Rejoice in the Lord! October 11, 2026

Scripture: Philippians 4:1-9

1 Therefore, my brothers and sisters whom I love and miss, who are my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord. Loved ones, 2 I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to come to an agreement in the Lord. 3 Yes, and I'm also asking you, loyal friend, to help these women who have struggled together with me in the ministry of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my coworkers whose names are in the scroll of life.

4 Be glad in the Lord always! Again I say, be glad! 5 Let your gentleness show in your treatment of all people. The Lord is near. 6 Don't be anxious about anything; rather, bring up all of your requests to God in your prayers and petitions, along with giving thanks. 7 Then the peace of God that exceeds all understanding will keep your hearts and minds safe in Christ Jesus.

8 From now on, brothers and sisters, if anything is excellent and if anything is admirable, focus your thoughts on these things: all that is true, all that is holy, all that is just, all that is pure, all that is lovely, and all that is worthy of praise. 9 Practice these things: whatever you learned, received, heard, or saw in us. The God of peace will be with you.



As we conclude our "Pressing On" series, we turn to Paul's invitation to joy. In the Common English Bible verse 4 reads this way: *"Be glad in the Lord always! Again I say, be glad!"* In the New Living Translation, it reads, *"Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again – rejoice!"* And in the New Revised Standard Edition this verse reads, *"Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice."* I think that no matter how it is translated, Paul is inviting us to always find joy and gladness in the Lord and to rejoice in all of the blessings that we receive through our faith in Jesus.



While Paul is emphasizing the word “always” in each of these translations, it is hard to always rejoice in the Lord and in our faith. We might be tempted to say something like this to Paul, “Yes, got that covered on Sundays, but there is too much going on the rest of the week to always rejoice in the Lord.” This reality is present in verses 2 and 3. In these verses Paul urges Euodia and Syntyche to come to an agreement in the Lord. They are apparently having a theological disagreement. Both of these ladies worked hard, struggling right alongside Paul, to share the good news of Jesus Christ with those in Philippi.

Paul urges his loyal friend Syzygus along with Clement and the other workers in the faith to help these two ladies to find a place of agreement. When our relationships are broken or when we are in conflict with others, it is hard to find joy and gladness. Paul’s call to resolve the conflict in the Philippian church is a reminder for us as well. To experience joy in our lives and in our communities of faith, we must all work together to build and to re-build community when necessary. With this purpose in mind, let us focus ourselves through this centering prayer. Please bow your head with me. Let us pray…

> *Dear Lord, we are thankful that you are constantly at work in our lives. You are a help in times of difficulty, a strength in times of weakness, a guide when we feel lost and alone. We know that through your Son, Jesus Christ, you have the power to transform lives, to mend broken relationships, to bring strength to the weary, and to give hope to the broken hearted. And now, O God, I ask that you would bless the words of my mouth and that the meditation of all of our hearts would be pleasing in your sight. You are our rock and our redeemer, our Christ and our king. Amen.*



Turning to verse 4, we lean into that hard word: “Always.” We do this because there is something important to know about Paul.

“Always” is a big word. It is not a very practical word most of the time. For example, even when we are at our most-est sincerest, like when we are standing there on our wedding day, face to face with the person that we love with all of our heart, and we say, “I will always love you,” well, there will be days or at least moments when “love” would not be the word that best describes how we are feeling. “Always” it just not a very doable word.

So, we must ask, why does Paul add that word in there? Because that is who Paul is. In almost all of his writing, Paul is very black and white. You are good or you are evil. You are faithful or you are faithless. You are always rejoicing in the Lord or you never rejoice in the Lord. Yes, for Paul, the reality is like it is with “always” – that is the goal, the target, who we are ultimately called to be in Christ. Yet in truth, we are almost always somewhere between being 100% good and 100% evil, for example. Hopefully, we are closer to the 100% good and faithful end of all of these spectrums.



Hypothetically, how does what Paul is saying and inviting us into change if we remove that one little word? It would read like this: *“Be glad in the Lord! Again I say, be glad!”* Take out that word “always” and this verse becomes a nice little bit of encouragement about being glad or happy. It feels like Paul would be encouraging us to just walk on the sunny side of life. And I think that most Christians would be willing to try to find gladness in their faith. We do it all the time. In worship and in fellowship we find a joy or a gladness in our faith. Together we witnessed this last week as we presented some of our children with a Bible and as we baptized four of our young people. There was a joy that was palpable. At least a few of us experienced a sense of joy last week as the band played through the chords and music for “Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus” about five or six times so that everyone could get through the communion line. Yes, there are times when we experience a deep joy in our faith.

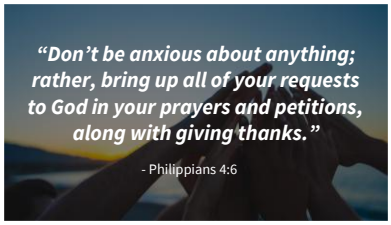
But Paul wanted more and was calling us to much more than just being all sunny and happy-go-lucky. The apostle was aiming at something more, something deeper, something eternal. You see, Paul did not want us to just experience joy in our faith. No, he wanted us to allow that joy or gladness to spill right out. Paul invites us to allow our gladness or our joy to be evident in our *"treatment of all people."* This joy, this gladness, it is not just for you or just for me or just for us as we worship together on a Sunday morning when the sanctuary feels full. In this life, joy is not a luxury. In the world in which we live, joy is vital. We cannot do this thing called life without joy. Joy is a gift from God, an act of grace that reminds us that God is with us and that we are with one another. Joy is what sustains us at times and gives us hope and resilience and perseverance at other times in our lives, especially in the moments when life seems most impossible.



In the Message paraphrase, Eugene Peterson puts this verse about how we treat others this way: *"Make it as clear as you can to all you meet that you're on their side, working with them and not against them."* There is a spirit of love, a spirit of community in these words. These words speak of hospitality and welcome and inclusion. They tell others that we will not judge or point fingers or accuse them of some sin. These words remind us that as followers of Christ, we agreed to drop our stones because none of us are sinless enough to cast the first one. And these words remind us to share our joy and our gladness, to rejoice in the Lord.

Peterson's words also reminds us that joy is not as escape. True joy is present to us in all of life and is something that is revealed in the realness of life. It is revealed when we offer words of love to someone who has always heard judgment or condemnation. It is revealed when we speak the truth about how we fall short and need God's grace. It is revealed when we name places of hurt and suffering in our community and do not step away but step in.

And it is revealed when we act like God is really with us always. This is what Paul writes about as we turn to verses 6 and 7. First, in verse 6 he writes, *"Don't be anxious about anything; rather, bring up all of your requests to God in your prayers and petitions, along with giving thanks."* Before diving into this verse, there are a lot of words that we could put in place of "anxious." We could substitute in "afraid" or "worried" or "doubtful" or any other negative emotion or feeling. And Paul is not telling us to pretend that these feelings don't exist or that we can just throw it all on God. We have a role to play.

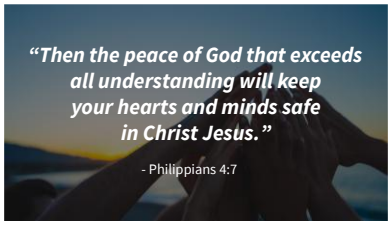


Sometimes our role is to live with an awareness of who and what we are. As we talked about on Monday, for example, if someone deals with depression, then there may be medical treatments or professional care that is also needed. To bypass these kinds of care and to just rely on God alone is not wise or safe or prudent. The same is true if one deals with an addiction or is battling an illness. Yes, God and prayer should be a part of our plan, but we and others have a role to play as well.

That being said, what does Paul offer concerning prayer? Paul tells us to bring our prayers, our petitions, *and* our thanksgiving to God. Paul is saying not to worry, yes, and also to get on our knees. Don't worry and pour it out. Don't worry and beg and plead and pound on the gates of heaven. Don't worry and know that your prayers are heard by our God. We cannot miss that last part, either: *"along with giving thanks."* As important as it is to bring our prayers and petitions to God, I believe it is at least equally important to bring God our thanksgiving.

Taking time to thank God has at least three primary benefits. First, it reminds us of God's power and presence in our lives. Second, it reminds us that God takes an active interest in our lives. And lastly, it keeps us humble as we are reminded that God is the one in control.

Answered prayer plays a role in what Paul writes about in verse 7, but the regular practice of gratitude also goes a long way. When we regularly and consistently bring our prayers, our petitions, *and* our thanksgiving to God, then we regularly and consistently experience verse 7: *"Then the peace of God that exceeds all understanding will keep your hearts and minds safe in Christ Jesus."* Our anxiousness, our worry, our fears, our doubts – they no longer have control because we sense that we are not alone, that God is with us in the fight.

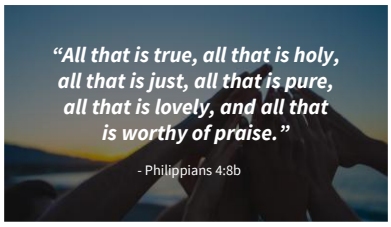


As God's peace pervades our life, we become increasingly aware that we have a place, a home, an identity, an existence that is meaningful and has purpose, that transforms us and draws us closer to God. As our faith and trust in God grows, we come to know that through this peace, God keeps us safe, guards us, shields us. God's peace and the resulting feeling of God's presence and protection reminds us again that God is with us always.

Where does this sense of belonging and contentment and peace come from? It comes from choosing joy and from rejoicing in the Lord always. It is a challenge. Our humanity makes it hard at times, and our culture does not help either. If we allow our weakened state to have a say, we want to negotiate this commitment. Sure, we say, we will rejoice in the Lord when it is convenient. Of when I have time. Or when I am in the mood. Or when life or the world isn't making waves crash over the walls of my boat. My friends, my brothers and sisters in Christ, if you've faced these challenges or if you find it hard to always rejoice in the Lord, then join me as we lean into the last two verses from today's reading.



In verse 8 Paul invites us to focus on the things of God that are *"excellent"* and *"admirable."* He defines these things in the second half of verse 8.



Paul invites us to focus on *"All that is true, all that is holy, all that is just, all that is pure, all that is lovely, and all that is worthy of praise."* Paul invites us to focus on, to dwell on, to meditate on, to take our cue from, to obsess on these things. To quote from earlier, Paul invites us to *always* think about these things. Always – as in never stop focusing on what is true, holy, just, pure, lovely, and worthy of praise. Paul is not giving us a set of standards, a list of things to notice in the world. No, Paul is inviting us to focus on these things so that they transform us, so that these descriptors become who we are at our core, in our spirit.

As it was with rejoicing in the Lord always, it is challenging to focus on these things in our day and age. Back in Paul's day, the people of God understood what it meant to be true and holy and just and pure and lovely. They knew what it meant to praise God. Two thousand years ago, they understood these things because these things were ingrained in who they were as the people of God. Back then, God was the culture. Was Paul or anyone else always true, holy, and so on? Of course not. But it was the norm, so it was easier for Paul and other believers to focus on and to live out these ideals.

In our world today, I think that these ideals are understood by most people. But in a relative way. What is right to me might not be right to you. What justice is to me might not align with how you see and understand justice. In our world today, individualism and personal preference and a focus on the self all make it harder to focus on and to live out this set of ideals presented by Paul. So our faith calls us to moments when we have to stop ourselves, when we have to listen to the Spirit within, when we have to make an intentional choice to align ourselves with God's will and way, to stand firm in our faith, and to live out God's understanding of what is true and holy and just and pure and lovely and worthy of praise.

Our passage ends with some practical advice to help us in our walk of faith. Turning to verse 9 we gain some wisdom in how to focus always on what is true, holy, just, pure, lovely, and worthy of praise. Here Paul writes, *"Practice these things: whatever you learned, received, heard, or saw in us. The God of peace will be with you."* The teenager that is alive and well in me wants to add in the word "always." As in, "Always practice these things…"



Always put into practice the things that you have learned: the teachings and parables of Jesus, the guidance and direction of Paul, the wisdom gathered through the ages by the community of faith. *Always* put into the practice the things that you have received from God: grace, mercy, love, forgiveness, patience, provision, protection. *Always* put into practice the things you have heard from the Holy Spirit and from your fellow believers: the encouragement, the correction, the discipline, the comfort, the accountability, the guidance and direction. *Always* put into practice the things you have seen done by the faithful: feeding the hungry, caring for the sick, giving drink to the thirsty, opening the door to the one without a home, welcoming in the stranger and the outcast.

When we *always* practice the things that we have learned, received, heard, and seen, we experience the upside-down kingdom of God. Instead of feeling like we've emptied ourselves, we feel like we have been filled up. When we live our faith out in the world, loving God and neighbor, then we experience joy. Filled with joy, we understand Paul's call to rejoice in the Lord always. Yes, always. May it be so for you and for me. Alleluia and amen.



GPS – Grow, Pray, Study

1) *Grow.* Daily practice is the invitation from Paul. How might focusing on what is true, holy, just, pure, lovely, and worthy of praise help you grow closer to Christ?
2) *Pray.* Prayer has long been the primary way to connect with God. Practice bringing your prayers and petitions *and* your thanksgiving this week.
3) *Study.* Read Philippians 4:10-13. How mind adopting the mindset that Paul practices help you to better learn, receive, hear, and see God's activity in your life?