

AIM

- To explain that, because of Christ, it is possible to be joyful, even when circumstances are difficult

EXPLORE

- *What questions do you have over the Follow-Up from Session 6?*
- Read Philippians 3:10-11
 - *In verse 10, Paul says that his goal is “to know Christ.” From verses 10 and 11, what is the challenge that comes from knowing Christ? We will “share in His sufferings.” Knowing Christ results in us facing suffering for the sake of Christ (cf. 1 Peter 4:12-16).*
 - *From verses 10 and 11, what comforts come from knowing Christ? We will know “the power of His resurrection.” We will also “attain to the resurrection of the dead”; in other words, when we die we will be resurrected to be with Christ (cf. 3:21).*
 - *What does Paul mean by wanting to know “the power of His resurrection” (cf. Ephesians 1:17-20)? He wants to know the power that raised Christ from the dead in his own life. It is amazing to know that the same divine force that raised Jesus from the dead is at work in us.*
 - *Can you echo Paul’s words in these verses? Why or why not?*

LISTEN (DVD)

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God” (Philippians 4:6).

Introduction

British holidaymakers love to feel anxious. Among the list of unusual complaints revealed by top British tour operators was the following: “No one told us there’d be fish in the sea. The children were startled.” One complainant grouched that there were too many Spaniards in Spain, another that there wasn’t any air-conditioning outside, and a third said this: “It took us nine hours to fly to Jamaica from England. It only took the Americans three hours.”

Is it possible to be joyful when circumstances are difficult? Is it possible to rejoice, if, for example, our relationships break down (like Euodia and Syntyche in 4:2) or we face persecution (like the Philippian church in 1:29)? Is it possible to be joyful even if our freedom is taken from us, as is the case with Paul?

Amazingly, that’s exactly what Paul commands in chapter 4 verse 4: “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!” Humanly speaking, such joy is unrealistic. Paul expects scepticism, and so repeats what he says in verse 4. We can rejoice “always” because God is “always” unchanging in His character and work—He has been, is, and will always be good. So, we need to remind ourselves that “God is always _____.” Indeed, that phrase “in the Lord” helps us to understand how this joy is possible even in difficult circumstances.

1. Problems must be resolved (vv. 2-3).

In Philippians 4:2-3, we read about two women, Euodia and Syntyche, who have fallen out over some matter. It's not as if they're not Christians – Paul says that their names “are in the book of life”. But something has driven a wedge between them, despite the fact that they have worked hard together at Paul's side “in the cause of the gospel”.

Paul pleads with them to “agree with each other in the Lord”. His words echo what he has already said in chapter 2, verses 3-5: “Consider others better than yourselves ... Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus”. In other words, this problem will only be resolved, and joy will only be restored, if both women are prepared to adopt the attitude of Jesus: taking the initiative, making themselves humble, serving others – even if such actions come at great personal cost.

Application: If we're “in the Lord”, we must take the initiative, swallow our pride and be reconciled to those we've fallen out with. And Christians should help other Christians to reconcile. Only through humility can joy and rejoicing be known.

2. Perspective must be regained (vv. 4-5).

In verse 5, Paul puts things into perspective by reminding us that: “The Lord is near”. The Lord is near because he will return soon, at a time no one will expect him, and draw life as we know it to a close.

But the Lord is near in another sense too. His Spirit lives in us, if we're Christian, and his presence reminds us that “our citizenship is in heaven” (Philippians 3:20). It is that intimacy with the Lord that enables our “gentleness [to] be evident to all” (v 5) and, again, to “rejoice” (v 4).

Application: Because we know that the Lord will return, we must be gentle with everyone—we don't have to have the last word...Jesus will; thus, we can rejoice. The presence of his Holy Spirit in us will help us to do that.

3. Anxiety must be removed (vv. 6-7).

The antidote to anxiety, says Paul, is prayer. “Do not be anxious about anything,” he says, “but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God” (v 6). The way to “be anxious about nothing” is to “be prayerful about everything.” God can actually do something about it. So, Paul doesn't tell us to “stop talking about it” or “stop thinking about it”; rather, he tells us to talk about it and think about it with God.

Our anxiety is removed because as we pray “with thanksgiving,” we are reminded of all the blessings we have in Christ – not least the fact that we are able to pray to God!

As we offer our requests and our thanks, “the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (v 7).

It's an amazing promise: not that God will take away difficult circumstances, but that “the peace of God” protects us from anxiety and worry even in difficult circumstances.

Application: If we often feel anxious and imagine that God is far from us, is it because we are spending so little time with him in grateful prayer? Is “the Lord” the first One we turn to when we're anxious? Our constant fretting and worrying demonstrates that we don't really trust God; it shows us that anxiety is really calling the shots in our lives, rather than Jesus. There is a direct connection between how little we pray and how much we worry.

4. Our minds must be pure (vv. 8-9).

Paul leaves us with a challenge in verses 8-9 – a challenge about how we use our minds. After all, we know that what we put into our bodies has a big impact on our physical health. How careful are we about what we put into our minds? That will affect our spiritual health.

Paul says in verses 8-9 that we must set our minds on things that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent and praiseworthy. That in itself will have a huge impact on our ability to rejoice in difficult circumstances (because if we put these things into practice, “the God of peace will be with you” – verse 9).

Application: How accurately does verse 8 describe the things we put into our minds? Or, are we dwelling on the opposite—those things that are false, dishonest, wrong, polluted, ugly, shameful, shoddy, deserving condemnation? We get our thoughts from our TVs, video games, music, magazines, and internet sites—are those helping to fill your mind with excellent things and your spirit with joy and rejoicing? Those excellent and praiseworthy things are designed to lift us up out of ourselves and admire the Person behind it—they are meant to be windows that teach us that their joy is an echo of the joy of the Lord Himself.

Conclusion

Rejoicing in Christ is not something that comes naturally – we have to work at it! We must pray right (vv. 6-7), think right (vv. 4-5, 8), and do right (vv. 2-3, 9)—then, God’s joy and peace will be our guard!

DISCUSS

- *Was there something in particular that stood out or struck you from the DVD?*
- *Do you think Paul is being unrealistic to say, “Rejoice in the Lord always” (4:4)? Why or why not?*
- *When we find it hard to rejoice, what practical steps can we take to help us “rejoice always”?*
- *Why will knowing that “the Lord is near” (verse 5) help us to be gentle?*
- *What action should we take when we are anxious, and why (vv. 6-7)?*
- *What does it mean to pray “with thanksgiving” (v. 6)? What does this help us to guard against?*

FOLLOW-UP

See the document entitled “Session 7 Follow-Up.” Please note that these follow-up questions differ from the ones in the *Discipleship Explored Handbook*.