

Rejoice! God loves you and you are one of his children because of the faith in you heart. Amen.

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. **This is God's Word.**

Dear joyous recipients of God's grace, mercy and love,

The Declaration of Independence states that an individual has certain unalienable rights; among them, the pursuit of happiness. But where do we find true, lasting happiness. Paul gives us a clue when he tells us to Rejoice in the Lord – true happiness can only be found in Jesus our Lord and Savior. You have that happiness – you have that joy so as we consider this portion of scripture, **“Let Your Joy Out!”** Let people see that you have a, **“Gentle Joy,” “A Prayerful Joy,”** and **“A Peaceful Joy.”**

I. “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!” Two simple sentences but they say an awful lot. Paul is telling us to rejoice because of the influence the Lord has had in our lives. Matter of fact, having God in our lives changes everything. We once were under a sentence of death because of our sins but now we live with the gift of life because the Holy Spirit has given us faith. Our sins are forgiven and the slate is wiped clean. And because we are children of God we have brothers and sisters in Christ to encourage us, to worship with us and to pray for us. What a wonderful blessing God gives us and so we can't help but to rejoice – to rejoice in all the Lord has done and continues to do for us.

But what do we do when something bad comes into our lives? How can we still rejoice? I was put to the test a few weeks ago when the doctor said, “You have prostate cancer.” No one likes to hear the word cancer from their doctor but even though I was disappointed that God allowed this come into my life I could rejoice. I rejoiced that it is curable. I rejoiced that I have good doctors. I rejoiced because of the encouragement and prayers of my family and I rejoice that you are praying for me and offering to help as well. Sometimes as we endure hardship we all of a sudden find out we have friends who care and love us – that too is reason to rejoice.

But maybe it's not a doctor's diagnosis that makes your life tough. What if you are having a bad day with the kids and then the dog leaves you a surprise or two as well. Where's the joy in that? Sometimes you have to look a little to find it. Maybe you rejoice when your spouse comes home and you head to your sisters for a glass of wine and a few minutes of relief. Maybe you rejoice because you have children and there are many couples that don't and you love them and know they are a blessing from God. Maybe you rejoice that they are in school or in bed or finally doing homework or chores and the house is once again quiet. Even in the midst of turmoil there is reason to rejoice – sometimes we have to ask the Lord to help us find it.

There are other tough situations that we might not be so willing to rejoice. I remember when I got laid off from my job. I didn't shout for joy but it turned out to be a good thing. The Lord led

me to a job that suited my schedule better and was better for my health and family. My rejoicing didn't come right away but a little later as I trusted God to take care of things in some way.

Paul's words are important to hold onto. I'm convinced that we can rejoice always because God gives us a little bit of sunshine by letting his Son shine in our hearts every day. Sometimes it's someone greeting you with a smile, sometimes it is someone taking a moment to help you, sometimes it is the sun shining after 4 or 5 days of dreary weather. And sometimes, God lets you be that little bit of sunshine in someone else's life – sometimes he gives us the opportunity to let our faith shine by helping someone else and we rejoice in the opportunity to serve.

But whatever you do, rejoice in the Lord and remember to let the joy of Jesus be evident in your life – as Paul puts it, **“Let your gentleness be evident to all.”** For the Lord is near. He is near as he speaks to you through his Word – he is near as he promises to come again on Judgment Day and that, too will be a joyful day, but let the joy of Jesus fill your heart each and every day. And when you are having those tough days and the rejoicing doesn't come so quickly, Paul gives us some more advice.

II. He tells us, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.” How do you get rid of anxiety? Talk to someone. Paul suggests that we talk to God – that we lay all of our anxieties; all those things that are bothering us and causing us to worry – take those things and lay them at God's feet – present them to God in prayer. Leave the solution up to God because he really knows more than any of us. Even when we are presenting our problems to him always keep in mind that we don't need to tell God how to solve our problem – he already knows the best way. We just need to tell him about them and to ask him to take care of it or to lead us to the best solution.

And remember that prayer is a heart to heart talk with God so don't forget to listen to God talk to you. He does that through his Word, so pick up your Bible or get in the habit of reading a daily devotion and don't forget to come to church. So many times people make their conversation with God one-sided and can't figure out why he isn't answering their prayer. Maybe he is but we are not looking in the right place for the answer.

Talk to God and listen to him and he can and will remove any anxiety from your heart and that will bring you a peace and contentment that you can certainly rejoice in.

III. “And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” We talk about the “peace of God,” but what is it? This is a peace that comes from God that is found solely in those who are justified by faith. This is a peace we have that God pours into the souls of those believers who have laid their problems and cares and worries at his feet and that trust that he will take care of them. This is a peace that exceeds any understanding of God that we have and it excels beyond our expectations.

The hard part about receiving this peace is that we don't always trust God and his Word. We say that we trust in God but then we think we have to do it all and we really are falling back on ourselves. When you were a child you trusted in your parents – well we are children of God and he wants us to trust in him in the same way. A simple trust that he can lead us down a path out of our problems and fill our heart with peace and contentment.

That is all possible because Jesus traveled the path to the cross for us. Jesus was perfect in our place as he traveled that path for us and he took our problems – our sins on himself and suffered the punishment for us so we can have peace.

This world isn't a perfect place and we aren't perfect either but as Paul reminds us – because we are in Christ – because he lives in us – he has made us perfect and he brings us perfect peace. So rejoice – rejoice in the Lord always. Amen.