

SPOKANENWORD

January
2023



Spokane Friends
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Following the teachings of the Living Christ, we are an open, loving, and affirming community. We believe that God's Light is inherent within all people. There are no exceptions.

Sunday Schedule

Traditional worship in stillness
begins at 9:00 a.m.
when first person sits down
Programmed worship 10:00 a.m.
In-Person and via Zoom
See Website For Link

First Sunday of the Month
Potluck Meal at rise of worship

Third Sunday of the Month
Monthly Meeting for Business
begins at rise of worship

Is Your New Year's Resolution a Radical Choice?

by LaVerne Biel

Philippians 4:4-9 (NIV)

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 every situation, 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 and sisters, 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.

A story that I'll share at the end of this message had a great impact on me. And the Scripture that came to my mind after reading the story was Philippians 4:4-9.

Why Philippians 4? When I was young (6 years old) my parents adopted my sister, Melody. It was shortly after that adoption that my mom discovered she was pregnant with John after being married for 21 years. She was overwhelmed with two small children. She did what any overburdened mom would do and enrolled my older brother and me in every Daily Vacation Bible School that she thought was appropriate during the summer. Admittedly, I was a willing participant because Daily Vacation Bible Schools had everything I loved. It had cookies, Kool-Aid, crafts, and games. What's not to love!

During one Vacation Bible School when I was around 8 years old, I learned to recite Philippians 4:4-8 and it has guided me and influenced me throughout my life.

Paul is speaking from prison to people he deeply loved about how he handles adversity. His approach is very radical. Webster's definition of radical is favoring extreme changes in existing views, habits, conditions, or institutions.

How can I change my existing views and habits? What is it that drives my anxiety? Finances, work, and overcommitment immediately come to my mind as areas where I am focusing my attention.

What drives your anxiety? Where are you focusing your attention?

Sometimes my focus is in the wrong direction. I feel that other people are not listening to me, and I have little patience to listen to them. This brings me to the story of the battleship.

Story of the Battleship: In the darkest part of the night, a ship's captain cautiously piloted his warship through the fog-shrouded waters. With straining eyes he scanned the hazy darkness, searching for dangers lurking just out of sight.

Suddenly he saw a bright light straight ahead. It appeared to be a vessel on a collision course with his ship. To avert disaster, he quickly radioed the oncoming vessel.

"This is Captain Jeremiah Smith "his voice crackled over the radio. "please alter your course 10 degrees south! Over".

To the captain's amazement, the foggy image did not move. Instead, he heard back on the radio, "Captain Smith. This is Private Thomas Johnson. Please alter your course 10 degrees north! Over".

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Appalled at the audacity of the message, the captain shouted back over the radio, "Private Johnson, this is Captain Smith, and I order you to immediately alter your course 10 degree south! Over".

A second time the oncoming light did not budge. "With all due respect, Captain Smith", came the private's voice again, "I order you to alter your course immediately 10 degrees north! Over."

Angered and frustrated that his impudent sailor would endanger the lives of his men and crew, the captain growled back over the radio, "Private Johnson. I can have you court-martialed for this! For the last time, I command you on the authority of the United States government to alter your course 10 degrees to the South! I Am A Battleship!"

The private's final transmission was chilling: "Captain Smith, sir. Once again with all due respect, I command you to alter your course 10 degrees to the North! I am a lighthouse!"

Talk about radical change. Real lasting change happens when I focus on a different target and change my choices. I find that I learn more when I try listen to others by taking a humble position, and not one of authority (like the Ship Captain)

What do these verses say about changing my choices?

In the introduction to the Scripture above, Paul mentions by name two women whom he asked to make peace with one another. He then asked a "loyal companion" to help these women to focus on the Lord. This "companion" doesn't have a name. It's open ended.... Interesting.....

It could be anyone or everyone. It could be you or it could be me.

The request seems radical because it means that we work behind the scenes and not seek recognition for ourselves

It's about how we respond to people who disagree with us or others. It could be that they are out of focus – and it's possible that it could be me. Maybe I'm only looking inward and not towards what other people are feeling. I need to be pursuing the goal of reconciliation.

How do we perfect our skills in handling such situations? Verses 4 - 5 remind us to rejoice and let Christ's gentleness be evident to all. How can I manifest gentleness?

It is through my word and actions. This reminds me of the picture we have in the foyer, Christ in our midst. Christ is always present. Rejoice, we don't have to do it ourselves!

Paul tells us to present our requests to God through prayer. Really, prayer? Why do I need to pray? Doesn't God know our hearts?

I hear a lot of parents ask young children to "use your words" (I have used this once or twice myself and maybe to myself.) God knows our thoughts but wants us to use our words Why? Perhaps to acknowledge God's presence and to focus our attention on God.

In verses 6 – 8; we are to "Be anxious for nothing." Really, nothing? We are to "pray about everything with thanksgiving and gratitude." A major change of focus is required to do this, but there is a wonderful reward: peace. We receive

peace from God (a gift)

peace with God (we have a working relationship)

the peace of God (beyond our comprehension, but it guards our hearts and minds (penetrating))

It is truly a radical change to re-direct our focus from our worries and anxieties and toward whatever is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent, and worthy of praise (verse 9). The result is that the God of Peace will be with us.

This passage from Ephesians had a profound impact on me as an eight-year-old, and it continually influences me. Here is the story I promised earlier. It was on a plaque at a local store.

An Old Cherokee Tale of Two Wolves

One evening an old Cherokee Indian told his grandson about a battle that goes on inside people. He said, 'My son, the battle is between two 'wolves' inside us all. One is Evil. It is anger, envy, jealousy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority, and ego. The other is good. It is joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion, and faith.' The grandson thought about it for a minute and then asked his grandfather: 'Which wolf wins?' The old Cherokee simply replied, 'The one you feed.'

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THERE WAS NO MONTHLY MEETING FOR BUSINESS IN DECEMBER 2022



Radical Resolution (continued from last page)

When I read this story, it had a profound effect on me. I had to find a chair and sit and read it over several times. Philippians 4:4-9 came to mind.

What are my thoughts and emotions feeding?

What are my feelings feeding?

My resolutions are to focus on Christ, turn my anxiety over to him, rejoice because God is with me and around me, and feed my thoughts and feelings with the good things of God's kingdom.

Philippians 4:4-9 challenges me to make Thanksgiving (and New Year's Day and any other day) a time of radical choice to refocus on God's answer to the worries and anxieties of my life. I hope it challenges you too.

LaVerne Biel and her husband Kent are long-time members of Spokane Friends (a Quaker Meeting), where she has served in a variety of positions including Elder, Children's Church Director, Friends Acting Troupe, and Clerk of Meeting. Her career involved being CEO and owner of Access Unified Networks, which installs voice and data systems for businesses. She also engaged in political action (candidate for City Council), volunteer service (East Central Community Organization), served as an Officer of many local business organizations, and is currently the Executive Director of East Spokane Business Association.

[Editor's Note: This message has been edited and shortened to fit this space. The complete sermon can be found on our website spokanefriends.com and is titled "Is Thanksgiving a Radical Choice?" It was given as a Thanksgiving message, but it seems just as appropriate for a New Year's Day message, this being the traditional time to reflect on our lives and perhaps embark on our own radical changes.]

A Psalm for New Year's Day By Wallace T. Collett

New Year's is a holy day when we celebrate the gift of time, the primeval gift, the majestic gift from the Most High.

We enter into this day with praise for the miracles that have been granted us in the past year—for the three hundred and sixty-five daybreaks, for the brilliant noons and the lavender twilights, for the joys and loves that have budded and bloomed, for the understanding we have gained from the sorrows.

We are filled with awe, on this holy day, to know that we shall be given yet more time, more moments to live with heart beating and mind pulsing in the moving now.

We resolve to use these hours and days truly as a gift from the Most High, to live in tenderness and humility, seeking for the sense of God's presence in the glory of His universe.

At this turning of time, on this New Year's Day, we pray that the madness and the anger of people* may be abated, that God's law of love may rule the nations, that the world may find peace.



Photo by Sergei Cherkashin

This is from the January 1, 1968 issue of Friends Journal and reprinted in the December 2022 issue.

