

## Rejoice in the Lord always!

Philippians 4:1-23

Key Verse 4:4 “Rejoice in the Lord always: *and* again I say, rejoice.”

Since mankind fell into sin, this world has a history of immense suffering due to materialism, hedonism, and humanism. Satan has always been on the battlefield causing Christians to feel weak, anguish, helplessness, and despair. It may seem like apostle Paul’s life was perfect because despite experiencing many shocking dangers, he did not fall into anguish, despair, weakness, or fear.

But how did Paul maintain courage, gratitude, love, faith, hope, and joy towards God and his faithful collaborators during such hardship? The secret to such beautiful life was that he lived his life centered on Christ. Through daily Christ-centered lifestyle, he received strength given by Christ. That is how he was able to greatly glorify God until he cried out, "Rejoice in the Lord always." I pray that God will give us understanding of his word on how to challenge this dangerous world and lead a joyful and victorious life.

Look at V.1. “Therefore, my brethren dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, *my* dearly beloved." The word "therefore" refers to the previous chapter where Paul taught the Philippians to run only looking towards the goal of obtaining the prize, which is eternal life. Paul loved his co-workers and sheep not only with the heart of a good father but also a good shepherd. They were his joy and crown and his greatest glory. Thus, he was able to serve them with respect, humility, patience, and warmth.

When we were estranged from God, we found greatest glory in top job positions in a company, prizes, academic titles, social and family recognition and so on. However, being in Christ, the sheep are our joy, crown and our greatest glory. When teaching the word of God, we see Christ crucified in them, who loved them to the point of giving His own life. That is why the World Mission work is a great blessing when we think about this. Because of this, we love the sheep and appreciate them so we can serve them patiently and humbly.

Paul says, "So stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved." What does “stand fast in the Lord” mean? This word reminds me of the lyrics from Baptist hymnal 397, “Onward, Christian soldiers, marching as to war; with the cross of Jesus going on before. Christ, the royal Master, leads against the foe; with the cross of Jesus going on before.” Like this praise, Paul's words inspire us to stand fast like war soldiers in this world. To stand fast also means to be well rooted in the Lord. The reason is explained to us by the word of saint John 15:5 “I am the vine, you *are* the branches: He that abides in me, and I in him, the same brings forth much fruit: for

without me you can do nothing”. Jesus is the vine and we are the branches, when we depend on Jesus by remaining in him, we can get strength. This is the secret to win and stand fast.

According to v. 2, it seems there was a division between two main collaborators in the church. Divisions cause wounds among brothers in faith. Sin of boasting, pride, envy, self-righteousness are fiery darts used by the devil to destroy the work of God even within the church.

Therefore, Paul pleads them “to be of the same mind in the Lord.” Each person has his own desire and will; hence, when trying to correct the other, it results in fight and division. Because of this, we must recognize we cannot control another person’s heart. Rather, we must express with love, giving them examples of serving, helping, and yielding. In this way, our brothers in Christ become of the same mind. Paul asks a pastor, a faithful companion of his, to help him (v. 3).

Look at v. 4. “Rejoice in the Lord always: *and* again I say, Rejoice.” The apostle commands brothers in the faith to “Rejoice in the Lord always, Rejoice!” The word "rejoice" is a command. So, if Jesus is in our hearts, we should rejoice in any and every situation. Generally, we rejoice when we are very blessed: we have a good job, we bear fruit, the church grows and prospers, we are in good health, our children grow up to our expectations, talking to God in prayer, studying the Word, meditating on it, and we rejoice in it.

But when everything goes wrong, it is not easy to rejoice. We could even get mad at God by thinking that He does not love us or that He has abandoned us. We could think He is punishing us for our sinful past and so on. Apostle Paul suffered greatly to bring the gospel of the Kingdom of God. For example, he was imprisoned, persecuted, flogged, stoned, hated, and rejected by his people because of the word of God.

Surely, he got tired mentally, physically, and psychologically. But despite all this, he did not turn back. His resilience amidst his sufferings came by knowing the truth that there is always victory in Christ. This gave him strength and joy. He awaited trial before Nero, the Roman emperor, who was a ruthless bloodthirsty man that killed his half-brother, wife, and his mother.

Knowing how wicked this man was, Paul wrote this letter to the Philippians to let them know of the types of difficulties that were approaching Christians so that he could spiritually prepare them. When the apostle Paul was in this great tribulation, his faith was even greater. This is what it means to stand firm.

As he wrote in Romans 5:3 “but we glory in tribulations,” he understood that all of these situations were used by the Lord to lead him to good. Paul’s life is like a movie, with many interesting dramas where God works with patience, miracles, power, and a happy conclusion.

God gloried in Paul, and Paul was full of wonder and praise to God exclaiming. "Rejoice in the Lord always: *and* again, I say, Rejoice," because this is God's will. Amen.

My name is Edith Nájera. I was born in Mexico. When I was 3 years old, my father abandoned me. My mom got together with other man who tried to abuse me sexually when I was a child. I felt unprotected, fatalistic and lack of love. Due to this, I had many boyfriends and drank alcohol to forget my problems. However, nothing filled my empty heart as my life had no meaning at all. I wanted to die. One day my family was in a serious problem which made me feel impotent and helpless. Even though I claimed to be an atheist, it was then that I spoke with God, telling Him if He did exist, to please help me believe in Him. God heard me, and He invited me to a Bible study at the university through M. Sara Hwang, who came from Korea to rescue me from death. What I needed was Jesus, but I did not know it. I went to study the Bible at the UBF center. The word of saint John 4 captivated me where Jesus had a heavenly love relationship with a Samaritan woman. Just like the Samaritan woman, I put my past life aside and ran to the UNAM fields saying: "Come, see a man who told me all things that I ever did." Since then, God began to grow my little heart into a shepherd's heart for His sheep. Now my life had a meaningful purpose: To witness my Christ among the college intellectuals.

I never imagine my Lord was accompanying me in this beautiful evangelization work. To serve the sheep, I had to lay down my pride and self-respect, which I did not like it. Nevertheless, when hearing the voice of Jesus saying: "Feed my sheep," my heart was moved, and it made me see the need of Bible teaching to the lost youths on college campuses. They have many problems, and they really need their true shepherd, Jesus. God trained me by helping me to repent my sin of pride, envy, boasting, and adultery. By giving 20, one to one Bible studies a week, He transformed my heart and made me into a mother of faith. In 1992, God blessed me to marry M. Isidro by faith and He gave me a son. I thank God for using our life to establish several marriages by faith in Mexican history and for transforming my useless life into one that helped serve and grow disciples who later became missionaries from Mexico to preach in other countries.

M. Sara Barry gave direction to send Mexican shepherds to pioneer Latin America. So, through the prayer and direction of M. Abraham Hwang, we came to El Salvador with great joy in 2006. There were many interesting experiences of how M. Isidro was able to overcome challenges only by having absolute faith in God. For example, entering the country, getting a new job in 2 days, and acquiring the UBF center in a week. God fulfills His promises in our lives based on saint Matthew 6:33 "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you". El Salvador is our mission land, where God has trained us with many spiritual struggles we experienced, but He allowed us to raise the first marriage by faith of Salvadorans, S. Juan Carlos and S. Yanette. This wedding was possible thanks to the collaboration and prayer of M. Pablo Star Oh and M. Daniel Park's families. Likewise, God

raised another marriage by faith of M. Raúl and S. Seneyda along with the establishment of two shepherds and precious sheep, who are faithfully studying the word of God.

El Salvador is a dangerous country filled with poverty, family disintegration, violence and gangs. Here, there is a saying “the most serious crime is being young” because young people are easily killed by gangs. My son, Isaac, studies communications and so he had to go to a protest to do some interviews. That day in my heart, I sensed something was wrong, so I began to pray fervently, wanting him to call me and waiting at the door for his return. When he finally arrived, I was relieved, but later, he told me that he had seen an extortion. They marked him by the colors of his clothes to kill him, but God, who is the owner of life, perfectly protected him from death. That whole day, Isaac felt persecuted and scared. As a mother, I could not help the tears; I thanked God for the opportunity to see my son again. I shared Psalm 23 “The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou *art* with me”. And saint John 10:28 says: “And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any *man* pluck them out of my hand. ” Being with God is the safest place, and He is always with us.

Since sharing that truth, Isaac is more obedient and collaborates the most in the work of God. We trust God will guide him to His Kingdom. I never imagined when accepting Bible study during my college years, that God would use me to become a missionary in another country. The grace of Jesus and His mercy make me rejoice in His cross. I cannot do anything on my own, but Jesus gives me the strength.

Now in v. 5b Paul says: "The Lord is at hand." This word reminds me that the second coming of Jesus is at hand, therefore, we can always rejoice in the Lord. Now look at v. 6. “Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God." Most of the time we are worried and anxious, but Paul firmly orders us not to worry because worry takes away sleep, joy, hope and our will to live.

Worry makes man fearful and helpless. In order not to worry, we must pray positively. "Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God." When we pray with thanksgiving, He gives us joy and when we repent of all our sins, He also gives us strength and rest.

Then comes the peace of God, which passes all understanding, which shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. (v. 7). True Christians struggle to think and practice speaking the truth and living in the truth of Christ (v. 8).

Paul rejoiced greatly no matter what condition he was in. He was a true servant who learned to suffer for Christ's sake. Paul knew how to live before God in both abundance and scarcity; he learned to live under the will of God because he knew Christ sustains him. Paul was overjoyed to

have known the secret by which he could overcome all circumstances and conditions. It is said the more man has the more he wants. When the basis of life is material, unfortunately, there is continuous discontent; and by immersing ourselves in such sin, we get lost. Even though Paul was in prison, his heart was overflowing with joy. Whether he was in need or abundance, in any circumstance, he did not lose faith. His heart was always full of joy and peace. That is, he overcame the circumstances and conditions as his heart was filled with the kingdom of God.

So, Paul declares, "I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me" (v. 13). The word "all" means everything in Christ's will, according to His plan and purpose. It also means there is nothing in life we cannot accomplish with the love of Christ. Paul loved Jesus with a pure heart and could not renounce this love even in scarcity or danger of dying. He could do everything in Him who strengthens him. Here, who is it that strengthens you? He is Jesus Christ. When we look at Paul's life, he may seem to us as a perfect person who easily overcame all difficulties. However, Apostle Paul found himself in difficult situations such as illness, imprisonment, failure, persecution, even being attacked and so forth. He did not depend on himself, nor on men, not even on his collaborators in the church but only on our Lord Jesus Christ; that is why the Lord gave him the power to overcome all difficulties. "I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me." The source and origin of all authority is Jesus Christ, the almighty living God.

Faith conquers everything. "Faith is victory as all things *are* possible to him that believeth." When the Lord almighty strengthens us, we can do all things. We can overcome all obstacles and conquer the world. Faith overcomes the power of sin and death, which reigns in many souls that are spiritually dead.

As the years went by, God trained me to participate in His cross through teaching the Bible often and reading it every year. This helped me learn to have faith, know everything is under His control and is according to His good will. Thus, I decided to depend on and trust only in Jesus.

At first, I was overly concerned about difficult situations. They made me feel distraught and full of fear and I could not act just by looking at my weaknesses. But when I understood the word "I can do everything through Christ who strengthens me," then I knew Christ is the only one who can give me strength. This word "I can do everything through Christ who strengthens me." For me, it is not just a theory, but it is a fact. Indeed, I put it into practice, and I have been surprised at how God accompanies me when I hear His voice through the Bible. This makes me always rejoice in Him.

Conclusion: Through the word of God, we learn when we abide in Christ, He strengthens us. Jesus is the reason of our rejoicing. Think about His great love that forgave all our sins and gave us eternal life by dying on the cross and rising again. He is *worthy* to receive the *glory*, and the *honor*. It is a privilege and sublime grace to serve the world mission. Praise the Lord and

magnify His name. I pray that the Lord will give us faith to be able to do all things in Christ Jesus who strengthens us. Amen.