



Forbear with One Another by Ron Julian

Adapted from a talk in a series on Philippians, given November 3, 2013, at Reformation Fellowship. To hear the complete talk, go to the "Audio" section of our website, www.gutenberg.edu.

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentle forbearance be known to all men. The Lord is near. Be anxious for nothing, 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 comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

—Philippians 4:4-7

This little passage is a favorite of mine. But at first it can seem like a pile-up of barely related concepts: Rejoice; Show your forbearance; The Lord is near; Don't be anxious; Make your requests to God; Pray with thanksgiving; The peace of God will guard your hearts.

The key to making coherent sense of these ideas is found in the sentence, "Let your gentle forbearance be known to all men." Much of the letter to the Philippians deals with how they relate to other people. Paul has just admonished Euodia and Syntyche to get along with each other, and he has been urging the entire church to pursue a loving self-sacrifice for each other. Here Paul is urging them to relate to all people with forbearance, with gentleness. The idea of this word translated "gentle forbearance" is not to retaliate. Is some other person giving you grief? Okay, you respond with forbearance, with gentleness, without striking back.

But how are they to arrive at such a mature and loving perspective? Paul sees it like this: Interpersonal tensions arise from a conflict of needs and desires. Somehow each person

is not getting what he or she wants from the other. Maybe another person is trying to influence the group to go in a direction you find scary or threatening. Maybe another person is saying hurtful things about you. Maybe you both are striving for something that only one person can have: you both want the same job or to marry the same person or whatever. Paul believes that the key to interpersonal peace is internal peace. That is, we can live with the fact that other people are not giving us what we want if we trust that God is indeed taking care of us. If I have confidence that I am ultimately going to be okay, then I can cut you some slack. That is what these little verses are all about.

Paul starts with, "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!" This, of course, is a repetition of what he said earlier, in chapter three. To rejoice in the Lord is to remember all that the Lord Jesus has done, is doing, and will do for us. And in remembering the Lord, we find great delight in the salvation He is bringing us. When I taught on chapter three, this is how I paraphrased what Paul meant by "rejoice in the Lord":

I know that you are suffering hardship. But remember the great things that the Lord Jesus is doing for you. He died so that you might find mercy. He will return to raise you up to an eternal life of goodness and fulfillment. The Lord is bringing us a salvation so valuable that we can hardly take it all in. So, in the midst of the hardships of your life, find comfort and joy in the great hope that the Lord is giving you.



Paul wants the Philippians to think about the Lord and His great gifts with longing and delight. This, then, means remembering that God is taking care of them. God has hold of them. God has promised to save them from everything that plagues their lives now. It is on that basis, then, that Paul can say, "let your gentle forbearance be known to all men." Since you have the Lord to rejoice in, you can forgive others for being less than what you want them to be. In this life, you are not getting from others what you want. But if you remember that you are going to be OK, you can let others off the hook. You can treat them gently. You can stop fighting them.

This leads right to, "The Lord is near." This phrase has its roots in the Old Testament. We see it being used there in one of two ways. It might be used as it is in Psalm 145: The Lord is near to all who call upon Him. That is, the Lord is closely concerned with our lives. When we call upon Him, He is right there, able to hear us and act on our behalf. Or it might be used as it is in the prophets: The day of the Lord is near. That is, the day of the Lord is on its way, is drawing near. It is important to note that in the many places the prophets use this phrase, none of them mean it will happen quickly. They say the day is near, but they don't mean in the very near future. Rather, it is *drawing* near. It is on its way, and it will not fail to arrive. So in our passage, Paul might mean two things: The Lord is near to you, is closely concerned with your life. Or, the second coming of the Lord is drawing near, it will not fail to arrive.



Forbear with One Another, continued

Either way, it means that we can count on the Lord to be our savior, our rescuer, our friend who will give us what we truly need. And so once again, we will be OK; we can cut each other some slack.

Next Paul talks about prayer: Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And once again, this fits right in with his admonition to treat each other with gentle forbearance. Paul is saying, “Let your heart be comforted and at rest, free from worry and preoccupation.” If you are confident that God will never let you down, then you can live with the fact that others do let you down. This translation says “be anxious for nothing.” I think the idea is to be preoccupied with things. I have problems, and I cannot let go of them. They are my constant concern and preoccupation. And so Paul encourages the Philippians to take those concerns to God.

At this point, we need to examine how Paul thinks about prayer. Why does it calm our hearts to take our requests to God in prayer? One answer might be, “If you ask God for what you want, He will always give it you.” That would be comforting, but it is not true. We know that Paul does not believe that. For example, in II Corinthians we see Paul praying that God would remove his “thorn in the flesh.” Three times Paul prayed this, and God told him “no.” God said, “My strength is perfected in weakness.” That is, God is saying to Paul, “I want you to have

this thorn in the flesh. I want you to know that what you are accomplishing is not by your own strength.” So, Paul is quite aware that God might say “no” when we make our requests known to him. No, the comfort in prayer comes from the fact that we are taking our concerns to the One who cares most for us. God has reached out to us in mercy. God has shown us His great love in Christ. God has promised to give us an eternal life filled with goodness and blessing. That is the one to whom I am making my requests. So, no, I can’t be certain that God is going to do specifically what I ask Him. But I can be certain that He is on my side. He is leading my life toward its ultimate fulfillment. God is leading my life in such a way that, as Paul says in Romans 8, “all things work together for good.” So, I can ask in thankfulness—not “thank you, God, that you are going to say ‘yes’ in answer to this prayer,” but rather, “thank you that you have shown me your love.” “Thank you that I can count on you to bless my life. If the answer is ‘no’ right now, still I know that you will do right by me. My ultimate prayer is that you will lead me into fullness of life, and I know the answer to that prayer will be ‘yes.’” So, I can free my heart from constant worry that things are not going well for me right now.

Paul then says, “And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” What does he mean by “peace?” One thing we can say for certain. Paul often ad-

monishes his readers to pursue peace in their relations with each other. That is, they should cease to fight and dispute with each other. In other words, Paul often uses the word “peace” to refer to exactly what he has been urging the Philippians to do throughout this letter: that in their relationship together, they should abandon strife and instead pursue being gracious toward each other. So Paul could easily mean “the absence of interpersonal conflict, the peace with each other that comes from God, will guard your hearts.” Sometimes, however, the word “peace” can refer to a lack of conflict in the heart. That is, “peace” can be what happens in a heart that has been freed from preoccupations, worries, and concerns. And so Paul could be saying, “and the freedom from anxiety and preoccupations, the freedom that comes from God, shall guard your hearts.” In a way, I don’t really care which way Paul is using the word “peace,” because the whole picture involves both concepts. Here is what Paul is saying: I want you to take your preoccupations and worries to God, those worries that lead to conflict among you. If you trust God to truly care for you, then your hearts will be guarded against the sort of personal worries and preoccupations that lead to conflict among you. As our hearts learn to trust God more, they are protected from making selfish demands on each other. Peace in the heart leads to peace among believers.

Ron Julian is a tutor at Gutenberg College, the author of *Righteous Sinners*, and a co-author of *The Language of God: A Commonsense Approach to Understanding and Applying the Bible*.

Student Art Show & Performance

April 21 at 7:00 PM

The annual art show at Gutenberg College highlights the performing and visual art of Gutenberg students. Performance begins at 7:00 PM. Limited seating is first-come, first-served. A gallery reception follows. A donation of \$5.00 for admission is requested but not required. All donations help support the arts at Gutenberg College. In the photo, Benjamin and Analia Chase perform at the 2016 Student Art Show.





A Fond Farewell From tutor Tim McIntosh

I'm leaving Gutenberg at the end of this academic year. This is one of the hardest decisions I've made in a long time. But I feel like now is the time to pursue the next chapter of my life.

When I joined Gutenberg ten years ago, I was determined to divide my time between teaching and writing plays. For several years, I was able to spend time doing both. But now I can no longer balance both efforts. I either need to forsake the hope of writing great plays, or I need to commit to it. I've decided to commit to it.

There are other reasons why I've decided to step away. My parents are getting older and are far away in Atlanta. My siblings also are on the East Coast. I'd like to be closer to them.

This change means that I will leave a place that I love, colleagues that I love, and students

that I love. This makes me very sad and made the decision very difficult.

I still believe in Gutenberg College. It's a truly remarkable place. I've taught in all sorts of institutions: public universities, public high schools, churches, private colleges. Nothing compares to Gutenberg.

Gutenberg sparkles because it embraces a tension. That tension is created by two sets of convictions: the founders' convictions and the students' convictions. Sometimes these convictions align, sometimes they clash, sometimes they strain. When placed together in the classroom, they create a tension that creates the most vibrant classrooms I've ever seen.

I have deep respect for Gutenberg's founders and for their willingness to create an organization where people of varying convictions could listen, reason, argue, and, hopefully, come to love and respect each other. I'm thrilled that Gutenberg is a place that these various people each call their home. This organization was created by teachers who I will miss greatly. I've been treated with great respect and affection by each of them.

About Gutenberg's students: Every worthy teacher unfairly favors his students; so I acknowledge I'm biased. That being said, Gutenberg students are the best. The biggest reason that our students are the best is this: They show up. They rarely need to be convinced that their studies matter. They rarely need reminding that their innermost selves

are at stake. Sure, every young person wavers in energy and commitment. But Gutenberg students seem immune to the sad insipidity of modern education. Instead, year after year, our students have consistently demonstrated courage, talent, and commitment. I'm honored to now call many of them my friends. May their tribe increase.

I'm hopeful about Gutenberg's future. I believe that the new board that President Chris Swanson has seated can steer Gutenberg to a sustainable, flourishing position. The board is full of polished professionals who know how to lead. Already they've begun building the administrative and financial stability that Gutenberg needs. They've articulated a strong recruiting plan and are already in conversation with a couple of strong candidates for my teaching duties. This should be encouraging to everyone who cares about the college.

Since deciding to leave, I've had many doubts about whether I'm making the right decision. Why leave such a wonderful place for such an opaque future? I can't provide a great answer. The best I can say is this: If I don't try, I fear I will look back with regret.

Meanwhile, I will continue to support Gutenberg in my prayers and will recommend it to anyone who wants the best college education that I've ever witnessed.

The faculty and staff of Gutenberg College wish Tim well in all his future endeavors. We will miss him.

2017 Summer Institute: Meaning and Flourishing in a Secular Age

Mark your calendar: July 27–29

Why do we suffer? How can we flourish? We humans have always asked such questions. In times past, our culture embraced (or tolerated) a Christian worldview that provided a foundation for answering those questions: meaning and purpose derive from our transcendent Creator. Today, however, we live in a thoroughly secular era, and answers are hard to come by. How did our culture end up here? How can a person of faith pursue a transcendent vision of life in such a culture? Gutenberg's 2017 Summer Institute will explore such questions. We'll search passages from the Bible, from the classics, and from contemporary works to find timeless truths and practical ways for pursuing God and flourishing in a secular age.



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Community Classes on Tuesday Nights

This spring, in addition to lecture/discussion classes, Gutenberg will offer reading/discussion classes. Led by a Gutenberg alum, participants will read and discuss a text chosen by the alum. Jonathan Carraher will lead the first discussion on **April 11th**, and Toby Swanson will lead the second discussion on **May 30th**. For more information, go to Gutenberg's website, www.gutenberg.edu, where you can also "subscribe" to receive emails about current classes and other Gutenberg news. (Gutenberg College will not share your information with other organizations.)



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It's Time to Apply!

In the Gutenberg College winter art practicum, students learned to play traditional Javanese Gamelan music in the pursuit of understanding various approaches to musical form.

Now is the time to apply to join these students and others at Gutenberg College in September 2017. See our website, www.gutenberg.edu/admissions, for admission requirements and to download an application.

Not sure? Come visit, attend some classes, meet our students and faculty, and ask questions. Email office@gutenberg.edu to make arrangements.