



*Priscilla Hochhalter*

I'm a writer in Portland, Oregon, and this much-loved photo is me with my husband, Dan, and parents, Wayne and Bertie Roberts.

Recently Mom died of cancer. Before she died, she was memorizing the book of Philippians; she didn't finish, but I think she learned a lot from working on it.

So this week, I'm writing about seven concepts from Philippians that I associate with Mom: Prayer, Passion, Purpose, Perfection, The Peace Principle, The Practice of Praiseworthiness, and Provision. The first three are concepts it seemed she was almost born thinking about; the last three are concepts she seemed to learn about over time; and the middle one is both. Some of the songs were her favorites, too. I hope you enjoy them.

*BIBLE READING: Philippians 1:3-6*

Like Paul, Mom believed in prayer. She prayed relentlessly, continually, daily. She prayed for herself, and for others. She prayed for people's physical and spiritual needs, their relationships, their futures. She prayed prayers of thanksgiving and repentance. She prayed that "he who began a good work" would finish it in the lives of those she loved.

She took Jesus' words seriously: "Ask—and keep on asking! Seek—and keep on seeking! Knock—and keep on knocking!" (Luke 11:9-10, NLT). The Greek verbs here are present and continuing. I call it "holy pestering."

Jesus advocated holy pestering in parables—the widow pestered the unrighteous judge for justice (Luke 18:1-5) and the host pestered a neighbor for bread (Luke 11:5-8). When blind Bartimaeus pestered Jesus loudly for healing, he gladly granted it (Mark 10:46-52).

But, some ask, didn't Jesus also teach that praying repeatedly about something shows ungodliness (Matthew 6:7)?

No! In various translations, that verse simply warns against "vain" or "meaningless" repetition, or "babbling." The warning is not against repetition, but against a lack of heartfelt meaning and trust—as Jesus then illustrates by introducing the Lord's Prayer, saying, "Pray like this." This prayer model amplifies rather than nullifies Jesus' exhortation to "ask—and keep on asking!"

So, yes! Like Bartimaeus and the people in the parables, we *should* practice "holy pestering." For Mom, it led to an amazing number of answers, even to some seemingly impossible prayer requests.

*SONG: Sweet Hour of Prayer*

*PRAAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, teach us to practice prayerfulness, and even "holy pestering," for the completion of your good work.*

—Priscilla Hochhalter

*BIBLE READING: Philippians 1:7-8*

In the King James Version, Philippians 1:8 ends with the phrase, “I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ.” “Bowels” is an archaic, but very evocative, expression of deep passion about someone or something. The Holy Spirit stirs up such passion in godly ways.

Mom’s biggest passion, like Paul’s, was loving, serving, and praying for people. But she was well-known for smaller passions, too. At potlucks, for instance, our church lacked enough matching flatware to make *all* of the tables match each other, so she made sure that *each* table matched within itself. She wanted to create beauty for everyone. She was picky that way—and pickiness is simply passion on a smaller scale.

Mom’s passion sometimes overwhelmed me, but I grew to love it; it meant she cared, and was giving her best. And I inherited it! The picky parts have been especially helpful to me as a writer, editor, and designer.

Does God find our “small” passions insignificant? Apparently not, because his instructions for making the tabernacle were just as particular—down to the color and order of each bell and pomegranate on the hem of the priestly robes (Exodus 28).

The world suffers not from too much passion, but from too little. Too much passion is never the danger—only misdirected passion is. And no passion is the most dangerous of all. Jesus’ walk of obedience to the cross is called “The Passion of Christ.” He, too, gave his best. Never in history has anyone cared about anything as much as Christ cared about us. There is no such thing as too much passion.

*SONG: Give of Your Best to the Master*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, you created our passions. Help me to fully embrace mine, and direct them as you desire.*

—Priscilla Hochhalter

*BIBLE READING: Philippians 2:1-2, 13*

Mom lived with purpose and conviction; nothing she did was random. Even at the end she lived deliberately, down to her scheduled medications and daily visitors.

I'm just about as passionate as Mom, but not as aggressively purposeful. In fact, my best creative ideas often come through meandering disorder—which would've driven Mom crazy—rather than through times that are more intentional and deliberate.

However, the most purposeful life is often redirected—sometimes through marital, economic, or job status changes, or through legal, family, or health issues. Even Mom, intentional as she was, wondered about purpose as she suffered through the redirection of cancer.

Human purpose isn't always clear, but *God's* purpose is.

I know you've heard it before, but listen: "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to *his* purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to *be conformed to the likeness of his Son*, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers" (Romans 8:28-29; emphasis added).

God's purpose is to make us like Jesus. That's it. Whatever we do, wherever we go, he is working to make us "willing and able to obey his own purpose" (Philippians 2:13, Good News Translation). If your purpose looks small or unclear to you, take heart. It does not look that way to God! He is filled with purpose for you.

Purpose to stick with him.

*SONG: I Have Decided to Follow Jesus*

*PRAAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, when I am disheartened about purpose, help me remember that you are not. You are purposefully working in my life to make me like Jesus.*

—Priscilla Hochhalter

*BIBLE READING: Philippians 3:3-14*

In conversations with Mom, I learned that some of today's verses were among her favorites. Even in her youth, she always desired to do better and go deeper with God, and to be "made perfect" (v. 12).

That desire is admirable. However, it can lead to the type of striving we know as perfectionism, a trait that runs throughout my family. Mom and I both have known the damage of perfectionism—especially religious perfectionism, or legalism. In its place, Christ offers us true perfection: his own righteousness (v. 9).

Yes, today's passage does speak of attaining, obtaining, and pressing on (vv. 10-12), but it also clarifies that we "put no confidence in the flesh" (v. 3). And yes, Philippians 2:12 does exhort us to "work out [our] salvation with fear and trembling," but Scripture makes it clear that Christ alone is the "author and perfecter" of our faith (Hebrews 12:2).

Perfection is accomplished by him, not by us.

Like Paul, Mom has finally reached her lifetime goal of being called "heavenward in Christ Jesus." I think she finally "got it" at the end. As she lay dying, Dad asked, "Bertie, are you ready to go be with Jesus, even though it means leaving all of us behind?" And Mom—who had always tried so hard to be perfect, to do it all, and to take care of everyone—replied: "*He* will take care of you."

All human striving is over, and Jesus has perfected her at last. *Hallelujah!*

*SONG: Ring the Bells of Heaven*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, here on earth and in our hearts, we long for perfection. But only you have fulfilled it. Help us to have perfect peace in the knowledge that you are perfecting all things through Christ—until we reach heaven.*

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*BIBLE READING: Philippians 4:4-7*

Peace did not come naturally to my mother. For much of her life, she worried and prayed a great deal about many things. Let's face it—there is a *lot* to be concerned about in the world!

Then one day, she and Dad discovered a powerful weapon against worry and anxiety: Philippians 4:4-7. From it they learned the principle that there is a cause-and-effect relationship between rejoicing/praying with thanksgiving and inner peace. In particular, they memorized the second half (v. 6-7), posted it on the refrigerator, clung to it, obeyed it, and quoted it often for the rest of their lives.

When they started memorizing and internalizing this Scripture I still lived at home, so I couldn't help but learn it too. Incredibly, just thinking about it and writing about it this week has dramatically relieved some of my current worries and anxieties. I forget how powerful Scripture is. Hey, I dare you to write today's passage on a card and say it every day for a month, and see what happens in your life too. And after a month, I bet you won't stop.

In the last year of Mom's life, when everyone knew she was dying, people often commented on her amazing courage and serenity. And recently it occurred to me that, at least in part, her peace was the fruit of learning to apply today's Scripture all those years ago. She buried that lesson in her heart—and I believe it buoyed her up as she faced the scarieness of her final months, weeks, and days.

*SONG: Why Worry When You Can Pray?*

*PRAAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, you promise to give us peace if we rejoice and pray with thanksgiving, instead of worrying. Help me to understand and follow this Peace Principle.*

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*BIBLE READING: Philippians 4:8-9*

Akin to yesterday's topic (worry and anxiety) is negativity.

Remember Eeyore, from *Winnie the Pooh*? Even when things are great, he sees life darkly. I have a bit of Eeyore in me, and Mom did too. She sometimes repeated Philippians 4:8 and sang "Count Your Blessings" as reminders to stay focused on the good in life.

Verse 9 adds another tip on how to do that: "Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice." We can take note of positive, praiseworthy people—people like Paul, my mom, and others—and learn from them. We can practice the lessons of their lives.

So, besides "thinking positive," what other lessons did Mom demonstrate for me to practice? Well, most of all I saw that Mom (an imperfect perfectionist) was able to receive God's grace and reflect his glory, despite her flaws. That's encouraging to me (another imperfect perfectionist), and I hope to do likewise.

And today's Scripture, like yesterday's, implies a cause-and-effect relationship that leads to peace: If we fix our minds on what is good, and emulate the good we've observed from others, then the God of peace will be with us. The amazing implication is that we can create an environment that actually inspires God to come and join us. Psalm 22:3 says that God "inhabits" (KJV) or is "enthroned upon" (NASB, NLT, RSV) our praise. We ourselves are his dwelling-place—especially as we focus on the best, and practice praiseworthiness.

*SONG: Count Your Blessings*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, we all know people who have modeled praiseworthiness and followed you in ways we'd like to imitate. Help us to put those ways into practice, and welcome the presence of your peace.*

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*BIBLE READING: Philippians 4:12-19*

The triumphant closing of Philippians claims that God will meet all our needs. Paul wrote this from prison, so we know he truly meant *all*—even in the worst circumstances.

Sometimes Mom struggled to believe “all.” She survived the Depression, and she remembered not having food. Later, she struggled to trust God’s provision for other needs too—especially the needs of her children and grandchildren. To be honest, not all of those needs were met.

So how can Paul say “all”?

Well, for one thing, this Scripture discusses God’s provision side-by-side with human generosity. God wants us to have the joy of participating with him in meeting each other’s needs. And I have found that a recession is an excellent time to practice. But what about intangible needs—mental, emotional, spiritual? The truth is everyone has some unmet needs.

So how can Paul say “all”? I don’t know. What I do know is that God’s provision is creative—and personal. He doesn’t provide the same things, or the same way, for everyone. In fact, he often shakes our dependence on everything but him, asking us to focus even more on trusting him and sharing with others.

I don’t understand “all”—I’m not there yet. But over time, I saw Mom learn to trust God more and more for “all”—even for the deepest needs of her heart. And she had many.

A profound songwriter at my church sings: “I have nothing—and everything I need.”

And now at last, in the presence of her all-sufficient Lord, Mom understands that better than I do.

*SONG: Day by Day*

*PRAAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, help us to understand what it means to find absolutely everything we need in you.*

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