

How to Have Joy All Year Long

Lord God Holy Father, What a privilege and responsibility to share Your Word amongst the brethern. Thank you for your anointing over me. Help me to speak only your Word to change hearts and minds. May this message help us throughout the New Year to serve you more and do your Holy Will. In Jesus' Name I pray.

The other day I was in a shop and there were some people singing outside and revelling in the spirit of Xmas as they call it. We call it Nativity Day. The owner told me as soon as the festive season is over all that joy and smiling will be wiped from their faces. It is just the season to be jolly he told me. What an artificial way of expressing joy! Instead of coming from the heart and a spirit full of Christ's happiness, people put on a face of happiness when inside they do not have it.

Indeed, As we come to the end of another year, once again we find ourselves in a world filled with

- problems,
- doubts,
- worries, and
- fears.

There are also conflicts, discord and divisions amongst christians. We find denominations not seeing eye to eye with other denominations and even born-again christians having different views and doctrines.

But still We sing "Joy to the world,"

But there is not as much joy as we would like. Too many unhappy people walk our city streets. People today aren't as cheerful as they ought to be. If we ask a dozen people "Why aren't you more cheerful?"

There is an expression, '**We are what we eat**', '**We are what we drink**'. **But we are also what we think we are**'.

Whatever is on the inside will show up on the outside sooner or later.

People who are perpetually miserable generally have made a series of **choices that led them to that sad condition**. What you think, you are. "**As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he**" (Proverbs 23:7 KJV).

For the New Year I want to take the advices and commands of the Apostle and start thinking with the mind-set he set out in, **Philippians 4:1-9 (which is the key scripture which I am using)**

Philippians 4:1-9 New King James Version (NKJV)

1. Stand fast or firm

4 Therefore, my beloved and longed-for brethren, my joy and crown, so **stand fast in the Lord**, beloved.

2. Settle your differences

2 I implore Euodia and I implore Syntyche **to be of the same mind in the Lord**. 3 And I urge you also, true companion, help these women who labored with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the Book of Life.

3. Rejoice

4 **Rejoice in the Lord always**. Again I will say, **rejoice!**

4. Ask God for a Gentle Spirit

5 **Let your gentleness be known to all men**. The Lord is at hand.

5. Pray about Everything

6 Be anxious for nothing, but in **everything by prayer and supplication**, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; 7 and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

6. Think Holy Thoughts

8 Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—**meditate on these things**. 9 The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.

6 topics that might be loosely called “**Christian attitudes**.” If you find yourself limping toward the finish this year, these inspired words can make next year a truly good year.

- Stand Fast
- Settle your differences
- Rejoice
- Gentle Spirit

- Pray
- Think Holy Thoughts

The context of this letter and scripture is Paul imprisoned in a cell with a Roman soldier guarding his cell. Paul imprisoned and chained with Roman guards 24 hours a day. He was on trial for his life with no certain hope of release. I take it that Paul didn't "enjoy" being in prison but he found reasons to rejoice even in that difficult circumstance.

During this solitary confinement, Paul did not grumble or complained of his situation but wrote a letter to the Church to address conflicts, discords and division within it. He gave a 'recipe' of how Christians can live both as individuals and as a community in joy and harmony.

I. Stand Firm

4 Therefore, my beloved and longed-for brethren, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, beloved.

The call to "stand firm" refers to a soldier staying faithfully at his post no matter what happens around him. Let the enemy attack as he will, the soldier's orders are clear: Stand firm!

This command was often repeated by the Apostle Paul:

- 1 Corinthians 15:58, "Stand firm. Let nothing move you."
- 1 Corinthians 16:13, "Stand firm in the faith."
- Galatians 5:1, "Stand firm ... and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery."
- Ephesians 6:11, "Take your stand against the devil's schemes."
- Ephesians 6:13, "Having done everything, to stand."
- Ephesians 6:14, "Stand firm ... with the belt of truth buckled around your waist."

- Philippians 1:27, “Stand firm in one spirit.”
- Colossians 4:12, “Stand firm in all the will of God.”
- 2 Thessalonians 2:15, “Stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you.”

Why this repeated emphasis on standing firm?

Paul had a healthy respect for the devil’s attempts to discourage and distract the children of God. He knew that we would be sorely tempted to leave our post when the bullets of temptation start whizzing by our heads. So he repeats it again and again: Stand firm!

Stay in the Cart Ruts (the narrow road that leads to salvation)

Over time the cart wheels dug deep ruts that hardened until they were called “traces.” A good driver would make sure his wagon wheels were firmly in the traces, and then he let the horses pull the cart to the destination.

This is a parable of the spiritual life. Most days nothing exciting happens. Ninety-nine percent of life is ordinary. You get up, eat breakfast, go to work (or take care of the children), come home, eat supper, go to bed, get up the next day and do it all over again. And the day after that and the day after that. Day in and day out—this is life for most of us.

What is the will of God for you and for me? It is to get up each day and do what you have to do—cheerfully if you can, grumpily if you must. But do it nonetheless. Doing God’s will means staying in the ruts of life day after day after day. Just do what God has given you to do. If you like it, that’s great. If you don’t like it, do it anyway. If you wish you were doing something else, grit your teeth and do it anyway. God blesses those people who do what they have to do each day—and do it even though they might prefer to do something else.

All of us are tempted to “jump the traces” from time to time., I can testify that I have never yet met a man or a woman who prospered after “jumping the traces.” You end up trading one rut for another plus you have guilt inside and broken hearts all around. If you “stay in the traces,” you may be bored tomorrow morning but at least you won’t be embarrassed or ashamed of the choices you made.

2. Settle Your Differences 2-3

2 I implore Euodia and I implore Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. 3 And I urge you also, true companion, help these women who labored with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the Book of Life.

Paul next deals with a difficult and delicate problem inside the Philippian church. It seems that two leading women couldn't get along with each other. One was named "Euodia" (meaning "sweet smell") and the other was named "Syntyche" (meaning "friendly"). We don't know much about these women or the precise nature of their dispute. They were evidently well-known leaders in the church who had a serious falling out. For whatever reason, "Sweet smell" and "Friendly" weren't very sweet or very friendly to each other.

I wonder how these two women felt when they heard their names read in public. Two thousand years later they stand for women who couldn't stand each other. I find it instructive that Paul doesn't give us very many details. We can't tell from his words the background of the problem, and nothing he says lets us know who was right and who was wrong. Instead of taking sides, he simply exhorts these two Christian women to settle their differences. That's a useful principle to remember because in most disputes it usually doesn't matter who started it. Once animosity builds up, there is generally plenty of blame on every hand.

We do know this much. Paul regards these women as genuine believers (their names are written in the Book of Life, v. 3). They are evidently personal friends of his who worked with him in founding the church at Philippi. The word "contended" in verse 2 means to engage in competition and indicates that these women were strong, determined, hard-working, and probably opinionated. They had their own views of how things should be done. With that background, it's easy to see how a rift might develop.

Instead of focusing on the causes, Paul exhorts these two women to "agree"—which literally means to come to one mind. It doesn't mean seeing eye to eye on every detail; instead it indicates a personal choice to focus on the things that united them in Christ.

As we ponder this short section of Scripture, here are six principles for handling our interpersonal problems:

- A. **Separate convictions from opinions**
- B. **Be willing to ask forgiveness**

- C. **Look for opportunities to show kindness in small ways**
- D. **Pray for the success of the other person**
- E. **Ask God to remove bitterness from your heart**
- F. **Ask a friend to hold you accountable in this area (accountability partner)**

WE need to

- A. Agree more ... Argue less
- B. Listen more ... Talk Less
- C. Produce more ... Advertise less
- D. Confess more ... Accuse less
- E. Laugh more ... Fret less
- F. Give more ... Receive less

III. Resolve to Rejoice 4

Paul's third command is quite simple: "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!" (4:4).

Note that the command to rejoice is the only one that is repeated. Why is that? I think it's because we tend to forget this one in the midst of dealing with difficult people and the upsetting problems of life.

When Paul says, “Rejoice always,” **he’s not talking about giddiness or a positive mental attitude.** This is not “put on a happy face” or “look for the silver lining.” The rejoicing he has in mind is **not based on outward circumstances.** That’s crucial because very often our circumstances are quite depressing.

Where was Paul when he wrote these words? In a Roman prison chained to Roman guards 24 hours a day. He was on trial for his life with no certain hope of release. I take it that Paul didn’t “enjoy” being in prison but he found reasons to rejoice even in that difficult circumstance.

One of the pioneers of televangelism and considered the ...BILLY GRAHAM.

Now in his 90s and Interviewed about his Parkinson’s Disease. (interviewed by Larry King)

When asked about how Billy Graham feel about the prospect of his own death?

Oh, I’m not afraid to die. In fact, I’m looking forward to it. I wish that day would hurry up and get here.”

And what does he expect will happen when he dies? “

When I die, an angel is going to take me by the hand and lead me into the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

When asked about how he felt about having Parkinson’s Disease, Dr. Graham replied,

“I feel great about it. It’s been a wonderful experience. I believe the Lord has many lessons to teach me through this disease.”

Surely this is what it means to “Rejoice in the Lord always.”

Do we have reasons to rejoice. Of course we have and how. This is just a tentative list.

- 1) My sins are forgiven
- 2) I have a Savior
- 3) Many Christian friends
- 4) A good church fellowship
- 5) The Word of God to guide me

- 6) The Holy Spirit to lead me
- 7) A wife who loves me
- 8) A healthy daughter
- 9) Good health
- 10) Enough money to pay my bills
- 11) Three new pullovers
- 12) Three good books to read
- 13) Many answered prayers
- 14) People who pray for me
- 15) Worthwhile projects for the future
- 16) New year means a new start
- 17) When I die, things get better not worse

IV. Ask God for a Gentle Spirit. 5

“Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near” (4:5).

This is the quality of “inner calmness

“Make it as clear as you can to all you meet that you’re on their side, working with them and not against them.” (solidarity, empathy and sincere interest in the needs of others)

This quality of “inner calmness” is especially needed in two situations:

1) When you are dealing with someone who is driving you nuts, and

2) When you feel yourself about to blow your top. (Those two situations are often one and the same.)

In that moment—when you feel the mercury rising and you know that very soon you will say or do something you will regret later—that’s when you need to ask God for a gentle spirit.

Here’s a simple question: Would the people who know you best consider you a gentle person? Would that word even pop into their minds when they think about you? Or to make the question harder: Would the people you like least consider you a gentle person? That’s the real test. **Anyone can be gentle around nice people**, but only the spirit of Jesus can enable you to respond gently to people who mistreat you.

This spirit means not to rejoice when your enemies suffer a loss of a loved one or when you see those you dislike having a bad day.

V. Pray about Everything6-7

6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; 7 and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Don’t be anxious. Don’t worry about anything. To which I respond, You gotta be kidding!

But it’s very good advice. Did you know that most of the time you spend worrying is basically wasted emotional energy? Some years ago a professor at a leading American university studied the things people worry about. His research yielded the following results:

40% never happen,

30% concern the past,

12% are needless worries about health, and

10% are about petty issues.

Only 8% are legitimate concerns.

That means that 92% of your “worry time” is wasted energy.

Worry is stewing without doing. Worry is wrong because it assumes that God can't take care of you. He promised to care for you, but when you worry, you are saying, “Lord, I don't believe you can take care of me so I'm going to take matters into my own hands.” WORRY IS A SIN BECUASE IT IS LACK OF FAITH IN GOD

As we enter the new year, we all have our own concerns that trouble us. It may be health issues, or financial pressures, or a big decision you need to make. It could be family problems or marital struggles or issues at school or on the job. Here's my question to you:

Do you know for certain what will happen next year? The answer of course is no.

Can your worrying about the future change the course of events? No.

Then why bother worrying at all? The past is done for, the future is not yet, why let worry ruin the present—the only moment we have?

Worry and prayer are opposites—like water and fire. You can worry or you can pray but you can't do both at the same time.

Paul has three pieces of advice for worriers:

- A. Pray about everything—“in everything by prayer”
- B. Pray with thanksgiving—“with thanksgiving”
- C. Pray with expectation—“present your requests to God”

When you take your burdens to the Lord, he replaces your worries with something much greater: the peace that passes all human understanding. Verse 7 says that peace will “guard” your heart. That's a military metaphor for soldiers guarding the city gate from the inside. When you pray, God's peace becomes a guard on your heart, protecting you from the cares of the world that could otherwise destroy you.

VI. Think Holy Thoughts 8-9

8 Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things. 9 The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.

Our passage closes with an exhortation to think holy thoughts. Did you know that the average person has 10,000 separate thoughts each day? That works out to 3.5 million thoughts a year. If you live to be 75, you will have over 26 million different thoughts. Already most of you have had over 2,000 separate thoughts since you got out of bed this morning. You'll probably have another 8,000 before you hit the sack tonight. Then you'll start all over again tomorrow.

The principle behind Paul's words is simple: **Sin always begins in the mind and so does holiness.** When Paul says "think about such things," the command is in the present tense: "Keep on thinking about these things." Find what is true and think about it. Find the lovely and think about it. Find the virtuous and think about it. Do it and **verse 9 says "the God of peace will be with you."**

You Have the Power!

If you are a Christian, you have within you the power to obey every command in this passage.

You can literally change your mind if you want to. How?

By remembering that all that is best is embodied in a Person! **I am speaking of Jesus Christ.** If you link yourself with him, you are joined with the highest moral power in the universe.

He is the embodiment of everything Paul has commanded us to do.

It's all in Jesus.

All virtue, **all beauty, all holiness, all truth, all that is good and right is found in him.** This is not some abstract philosophy but a **call to a personal relationship.**

My exhortation is simple. Hold on to Jesus! Think about him! Rest in him! Live in him! When Jesus Christ reigns in your heart, you will ...

- Stand Firm
- Settle Your Differences

- Resolve to Rejoice
- Ask God for a Gentle Spirit
- Pray About Everything
- Think Holy Thoughts

How does he do it?

He does it by the magnetic power of his transforming life. As you hold on to Jesus, he pulls you up from the muck and mire of the old life. He pulls you up from bitterness, up from futility, up from resentment, up from anger, up from compromise, up from impurity, up from dishonesty, up from selfishness, up from greed, up from pessimism, and up from despair.

We stand at the brink of a new year—the final year of this century looms before us and a new millennium is only 12 months away. The year 2015 is filled with great possibilities. What will it mean for you?

If you want my advice, here it is: Lay hold of Jesus by faith. Walk with him. Talk with him. Learn of him. Hold on and don't let go. Do that and your life will never be the same.

I WISH YOU ALL A BLESSED NEW YEAR