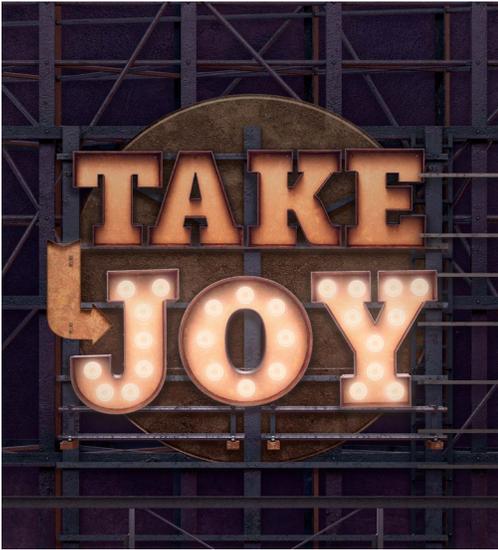




# Sermon Growth Guide

**February 19, 2023**  
**Rejoice in the Lord**



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**February 19, 2023**

**Take Joy - Rejoice in the Lord**

**Philippians 4:4-23**

**Key Verse:** Philippians 4:4 “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice.”

**Big Idea:** The reason we can rejoice in everything is because of what Jesus has done for us.

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## Foundations

When you read this letter to Paul’s beloved congregation, there are several things that stand out. First, there is no mistaking Paul’s love for his people in Philippi. Second, the church gathered there is not perfect. No church is, so it is clear that Paul’s affection for them is unconditional. Third, the letter is immersed in the significance and value of joy in the Christian life. And finally, there is an overwhelming sense that Paul knows that his earthly life is almost over.

We, therefore, should understand that what Paul says in this particular letter is essential to the ways in which we live out our faith in Jesus. What is interesting, however, is that joy is promised to God’s people in the Old Testament. Prophets like Isaiah, Micah, Zephaniah, among others, write of God’s delight and joy which will be experienced by His restored people.

Joy permeates the Psalms. Psalm 16, for example, promises: *You have made known to me the path of life; in Your presence there is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures evermore* (Psalm 16:11).

Paul grasps fully the reality that all the joy, delight and pleasures he had learned from Hebrew scripture were to be found in Jesus Christ and in Him alone. Keeping Christ foremost in his field of vision allowed Paul to live fully and gratefully no matter his circumstances.

## Understanding God’s Word

Verse 13 is quite popular. *I can do everything through Him who gives me strength*. Many often pray this verse, hoping that they will be able to overcome obstacles and accomplish a superhuman feat. This has led to disappointment and a misunderstanding of what Paul is saying. An alternate translation says: “I can **face** all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

*How does this translation affect your understanding of this verse? How does Christ-sufficiency rather than self-sufficiency affect your experience of joy?*

## Applying God’s Word

Paul lists things we should focus on in Philippians 4:8-9. This is not an exhaustive list—it is a representative list (Paul loved making lists.) How does thinking about these qualities help you grow in gratitude and the ability to rejoice no matter what? (See also verses 4-7.)

## Witnessing God’s Word

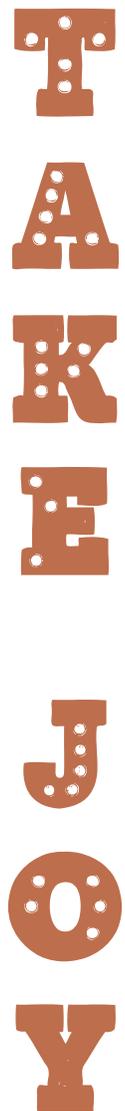
Blaise Pascal said, “Do great things as if they were small because of Jesus Christ and do small things as if they were great because of Jesus Christ.” How does being joyful in Jesus enable us to do this and what difference does that make in our community?

“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!” (Philippians 4:4). **Take Joy.** It’s not a suggestion; it’s a command. And it’s repeated. You know, you can command a dog to smile but that doesn’t mean it’s happy. It’s just a behavior reinforced by positive rewards. It does what you say. A 2009 study by the Dog Cognition Lab of Columbia University concluded that the guilty look dogs give you when you scold them has nothing do to with actual shame. Dog’s don’t have emotions. That’s science, people. OK, if you don’t agree, (actually I don’t either, and there are studies that say dogs feel happy), let’s do this. If you’re a social media person, tag us to your best smiling dog pics. @firstprescos, #smilingdog. Or email us. We’ll find the happiest dog in town. Or cat...if you can find one that smiles.

“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!” (Philippians 4:4). We have learned a lot from this joy letter written from prison. Far from something light and flighty, joy is solid and substantial. As C. S. Lewis said, “Joy is the serious business of heaven.” We learned that joy is not based on circumstance. Whatever the situation, you can pray with joy. Sometimes it takes a process, like lament, to free up your prayers. We learned that faith in Christ is bigger than life, and that is true cause for joy. We saw that there is no higher truth but that Jesus is Lord, and this is grounds to take joy. In the fourth week, we saw that friends are a gift that gives us joy, and last week we talked about the heavenward call, the upward call that lifts our heads. Finally we land here with this firm command: **Rejoice in the Lord.** Take joy in the Lord. Learn to ground your joy in the Lord Jesus Christ. Not a fake smile, true joy.

True joy is possible in the Lord. Paul brings us one last ingredient in his joy letter: Peace. “Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6-7). Again in verse 9: “Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you” (Philippians 4:9). In our search to ground our joy and find some way to answer the command to take joy, the Scriptures turn to the necessity of peace. Peace is necessary for joy. Not necessarily peace in the world around us. This isn’t about peace in Ukraine or peace on our streets, although it can lead to that peace. This is about inner peace. “You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you” (Isaiah 26:3 ESV). It’s the kind of peace Jesus promised: “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid” (John 14:27). Peace that surpasses understanding. That peace.

Joy and peace are related and interdependent. I can’t study joy, as I’ve said earlier, without going back to the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5. “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law” (Galatians 5:22-23). It has occurred to me that maybe Paul, in the Spirit, was actually talking about the same three ideas in three ways. Look at this graphic (on a slide) of the nine fruit. We have to remember the word “fruit” is singular in the passage. It’s like this is one thing with nine characteristics. If



you grow in one you grow in all. But what if they are grouped up? “Love, Joy, and Peace,” or in other words, “Patience, Kindness and Goodness.” Or in other words, “Faithfulness, Gentleness and Self-Control.” If they’re grouped, then Love stands on a foundation of Patience and Faithfulness. Joy is held up with Kindness and Gentleness, just as gets repeated here: “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near” (Philippians 4:4-5). Joy and Gentleness. Why? Out of some imaginary, self-deceptive, happy-clappy mind game? No. But on the very real basis that the Lord is near. How about Peace? It stands on Goodness and Self-Control. Would anyone contest that Peace comes as we grow in our commitment to Goodness and Self-Control?

Paul wishes peace on the church at Philippi. Is it possible? This is a real church Paul is writing to in Philippi, the church founded with Lydia and her prayer team of women who used to meet by the river in Acts 16. We see in Acts 16:40 that they met regularly in her house. Paul would usually start in the synagogues when he evangelized new towns, but there was no synagogue in Philippi. There was, however, the group presided over by Lydia. The church was born there. That is a vulnerable community to commit themselves to something illegal like worshiping Jesus. Is peace possible for them?

The sweetness of the relationship should not be missed. This church supported Paul in his ministry. Even when he was in Thessalonica, he received support from this church. Paul is grateful for that, grateful for the true friendship, partnership, the intimacy of gifts given and received. But he wants them to know, his

heart is at peace. Back in the first greeting, “Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel” (Philippians 1:12). That’s what gets picked up again here. “I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want” (Philippians 4:11-12). To be content, to be at peace, inside, with the Lord, no matter the external situation. “I can do all this through him who gives me strength” (Philippians 4:13). God might calm the storm, or God might calm you in the storm, either way for His glory.

One very practical thing to help cultivate the inner life of joy and peace is the thought life. Where is your head? “Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things” (Philippians 4:8). Your thoughts become your words; your words become your actions; your actions become your habits; and your habits become your character. Where are your thoughts? Peace is not going to grow easily on a steady diet of murder podcasts and dark police dramas and dystopic fantasy series. Sorry. And peace is not going to thrive on infotainment, arguing and bickering in constant outrage. That’s not news; that’s yelling. There’s a difference. Peace is not going to grow in an environment of constant scrolling through other peoples’ highlight reels. You say, “But I like to be entertained.” I know, but your

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mind is a lot like your stomach—garbage in, garbage out. You don't eat everything you want, do you? But we usually allow all kinds of trash in through our eyes. "The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!" (Matthew 6:22-23). Whatever is true, whatever is noble, right, pure, lovely, praiseworthy—we scoff at that stuff. Maybe we need that in our soil to cultivate peace. Think about these things, and let these thoughts become your actions.

First Pres, citizens of Heaven, I want to send you out into the world today in peace. Love, Joy, Peace. Yes, if you're wondering, Paul did cover Love earlier in the letter. "And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight" (Philippians 1:9). Love, Joy and Peace. They are interrelated and interdependent. I wonder what it would look like if we genuinely took up the challenge. God gathers 3,000 citizens of Heaven. "You are going to live in Colorado Springs in the year 2023. Make sure those people know more of Jesus by the end of the year than they do at the beginning." What does that inspire in you? What do you picture doing differently? A big part of it is living with supernatural Love, supernatural Joy, and yes, supernatural Peace that surpasses human understanding. I want us to be steeped in this stuff. Marinated in it, like when you marinate a steak—you press on it and it just oozes out, you cut it and it bleeds Love, Joy, Peace.

So, here is a little exercise. This jar represents our souls, our inner peace surpassing understanding. (Holding a

jar of water with soil at the bottom.) When it gets bumped or jostled or disrupted, well, this is what happens. And this makes us anxious. We start wrestling with this thing. Why can't I make that all clear up? What's wrong with my soul? What's wrong with me? Maybe if I turn it over. Maybe if I spin it the opposite way. Well, that's it! I've done all I can do! Be still. "He says, 'Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth'" (Psalms 46:10). "You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you" (Isaiah 26:3 ESV). I want to give you the gift of 60 seconds of peace and quiet with God. One minute of silence, to be steeped, marinated in peace. (A moment of silence.)

Love. Overflowing love. Joy. Superabundant joy. Peace. Surpassing peace. "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!" (Philippians 4:4). We do not rejoice in ourselves, or in our position, or in our capabilities, or in our good fortune. We rejoice in the Lord always. If you believe in Christ, then you are "in Christ." In union with Christ, we rise. Our lives are not our own. We belong to Christ and we receive His eternal life as we rise in Him. Take Joy. Wherever you are and whatever you are suffering, from there you can, in Christ, rejoice. And as the letter began with grace and peace, "Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:2), it ends with peace and grace. The God of peace will be with you, and "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen." (Philippians 4:23).

