

Thursday March 11 Philippians 4:4-9 – old advice rediscovered

4 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!

5 Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.

6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

8 Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.

9 Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

While we've been living under lockdown restrictions, we've had a lot of advice on how to nurture healthy minds alongside healthy bodies. I saw an interview on TV breakfast news with a psychologist from Edinburgh University; it's important for good mental health, she said, to find things to be thankful for. The web site *Psychology Today* reports that leading gratitude researcher Robert Emmons has been studying the link between gratitude and well-being; his research confirms that gratitude increases happiness and reduces depression. It reduces an army of poisonous emotions, from frustration and regret to envy, resentment and anger.

So this suggestion of finding things to be thankful for is a good one! But it's not new. Nearly two thousand years before this research, Paul was saying the same thing in his letter to the Christians in the Macedonian city of Philippi. This is what he said:

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

Note the phrase 'prayer with thanksgiving'. It's the THANKSGIVING bit that we're not good at. An American pastor once wrote about his disappointment when he suggested a time of thanksgiving in his Sunday morning service, and all his congregation could come up with was to give thanks for waking up and being alive for a new day. If you get out of the habit of giving thanks, it's difficult to think of what it is that you ought to be giving thanks for; try getting *back* into the habit, and that might begin to change ...

So here is just one suggestion: give thanks to the Lord for the new vaccines. Until Covid came along, it took years and years to develop new drugs; now we have Pfizer-BioNTech, Oxford-AstraZeneca and Moderna, with other anti-Covid vaccines still being developed, and it's all been done in a matter of months. Every day in the UK 500,000 people are getting their jabs. I had my first one several weeks ago. That is truly amazing, and the new techniques that the boffins have come up with means that the process could be speeded up in future for other new medicines. If that's not cause for THANKSGIVING, then I don't know what is!