

STUDY GUIDE

PLEASANT RIDGE BAPTIST CHURCH
PHILIPPIANS: CITIZENS OF HEAVEN LIVING ON EARTH
REJOICE WITH THOSE WHO REJOICE
PHILIPPIANS 4:4-7
11/12/2017



MAIN POINT

Rejoicing with those who rejoice means aligning our hearts with someone else as we praise God together.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Have you ever had to fight through jealousy when you see someone else rejoicing? Why do you think that is?

How is rejoicing with those who rejoice a truly Christian characteristic?

The command is not “Be jealous of the joy of others,” but rejoice with those who are rejoicing. What wonderful news this is for us. In the body of Christ, we find people who are living through many different seasons of life. Some are going through times of difficulty, and others are going through seasons of great rejoicing. If you are in that season of hardship think about how wonderful it would be to feel joy. This is the invitation. Look for those people in your life who are rejoicing and join in with them. You may not feel like joining in, but it’s in the very act of praising God that we discover the joy of it. Rejoicing with those who rejoice means aligning our hearts with someone else as we praise God together.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ PHILIPPIANS 4:4.

We have all seen bad decisions that were made because of feelings. However, we should never make the mistake of dismissing feelings altogether. We are brought into balance when we understand that God commands and helps us to rejoice. He commands our rejoicing!

Is it possible to rejoice in the Lord even through difficulty? Describe a time when this has been true for you, or when you watched someone else live this out.

Rejoicing in the Lord seems like it would be easier in times of ease and victory. What do you think?

It has been said, “If you struggle to pray, then pray yourself into prayer.” Could this principle be applied to rejoicing?

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ PHILIPPIANS 4:5.

Verse 5 contains an incredible truth that so often goes overlooked. Philippians 4:6-7 is a passage that many Christians have memorized for good reason. However, let's look at verse 5 and see if we find a jewel or two.

What reason is given that prompted Paul to say, "Do not be anxious about anything?"

Although this passage is referring to prayer, how does the truth that "the Lord is near" give us reason to rejoice with those who rejoice?

Why would the fact that "the Lord is near" be frightening for some and comforting to others?

We can rejoice and be gentle in spirit because God is available to us. He is not far removed in heaven but present in our hearts to hear and relate to us. His nearness also means he knows us and what we are. His nearness is a source of joy for the believer.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ PHILIPPIANS 4:6.

If it is something you can be anxious about, then it qualifies as something to be prayed about. Big things or small when you find yourself worrying about it, bring your request to God.

Evaluate your life. What are some areas that you are consistently anxious about?

If someone is praying with thanksgiving in their heart, what does that mean?

It's essential that we pray during times that threaten our joy. When we pray, we not only must make the choice to give thanks; we should also tell God what we need. Many times, though, there is a deeper need behind what we think we need. We might, for example, pray for a job, but the deeper need is security. We might pray for a relationship but our deeper need is about our loneliness and identity. As we pray, we should look behind our requests to see the true desires of our heart.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ PHILIPPIANS 4:7.

Have you ever experienced a time that the peace of God surpassed your understanding?

Have you witnessed someone have peace in the mist of great hardship? How was God glorified through this?

How does the truth of this verse help us to rejoice in the Lord, always?

God already knows what we need; the question is whether we know what we really need. It's at this deep, heart level where God meets us, and it's at this level that we find true peace. When God meets us in our true need, we find the peace that only He can give. This kind of peace is bigger than our understanding. In fact, when we have this peace from God that comes even when our circumstances aren't perfect, we become a powerful testimony to those around us that Jesus is enough.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Reflect on the promise of God's ever-present help in our time of need. How does this help you to rejoice through

all circumstances?

Think about your church family. What would it look like for you to take rejoicing more seriously, and find someone to celebrate with this week?

The world is thirsty for a reason to rejoice. Christians have that reason! How can we spur each other on to share this good news?

PRAY

Jesus, thank you that you've given us a family to rejoice with, and an incredible reason to rejoice. Father, free me from selfishness that I may rejoice with those who rejoice.

COMMENTARY

PHILIPPIANS 4:1-10

Max Anders, *Galatians-Colossians*, vol. 8, *Holman New Testament Commentary*

4:1. Again Paul demonstrates his love and friendship for the church at Philippi. He addresses them as my brothers and dear friends, that is, as equals under God not as a superior church authority to subordinate members. In this most personal of his writings, Paul expressed his fond affection and the pain of separation by telling them that he both loves and longs for them. They are his joy and crown because their growth in the Christian life makes him proud. He points back to everything he has written in the previous three chapters as the reason to maintain a firm foundation in the Lord. He points forward to the following verses to show how to stand firm. He remains ever concerned with believers' spiritual lives. Deeper spirituality can come but only by heeding the rapid-fire list of imperatives Paul is about to throw at us.

4:2. Paul addressed a specific situation in the Philippian church, a quarrel between two Christian sisters—Euodia and Syntyche. This discord may be why he wrote what he did in Philippians 2:1–4. Although he believed their conflict would negatively affect the entire church, Paul did not reveal the nature of their problem or take sides. He did appeal tactfully for unity by asking them to agree with each other in the Lord. To agree is a strong Pauline word which NIV translates with several different English equivalents (phronein, 1:7; 2:2, 5; 3:15, [16 KJV], 19; 4:2, 10; compare Rom. 8:5; 11:20; 12:3, 16; 14:6; 15:5; 1 Cor. 13:11; 2 Cor. 13:11; Gal. 5:10; Col. 3:2; 1 Tim. 6:17). The word basically means “to think, form an opinion,” or “to set one’s mind on something.” It came to mean to be in agreement, to live in harmony. This is the picture of the Christian church standing firm in Christ.

4:3. Paul asked a specific member of the congregation to help these women. Despite numerous guesses, no one knows who the loyal yokefellow was. Some even think Paul referred to the entire church. At least he set a precedent for church disputes to be settled by mediation within the church. Paul uses strong, urgent language to insist that the church get the problem solved and get back to the Christian position of standing firm “in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel” (1:27; compare 2:2–4). Disagreements even among mature Christians are not new. Mature Christians do not allow these disagreements to interfere with love and unity in the body of Christ.

Quarreling is not the nature of the church nor was it of the women involved. They had fought alongside Paul like gladiators in the arena to spread the gospel message. God had written their names in heaven’s registry of citizens alongside all the others to whom he promised eternal life. Paul sets the women on an equal level with others whom the Philippian church knew as faithful soldiers of the cross. Paul names one specifically—Clement. We know nothing else about him. The third bishop of Rome was named Clement, but we have no evidence to connect the two persons.

4:4. Again Paul returns to the key theme of this letter: joy. He calls believers to rejoice at all times and repeats the call for emphasis. This includes the bad times as well as the good (compare Jas. 1:2–5). Christians should be known as joyful people. Such joy resides not in circumstances or positive attitudes toward life. Joy reigns in the heart only when Christ is Lord of life. Joy is always in the Lord.

4:5. A practical way to have joy is by exhibiting gentleness to all. This lets the church and world see that you belong to the Lord. The Greek word *epieikis* means “yielding, gentle, kind.” It includes the ability to go beyond the letter of the law in treating others, to provide something beside strict justice. It does not insist on personal rights or privileges. Christ embodied

such gentleness in his dealing with all people (2 Cor. 10:1; compare 1 Tim. 3:3; Titus 3:2; Jas. 3:17; 1 Pet. 2:18). Why should we surrender personal rights for others? The Lord is near. In both time and space, God is available to us. He is not far removed in heaven but present in our hearts to hear and relate to us. His nearness also means he knows us and what we are. In time, God is near, for he is coming again. Then we will receive our rewards for living like Christ rather than like the world.

4:6. Joy replaces anxiety in life, so Paul advises the Philippians not to be anxious about anything. The cure for anxiety? Prayer! Worry and anxiety come from focusing on your circumstances such as imprisonment or persecution which Paul and the Philippians faced. Anxiety or worry doesn't accomplish anything, but prayer does (Jas. 5:16). Jesus warned against worry which demonstrates a lack of trust in God (Matt. 6:25–34).

4:7. The peace of God comes from prayer involving both asking God for earthly needs and thanking God for his presence and provision. The expression appears only here in the New Testament. God's peace reflects the divine character, which lives in serenity, totally separate from all anxiety and worry. Such peace is like a squad of Roman soldiers standing guard and protecting you from worry and fret. Such peace is not a dream of the human mind. The human mind cannot even comprehend this kind of peace, wholeness, and quiet confidence. Such peace protects the two organs of worry—heart and mind that produce feelings and thoughts. Such protection is real, available in Christ Jesus. Those who do not trust and commit their life to Christ have no hope for peace.

4:8. Continuing his strong imperative style, Paul suggested what should occupy our minds rather than anxiety and worry. Paul understood the influence of one's thoughts on one's life. Right thinking is the first step toward righteous living. What is right thinking? It is thinking devoted to life's higher goods and virtues. Thus Paul picked up a practice from secular writers of his day and listed a catalog of virtues that should occupy the mind. Such virtues are not limited to the Christian community but are recognized even by pagan cultures.

True is that which corresponds to reality. Anxiety comes when false ideas and unreal circumstances occupy the mind instead of truth. Ultimately, thinking on the truth is thinking on Jesus, who is the truth (John 14:6; Eph. 4:21). Noble refers to lofty, majestic, awesome things, things that lift the mind above the world's dirt and scandal. Right refers to that which is fair to all parties involved, that which fulfills all obligations and debts. Thinking right thoughts steers one away from quarrels and dissensions to think of the needs and rights of the other party. Pure casts its net of meaning over all of life from sexual acts to noble thoughts to moral and ritual readiness for worship. Thinking on the pure leads one away from sin and shame and toward God and worship. Lovely is a rare word referring to things that attract, please, and win other people's admiration and affection. Such thoughts bring people together in peace rather than separating them in fighting and feuding. Admirable is something worthy of praise or approval, that which deserves a good reputation. Pondering ways to protect one's moral and spiritual image in the community leads away from worries about circumstances and possessions that project a different image to the community and which thinking cannot change.

The catalog of virtues Paul sums up in two words: excellent and praiseworthy. The first encompasses what is best in every area of life, the philosophical good for which every person should strive. Here it is especially the ethical best a person can achieve. The second term refers to that which deserves human praise. The catalog of virtues thus reflects the best life a person can live and the best reputation a person can thereby achieve in the community.

Finally, in this verse, Paul gets to his point: think on these things. That, joined with prayer will relieve all anxieties and lead one to praise God and live life the way he desires.

4:9. Is such noble thinking possible. Paul says, "Yes, it is. Look at my example." This is not braggadocio or pride. It is the state every Christian should live in, a state of being an example for all who observe you. The example includes Paul's teaching, the tradition he received from the apostles and passed on, his reputation for Christian living, and the Christian lifestyle they saw him practice. If they obey Paul, God will bless them with his peace (see v. 7; John 14:27; 16:33).

4:10. Paul shows his attitude of gratitude by expressing joy over their gifts which Epaphroditus had delivered to him (Phil. 2:25), gifts which continued a long history of the Philippian church's supporting Paul (see 4:16; 2 Cor. 11:8–9). The gifts provided a problem for Paul. He consistently refused to accept payment for his ministerial work, not wanting to burden the churches (1 Cor. 4:8–13; 9:1–18; 2 Cor. 11:7–10; 1 Thess. 2:5–12; 2 Thess. 3:7–12). Thus he never used the term thank you as he wrote the Philippians, and he delayed using the term gift until verses 17–18. He concentrated instead on the attitude of the Philippians and the relationship the gift represented. He used a unique verb to express the freshness of their concern for him, saying it had blossomed afresh like a flower in springtime.

Why the Philippians had a time when they could not show concern for Paul we do not know. Perhaps it had to do with the distance to his Roman imprisonment, the lack of opportunity to send messengers that far, or some problems in the Philippian church. Paul cast all that away as past history. The emotion of the moment was joy at renewed relationship and renewed expression of care for one in trouble (see v. 14).