

GOOD NEWS, GREAT JOY

"THE CALL FOR GREAT JOY"

PHILIPPIANS 4:4-7

This Week's Core Competency

Joy – I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances. John 15:11, *I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.*

Joy is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit. He produces joy in us. Nevertheless, there are joy breakers and joy makers, things that we can do to frustrate or further his work in us.

Here are a few examples of joy breakers. *Disobedience* is a joy breaker. Jesus said to his disciples, "I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete." So to what does "this" refer? According to the previous verse, it refers to obedience. "If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love." In his book *The Celebration of Discipline* Richard J. Foster comments on "the joy of obedience." He writes, "Joy comes through obedience to Christ, and joy results from obedience to Christ. Without obedience joy is hollow and artificial" (192).

Materialism is another joy breaker. Ironically money and the stuff it buys often bring sadness rather than joy, and the law of diminishing returns guarantees that enough is never enough. Solomon amassed silver and gold enough to say, "I denied

Always be glad for what the Lord has done, I will say it again, be glad.

– Paul

myself nothing my eyes desired." And yet, he concluded, "When I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind" (Eccl. 2:11).

What makes couples happy—gives them joy? According to one UCLA researcher, it isn't material things. Allen Parducci found that money, success, health, beauty, intelligence and power have little to do with a couple's "subjective well-being." Instead, research reveals that the level of a couple's joy is determined by each partner's ability to adjust to things beyond his or her control. Happy couples learn to find the right attitude in spite of the conditions they find themselves in.

Workaholicism is also a joy breaker. If it were a joy maker, the population would be ecstatic. This is no criticism of work. Work done unto the Lord glorifies God and meets the needs of others. But workaholics make no time for celebration, and celebration is an indispensable joy maker. Celebration brings joy into life, and joy makes us strong.

But the ultimate joy maker is *Christ*. No wonder Paul tells the Philippians, "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!" (4:4). It may not be possible to rejoice in serious illness, in financial loss, in broken relationships, or in sudden heartbreak, but it is possible to rejoice *in the Lord* in the midst of such dreadful situations. The Greek preposition [*en*] translated "in" can also be translated "because of" (Dana and Mantey, 105). In Galatians 1:24 Paul writes, "And they praised God *en* me," a verse the NIV translates, "And they praised God *because of* me." That being the case in Philippians 4:2

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Paul isn't telling the Philippians to rejoice because of distressing circumstances but in spite of them. And the way they are to do that is to rejoice *because of the Lord*—their relationship to him and all he has done for them. Other translations make this perfectly clear: "Always be glad because of the Lord! I will say it again: Be glad" (CEV); "Always be joyful because you belong to the Lord. I will say it again. Be joyful!" (NIRV); "Be full of joy always because you belong to the Lord. Again I say, be full of joy!" (NLV); and "Always be glad for what the Lord has done, I will say it again, be glad" (WE).

One commentator writes regarding Philippians 4:4: "Paul was not urging us to be unrealistic. He was not saying that we should never feel sad. Even Jesus wept (John 11:35). However, he was advocating focusing on the blessings we have in Christ, and being grateful for these regardless of how sad we may feel at any particular time. He had set a good example by singing when he was in prison in Philippi (Acts 16:25)" (Thomas L. Constable, "Notes on Philippians," 2016 ed., 72, www.soniclight.com).

day 1 ENCOUNTER – read God's word to put yourself in touch with him.

Philippians 4:4-7

4 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! 5 Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. 6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Cf., another translation

4 Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I say, rejoice! 5 Let everyone see your gentleness. The Lord is near! 6 Do not be anxious about anything. Instead, in every situation, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, tell your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. (NET)

EXAMINE – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

- * Highlight "rejoice" in v. 4.
- * Bracket "in the Lord" in v. 4.
- * Circle "gentleness" in v. 5.
- * Bracket "the Lord is near" in v. 5.
- * Underline "do not be anxious" in v. 6.
- * Box "instead" indicating *contrast* in v. 6.
- * Circle "peace" in v. 7.
- * Bracket "of God" in v. 7.
- * Circle "guard" in v. 7.

day **2**

EXPLORE – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the notes to follow if you need help.

1. Paul repeats his command, "Rejoice," in verse 4. What do you make of that?
2. The apostle's command is *counter-intuitive* given his readers' situation (cf., 1:27-29; 2:14-16). How so?
3. Paul *qualifies* his command with the words "in the Lord." What does he mean by that?
4. Explain what *joy* and *gentleness* have to do with each other and with the Philippians.
5. Paul says "the Lord is near" (v. 5). In what sense and so what?
6. Explain the *contrast* in verse 6.
7. Explain what "of God" in the phrase "peace of God" means?
8. Put what "transcends all understanding" means in your own words.
9. **Discussion:** The "peace of God" is practically *personified* in verse 7. Talk about what this divine sentry guards against and how.

day 3 **EXAMINE** – an explanation of the message to better understand the meaning of the passage.

In Philippians 4:4-7, Paul opens with the command, "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!" The word and the theme are repeated in the letter. One commentator observes: "The word 'rejoice' appears several times in the epistle (1:18 [twice]; 2:17-18 [twice]; 3:1; 4:4 [twice], 10). It seems from this repeated emphasis that the Philippian Christians needed this word. Most of God's people need this challenge often. It is easy for believers to let circumstances discourage them. The cure for discouragement is to rivet one's attention on the Lord and rejoice in Him" (Robert P. Lightner, "Philippians," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, 658-59). Alluding to the struggles his readers faced, he writes in 1:27-29: "Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in the one Spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved—and that by God. For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him, since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have."

As far as the meaning of the whole passage is concerned, the following summary statement is too good to ignore. After commenting on the meaning of the term translated "be anxious" in the negative command "Do not be anxious about anything" (v. 6), another commentator explains: "All of this points to the context of persecution as the background for Paul's admonitions. The Philippians were suffering under opposition from their pagan neighbors, just as Paul and Silas had suffered when among them (Acts 16:19-24; Phil. 1:28-30). Thus, just as Paul had started the admonitory section of the letter with a command for the Philippians, despite their persecution, to conduct themselves in a manner worthy of the gospel (1:27-30), so he returns to this theme at the end of the section, asking the Philippians to maintain an attitude of joy 'in the Lord' at all times (v. 4; cf. 3:1), urging them to adopt toward their persecutors Christ's approach of gentle nonretaliation (v. 5; cf. Rom. 12:17-21; 15:3; 1 Peter 2:23; 3:8-9; cf. Isa. 53:7-9), and admonishing them

not to be anxious about anything (v. 6; cf. 1 Peter 5:7). Instead, they should remember that the Lord is near (v. 5; cf. 3:20-21) and replace their anxiety with thankful prayer about their suffering (v. 6) . . . If the Philippians follow Paul's advice, he says, then 'the peace of God, which transcends all understanding' will stand like a garrison over their hearts and minds" (Frank Thielman, *The NIV Application Commentary: Philippians*, 219).

Verses 4-7 contain four commands: "rejoice," "let your gentleness be evident," "do not be anxious," and "present your requests to God." The first command is counter-intuitive in that people aren't normally filled with joy in the face of adversity. But Paul isn't commanding his readers to welcome adversity; he is commanding them to be filled with joy *because of the Lord* in spite of adversity. This suggests that unmitigated, untrammled joy ought to be a distinctive mark of the Christian. One writer puts it this way: "The wearing of black and the long face, which so often came to typify some later expressions of Christian piety, are totally foreign to the Pauline version; Paul the theologian of grace is equally the theologian of joy. Christian joy is not the temporal kind, which comes and goes with one's circumstances; rather, it is predication altogether on one's relation with the Lord, and is thus an abiding, deeply spiritual quality of life. It finds expression in 'rejoicing,' which is not a Christian option, but an imperative" (Gordon D. Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, NICNT, 404).

Paul's second command appears at first glance to be unrelated to his first, but a closer look reveals their connection. Joyless believers might be expected to respond harshly to persecution and their persecutors, but not joyful believers. While their internal joy might go unnoticed by their detractors; their external forbearance and nonretaliatory spirit would not. Verse 5 echoes Peter's comment regarding the Lord, "When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats" (1Pe 2:23). It is this "meekness and gentleness of Christ" that Paul appeals to in 2 Corinthians 10:1 and that he commands the Philippian believers to exhibit here.

Paul's third and fourth commands are joined in verse 6 by means of contrast. On the one hand, believers are not to be anxious about anything; instead, in everything they are to present their

requests to God. The second command makes obedience to the first one possible as one commentator says: "The possibility and reality of prayer give the rationale of the first words of the sentence which, by themselves, seem so impossible to obey. We may be freed from all fretful care and feverish anxiety because we may refer all our distresses and problems to God in prayer. Thus Bengel's comment is so apt and true: anxiety and prayer (*curare et orare*) are more opposed to each other than fire and water" (Ralph P. Martin, *The Epistle of Paul to the Philippians*, TNTC, 171)

The paragraph ends with a promise. God will give peace to those who pray, and the peace he

gives will stand guard over the petitioners' hearts and minds to protect them from all anxiety. Hear the following concluding words: "Joy, prayer, thanksgiving, peace—these identify Pauline spirituality. Such lives are further marked by gentle forbearance and no anxiety. The key lies with the indicative, 'the Lord is near'—now and to come. The Lord is now present by his Spirit, who prompts prayer and thanksgiving, among whose 'fruit' in the life of the believer and the believing community are joy and peace. Here is God's ultimate gift to those who trust in Christ, *shalom* and joy" (Fee, 412).

The Message of the Passage

Rejoice in the Lord, that your gentleness might be evident to all, your anxiety might be replaced by prayer, and consequently, you might receive peace from God to guard your heart and mind.

day **4** **EMBRACE** – how God spoke to you in his word.

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James teaches in James 1:22. Reflect on 3 "living questions" to apply what you have learned this week.

- **Journal your answers to the following *living* questions:**

–How is God making himself known to you?

–How does God want to change you?

–How is God calling you to change your world?

notes **N** STUDY – the commentaries to answer the questions.

v. 4 **rejoice** "To feel or show joy or great delight" (www.m-w.com, s.v. "rejoice). Cf., "be glad" (CEB, WE); "be joyful" (GNT, NOG); "be full of joy" (NLT, TLB). "Here the keynote of the Letter is sounded once again (cf. 1:4, 18; 2:17, 18; 3:1), and it comes to the believer as a divine imperative" (Jac. J. Muller, *The Epistle of Paul to the Philippians*, NICNT, 140). "The appeal to constant rejoicing (cf. 1 Thes. 5:16) is no empty phrase. To a company of Christ's people, who were in doubt and fear (1:28) and set in the midst of a hostile world (2:15), this assurance rings out like a clarion call, and is repeated so that its message may not be misunderstood" (Martin, *The Epistle of Paul to the Philippians*, 169).

v. 4 **in the Lord** "Christ is the One in whom the sphere of rejoicing was to take place. Surely there are many circumstances in which Christians cannot be happy. But they can always rejoice in the Lord and delight in Him. Paul himself was an excellent example of one who had inner joy when external circumstances—such as persecution, imprisonment, the threat of death—were against him" (Lightner, 663). "In the Lord is the governing factor in the exhortation. It is the Philippians' faith in the Lord which makes rejoicing in the throes of opposition a glorious possibility, as Bonnard finely comments: 'The Pauline appeals to joy are never simply encouragements; they throw back the distressed churches on their Lord; they are, above all, appeals to faith'" (Martin, *The Epistle of Paul to the Philippians*, 170).

v. 5 **gentleness** "Joy, an inner quality in relation to circumstances, may not always be seen; but the way one reacts to others—whether in gentleness or harshness—will be noticed" (Lightner, 663). "*Epieikeia*, which is the noun corresponding to the adjective in the text, is an ethical term used again by Paul in 2 Corinthians 10:1 . . . L. H. Marshall gives a full description of its meaning as 'fairmindedness, the attitude of a man who is charitable towards men's faults and merciful in his judgment of their failings because he takes their whole situation in to his reckoning'. Perhaps 'graciousness' is the best English equivalent; and, in the context here, it is to be the spirit of willingness to yield under trial which will show itself in a refusal to retaliate when attacked" (Martin, *The Epistle of Paul to the Philippians*, 170).

v. 5 **the Lord is near** "On the one hand, this looks very much like another instance of intertextuality, purposely echoing Ps 145:18, 'the Lord is near all who call upon him,' in which case it introduces vv. 6-7 as an expression of 'realized' eschatology: 'Because the Lord is ever present, do not be anxious but pray!' On the other hand (or perhaps at the same time), it also echoes the apocalyptic language of Zeph 1:7 and 14 ('the Day of the Lord is near'), picked up by Paul in Rom 12:12, and found in Jas 5:8 regarding the coming of the Lord . . . Since their present suffering is at the hands of those who proclaim Caesar as Lord, they are reminded that the true 'Lord' is near. Their eschatological vindication is close at hand. At the same time, by using the language of the Psalter, Paul is encouraging them to prayer in the midst of their present distress, because the 'Lord is near' in a very real way to those who call on him now" (Fee, 407-408).

v. 6 **anxious** "Do not be anxious is a negative command based on the idea that anxiety (*merimna*) betrays a lack of trust in God's care and is a species of 'unconscious blasphemy' against him (so Oswald Chambers); see Matthew 6:25-34; Luke 12:22 where the same verb is used" (Martin, *The Epistle of Paul to the Philippians*, 170).

v. 7 **peace of God** The phrase "of God" indicates *source*, i.e., "peace from God." "Every child of God has peace *with* God through justification by faith (Rom. 5:1). But the peace *of* (or from) God relates to the inner tranquility of a believer's close walk with God" (Lightner, 664).

v. 7 **transcends** "The descriptive phrase, which transcends all understanding, may signify 'achieving more than our clever forethought and ingenious plans can accomplish'; or 'transcending every human thought (*nous*), surpassing all our dreams' (cf. Moffatt), and therefore beyond the range of our comprehension (Eph. 3:20). The verb transcends, *hyperechousa*, is allied to the noun translated 'surpassing greatness' or 'excellency' in 3:8; and in both cases the meaning of absolute uniqueness, not relative superiority, seems preferable. Hence the second translation is the correct one (Beare)" (Martin, *The Epistle of Paul to the Philippians*, 172).

v. 7 **guard** "In the present context 'God's peace' will be his 'garrison' around their 'hearts' so that they do not fall into 'anxiety.' It will also guard their 'thoughts'" (Fee, 411). "Paul uses a military metaphor in describing the activity of God's peace, which is almost personified. *Will guard*, *phrouresei*, is better expressed in the military language of 'will keep guard over' (cf. 2 Cor. 11:32 for the verb in this sense). The Philippians, living in a garrison town, would be familiar with the sight of the Roman sentry, maintaining his watch. Likewise, comments the apostle, God's peace will garrison and protect *your hearts and your minds*" (Martin, *The Epistle of Paul to the Philippians*, 173).

Family Talk

Encouragement from one parent's heart to another

The hustle and bustle of the holiday season has arrived. Thanksgiving, though only a few days ago, is a distant memory as we have turned our attention to the sights and sounds and smells and tastes of the Christmas season. This time of year brings the hopeful anticipation of celebrating and spending time with family and friends. But it can also bring stress as we try to balance the financial strains of the season and a calendar full of holiday activities. As parents, it is challenging to keep our families focused on what's important. Let me encourage you to pause this week and push the reset button. I am challenging myself to slow down and focus on the reason for the season each morning before I begin my day. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). This indescribable gift that we have been in Jesus is the source of our joy. As we daily remain in Him, our joy is full and complete (John 15:11). Joy is a deep and abiding presence of contentment, peace and pleasure. I am praying for your family this Christmas season that you would experience joy and peace as you abide in Him daily. Let the holidays begin!

What Does The Bible Say

Weekly Verse: Read Php 4:4-7

1. Fill in the blank.
"_____ in the Lord always.
I will say it again: _____!"
2. What are you to do instead of being anxious?
3. What will guard your heart?

What Do You Think

1. When is it easy to rejoice?
When is it hard?
2. Have you ever prayed about something and felt God's peace about it? When? If not, ask Him to give you peace in a situation you are praying about.

What R U Going To Do

Ask your parents to help you get a copy of a December calendar. Write something on each day that you want to pray about this month. Post it somewhere you will see it every day and watch how God will answer your prayers.

Core Comp

Joy - I am happy on the inside no matter what's happening on the outside.

Memory Verse

Lk 2:10-11 – *But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.*

KIDPIX COUPON

I memorized my verse _____, completed Scrolls _____, brought Bible _____, brought a friend _____.

Series Discipleship Challenge located in KidPix Store.

Child's name _____ Grade ____ Parent's signature _____

Earn 1 token by completing the PantegoKids Bible study and another token by reciting the memory verse.

Questions: Kids@pantego.org

30 CORE COMPETENCIES

10 CORE BELIEFS

Trinity 2 Corinthians 13:14

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Salvation By Grace Ephesians 2:8-9

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Authority of the Bible 2 Timothy 3:16-17

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Personal God Psalm 121:1-2

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Identity in Christ John 1:12

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Church Ephesians 4:15-16

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Humanity John 3:16

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Compassion Psalm 82:3-4

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

Eternity John 14:1-4

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

Stewardship 1 Timothy 6:17-19

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

10 CORE PRACTICES

Worship Psalm 95:1-7

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

Prayer Psalm 66:16-20

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Bible Study Hebrews 4:12

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-mindedness Matthew 6:33

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts Romans 12:4-6

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Biblical Community Acts 2:44-47

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Giving Away My Time Colossians 3:17

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Money

2 Corinthians 8:7

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Faith Ephesians

6:19-20

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Life Romans 12:1

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

10 CORE VIRTUES

Joy John 15:11

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace Philippians 4:6-7

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

Faithfulness Proverbs 3:3-4

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Self-Control Titus 2:11-13

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Humility Philippians 2:3, 4

I choose to esteem others above myself.

Love 1 John 4:10-12

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Patience Proverbs 14:29

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness 1 Thess. 5:15

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

Gentleness Philippians 4:5

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Hope Hebrews 6:19-20

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

About the Authors

Tom Bulick (M.A. in Educational Leadership, Eastern Michigan University, Th.M. in Old Testament, and Ph.D. in Bible Exposition, Dallas Theological Seminary). For more than forty years, Tom has served as pastor, faculty member, and administrator. Tom was Vice President for Student Life and Associate Professor of Religious Studies at Trinity Western University (Vancouver, B.C.) for twelve years before accepting the position of Spiritual Formation Pastor at Pantego Bible Church in 1998. He and his wife Ruth have one son, Zach.

Wendy Hollabaugh (B.S.W. University of Texas at Arlington) is the Children's Minister at Pantego Bible Church. Wendy has over ten years of experience in Children's Ministry. She has a passion for leading families to connect with God and each other. She enjoys creating compelling environments where kids fall in love with God and His Truth. Wendy and her husband, Greg, are also involved in their own personal youth ministry as they are training their three teenagers, Hannah, Aaron and Noah.



8001 Anderson Blvd.
Ft. Worth, TX 76120
1-866-PANTEGO
Fax 817-275-6403
www.pantego.org

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