a place of joy and peace as Adam and Eve rested in God's control over their lives. But eventually, Adam and Eve rejected God's control, God's lordship over their life, and they took control themselves. They ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which was simply a decision to run things their own way. And ever since, the default mode of our hearts is to not trust the Lord who makes the sun rise each morning, but to trust ourselves, to believe the illusion, the mirage, that we ought to be,

and are capable of being, lord of our own life.

At its deepest level, our lack of joy, our worry problem, is a control problem. That's why we worry—because we think it does something, because we think our anxiety exerts a measure of control over how things will turn out.

Speaking about worry, the great theologian Mark Twain once said, "I have known a great many troubles, but most of them never happened." Most of my great troubles never happened either and the troubles and difficulties that *have* come my way are all things that would've still happened even if I had worried about them. You and I simply don't have the control over our lives that we think we have, that we want to have. It makes perfect sense that we don't have the joyful Philippians 4 life if what I'm saying is true, if we're busy trying to control our lives rather than simply living and enjoying our lives. I will confess before you, and you have permission when you see me around town to stop me and check in with me on this, the single greatest surface sin in my life is anxiety and this is driven by a really big idol of control that I bow down to on a weekly basis instead of bowing down to the Lord. That's why eight years ago I made a resolution regarding these verses, because I believe these are four verses for the rest of my life. I believe I will be in process under them until the day I die.

So, what do I do? What do you do? How can we at least begin to apply these verses and move towards the joyful, worry-free life they offer us?

III. How do we get a Philippians 4:4-7 life?

Our third and final question: how do we get a Philippians 4:4-7 life? I believe that Paul is serious about what he's written here. This is the word of God we're looking at this morning and the word is clear; we're commanded to live with an uncommon joy and with freedom from anxiety. And the fact that we're called to take these four verses seriously becomes all the more clear when we remember that the person writing these commands isn't somebody who's living a comfortable, storybook life. This is the apostle Paul. He's writing from a prison cell, he's lost all of his possessions, he's been betrayed by loved ones, he might be executed any day, and yet he writes these four radical verses.

Everything that Paul's said so far in this letter has paved the way for these four radical verses. Paul's been saturating this letter with descriptions of the character, kindness, and promises of our Lord. The title "Lord" shows up fifteen times in this short letter and two times in these four short verses. Of all the different titles Paul could use to refer to God,

here he emphasizes the title “Lord,” which means, “the one who is in charge,” the one who is in control. That’s what Lord means. The Bible uses the title Lord to express the absolute ownership and control God exercises over creation.

Look at verse 4 again. The command isn’t simply, generically, a command to rejoice—a command to try real hard to stir up some joy. The verse says, “rejoice in the Lord.” The joyful life the Scriptures invite us into is glued to the Lord, glued to rejoicing in the one who is in control. We’re never going to have joy in our lives until we take a deep breath, step back, and behold what the whole book of Philippians has said about the kind of Lord we have.

Paul knows how humans operate. He knows that we’re afraid to give up the control and the anxiety. He knows that even if we understand intellectually that control is just an illusion, that we really don’t have the wisdom and resources to be lord of our own lives, we’re still afraid to give it up. Paul understands this and that’s why Paul has used everything he’s said so far in Philippians to paint us a portrait of the bigness and kindness and the nearness of our Lord.

Look at what Paul says about our Lord in verse 5: “the Lord is at hand.” This phrase “at hand” can be taken two different ways. It can refer to time or to space. It can mean that the Lord is coming, that he’s on his way back, that he’s soon to be at hand. Or it can mean, and this is the interpretation that I favor, that the Lord is near, that he’s nearby, that he’s present—at hand. Isn’t this the message of the whole Bible, that the Lord of the stars and the sky and the sea is near to us? Brothers and sisters, you need to hear this from me—the Lord is near to you, he’s present right here, right now. He’s close to you. All of his character, all of his wisdom, all of his power, all of his love, is at your disposal. Do you know this? Sometimes, late at night I go into my son’s bedroom, I sit on the floor about two feet away from his crib and I just watch him and think about him and pray for him. My son doesn’t know that I’m at hand like that, that I’m near to him, but I am. You might not perceive that the Lord is near to you right now, but he is.

If you’ve been a Christian for a long time, I think you might be in the greatest danger of forgetting this. You might be in danger of forgetting the kind of a relationship you can have with your Lord. Verse 6 tells us that we can approach the Lord, we can talk to him, about anything and everything. We can tell him thank you, we can come to him with all our needs, we can lay our requests on his shoulders. This is the relationship of relationships! But if you’ve ever fallen in love you know that as time goes by you face the danger of forgetting the wonder of that relationship, the wonder of that love you’ve fallen into.

And when it comes to the Lord, you’re never going to rekindle that initial wonder, you’re never going to get the joy, the peace, the worry-free life, until you give something up. Here’s the answer to our question, here’s the point of this text, here’s the clothesline that you can use to hang this whole sermon on: a joyful, worry-free life requires a lifetime of giving up control. That’s the paradox of this text. We get the joy and the peace only by giving up the control, only by letting go and letting the Lord be Lord. And that’s a process that’s going to take you the rest of your life.

Now, that’s really big and somewhat abstract—getting this joyful life requires a lifetime of giving up control. You’re wondering, how exactly do I do this, how exactly do I apply this? Well, two ways. If I had the time I’d give you ten ways of applying this passage, but I don’t have the time and I want you to stick with these, as I’ve said, for the rest of your life, so I’ll settle for two ways you can apply these four verses for the rest of your life, two specific ways of giving up control. Both of these stem from verse 6 which I think is the hinge of this whole passage.

First, let your anxiety trigger your prayer life. This passage doesn’t say that we’ll never experience anxiety. In chapter 2, verse 28 of this same letter Paul spoke of his own anxiety. This passage acknowledges that anxiety is a reality in our lives, but it’s a reality that we’re supposed to do something about. Richard Lovelace once said that, “Anxiety is often a red light on the mind’s dashboard that tells us we are not expressing our needs to God and trusting his providence.” Let anxiety be a red light on the dashboard of your mind that alerts your prayer life, that triggers you into praying to the Lord. And make sure you really do turn your anxiety into prayer. If you’re like me, a lot of times you think you’re praying when you’re really not—you’re merely thinking things through in your head rather than actually talking to God about those things in your head. This is a radical change of habit for most of us, to pay attention to when that red light of anxiety comes on and to begin to do something different with it and turn it into prayer.

Second, use your prayers to regularly repent. The Christian life is meant to be a life of continual repentance. You and I are broken people who return to this stubborn, silly sin of trying to be lord of our own lives, so in your prayers regularly repent of this and other sins. There’s a simple equation that runs throughout the Scriptures and it’s this: regular repentance = fresh joy. And the reason this equation works is because when we repent we come to the last two words of our text, Christ Jesus. Repentance is coming to Jesus, coming to the one who left the

garrison of God's peace, who left the joy of the Lord, in order to experience the anxiety of the cross and give peace and joy to you and me. Jesus did this for us so that we would come to him, regularly, weekly, daily, and repent and find fresh joy in the forgiveness that he loves to give to us.

So, let's do this right now together as we prepare to celebrate communion. I'm going to read an old prayer of repentance for us, Psalm 51, which is King David's old prayer for fresh forgiveness and fresh joy. As I read this and as the communion elements are passed out, quietly pray this prayer with me, knowing that Jesus is the answer to this prayer, knowing that Jesus is Lord and he is near:

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment. Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me. Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have broken rejoice. Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.

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