



## ***Practice = Results!***

**Scripture Reading:** Philippians 4:4-13

I know many young people who have begun their winter sports season in recent days. A few weeks ago, they had tryouts. Then, after the coaches selected their teams, the athletes began intense conditioning exercises and started doing drills, learning and practicing their skills until they become second nature. Finally, before the season got underway, they started competing in scrimmages, further

testing and developing their skills, becoming aware of their weakness and working to overcome them, putting plays into action and learning to work together as a team. All of this and more went into preparing for the season. In reality, all of this continues until the season ends.

In sports, music, and most significant pursuits in life, we don't just prepare and go on our way, we keep preparing, practicing, learning, and developing as long as that pursuit is important to us. When it comes to the Christian life, this principle is just as true. In his letter to the Philippians, the Apostle Paul makes it clear that he isn't really offering a whole new set of instructions. What he is urging them to do is to practice what he's been teaching and telling them to do all along:

“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say rejoice!”

“Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.”

“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...”

Paul is like a coach telling his players that persistence will pay off, that practice will bring about the results they long for, the results he as a coach knows they will experience if they keep at it. Results like these:

“And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

“And the peace of God will be with you.”

And Paul tells them they will learn as he has a great secret, “to be content with whatever I have...I can do all things through him who strengthens me.”

All this and more, Paul tells them, can be yours as you put into practice what I'm teaching you. And while it is true that peace and joy can come out of the blue on occasion, we all know that practicing the right skills provides a great foundation for a consistently successful experience. We aren't talking about winning and

losing when it comes to our spiritual lives, of course; we are talking about something far more important and long lasting. We are talking about and aiming at abiding in, walking with, trusting in, and serving well our Lord Jesus Christ. What joy is ours as we live such a life, a life in which we like Paul can, “Rejoice in the Lord always!”

**Prayer:**

God of peace and joy, thank you for your presence here with me. Thank you for loving me. Thank you for hearing me as I pray. I lift up to you those people I am especially concerned about \_\_\_\_\_. I lift up to you those things I am anxious about \_\_\_\_\_. I entrust these people and these things into your loving care with thanks that your loving care, and your wisdom and power to care, are so much greater than mine. I rejoice in you and in your love, praying with confidence and joy in the name of Jesus Christ my Lord. Amen.

**Suggested Verse for Meditation and Memorization:**

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.

Philippians 4:8-9

**Some Thing(s) to Try:**

- Meditate on the suggested verses of the week, taking time to prayerfully reflect on them. You might try emphasizing different words each time you read or recite the verses, noting how that particular word directs your thinking.
- Practice sitting still with God away from distractions for five minutes or more each day Try slowly breathing in and out, thinking about something “worthy of praise”, such as God or something God has made or done.
- Practice praying as the Apostle Paul urges us to do in Philippians 4:6-7. Talk with God about the things that trouble you, raising up your head toward heaven to the God who loves you. Give thanks for God’s faithfulness, that he sees you, and hears you, and answers you as you pray. Pray with joyful confidence and thanksgiving.
- As you head into challenging situations today/this week, stand still, raise up your head, give thanks to God for God’s presence, and pray for the Holy Spirit to fill you with wisdom, faith, and love.

**Further Suggested Readings:**

- Zephaniah 3:14-20
- Isaiah 12:2-6
- Luke 3:7-18
- Colossians 3:12-17