



Call: Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!

Prayer: Lord we come today with joy in our hearts. We come today to worship you, to give thanks to you and to praise you. We come today with joy in hearts even if we are unhappy, because we can know you deep in our hearts and whatever we may be facing, you will never leave us. Amen

Hymn: STF 608 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K9VTysZ1nT8> Charles Wesley (Used By Permission.)

All praise to our redeeming Lord,
Who joins us by his grace,
And bids us, each to each restored,
Together seek his face.

Ev'n now we think and speak the same,
And cordially agree;
Concentred all, through Jesu's name,
In perfect harmony.

He bids us build each other up;
And, gathered into one,
To our high calling's glorious hope
We hand in hand go on.

We all partake the joy of one,
The common peace we feel,
A peace to sensual minds unknown,
A joy unspeakable.

The gift which he on one bestows,
We all delight to prove;
The grace through every vessel flows,
In purest streams of love.

And if our fellowship below
In Jesus be so sweet,
What heights of rapture shall we know
When round his throne we meet

Prayers: From the depth of our beings, we adore you, Loving God. We rejoice in your message, marvel at your words, are astounded at your deeds, are inspired by your Spirit, and feel overwhelmed by who you are. We rejoice that you speak to us in ways we understand, and in times when we need to know you are with us. We rejoice that you know us all individually and speak our 'language'. In this moment, we cannot help but adore and praise your holy name and rejoice in your love for us. Amen.

Forgive us Lord, when we have looked for short term happiness and failed to seek contentment in you.

Forgive us when we have taken the easy route rather than what we know is right.

Forgive

us when our words are superficial and our actions are simply token gestures. Forgive us, Lord and help us to be better witnesses to your gracious love. We thank you that through your Son Jesus Christ our Saviour we can know that our sins are forgiven and we can again experience that joy of coming closer to you. Amen.

Hymn: STF712 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5VI_sd5A-h8

Put peace into each other's hands
and like a treasure hold it,
protect it like a candle-flame,
with tenderness enfold it.

look people warmly in the eye:
our life is meant for caring.

Put peace into each other's hands
with loving expectation;
be gentle in your words and ways,
in touch with God's creation.

As at communion, shape your hands
into a waiting cradle;
the gift of Christ receive, revere,
united round the table.

Put peace into each other's hands
like bread we break for sharing;

Put Christ into each other's hands,
he is love's deepest measure;
in love make peace, give peace a chance
and share it like a treasure.

Reading: Philippians 4:1-13 : Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends! I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. Yes, and I ask you, my true companion, help these women since they have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life. Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. 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. 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. 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. I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. 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. I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

Hymn: STF 351 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m_063OI38RQ

In Christ alone my hope is found,
He is my light, my strength, my song;
this Cornerstone, this solid Ground,
firm through the fiercest drought and storm.
What heights of love, what depths of peace,
when fears are stilled, when strivings cease!
My Comforter, my All in All,
here in the love of Christ I stand.

There in the ground His body lay,
light of the world by darkness slain;
Then bursting forth in glorious Day
up from the grave He rose again!
And as He stands in victory,
sin's curse has lost its grip on me,
for I am His and He is mine -
bought with the precious blood of Christ.

In Christ alone! - who took on flesh,
fullness of God in helpless babe!
This gift of love and righteousness,
scorned by the ones He came to save:
Till on that cross as Jesus died,
the wrath of God was satisfied -
for every sin on Him was laid;
here in the death of Christ I live.

No guilt in life, no fear in death,
this is the power of Christ in me;
from life's first cry to final breath,
Jesus commands my destiny.
No power of hell, no scheme of man,
can ever pluck me from His hand;
till He returns or calls me home,
here in the power of Christ I'll stand

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Message: The letter of Paul to the Philippians is a letter of comfort and encouragement, which is all the more surprising as he's writing it from a prison cell in Rome, with an uncertain future ahead of him. It is a warm and personal letter to the church at Philippi, for which Paul has a particularly close bond. He had suffered much when the church was first formed, with him and Silas ending up in chains in prison for speaking out about the gospel. And it was here that their chains were miraculously broken and the Roman guards were converted. This letter was possibly also triggered by the generosity of the church in Philippi to the imprisoned Paul.

The other surprising feature of Paul's letter is that it mentions joy or rejoicing several times, sixteen in all. However this serves to further emphasise that we can experience joy in times of hardship, and to illustrate the difference between happiness and joy or contentment.

I can feel happiness when the sun shines, but there will be rainy days. I felt real happiness, and would even go as far to say I felt joy and contentment when we were all together as a family recently. (One son lives in Australia and this was the first time he had met his 9 month old niece.) But holidays end, and we had to all go our separate ways with

happy memories. Some people felt happiness when Ipswich got promoted or when Arsenal won the Premier Football League. But teams can go down as well as up!

Happiness is dependent on external circumstances and can be manufactured or certainly influenced by our own efforts. Our holiday took months of planning, and considerable anxiety over travel arrangements, accommodation, and transport amongst other things. We were able to change plans at the last minute after flight delays. We were able to decide the best way for us to enjoy our time together. This brought us happiness, albeit for just one week, and the memories afterwards. Football teams, need good players, good management, and enthusiastic support. They need to train, they need money (lots of it) to buy decent players, and then perhaps they will bring happiness to their loyal supporters. The sun may shine, but we may regret the increasing temperature with ever warmer climate, unpredictable weather patterns leading to droughts and floods.

Joy or contentment, in contrast to happiness which is transient and dependent on external experience, is an emotion, or a feeling deep within us. Joy or contentment is something that we feel whatever our external circumstances. It is independent of all external things because it has as its source the continual presence of Christ. For us as Christians, joy or contentment, is a permanent state based on our confidence in the love of Jesus, in the security of God's grace, the foundation stone of our hope in God. It is a certainty deep down within us that God is good, not just when the sun shines, not when our team wins, not when we get together with family. God is good when it's raining, when our team gets demoted, when we have to say goodbye at the airport. Paul was in prison yet he felt joy, his future was uncertain yet he was content.

This may all sound very positive, very upbeat. However, we remember that Paul was writing at a time when his life was anything but positive or upbeat. We can give the idea that church is always a happy and upbeat place, and that we cannot show our vulnerabilities, express our anger and frustration, and have to put on a superficial smile. But Paul's letter can help us in our times of struggle, after all there are many references to personal struggle throughout the bible. In his other letters, Paul often expresses his anger and frustration or disappointment. Jesus displayed anger at the market traders in the temple He cried out in apparent despair on the cross.

Paul tells us that even in our darkest moments, even when the future seems uncertain, we can be content, we can rejoice. We can look to the positives, or to use an old phrase, "count our blessings." He was ahead of his time – when times are tough and we may be struggling, one of the things that can sometimes be helpful is to focus on the positives, however small and insignificant they may seem. "Whatever is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable." Paul tells us, focus on these things.

And we are not alone. He also tells us "not to be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God."

It's very difficult not to be anxious or to worry, but Paul encourages us by his example of contentment in whatever circumstance he finds himself, whether he is hungry or well fed, whether he has plenty or is in need. And that contentment comes from the strength he has received from knowing Christ. That contentment also brings us peace. A peace that passes understanding – a peace that we cannot manufacture by signing a promise not to go to war. It's not that sort of peace, this is a peace which we cannot bring about, only God through Christ brings that peace, that joy and that contentment.

So, what brings you happiness and what brings you joy or contentment? Think of three things in this past week or month that have brought you happiness. Think of three aspects of Jesus that bring you joy. Read these verses again, "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."

Offer a prayer of thanksgiving for each blessing you have received and ask God to grow joy, peace and generosity in your life. Amen

Prayers of Intercession: Gracious and loving God we bring before you now our anxieties and our worries. We pray for our church and circuit as it faces the future. We thank you for our ministers and lay staff. We thank you for the

volunteers in each of our churches who work to bring glory to you. Help those who are tired to be able to step back and renew in us a sense of mission and eagerness to share the gospel in our local communities.

We pray for our government, at this time of uncertainty. May our leaders govern with humility and integrity. May they seek to feed the hungry, house the homeless, welcome the stranger, support the health service for the sick, and to support the poor and marginalised.

We pray for those we know who are sick, who face an uncertain future, or who are awaiting results. Allay their anxieties, give them strength to face whatever they need to, heal wounds, cure sickness and comfort the dying.

We pray for any who are grieving, may they know the joy and contentment that their loved ones are now at peace and with you in heaven.

We pray for ourselves, that we can recognise moments of happiness that is temporary and strive for the joy that comes of knowing you, and the strength that comes from having Christ in us. In the name of your Son Jesus Christ our Saviour, we pray. Amen

Lord's Prayer : Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be your name; your kingdom come; your will be done; on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. For yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

Hymn: STF 545

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b-xFSDgMx1s>

Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart,
be all else but naught to me, save that thou art;
be thou my best thought in the day and the night,
both waking and sleeping, thy presence my light.

Be thou my wisdom, be thou my true word,
be thou ever with me, and I with thee, Lord;
be thou my great Father, thy child let me be;
be thou in me dwelling, and I one with thee.

Be thou my breastplate, my sword for the fight;
be thou my whole armour, be thou my true might;
be thou my soul's shelter, be thou my strong tower:

O raise thou me heavenward, great Power of my
power.

Riches I heed not, nor earth's empty praise:
be thou mine inheritance now and always;
be thou and thou only the first in my heart:
O Sovereign of heaven, my treasure thou art.

High King of heaven, thou heaven's bright sun,
O grant me its joys after victory is won;
great heart of my own heart, whatever befall,
still be thou my vision, O Ruler of all.

Irish, 8th century translated by Mary E Byrne versified by Eleanor H Hull (1860-1935) (Used By Permission.)

Blessing: 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 these things. And the God of peace will be with us all. Amen