

Joy *in* Christ

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I say it again:
Rejoice!

PHILIPPIANS 4:4

JOY IN CHRIST

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Presented at Trinity Community Church, San Rafael, CA, on Sunday, October 25, 2020

Philippians 4:4-9

Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again: Rejoice!

Let everyone see that you're considerate in all that you do.

Remember, the Lord is coming soon.

Don't worry about anything; pray about everything.

Tell God what you need and don't forget to thank Him for all He has done.

If you do this, you'll experience God's peace, which is far more wonderful than the human mind can understand.

His peace will keep your hearts and thoughts quiet and at rest as you trust in Christ Jesus.

And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing:

Fix your thoughts on what is true, what is worthy of respect, what is just, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise.

Keep putting into practice all you learned and received from me—everything you heard from me and saw me doing.

Then the God of peace will be with you.

Doesn't this passage apply to our current circumstances? Just about any topic under current discussion today tends to divide us and introduce feelings of confusion, anger, or fear. Where is the joy?

Paul said "*Always be full of joy in the Lord.*" That is, in *all your ways* (the ways of your journey) and at all times. This is an imperative. But you won't always find joy in your circumstances or relationships. Yet, *in the Lord*, we may find a constant source of uplifting joy, because He has all things under control. He's got the whole world in His hands.

Be Considerate

"Let everyone see." Your life is on display; don't hide it. People are watching. Your spouse is watching. Your children are watching. Your neighbor is watching. The stranger at the grocery store is watching. The teller at the bank is watching. Let them see that you are "*considerate in all you do.*"

You don't just live for yourself. Life isn't just about what makes you happy. So, don't make that your prime consideration. We may have joy in Christ under the worst of circumstances, because we know that He is working all things together, according to His will and for our good. In THIS we can rejoice.

"Considerate" is also translated as "gentle," in the same sense that Jesus was gentle with people whose sin was exposed before Him. Consider the need of the other person, before you think about what you want. Jesus Himself said, *"I haven't come to be served, but to serve, and to give My life."* Could we have the same attitude? You haven't been saved to be served; you've been saved to serve one another in love.

God's eternal love is assured us in Christ. Nothing can separate us from His love. No one can pluck you from His protecting hand. God's love will always be flowing toward you like the current of a mighty river. You don't have to worry about that, so you can begin to give yourself away. You can share His love freely with others. Let them see how He loves.

Do you pause to think before you speak? Before you type? Before you post? Before you answer back? Do you think first before you react? It only takes a moment to ask, "Lord, what's going on here? How should I respond?"

Always rejoice in the Lord and be considerate in all you do, *"because the Lord is coming soon."* The love of God gives us joy, while the fear of the Lord gives us pause to think about our behavior. His reward will be with Him when He comes to judge the world in righteousness.

All the things that frustrate you, that confuse you, that irritate you, that hurt you, that anger you—all have an end, because the Lord is coming soon. People may misunderstand you, even mistreat you, but God has loved you—before you took your first breath, before you did one thing, right or wrong—and He is coming soon, for you.

Don't Worry

"Don't worry about anything." Worry is so natural to all of us. We scarcely think about it; we just do it. We worry about our next meal. We worry about traffic. We worry about how people think about us. We prefer not to think of ourselves as worriers, but we worry. Paul said, "Don't."

What difference does worry make? None. Worry won't change your height, or your hair color, or the shape of your chin. Worry won't get that promotion, or make more friends, or improve your test score. Worry does nothing but occupy your time and energy in a negative spiral. Don't do it. You can't worry and have joy in the Lord at the same time. You need to be intentional about following Jesus, or you'll be left behind.

There isn't anything outside of God's control, so don't worry about ANYTHING. Worry is what happens when we're afraid. Worry is the primary function or activity of fear. Fear first manifests itself as worry. At the root of your worry is a certain fear. As you identify that fear, you can bring it to God in prayer, and He will undo your worrisome thoughts.

Pray

So, pray about EVERYTHING. God is willing to hear you talk about whatever concerns you. You don't have to put on a confident face for Him (He already sees your heart). Just honestly tell Him what you're afraid of and put your trust in His sovereign plan. Trust in the might of His powerful love.

Prayer is the way trust functions. Making our requests known to God and thanking Him for His faithful care is how we express our faith in Christ. Are you a praying Christian? Would others say you're a praying person? Is it clearly a function of your life?

It's possible to pray WITHOUT faith—as a routine religious exercise. But the kind of praying that makes a difference is not the ritual, but the relationship that is expressed in faith. That you pray, says that you're a believer. What you pray about, says what you trust God for.

How can you learn to trust God in everything and for everything that you need? By praying. How can you know if you are praying correctly and developing trust, or praying incorrectly and defeating trust? Paul told us how!

To be an effective pray-er, you need only to do two things: *"Tell God what you need, and don't forget to thank Him."* Can it be that simple? YES! Oh, sure, you can accessorize your praying in a variety of ways, but the foundation of prayer will always remain the same (tell God and thank God). That's all you need to become a person of prayer.

If you wrestle with worry in your life, the answer is to get back to the basics of prayer. As you do, God will increase your trust, and decrease your worry. *"If you do this"* you will experience God's peace, *"which is far more wonderful than the human mind can understand."* You may not understand HOW things will be resolved, but you can experience God's peace. You may not understand WHEN things will be resolved, but you can experience God's peace.

The experience of God's peace is never dependent on your understanding (*"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and don't depend on your own understanding."* Proverbs 3:5); it only depends on your trusting prayers. In a lifetime of learning, we will only know in part. Understanding is limited. But if you do this... you will experience the presence, the power, the purpose, and the peace of God.

And this will keep your hearts and thoughts quiet and at rest in the midst of the challenges of your life, or the world's change and chaos. What a promise! Are you ready for that? If. You. Do. This.

One Final Thing

"One final thing." Don't let the world or the culture steer your thoughts. What seems urgent in the world around us is not necessarily what is important in God's eyes. *"Fix your thoughts"* doesn't mean to repair them, but to focus them, anchor them, affix them (as with glue). Don't just go with whatever pops into your head. You're not obligated to entertain or follow every thought that occurs to you. It is not wise to do so.

It is said, "You cannot stop the birds from flying through the trees, but you can stop them from building their nests there." You can't stop thoughts from entering your mind, but you don't have to welcome them in or follow their lead. Take charge of your mind, your thoughts, and your thinking processes. You won't do it consistently, but don't give up. It is *your* mind, after all.

Paul listed eight goals for Christian thinking: what is true, what is worthy of respect, what is just, what is pure, what is lovely, what is admirable, what is excellent and worthy of praise. Too much time is wasted (misused, really) thinking about things we disdain and despise. Instead, follow Paul's instruction. You are free to choose how you feed your mind. Feed on the thoughts that will feed you in return. Things that will increase your faith, increase your joy, and increase your well-being.

Paul knew what he was talking about. He wasn't writing from a white sand beach, but from a prison cell, in chains. Take charge of your thoughts. Don't let them be your masters. If you want to be joyful in the Lord, you have to *"fix your thoughts."* To do that, you must begin by praying—telling God what you need and giving Him thanks. This will shift your thinking.

Keep putting this into practice and this will continue to be your experience. And *"THEN"* (and only then) the God of peace will be with you. Don't be forgetful hearers only, but be doers of the Word. No matter how many times you have to restart. Do this... and THEN the God of peace will be with you. He is not unwilling; you don't have to persuade Him. You just have to make room for Him, by trusting and praying and showing others His love.