

# Rejoice in the Lord Always

Philippians 4:1-23

Key Verse: 4:4

**“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!”**

The major theme of Philippians is to know Christ and to grow in his likeness. Thus far, Paul testified that he had a clear life goal to know Christ and that he pressed on toward that goal. In doing so, he fought against two enemies: legalism and antinomianism. Paul didn't turn to the left or to the right but pursued Christ with all his heart and strength. It was possible because he had hope in heaven for the Second Coming of Jesus. His mind was not bound by earthly things. Rather, he lived as a citizen of heaven. Now, in chapter 4, he exhorted the Philippians with practical teachings about how to live in this world as citizens of heaven until Jesus comes again. There are many important things we should learn in this passage. One of them is to rejoice in the Lord. This is one of the main themes of Philippians. A characteristic of citizens of heaven is rejoicing in the Lord always. But it is not easy to rejoice always. There are many joy robbers who try to take away our joy, including conflicts between coworkers, anxiety, impurities, greed, and so on. Frankly speaking, it is hard to rejoice in the real world. So many painful things happen. Unexpected tragedy and hardship seems to be waiting right around the corner. People are afraid to rejoice. How can we rejoice always? In this passage we can find four exhortations that guide us to rejoice always.

**First, stand firm in the Lord (1-3).** In verse 1 Paul called the Philippians “brothers and sisters,” “you whom I love and long for,” “my joy and crown,” and “dear friends.” It seems to be a love letter. He treasured them in his heart. He shows us how we should love and value our Bible students and coworkers. Paul's point was to encourage them to stand firm in the Lord. The word “therefore,” refers to his teaching at the end of chapter 3. They were in the midst of enemies of the cross of Christ. The word “stand” means to keep one's position in battle without swaying or wavering. Paul exhorted them to stand firm in the Lord when enemies attack. Peter gave a similar exhortation: **“Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith...”** (1 Pe 5:8-9a). Paul said, **“Stand firm in the Lord.”** Here the words “in the Lord” are important. When Noah and his family members were “in the ark” they were protected from the floodwaters that covered the earth. Likewise, when we are in the Lord he keeps us safe from the attacks of enemies. There is no security or salvation outside the Lord, but security and salvation are guaranteed “in the Lord.”

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In verses 2-3 Paul deals with a conflict among women in the Philippian church. These women, Euodia and Syntyche, had devoted themselves to the work of the Lord. They had stood side by side with Paul in the cause of the gospel. No doubt, they were powerful women. But for some reason they had come into conflict. They stopped greeting or talking with each other. Their faces were gloomy. They lost joy. Their joylessness influenced their friends and family members in the church. Their conflict was not just a personal matter; it damaged the church. How did Paul deal with this problem? Verse 2 says, **“I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord.”** As an apostle, Paul had great spiritual authority. But he did not command them on the basis of his authority. Rather, he pleaded with each of them personally. Paul did not take sides with either of them. He did not have a judgmental attitude toward them. He simply pleaded with them to be of the same mind in the Lord. He urged them to have the mindset of Christ Jesus who humbled himself. Conflicts between coworkers can be solved only in the Lord. When we have conflicts, let’s come to Jesus.

In order to help people come to the Lord, mediators are necessary. So Paul asked his “true companion” to help Euodia and Syntyche. Paul also asked help from Clement and the rest of his coworkers (3a). We are not sure who these people are, but one thing is clear: they were very valuable because their names are in the book of life (3b). Paul asked them all to work together to solve the conflict between Euodia and Syntyche. To Paul, solving this problem was urgent. When conflicts arise between coworkers, we should not think that it is their problem. Rather, it is a problem for the whole church. We should all pray and work together to resolve conflicts. Jesus is our Lord. Jesus is the head of his church. We are all members of his body. Let’s pray that we may live in harmony with one another in the Lord in order to glorify God and serve his good purpose.

**Second, rejoice in the Lord always (4-7).** In verses 4-7 we find three exhortations. The first among them is in verse 4. It says, **“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!”** Paul repeated and emphasized the word “rejoice,” again and again. The words “rejoice,” “joy,” and “glad,” appear sixteen times throughout the letter, and in Greek they all are the same root word (khah-: 1:4,18,18,25; 2:2,17,17,18,18,28,29; 3:1; 4:1,4,4,10). Why did Paul continually say “rejoice”? There may be two possibilities. One is that he lost his mind due to his long imprisonment. We cannot take this possibility seriously. More likely, he had a secret of joy in any and every situation. Where did this secret of joy come from?

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The words “in the Lord” tell us that it came from the Lord; it was heavenly joy. Nothing can take away this joy.

Joy is essential in our lives. The problem is, what kind of joy do we have? Usually people seek joy from physical pleasure: eating and drinking, shopping, consuming media, boasting about what they have and do, and the like. This kind of joy is temporary and it cannot satisfy our souls. In the pursuit of joy, some people begin to seek carnal pleasures and become perverse. They indulge in alcohol and drugs, sexual immorality, violent video games, and the like, and become addicted. These carnal joys destroy one’s character and personality, health, family and the community. We need true joy which can satisfy our souls. This is the kind of joy Paul is talking about. This is the heavenly joy that comes to anyone who receives the gospel. When angels announced the birth of Jesus, the first gospel message, they called it good news that will cause great joy for all the people (Lk 2:10). Wherever the gospel is preached people who receive it become joyful. When Philip the Evangelist preached the gospel in a city in Samaria, many received grace and there was great joy in that city (Ac 8:8). When the jailer in Philippi heard the gospel message and accepted it, he was filled with joy (Ac 16:34). We also experienced this kind of joy when we received Jesus as our Savior. People seem to be suffering for many reasons, such as poverty, disease, broken relationships, and social injustice. But the root cause of all human misery is the power of sin. Sin breaks our relationship with God and leads to death, and after death we must face eternal punishment in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. No matter how wealthy we are, or how much we achieve, we cannot be joyful under the power of sin and death. But when we receive Jesus we cross over from death to life (Jn 5:24). This gives us real joy no matter what our situation may be.

The problem is that after receiving Jesus, if we commit sins, our relationship with God is damaged and we lose joy. When King David had a right relationship with God, God was very pleased with him and gave him a messianic promise and David was full of joy. However, when David committed the sin of adultery and murder, God was grieved, and David lost joy and became very miserable even though he was a king. When Nathan the prophet rebuked him, he repented and asked the Lord, **“restore to me the joy of your salvation”** (Ps 51:12a). God answered his prayer and restored his joy. As long as we remain in Jesus our Lord, we can rejoice always. This means that joy comes when we have a right relationship with God regardless of our situation. Whenever we lose our joy, it is time to come to Jesus as we are with repentant hearts. Jesus restores our souls and gives us true joy. Then, not only do our souls become healthy, but our bodies become strong. However, if we lose joy, our spirit is crushed and our bodies do not

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work properly even though we eat well. Proverbs 15:30b and 17:22 say, “...**good news gives health to the bones,**” and “**A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones.**” Furthermore, when we rejoice, we become a blessing to the people around us. But when we lose joy, we become a burden to others, including our kids and our Bible students. So it is very important to rejoice in the Lord always. Let’s come to Jesus, who gives us true joy.

In order to rejoice always we need to live in harmony with everyone, even unbelievers. Verse 5 says, “**Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.**” Here the Greek word for “gentleness” means “reasonableness” or “moderation.” It is a disposition that seeks what is best for everyone and not just for oneself. Simply speaking, it is showing a Christ-like consideration for others. This is crucial for maintaining harmony in community. We should respect others, listen to them and understand them. We should not insist on our own opinions about things that are not essential. This calls for patience in the midst of disagreement, and even when facing opposition. In this way we avoid unnecessary conflicts that rob our joy. How can we do this? By knowing that the Lord is near (5b). The Lord is the Judge of all men. When he comes, everything will be revealed before him. He will reward those who patiently bore with all kinds of mistreatment for his name’s sake. He will also repay those who mistreated his people. We should not have a revengeful spirit toward others. Rather, we should entrust all things to the Lord’s hand and let our gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near!

In order to rejoice always we need to present our requests to God, overcoming anxiety. Verse 6 says, “**Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.**” One of the greatest enemies of joy is anxiety. Anxiety comes in various ways: we have anxiety at home due to maintenance or housework worries; we have anxiety outside, especially when we travel. When we have no job we have anxiety; when we have a job we also have anxiety. We have anxiety about homework, family finances, children's education, our ministry direction, the future of our nation, and so on. If we find that we have no anxiety, we become anxious thinking that something is wrong with us, and we manufacture anxiety. Anxiety disorders are the most common mental illness in the U.S., affecting 40 million adults, and costing more than \$42 billion a year to treat.<sup>1</sup> Consider some more statistics about anxiety: 40% of all things that we worry about never come to pass; 30% of all our worries involve past decisions that cannot be changed; 12% focus on criticism from others who spoke because they feel inferior; 10% are related to our health, which gets worse when we worry; only 8% of our worries could be

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described as “legitimate” causes for concern.<sup>2</sup> Obviously, we cannot solve this problem of anxiety by ourselves. Then how can we solve it?

In verse 6 Paul gives us clear direction: **“Do not be anxious about anything,”** even when it seems reasonable, **“but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.”** “Anxiety” in Greek, “mer-im-nah’-o,” is derived from “mer-id’zo” which means “divided.” Although anxiety appears in many forms, at the root it comes from a divided heart; we are not fully trusting in God. Jesus encouraged us, **“So do not worry...But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well”** (Mt 6:31a,33). Apostle Peter urges us, **“Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you”** (1 Pe 5:7).

In verse 6 Paul tells us the attitude of prayer. It is with thanksgiving, not complaining. When we pray with thanksgiving, God is pleased and answers our prayers. Presenting our requests to God in thankful prayer is the best solution to our anxiety problem. God has given us a great privilege to live an anxiety-free life through prayer. Let's make the most of this privilege in any and every situation. When we do so, God has promised us in verse 7, **“And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”** The peace of God transcends all understanding. It is beyond our reason and wisdom. The peace of God has power to crush Satan (Rom 16:20a). Though Satan attacks our hearts through anxiety, when we pray to God, the peace of God guards our hearts and minds. Then we can rejoice and solve all problems with God's wisdom.

**Third, think about such things (8-9).** In maintaining our Christian joy, what we think about is very important. Let's look at verse 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.”** When God made the world, each day he saw that “it was good.” On the last day of his creation, he saw that it was “very good” (Gen 1:31). Paul said in 1 Timothy 4:4a, **“Everything God created is good....”** So in verse 8, whatever is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent or praiseworthy comes from God and reflects his character. Paul exhorts us to “think about such things.” We can compare our minds to a reservoir which God wants us to fill with beautiful things. Whatever things we allow into our minds will be reflected in our words and our actions and bear fruit. Our thought world is very important. Behavioral science teaches us that thoughts guide behavior, behavior forms our habits, habits develop our character, and character

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shapes one's personality. The thoughts we think have tremendous power in our lives. When we wear black glasses, everything looks black. Likewise, when we think about ugly things, we see nothing but ugliness in the world and we become ugly people. Tim McEathron shared his agony as a CBF teacher. Children who are saturated with media can easily fill their minds with violence and immorality. When they do, they cannot hear the beautiful stories of the Bible or appreciate the godly examples of noble men and women around them. But when we think about noble things of God's world, we can appreciate his beauty and become noble people. When Missionary Daniel Kim was young, he enjoyed reading many biographies of godly people and later he became a missionary. Paul urges us to think about noble things as citizens of heaven. When we do we can maintain our joy and grow to be like Jesus. Paul also exhorts us to "put into practice" what we learn and receive from his godly example. And the God of peace will be with us.

**Fourth, learn the secret of being content (10-23).** In verses 10-20 Paul was very thankful for the material support given by the Philippians. He did not thank them in order to get more support (11). His main concern was for the growth of their faith. And for this he rejoiced greatly in the Lord (10). He went on to share with them a secret. He said, **"I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want"** (12). In regards to contentment, there are two dangers which can rob our joy. When we are in want we try to become rich. There seems to be no time to serve God, study the Bible or care for others, because we are driven to make money and eventually we lose joy. On the other hand, when we gain riches, it is natural to become proud, look down on others, lose spiritual desire and joy, and betray God. So Proverbs 30:8-9 says, "...give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, 'Who is the Lord?' Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God." How can we be content? Paul said in verse 13, **"I can do all this through him who gives me strength."** It is possible to be content only when we trust fully in God. Those who trust in God are free from greed and anxiety; they are truly the richest people. There is a Jewish proverb which says: "Who is the wisest man in the world? The one who always learns from everyone. Who is the strongest man in the world? The one who overcomes himself. Who is the richest man in the world? The one who is content with what he has."

After sharing the secret of his contentment, Paul again shared his gratitude to the Philippians for their generous support. He appreciated them. They were the only church who shared with him in the matter of giving and receiving and in that way they built up love relationships and grew to be like Jesus. Paul valued their

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support as a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God (18). And he assured them that God would meet all their needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus (19). Then he said: **“To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”** (20). Paul greeted all of God’s people in Christ Jesus. Especially, he sent greetings from those belonged to Caesar’s household (21-22). He concluded: **“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen”** (23).

In this passage we have learned how to rejoice always. There are many joy robbers: conflicts between people, anxiety, impurities and greed. But let us stand firm in the Lord. Let us rejoice in the Lord always. Let us not be anxious about anything, but present our requests to God with thanksgiving. Let us think about what is true and noble. Let us learn the secret of being content in any and every situation. In this way we can know Jesus more and more and grow to be like him. Then we can be happy and be a blessing to others.