



Joyful and Worry Free

Philippians 4:4-9

One of the benefits of life is joy, and one of life's crippers is worry. With these two polar opposites in mind, how would you rate yourself on a scale of 1 to 10 with 1 meaning "consumed by worry" and 10 meaning "abounding with joy"?

If you consistently score in the lower range of that scale, your source for joy and worry free living needs to be examined. If you lack joy and struggle with worry, then you depend on people, things, locations, or circumstances to be your so-called "never-failing" sources for producing joy and eliminating worry. When these sources actually do fail to meet your expectations, then joy can plummet and worry can skyrocket.

Since joy and worry are associated with daily life, Scripture addresses these matters. God's Word reveals that joyful and worry free living is available to a child of God who trusts Him and demonstrates that trust by specific behavior. The Apostle Paul instructed the Philippian Christians on these matters almost 2,000 years ago and, by God's grace, simultaneously provided direction that is applicable to followers of Christ in any age.

In Paul's instruction to the believers at Philippi, he reminded them that joy for a follower of Christ is not an option. In fact, for a believer in Christ, rejoicing continually in the Lord is a command.

Philippians 4:4, Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.

Since joy provided by the Lord is one of three key characteristics of the kingdom of God, then joy is always available to a child of God in every situation of life.

Romans 14:17, For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

Joy that is not shaken has its source in Jesus Christ. He stated this joy was available to His followers.

John 15:11, These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

John 16:24, Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.

John 17:13, But now I am coming to you [*God the Father*], and these things I speak in the world, that they [*Christ's followers*] may have my joy fulfilled in themselves.

Consistent joy is also indicative of someone growing in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Galatians 5:22-23, But the fruit of the Spirit is love, *joy*, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. (*Emphasis added*)

If you are to faithfully rejoice in the Lord, then this joy will not be dependent on people, circumstances, locations, or things. All of these will inevitably change. Jesus, on the other hand, will never change.

Hebrews 13:8, Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

True, lasting joy is found only in Christ—who He is, what He has done, and what He will continue to do. As a believer who trusts in Jesus, do you believe that the Lord will do what is beneficial for your life? Are you assured that He knows what is best? Are you confident that He has the power to accomplish what is good—which is Christ-likeness developed in you—even in some of the worst situations you can imagine? Of course He can do all of that.

Romans 8:28-29, And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

According to this truth, nothing and no one can hinder God from working things together for the greatest good (becoming more like Christ) in the life of a believer. That's something for which any believer can rejoice. Maintaining this joy, however, requires a believer to stay focused on Jesus instead of being fixed on difficulties that are part and parcel of daily life.

Hebrews 12:1-3, Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ²looking to [*staying fixed on*] Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. ³Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.

When Jesus is the center of your life, then you will have ample reason for continual rejoicing and will not lose heart even in the most difficult problems of life. After all, Jesus endured the cross, including its shame, in anticipation of “the joy that was set before him” (Hebrews 12:2).

See [Don't Lose Heart](#)

In addition to a believer's purposeful and ongoing rejoicing in the Lord, Paul mentions another trait in Philippians 4 that a rejoicing Christian can accomplish.

Philippians 4:5, Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand.

Some translators have said this verse is one of the greatest translation challenges in Scripture. The challenge centers on the word “reasonableness” (New English Version of the Bible). Notice the different shades of meaning in various Bible versions:

- “gentle spirit” (New American Standard Bible)
- “moderation” (King James Bible)
- “gentleness” (New International Version)
- “forbearance” (Young's Literal Translation)
- “patience” or “temperance” (Wycliffe New Testament)
- “gentle and kind” (New Century Version)
- “unselfish” or “considerate” (Amplified Bible)

You probably get the picture as to the difficulty this word posed for Bible translators. But why, you may ask, make such a big deal out of it? The answer is: Whatever this word means, believers are told to be characterized by this trait ... and all who observe these believers will recognize it!

For purposes of life application, the use of “merciful justice” is an apt description that can encompass all of the above shades of meaning in this challenging translation. One of the most well-known Bible expositors, John Gill, expresses a similar perspective in his *Exposition of the Bible* (which can be accessed through many Bible study sites on the internet).

Gill explained this particular word in Philippians 4:5 in the following manner:

“Showing clemency and lenity [being lenient]; not dealing with men according to the severity of laws and strict justice, but according to equity, and with mildness and gentleness; giving up strict and proper right, receding from what is a man's due, and not rigidly insisting on it; putting up with affronts and injuries, and bearing them with patience; and interpreting things in the best sense, and putting the best constructions on words and actions they will bear; and in using inferiors and equals with all humanity, kindness, and respect: and this is what is here intended.”

In Scripture, “merciful justice” was displayed when the adulterous woman was brought before Jesus (John 8:1-11). The Law said, “stone her.” But Jesus said that the sinless ones in her accusing group should be the ones to stone her. The fact that she was guilty was unquestioned. The fact that she also needed mercy was unquestioned as well. Instead of being stoned, she was given a second opportunity in life by Jesus' exercise of “merciful justice.”

Obviously, justice can be legitimately applied in many situations. Believers who habitually rejoice in Christ will be able to deal “in justice” and “in mercy” simultaneously and, in the process, demonstrate Christ-likeness. The linkage between joyful believers and their exercise of “merciful justice” is possible because of the following realities:

- Believers are joyful because they deserved justice to be applied to them as a result of their own sinful pathway to death but, instead, received mercy (which brought life).

Romans 6:23, For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

- Believers are joyful that they will continue being recipients of divine mercy as they willingly grant mercy to others.

Matthew 5:7, Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

James 2:12-13, Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

- Believers realize that God exercises righteous judgment and, simultaneously, provides mercies that are “new every morning.” Knowing that God’s unfailing love is available to ungrateful, evil people, believers can also be merciful and loving in a similar manner as they follow the Lord.

Lamentations 3:21-23, This I recall to my mind, Therefore I have hope. The LORD'S lovingkindnesses [*mercies*] indeed never cease, For His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness.

Luke 6:35-36, But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

- Believers learn to treat others as they would like to be treated.

Matthew 7:12, So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

The practice of “merciful justice” is not emphasized nor taught as much as it could be. Yet, its practice could actually lend itself to increased joy and lessened worry in the lives of believers. These results can occur because joy is a result of realizing what God has done and continues to do, and lessened worry is a by-product of being obedient to God’s plan for everyday life.

There is another habit of living that Paul mentions in the next verse in Philippians 4. This characteristic also correlates with being able to rejoice in the Lord and be worry free. This habit is bringing everything to the Lord in prayer.

Philippians 4:6, do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

The word for “anxiety” or “worry” in this verse means “to be stretched apart” or “to be distracted.” It is the word used by Jesus to describe Martha when she complained that Mary would not help her with the household tasks but, instead, stayed in the presence of Jesus.

Luke 10:41, “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and bothered about many things.”

In other words, Jesus said to Martha, "You are allowing yourself to be stretched between what is necessary and what is not that important."

In Philippians 4:6, notice that Paul does *not* say that the answer to “being stretched out” is setting priorities and following them. There is, obviously, nothing wrong with setting priorities and following them, but the scriptural alternative to worry is *to pray about everything*. There are three descriptive statements about this verse:

- Biblical prayer begins with God, not personal needs, so when you pray ... begin with worship.
- Faith-based prayer makes a priority of taking requests to God, not simply repeating potential prayer needs to others.
- Effective prayer is always accompanied by thanksgiving.

The above statements come from Paul's very careful use of his words to show that *the scriptural alternative to worry* results from a God-centered plan for prayer.

Paul uses the word for *prayer* that emphasizes adoration and worship. In others words, when you pray to the Lord in a habitual manner, you come to Him because of Who He is, for the Gift of His Son, the provision for eternal life on your behalf, for His promises, and for His sovereign care of you in any and all situations. If you're going to ask anything at this point, ask the Lord what He wants to accomplish in and with you.

Out of this heart-to-heart encounter with the Person and character of God, then Paul says to ask for specific things—*supplication*. You can always tell someone who doesn't pray much or who doesn't know God's priorities of prayer because their prayer *begins* with "asking" instead of “worshiping.” Obviously, asking is a necessary aspect of prayer, but

Scripture reveals that prayer most often begins with worship. It should not be surprising that this prayer priority is maintained as part of the biblical alternative to worry: *worship comes first, then asking follows*.

Thanksgiving comes after *worship and asking*. You may think, “I can worship God for Who He is” and “I can ask for God's help in specific situations,” but “I don't know about giving thanks in everything.”

Notice Paul does *not* say, “Thank God for everything.” He says, “In everything, give thanks.” Why? You can thank God that in spite of circumstances, He is in control for He is sovereign. His love never fails, and His power never lessens. As was asked earlier: Can God work things out together for a believer's good in any situation? Of course He can, so thank Him for that promised benefit that is wrapped up in any challenge of life.

See [God's Purposes in His Children's Trials](#)

With regard to this biblical model for prayer in Philippians 4:6, more than one person has observed, “A person who comes apart in difficult situations has not made a habit of coming apart from the routine of life to meet with the Lord.” You can come apart throughout your daily routine to meet with the Lord in prayer, a characteristic of a believer who “prays without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

Believers who do not pray in a manner similar to the prayer pattern in Philippians 4:6 will tend to respond to difficulties by simply telling others what they are going through and what they think they need. This type of communication can temporarily lessen emotional turmoil associated with worry, but it does not lend itself to spiritual growth in Christ. Without Christ-like development, anxiety (worry) will thrive to an even greater degree.

See [A Prayer Pattern to Help Structure Your Life](#)

Those who pray in the manner directed in Philippians 4:6 are promised peace that is beyond full comprehension, as the following verse indicates.

Philippians 4:7, And the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

This peace cannot be adequately described. You know it when you have it, and you certainly know it when you don't. It is the tranquil inner condition of a believer who knows that his sins are forgiven in Christ and, thus, fears no judgment from God. This peace also allows a believer to “rest in the Lord” in any difficulty because he knows God is in complete control. This peace is diametrically opposed to being anxious (worried).

Possessing God's peace is illustrated in the story of the little boy who was in a ship tossed about in a violent storm on the ocean. Everyone else was panic-stricken, but the little boy was so calm that his demeanor drew attention. When asked “Are you afraid?” the little boy replied, “No.” When asked, “Why?” the little boy replied, “My father is the captain and he's at the wheel.”

Everyone else looked at the storm, but the boy placed his trust in his father. In addition to the indescribable peace that only God can give in some of the most violent storms of life, there is a characteristic of God's peace that is markedly different from any other peace in the world. The last part of Philippians 4:7 says that God's peace guards your heart and mind. Literally, God's peace is a *sentinel* over your inner being (your heart), the very core of your life. God's peace also guards your mind (your thoughts and where your attention is focused). When God's peace is the sentinel over your heart and mind, you will not succumb to worry.

The Apostle Paul lists six specific aspects of a godly thought life in Philippians 4:8.

Philippians 4:8, Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable [*noble*], whatever is just [*right*], whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable [*admirable*], if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

The New International Commentary states the following about this verse:

“These six items are mentioned as objects of a wholesome thought life, and each one is introduced with whatever. In the Greek, whatever is plural, which suggests that several things could be included under each heading.

“**True** things are of course the opposite of dishonest and unreliable things. **Noble** refers to what is dignified and worthy of respect. **Right** refers to conformity to God's standards. **Pure** refers to what is wholesome, not mixed with moral impurity. **Lovely** speaks of what promotes peace rather than conflict. **Admirable** relates to what is positive and *constructive rather than negative and destructive*. *These six objects of thought are then described as excellent*

and praiseworthy.”¹

These characteristics are also those of Jesus Christ, on whom we are to focus our attention.

Hebrews 12:1-2, Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, *looking to Jesus*, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. (*Emphasis added*)

As Philippians 4:8 states, a godly thought life is a necessity for believers. With this practical foundation in place, believers can faithfully obey the Lord and, as a result, enjoy divine fellowship in a profound manner, which is mentioned in Philippians 4:9.

Philippians 4:9, What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

The Apostle Paul not only taught the Philippian believers about the Christian life, he lived it out before them. As a result, they had a living example of what it means to follow the Lord . . . in word and deed.

See [What Do You Believe . . . No, Really](#)

What you believe internally will never be known by others unless you tell them. What you *really* believe will never be known by others until you show them.

When your mind is focused on God and His perspective of your life instead of you and your perspective of your life, you will live in a Christ-like manner. When that occurs, the following results will occur:

- God’s peace will be realized as you consistently rejoice.
- God’s peace will be realized when you exercise merciful love instead of unyielding justice.
- God’s peace will accompany a life of prayer that is based on worship, requests, and thanksgiving.
- God’s personal fellowship will be experienced in greater measure and, not surprisingly, joy and worry free living will characterize your life.

All of the above benefits can be yours when you commune with the Lord as a way of life. What can you do if you do not abound with the joy of Christ and are more prone to worry than to pray?

Remember this first of all: The Good News (Gospel) of Christ focuses on you, not your circumstances. That does not mean that God is not concerned about your circumstances. He uses them to mature you and bring you to greater Christlikeness. The message of the Gospel is concerned about us as people before Almighty God, not us before ‘almighty’ circumstances.

The Apostle Paul said in Philippians 1:21, “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” In other words, neither Paul nor any other believer can lose when Christ is the focus of life.

Where are your thoughts going today—to Christ or to your circumstances? Your answer determines whether you are experiencing the fullness of joy found only in Jesus or whether you are being stretched by the worries of this life. If you are already focused on Christ, continue to rejoice and let your merciful justice be evidenced by all. If you are focused on your circumstances, bring your mind to Christ and the Bible and allow the Holy Spirit to teach you about real living.

As part of “real living in Jesus,” you will learn to rest in the school of prayer as you rejoice in what He has accomplished and will continue to accomplish in everyday communion with Him. For a believer, being joyful and worry free is not a wishful thought . . . it is to be a way of life.

¹The Bible Knowledge Commentary, New Testament Edition, based on the New International Version, page 664, Victor Books, 1983, Editors John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck.