

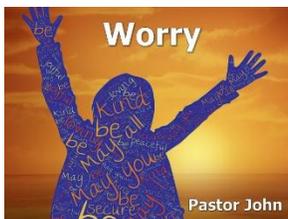
**Worry**

October 8, 2017

**Philippians 4: 4-9**

*<sup>4</sup> Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. <sup>5</sup> Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. <sup>6</sup> Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. <sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. <sup>8</sup> Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. <sup>9</sup> Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.*

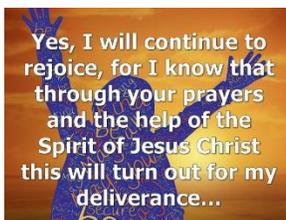
[Play video – “Distraction” (2:49)]



Paul tells us in verse four, “*Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice*”. This sure is easy to do when things are going well, isn’t it? Paul goes on to reassure us that “*the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus*”. Like Paul says and like the video we just watched points out, at times we can know such peace. God can bring us a peace that does indeed transcend all understanding. In this place, we experience an intimate connection with God. And like the video stated, it can be so strong that we think it will never leave. And then it does. And then it is gone. Let us pray.

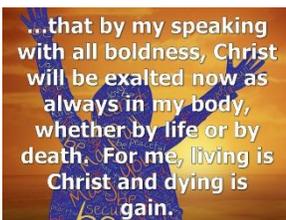
“Rejoice!” It sounds simple enough. Yet it can be so hard to do. Let’s step into the scriptures for a moment and look where Paul is writing from. He is writing this letter to the Philippians as he sits in chains on death row. He awaits execution for preaching the good news of Jesus Christ. To get to this point he has been beaten, has been stoned almost to death, and has endured a ship wreck at sea. It is from this place that he gives the command, “Rejoice!” If Paul can encourage others to rejoice from where he is at and after what he has recently gone through, then we should all be able to rejoice always, correct?

To gain a better understanding of where Paul is coming from, to understand his spiritual place of reference, let’s step back a few chapters in the book of Philippians. In the first chapter, verses 18 through 21, Paul writes these words:



Yes, I will continue to rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance...

*Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance... that by my speaking with all*



...that by my speaking with all boldness, Christ will be exalted now as always in my body, whether by life or by death. For me, living is Christ and dying is gain.

*boldness, Christ will be exalted now as always in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain.*



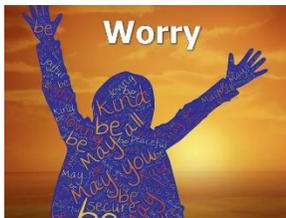
Worry

With these words, we hear that Paul is all in. Paul is totally committed. By speaking the gospel, Paul knows that Christ will be exalted. Paul is willing to exalt Christ right up to the

moment of his execution. All around him, the church and the apostles are being attacked and persecuted. Families are being torn apart. Christians are dying

almost daily for their faith. Fear is the overriding emotion for most believers. And Paul's word to the body of Christ, even while facing his own death: Rejoice! Do not worry about it.

To me, what is so powerful about Paul encouraging the Philippians, and us, to rejoice is how incongruent this is with his context and situation. For Paul, nothing seems to be going well. He is on death row for preaching the good news of Jesus Christ. This does not seem where one should end up because they are preaching love and hope and forgiveness and salvation. How can Paul have such peace and joy in his present situation?



The world offers a sort of peace of mind as well. It does so many different ways. Sometimes the world teaches us to just ignore what is wrong. Just look the other way. Do not get involved. Do not make eye contact. Sometimes the world teaches us to detach. It is not really your problem. It does not affect you, so why bother? It doesn't really matter. And sometimes the world teaches us to become numb to the problem. Just turn on the TV and lose yourself. Just pop another pill or have another drink. Just get away for a few days. But all of these methods of finding peace are temporary. They are passing. Paul preaches a peace that lasts.

He offers a peace that passes all human understanding. When we build our peace on the shifting sand of this world, then we should not be too surprised

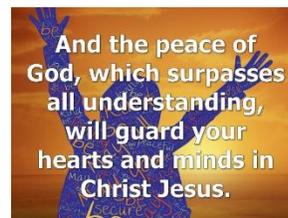
when the storms of life come along and take our peace. This is why Paul says, *"Rejoice in the Lord!"*

How do we do this? How do we put aside worry? Paul has a plan. Paul has faced much hardship and trial. Paul is not telling us to just think happy thoughts. This is the logic of the world again. Paul is encouraging us to find peace in the midst of the pain and darkness of this world. As he sits in chains awaiting death, Paul knows the pain and darkness that this world can bring down upon us. He is fully aware of the evil that grips God's creation. But Paul chooses to believe in another story. He invites us to do the same.

In verse six, Paul begins to give us the steps we need to take to rest in God's peace. In verse six he writes, *"Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God"*. Paul suggests that instead of worrying, we should instead pray. When worry begins to creep in, pray. When fear begins to rise up, pray. When anxiety rears up its ugly head, pray. And how does Paul say to pray? With thanksgiving bring our prayers to God. For Paul, worry was the trigger to pray. Fear was the trigger to pray. Anxiety or doubt or persecution or... All were triggers to pray.



Paul continues with what happens when turning our concerns over to God becomes our standard mode of operation. He writes, *"And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus"*. When we look at Paul in his current situation, we see what it looks like





Part of my conversation in the lead pastor's office that day had been about the necessity to inform the congregation of the decision in a quick and timely manner. I was tasked with writing an open letter to the congregation. After much prayer and time seeking discernment, I began to write my good-bye letter. But a funny thing happened. As I prayed about what to write, I began to turn the situation over to God. I sought His presence and His guidance even in the midst of this trial. I brought my prayers and supplications to God with a sense of thanksgiving in my heart.

God replaced my anger with anticipation, my fear with a sense of new beginnings, and my hurt with the promise of new opportunities. A peace settled over me that was beyond my understanding. There were many hard and tear-filled good-byes to be said yet, but I knew beyond a doubt that God was guiding and blessing this change in our lives. I knew in my heart that God would be our shield and protector as well. The verse from Jeremiah 29:11 was my heart scripture for a while there. It reads: *"For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope"*.

Paul also writes of the protection that we receive from God when we turn over our worries to Him. Again, in the second half of verse seven, we hear, *"will guard your hearts and minds in Jesus Christ"*. The word Paul used for guarding our hearts was a military term which his readers would have understood as a 'sentry watchman'. Paul was telling the Philippians, and us, that the Lord of the



universe will stand watch over your heart and will protect it from whatever the world can throw at us.

The second step that Paul encourages us to take when worry or doubt or fear or whatever rises up is to focus on the things of God. In verse eight, Paul writes, *“Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things”*.

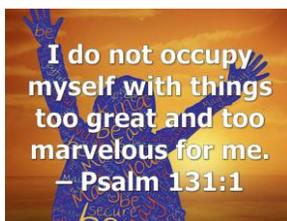


These are the things of God that will draw our mind and heart away from the cares and concerns of this world.



One of the dangers we all face is our penchant to dwell on “the things of the world”, many of which have no answer or, at the least, will not be solved right then and there. Yet we

roll them over and over in our minds, we devote much energy to them, we often lose sleep over them. On Friday morning, I read an article called “Weapons in the Fight Against Anxiety and Fear” that shed some light on this topic of worry. Here is a snippet from that article:



*“In Psalm 131:1, David says, “I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me.” Most of us would benefit from such a frame of mind. We would experience less sleepless nights, obsessing over things beyond our reach*



To close, one more insight from the same article. The author writes:

*Christian, we do not have answers for all the happenings in this life. Somethings remain outside our sphere of comprehension and necessarily outside our sphere of responsibility. We serve a God who reigns over all. He can be trusted; He can be relied upon. There are times we just need to quiet our minds and rest in Him. When we do, we will find that many of our anxieties, worries, and fears quickly disappear.*

We will also find that peace that passed understanding. It is when we acknowledge that God rules over all, when we quiet our hearts and minds and rest in God, that we can join Paul in saying, "*Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I will say, rejoice!*" Amen.

### **GPS – Grow, Pray, Serve**

- 1) Which worry or fear or doubt or anxiety or ... most tests your faith and trust in God? Take a few minutes to read and reread today's scripture.
- 2) What in your life do you need to turn over to God in prayer and supplication with thanksgiving? Spend some time in prayer today!!
- 3) When have you experienced God's peace that passes understanding? Again, go to the Lord in thankful prayer for these experiences.