

RELAX IN THE SON

PART V: JOY AND PEACE

BY PASTOR LARS JAENSCH (AUGUST, 16TH 2026) / WWW.FCGKIEL.DE

FROM SUMMER IDYLL TO REALITY: WHEN SHADOWS DARKEN LIFE

Every now and then, Marion and I have a free evening in the summer. We like to end the day with a delicious picnic and perhaps a nice cool drink. Of course, we also go swimming, but the best part is simply sitting there, looking out at the sea, listening to the seagulls and the waves, and watching the pretty sailboats pass by. Simply unwinding—until the sun finally sinks into a burst of color on the horizon. Occasionally, a band plays in the nearby restaurant and fills the entire beach with South American or Caribbean tunes. Oh, isn't that just wonderful? Beautiful, simply beautiful... unless we've brought a friend along to our evening picnic who speaks Spanish.

She understands all the lyrics to the cheerful songs and explains to us that "La Cucaracha" means the cockroach. Some things you just don't want to know! Or the band plays *Vamos a la playa*, the summer hit from 1983. Everyone enthusiastically belt out the catchy chorus, but did you know that this song was inspired by a beach in Spain contaminated by nuclear radiation? In 1966, a tragic plane accident occurred in Palomares on the southern coast of Spain. A US Air Force refueling plane collided in mid-air with a B-52 bomber carrying four hydrogen bombs—and the bombs fell on the small coastal town. Thankfully, none of the four bombs exploded—each had 100 times the explosive power of the Hiroshima bomb—but the conventional explosives detonated, releasing several kilograms of highly radioactive plutonium. It spread across the beaches and surrounding countryside, contaminating them to this day.

Oh wait a minute... Stop, stop! Just a moment ago we had those beautiful Caribbean sounds in our ears, and now this! What's all that about? Suddenly, all that lovely summer lightness is gone—and the heavy, oppressive darkness is back.

It's just like the solar eclipse on August 12, 2026. A moment before, there was the brightest sunshine—and suddenly it became dark and noticeably colder. All across Europe, hundreds of thousands of people watched this spectacle, deeply moved, including in Kiel. People stood shoulder to shoulder, for example on the Holtenauer High Bridge over the Kiel Canal, which offered an unobstructed view of the spectacle. And everywhere it was the same picture: As the moon slipped in front of the sun, voices fell silent, even the seagulls went quiet, and everyone everywhere looked up at the sun—behind thick protective glasses—profoundly moved. Unfortunately, I could only follow the whole thing via live stream on TV, but I too was deeply touched and thought to myself: Sometimes we take the beauty in our lives, the light, the sunshine, or even our health for granted—and only notice all the good when it's suddenly no longer there and missing. When the sun finally emerged from the shadow of the moon after 90 seconds, the TV reporter spontaneously uttered a heartfelt: "Thank God! Mazel tov—what luck! It's back." But let me tell you something: The sun was never gone! Circumstances had merely darkened it for a while.

LIGHT AND SHADOW: WHY TROUBLES CANNOT DARKEN GOD

Part of a breezy, lighthearted summer sermon is being completely honest: Yes, in our lives—and as Christians, we are not exempt—there are certainly times when dark circumstances, hardship, and suffering push themselves entirely in front of the sun.

I don't think it's a surprise when I say that after returning from vacation, not all your worries packed their bags and disappeared, right? Unpaid bills, problems at work, failing health, political turmoil in the world—or the heavy silence of loneliness—all of that is still there even after the vacation... Unfortunately.

In our sermon series "Relax in the Son," we've been looking at the Book of Philippians. Paul didn't write this letter while comfortably on vacation, sipping a cocktail on a lounge chair by the pool of his Mediterranean club hotel. Rather, he was sitting in a Roman prison—a dark, rat-infested, foul-smelling, drafty, damp dungeon.

Out of all places, from this gloomy cell, he writes a bright letter that feels like a warm summer evening—a genuine invitation to catch your breath. Chapter 4 is no exception. Let's read a passage, and you'll understand what I mean.

Philippians 4:4–7 (NASB): *Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentle spirit be known to all people. The Lord is near. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and pleading with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

After my introduction, it should already be clear that this isn't the feel-good routine of some random YouTube influencer trying to keep their (paying) audience happy with superficial, catchy slogans just to chase clicks and likes (because that's where the money is). Paul wants to give the Philippians a practical and proven recipe for how they—and we—can find a lightness for life in everyday routine and after vacation that doesn't depend on circumstances, but on God. Before we look at Paul's battle-tested tips, one important preliminary remark.

In life, we often face problems, difficulties, and challenges that seem massive and insurmountable. Our limited perspective often focuses only on the here and now, so that problems consume our entire field of vision. It's like the solar eclipse last week. The sun's actual diameter is about 400 times larger than that of the moon. It measures around 1.39 million kilometers, while the moon measures only about 3,480 kilometers. Although the sun is roughly 400 times larger than the moon, they appear almost the same size to us from Earth. The reason is their distance: The sun is about 150 million kilometers away, while the moon is only about 384,400 kilometers from us. The sun is 400 times larger, but also 400 times farther away. That's why, from an earthly perspective, they fit over each other so precisely during a solar eclipse. And our worries, standing so present and sometimes frighteningly close before our eyes, can also overshadow the vastness of God. But have you ever noticed how naturally Paul includes eternity and God's dimension in his reflections? Almost in passing, he says in our chapter, for instance:

Philippians 4:5 (NIV): *The Lord is near!*

Philippians 1:6 (NASB): *'For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.'*

Jesus Christ is his goal, his standard against which everything else is measured. This focus explains his serenity and confidence—despite everything he is currently going through. That leads us to ask ourselves personally: Do I live with this awareness and broad perspective, or do I limit myself to an earthly, small, limited, and very narrow view?

THREE KEYS TO INNER LIGHTNESS: JOY, PRAYER, AND FOCUS

Now let's take a closer look at the verses we just read:

Philippians 4:4 (NASB): *Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!*

When you are genuinely happy, you probably just skim over these words. But when you're—just like Paul—really sitting in the mud and don't feel like laughing at all, this appeal is indeed very provocative! Yet the letter to the Philippians is saturated with the word "joy." But what exactly does that mean? The emphasis is on "Rejoice—in the Lord—always!", pointing to a joy that stems from an eternal dimension.

Natural joy always springs from a specific event, whether it's a promotion, praise, or a gift. When such occasions are absent, joy vanishes or fades quickly. That's only natural, completely normal. It's a fleeting feeling that depends entirely on favorable circumstances.

Paul, however, is not talking about this fleeting joy here, but about a deep, abiding, supernatural joy that has its origin in heaven ("in the Lord") and is therefore inextricably linked to God Himself. It is, so to speak, an inner attitude toward life that exists independently of circumstances and is fed by God Himself. In prison, Paul was by no means in the mood to laugh. However, he realized that he would lose his mind if he kept staring gloomily at the wall. And then one day, a psalm came to his mind:

Psalm 34:4–8 (NIV): *I sought the HERR, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears. Those who look to him are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame. This poor man called, and the HERR heard him; he saved him out of all his troubles. The angel of the HERR encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them. Taste and see that the HERR is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in him.*

"I was afraid, I was at the end of my rope, I was in deep distress and in mortal danger"—that's how the psalmist describes his situation. And then he decided to consciously look away from his situation—and intentionally look toward God. In doing so, he experienced how his inner self was filled with a supernatural joy that probably only someone in such a situation can truly understand. Similarly, Nehemiah encouraged his contemporaries who were discouraged and worn down by their problems:

Nehemiah 8:9–10 (NASB): *Do not mourn or weep! (...) Do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength (refuge / stronghold)!*

And that is precisely what Paul means when he says here: "Rejoice in the Lord always!"—It's not about "Happy Clappy!" Especially in dark, hard times, our soul needs a place of refuge, a stronghold high above the clouds and the fog; a place of rest. Exactly: *Relax in the Son!* Paul's second survival tip is directly connected to this:

Philippians 4:6 (NASB): *Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and pleading with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.*

Worries are mental carousels; they spin constantly and make you dizzy, but they never reach a destination. Prayer is the place where we stop the carousel. It's not about ignoring problems, but handing them over to the One who is greater than our understanding. The result is a peace, a joy, that far surpasses understanding—simply supernatural. And gratitude, in turn, directs our gaze toward the good that is already present in our lives. This realization strengthens our faith that God will take care of everything else as well. A good friend of Paul, namely Peter, adds:

1 Peter 5:7 (NIV): *Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.*

Paul can only agree, and in Philippians 4 he goes on to describe the consequence of this inner focus:

Philippians 4:7 (NLT): *Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.*

The peace of God and joy in Him protect our heart and help us keep our thoughts and emotions in check. Our world of thoughts and feelings is crucial. Not for nothing does it say in the Book of Proverbs:

Proverbs 4:23 (NIV): *Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.*

In a very similar direction to gratitude goes the third point that Paul cares so deeply about. Question: *(holding up a sheet of paper)* What do you see here? Most people instinctively say: A black spot! Yet I am holding a large, white sheet of paper. And yes, there is a small spot on it. True enough. But often we only notice the dark spot and don't even register the infinitely larger white sheet. Our life, however, is far more than just this dark spot! Yes, it exists, and you can't argue it away. But there is also so much good and beautiful in our lives, yet we often forget that in tough times because we are so fixated on the dark spot that has pushed itself in front of our view—like the moon in front of the sun.

Paul would have had plenty of reason to despair. His life was hanging by a thread, and he was trapped in a cold, damp, drafty hole. There was a really big, black spot. And that couldn't be changed for the time being. Yet he still writes to the church in Philippi:

Philippians 4:8 (NLT): *And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise.*

Paul urges us to deliberately direct our thoughts, because what we look at shapes our soul. The question is what we absorb, what we look at, and what we dwell on. Do we set our sights on what is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, and beautiful? Or do we spend the whole day consuming bad news, staring paralyzed at the spot? Sometimes it's not just the problems themselves, but our thoughts that make life difficult and drain our strength and last nerve.

REGARDLESS OF CIRCUMSTANCES: FINDING REST IN JESUS

I conclude this sermon series with a frequently quoted word from Paul, which is just as often completely misunderstood:

Philippians 4:13 (NLT): *For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength.*

At first glance, that sounds like a bold superhero motto. But the verse stands in a context that must be read along with it: "through Christ," but then also:

Philippians 4:11–13 (NLT): *I have learned how to be content with whatever I have. I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little. For I can do everything...*

Paul doesn't write: "I live under perfect circumstances." But rather: "I have learned to be content with what I have and to cope with any situation." How? By *Relaxing in the Son*.

Sometimes a beach photo looks perfect. But just seconds after the photo is taken, a child screams, sand blows into the food, rain sets in, or the phone rings. Perfect moments rarely last long. The vacation ends. The summer passes. Life remains challenging. Yet Jesus is the same—yesterday, today, and forever. Whoever finds their rest in Jesus doesn't need perfect circumstances, a worry-free future, or a perpetual vacation. They possess something infinitely greater: the peace of Christ that guards heart and mind (Phil 4:7).

Philippians 4:4 (NASB): *Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!*

Even—or especially—in the middle of dreary everyday life. So: **Relax in the Son!**