

The Lord Is Near

TRANSCRIPT (AUTO-GENERATED)

Rejoice in the Lord, always and again, I say rejoice. Rejoice in the Lord, always and again, I say rejoice. Rejoice, rejoice, and again, I say rejoice.

Rejoice, rejoice, and again, I say rejoice. Well done. How many times have we sung those words?

Many, many times. You know that thing when you repeat the same words over and over and over again, and they start to lose coherence and meaning. Like my name, Ben.

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Rejoice in the Lord, always. Don't be anxious. We've heard these words so many times in song and in sermon, countless sermons probably.

So when I came to this passage, I had a sense of like, what more could be taken from this passage than has already been preached on? And then I reminded myself, this is the word of God. It is applicable in every situation.

Timothy says it is, Paul says to Timothy, it's useful for teaching, correcting, rebuking and training in righteousness. We believe, I believe God has something to say to us this morning from this word, even if we've heard it a hundred times.

So let's come under it together in prayer. Lord God, we thank you for your word. We thank you for its power and its truth.

We trust you have things you want to do in us and through us this morning. So I pray that I would get out of the way and you would have your way amongst us. In Jesus name, Amen.

We're in week something of our Philippian series. We're reading the Book of Philippians, which is really the letter to the Philippians. We say this every time, but Paul wrote a letter to the Philippian Church.

These are people that he knows, people whose issues and opportunities and challenges Paul knows. He's addressing specific issues in the Philippian Church. In that sense, we're reading somebody else's mail.

We don't have the relational context that the letter sits in, and so we read it with a kind of searching to find the situation that the Philippian letter was written in. The thesis statement of Philippians is Chapter 1, Verse 27.

It says, whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the Gospel of Christ. Philippians is not a letter about right thinking, about right theology, but about practical living. How do you live out the Gospel?

To conduct yourself in a manner that is in some way worthy of this Gospel that we have received. And so now we come, as we're working our way through Philippians, we come to this very well-known passage. Philippians 4 and verses 4 to 7.

I memorized this passage probably in 2016 or 2017 maybe. My sister was running the Switch Sundays program, which is happening downstairs right now for the teenagers.

And she got us, whoever was in the group at the time, to memorize Philippians 4 verses 6 and 7. Do not be anxious about anything. It's a pretty good one to memorize.

In times of anxiety, to remember, don't be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and petition. So we know these words, but we'll come to them again from verse 4. Rejoice in the Lord always.

And again, I say rejoice. Let your gentleness be evident to all the Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything.

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.

The approach I want to take today to this passage is not a top to bottom approach, like we've done in previous weeks, but more of a zoomed out to zoomed in approach. In fact, a zoomed out to zoomed in to zoomed out approach.

So we're kind of jumping all over the passage a little bit, but we're staying within the boundaries of verses 4 to 7. Does that make sense? So the biggest zoomed out statement I would make first is that Paul is saying two things.

He's setting up a paradigm between two things, rejoicing and anxiety. He says, rejoice in the Lord always and don't be anxious.

And that relationship between these two things is the dominant overarching paradigm that he sets up, a comparison between these two things.

If we were to use the tick and cross system that we used, Jonathan used last week, rejoice, tick, anxious, no, do not be anxious. In the Greek, the two verbs rejoice and be anxious are in exactly the same form.

So, they're different words, but all the other things that Greek tells us, they're in the same form, which means that Paul is, even in the grammar of the Greek words that this was written in, he is inviting us to hold these two things together, next

to each other, to compare them and juxtapose them. Of course, there is one difference. It says rejoice always, but there's one word which is negating the anxious. It says do not be anxious.

So, in the positive sense, Paul says rejoice always and do not be anxious. And he's giving us these two aspects, rejoicing and anxiety for us to grapple with the relationship between these two things. So, that's kind of a big picture.

The overall 30,000-foot view of Philippians 4-7 is rejoicing and anxiety. How do these two things fit together? Now, we zoom in.

We focus the lens on what it means to rejoice, and then we'll look at anxiety. So firstly, rejoice. What does it mean to rejoice?

And especially to rejoice always. Rejoice in the Lord always. Of course, rejoice just means to take joy, to have joy.

So really, we're asking, what is joy? What is biblical joy? What does it mean to take joy in something?

Rejoice is the verb form of the noun joy. When I think of the word joy, the image that comes to mind is some loud extrovert running and jumping and leaping and doing the little heel-click thing.

And for me, as an introvert, maybe once in my life, I've done that. That's what my joy has looked like. More often, my joy is like this.

It's on the inside. I'm joyful, but as an introvert, maybe joy doesn't always look like running and leaping and praising God. We'll see.

Dallas Willard defines joy as not pleasure, not a mere sensation, but a pervasive and a constant sense of well-being. It's been said before that joy is not happiness, but happiness despite circumstance. And I like that.

I think there's truth to that. I think joy is something deeper and more abiding than happiness, and I think that has to be true for Paul to say, rejoice always. You can't be happy always.

The situation, the circumstance of this world, the brokenness of this world means we can't be happy always, but we can rejoice always because it is a more fundamental aspect of our life that can pervade our faith. Happiness despite circumstance.

James 1 verse 2 says this. Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds.

In the same way, 1 Peter 1 verse 6 says, In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.

It is fundamental to biblical joy, this depth that enables you to endure suffering and retain your joy. When the Bible, the New Testament, speaks about joy, it is so frequently paired with suffering.

Even the same sentence putting these two things together. Joy is happiness despite circumstance.

But, there's truth in that statement, but I want to say that joy is not happiness despite circumstance, in the sense that we say, okay, I'm going to forget that this situation is so bad, and I'm just going to be joyful as though it doesn't exist.

That doesn't help anyone.

But biblical joy, I believe as the New Testament teaches, is holding the trials and the tribulations and the sufferings of life, the deep pains and the tears in one hand, and without looking away, holding the gospel in the other hand, and looking at

the two of them, and somehow finding joy in the Lord through the circumstance. Joy is not happiness despite the circumstance, but happiness through and in the middle of the circumstance, and that is powerful. Joy is powerful.

Rejoicing is a discipline, a habit, a practice, an exercise. It's a decision, a response. Rejoicing to take joy is an internal response to external realities.

Biblical joy says that no matter what is going on, in the external world of my life, I can, in my internal world, my inner self, be marked by joy. Joy is an internal response to an external reality, a pervasive and a constant state of well-being.

Not happiness despite circumstance, as though we look away, but happiness even in the middle of circumstance. This is what joy is, and that's one part of the paradigm which Paul sets up. So we zoom out a bit and then zoom in to anxiety.

We've looked at rejoicing onto anxiety. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation present your request to God. Jesus says in John 14 verse 1, do not let your hearts be troubled.

Matthew 6 25, Jesus says, Therefore, I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Doesn't that sound easy?

Don't be anxious. Oh, great. I wanted to be anxious.

Now because you've told me not to be anxious, I won't. Doesn't he know how much more nuanced it has to be? One of my, I won't say least favorite things, but I don't love it when people say yes, but.

Apparently, it's like the wise thing to do is to say yes, but, and there's always a but. But sometimes you just have to affirm something fully and not say but. Anyway, that's it.

That's not what I'm trying to say here. Do not let your hearts be troubled and don't be anxious about anything. It seems so easy.

And as I come to this topic of anxiety, I have a sense of wanting to speak carefully because of how real this is for so many of us.

There are many, even amongst us, who anxiety is a big part of our life and a big struggle, and I don't pretend to know much about it, if anything. So I guess I'm just saying that, like, as we come to it.

Tim Keller makes a good point about anxiety when he says that to love someone is to take on the burden of loving care for that person.

Such that if you're home and your loved one is out at night, to love them is to feel that burden of, where are they? Are they safe? Are they coming home?

To text them or call them. That's what it is to love someone. You can't love someone and not care for them in that way.

So Tim Keller says anxiety is something that goes beyond the natural loving burden you feel for a person. Anxiety is something different. It's worrying too much or being too anxious.

Interestingly, Paul uses the word or words surrounding the biblical idea of anxiety positively, multiple times in the New Testament. He'll say things like, I was concerned for you. I was anxious for you that you might do something.

Or this person is having a hard time. I am anxious for them. So Paul says anxiety is not a bad thing, but being overly anxious is a bad thing.

That's where it starts to be unhelpful for your walk. Jesus, I think, implies as much when in that passage in Matthew 6 we looked at, he says, today has enough troubles of its own, therefore don't worry about tomorrow.

What he's saying is let the limits of what you worry about, and you are like, lowercase a, anxious about, be today. Be the immediate present. Don't worry about tomorrow or the next day or the day after, because those days will worry about themselves.

Be anxious. Just keep your eyes on what is immediately around you and deal with that. That's the advice from Jesus.

Anxiety, too, is an internal response to an external reality. The external reality of the world causes an internal response of anxiety, which can be stronger than it needs to be.

So, zooming out again, lots of zooming in and out, we've looked at rejoicing and anxiety. These two things which Paul is putting right next to each other, even grammatically, he's telling us to juxtapose these two ideas.

And the big point here is that they are both internal responses to external realities. It's almost like Paul is saying, life happens, it gets you. In fact, this passage comes almost towards the end of the letter to the Philippians.

It's like he's saying one more thing, guys, life will get you. You can't control what is out there, but you can control your internal response. By rejoicing and by not being anxious, you can respond to the outside world differently.

In fact, that's how you would conduct yourself in a manner worthy of the Gospel.

Remember the thesis statement, the umbrella over all of Philippians, all of Philippians exists to illustrate and apply and prove the point conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the Gospel.

So Paul says, in the area of the way the external realities of the world interact with your internal self, in your response to those things, this is how you conduct yourself in a manner worthy of the Gospel. By rejoicing and by not being anxious.

And these two things go together. I'll read the passage again. Rejoice in the Lord always.

I'll 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 request to God.

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. He is absolute. Rejoice always.

Do not be anxious about anything. He gives no caveat. It's like Paul, don't you know life is more complex than this?

I wish Paul had have said, rejoice always, apart from like if life is going really bad, but then go back to the rejoicing. Don't be anxious about anything, but in every situation, aside from this, this, this and this, do not be anxious.

But he speaks in this total, like generalized statement, do not be anxious about anything. But in every situation, bring your request to God. Rejoice always.

I feel like asking Paul, and I will ask him one day, don't you know that my generation, Gen Z, is the most anxious generation we have ever seen?

Don't you know that we, through the Internet, have information based on what is happening in the other side of the world, terrible, terrible things that I can find in my pocket. It's causing anxiety, and it makes it really hard to rejoice.

Maybe it's getting harder to rejoice and easier to be anxious, as time wears on, as technology kind of transforms this world. I want to say, Paul, do you really mean rejoice always? Are you like speaking in hyperbole, in exaggeration?

Is there any caveat? And yet he says what he says, rejoice always. Remember this guy, Paul, is someone who has experienced life, the full gamut of life.

2 Corinthians chapter 11, verse 23, Paul gives a list of every bad thing he's ever gone through.

This is who writes these words, I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again.

Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes, three times beaten with rods, once pelted with stones, three times shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, constantly on the move, in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits,

from Jews, from gentiles, in the city, in the country, in the sea, from false believers. He has known hunger and thirst and sleepless nights. This is the Paul who writes these words. So he says, rejoice always and do not be anxious about anything.

And I think when he writes those words, he casts his mind back to those times in his life. He's a smart guy. He knows what he's asking.

When he says, rejoice always, he's thinking of the countless times he's been shipwrecked and hungry and beaten and stoned nearly to death. And he says, rejoice always. It is still possible to rejoice always.

But it's hard. I think this word hits us and rubs us sort of the wrong way. He speaks in such a generalization.

We don't like to do that so much anymore. He says, don't be anxious about anything and rejoice always. How?

How is that even possible? To live this life that he says we can live, one that has a pervasive and constant sense of joy, how do you do that? I believe he gives us the answer.

Four words, four inconspicuous little words that sit in the middle of this passage. The Lord is near. The Lord is near.

This beautiful, elegant, succinct nugget of truth. The Lord is near. I don't know how I missed it every other time I read this passage.

We tend to like the rejoice bit and the anxiety bit. We forget the middle bit. Rejoice in the Lord always.

Don't be anxious about anything. Squarely in the middle, between these two things, the Lord is near. I believe that is the key to living the worry-free, anxious-free life that rejoices always.

The Lord is near. I believe that means two things. He is close and he is coming.

He is close and he is coming. Psalm 145 verse 18 says, the Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth. Psalm 34 verse 18, the Lord is close to the broken-hearted.

For the Lord to be near, it means he is close. He is close to the broken-hearted. The Psalms are full of this language.

He is so present in our lives. Psalm 139 is like the manifesto of the Lord's nearness. Where can I go from your spirit?

If I go to heaven, you are there. If I go to the depths, you are there. If I ride on the wings of the dawn, your hand will find me.

Psalm 139 says there is not a place in the world, in time or space or matter or light or darkness where the Lord will not find you and where he is not with you. He is with you always. He is close.

In John 14, Jesus speaks of a moment when he will ascend to heaven, and he uses the word orphan. He says, I will not leave you as orphans, but I will breathe my spirit on you, and the spirit will be with you always.

And that's the reality we live in today. As believers who have the Holy spirit, we have God himself with us, close by us all the time. This is the closeness of God that the Lord is near.

And that means whatever you go through, he is with you. Psalm 23 says, even though I walk through the darkest valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil. Why?

For you are with me. He is with us. And that means when we are weeping, he is weeping with us.

When we are rejoicing, he rejoices with us. When we're crying, he cries with us. Lamenting, he is with us.

In every situation in life, he is with us. He is with you. The Lord is near.

Even in the circumstances where we would say, it's hard to rejoice always, and it's hard to not be anxious. In the mountains and the valleys of life, he is with us through them all. And that is how you rejoice.

That is a reason to rejoice and not be anxious. And it's also the means of rejoicing and not being anxious. Knowing that he is near helps us to live this life that he is calling us to.

The Lord is near. He is close and he is coming. The Lord is coming.

He is coming soon to put an end to this world, to the suffering of this world and to redeem it and recreate it for his glory.

Revelation 1 verse 7 says, Look, Jesus, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all peoples on earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be. Amen.

I am the Alpha and the Omega, says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come the Almighty. The Lord is coming to wrap up the story of history, to bring an end to this universe for his glory and to start the new creation with us in it.

He was at the beginning of the story and he will be the end of the story. He is coming back.

And so, while the Lord is near in that he is close, in that he weeps with us and laments and mourns this broken world, he weeps with us, but he is the same one who is coming on the clouds of heaven to put an end to suffering and to wipe away every

tear from our eyes. He is close and he is coming soon and it will be okay in the end. He is victorious. That's the point of the Book of Revelation.

Revelation says, doesn't matter what you're going through, Jesus wins. He wins in the end. It's going to be okay.

Even if it sucks right now, he wins in the end. And we know that because he is with us. He is near to us.

He is close and he is coming. And that is a reason to rejoice. And the means of rejoicing.

A reason to not be anxious and the means to not be anxious. The Lord is close and he is coming. He is with you now.

He is with us in this room. When we walk out those doors and drive into our weeks, when we go to the street party, he is with us. He is close and he is coming.

That's the key. How do you rejoice always? To not be anxious about anything?

You know that as pervasive as the difficulty is to not rejoice, he is more present. That even when it feels like I cannot rejoice in this situation, this is a caveat situation. Paul didn't see this coming.

He did. He said rejoice always because the Lord is with you, because he is close and he is coming. This term at Youth, we have been looking at the theme Good News.

We have had over nine, well in the middle of nine weeks, where we look at a different part of the Gospel. The Gospel story. God is real, Jesus is king, help is here, you are needed.

And we look at how all these different pieces are good news for us, or good news for the teenagers who come. And it's kind of got me in this habit of whenever I kind of think something, I go, why is that good news? Oh, it's good news because.

And it's a good habit. He is close and he is coming, and this is good news for us, that our Lord will come back. Rejoice in the Lord always.

I'll say it again, rejoice. Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.

Underline that one. If you're an underliner, you've probably underlined the rejoice bit and the anxious bit. Double underline the Lord is near.

He is close and he is coming. Do not be anxious about anything.

But in every situation by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your request to God, and the peace of God which transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

I would be deeply remiss if I didn't make one point, one more point. Prayer is the means by which we engage with the Lord who is near. As such, prayer is the practice, the discipline that helps us rejoice always and to not be anxious about anything.

You can't preach this passage without mentioning prayer. For Paul, he makes an unbreakable connection between anxious situations and prayer.

We talked last year, I think, in a sermon about kind of the idea of trip switches or circuit breakers, kind of the idea of when something happens, you just click your fingers and it leads to a second thing.

Paul sets up a trip switch, circuit breaker thing for anxious situations and prayer. He says, are you feeling anxious in any way? Pray.

Bring it before the Lord. And the reason that prayer is the vital, necessary center of this passage in terms of application is that Dallas Willard defines prayer, I know the second Dallas Willard quote.

Dallas Willard defines prayer as whole being, orientation towards God. Prayer is putting every part of yourself, your soul in the direction of God. And that means that you are becoming aware of the Lord's presence and you know the Lord is near.

The Holy spirit in you testifies on our behalf and we join with him in praying for our situations. And outcome based prayers. It says bring your petition, bring your request before the Lord.

That is a request that the Lord would show up in my life and do something. It is an outcome based prayer that we bring to the Lord. Whole being orientation towards God is the practice.

Prayer is the discipline to rejoice always and to not be anxious. So as we go out, when you feel anxious, trip switch, pray. When you rejoice, trip switch, pray.

When you feel like you can't rejoice, trip switch, pray. And Paul promises something remarkable. He says, the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

When we bring our prayers before the Lord, the peace of God, which does not make sense, given the circumstance, will guard your heart and your mind.

Through prayer, as we acknowledge and engage with the Lord who is near to us, who is close and who is coming, as we pray, we can have peace. Thank goodness that Paul uses the same absolute language at this point. He says, rejoice always.

Don't be anxious about anything. Thank goodness, he says, the peace of God will guard your hearts and your minds. By prayer, Ephesians says, he, Jesus, himself is our peace.

He himself is our peace. We do not pray to God, would you give me peace apart from you? We don't ask for the peace of God, but for the God of peace.

The peace of God is the God of peace because he himself is our peace. And so knowing that the Lord is near is the key to peace. It all comes back to this line.

The Lord is near. He is our peace. And so we want more of him.

We don't want the peace. We don't want a peace that comes apart from him because there is none. But by prayer, as we acknowledge that the Lord is near, he himself will be our peace.

We want to know him. To know him is the greatest treasure in the world. And to know the peace that he is.

And as we come to Christmas and we have the beautiful tree up, we remember he is the prince of peace. And in this time, he, the Gospel of Luke said he came to bring a sword, but he brought peace.

His message, his life was lived that we might have peace with God through his bloodshed on the cross. He himself is our peace. He is close and he is coming.

The Lord is near. That's how you rejoice always. And that's how you do not be anxious about anything.

The Lord is near. If you're feeling this morning like you don't have that peace and you're feeling anxious, and as we come to the end of a long and tiring year, you want some of this peace.

I just invite you to stand in a moment, and I'm just going to pray for you, and pray for all of us that we might receive him again in a full way, that your eyes may be open to see that the Lord is near to you even now, that whatever you go through,

whatever your world involves when you step out those doors, he can be your peace. The Lord is near. So if you would like that peace, I just invite you to stand now, and I'll pray for you especially, and then we'll sing together.

If you have a situation where it's hard to rejoice, stand with us, and I'll pray for you that the God of peace would be with you. Let me pray. Lord our God, we thank you that you are near to us.

By your spirit, you are closer than we know, closer than we will ever see. And God, we don't come to you petitioning and requesting that you give us a peace that is not from you, because there is no peace.

We come to you and we ask for you, Lord Jesus. You are our peace. And so I pray for every heart that is standing up in this room and online, the ones who need peace in their life.

Fill them please with your spirit. Open their eyes and their minds to see that you are near to them. Always.

You are close. That even though they walk through the valley of the shadow of death, they can fear no evil for you are with them. Would you impress upon our hearts how near you are?

And in the name of Jesus, let anxiety flee from the name of Jesus, which has all power. In the name of your risen powerful all-conquering name, we pray.