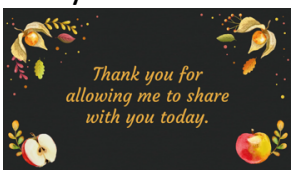
Sermon: RFCoG – Nov. 22, 2026



Scripture:

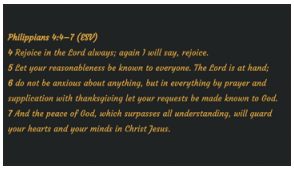
Philippians 4:4–7 (ESV)
4 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.
5 Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand;
6 do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.
7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.



Introduction:

Thank you for allowing me to share with you today. It is always a privilege when I get to share God's Word. Let's start with a short prayer:

Lord, thank you for bringing us together today and allowing us to have fellowship and offer you praise. Please open our hearts and our minds as we read and study your Word. Thank you for paying our debt on the cross so we can come to you and have life. In Jesus name, AMEN.



Setup:

Pastor Paul asked if I would mind giving the Thanksgiving Sermon this year. With that holiday in mind, I wanted to focus on "giving thanks." There are a great many

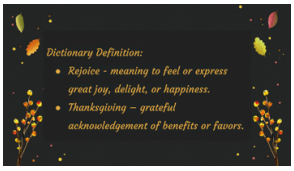
passages that we can focus on when it comes to thanksgiving and today, I would like to talk about Philippians 4:4-7.

I started off focusing on verses 6-7 only, but as I started to read and think about the topic, I decided to include verses 4-5 as well. We will not break down and dissect every aspect of these passages. If we did, we would be here until Thanksgiving! Instead, I will focus on these two areas: Rejoice and Thanksgiving.

To do this, I will share how I understood these passages initially when I came to faith in Christ, and how my understanding has grown throughout my Spiritual Journey. Hopefully you will connect with some part of this message, and it benefits you as much as it benefits me by getting to share with you all today.

While rejoicing and thanksgiving are complimentary to one another, early on, I found myself conflating their meanings and not fully understanding the differences. Because of this, when I would read the Apostle Paul's letter to the church in Philippi, I would read these passages and think, "This concept sounds good, but it's NOT at all realistic."

The problem comes when we do not explore and seek out the deeper meaning of scripture. On the surface, these passages sound like they are telling us to, "Rejoice ALWAYS" followed by "do not be anxious" and "in everything, give thanks!"



As a new Christian, I remember thinking, "Yea, right!" Talk about easier said than done!

"Rejoice, always?" Really LORD? Maybe I'm not understanding what "rejoice" and "thanksgiving" means?

- Rejoice - meaning to feel or express great joy, delight, or happiness.
- Thanksgiving – grateful acknowledgement of benefits or favors.

With that level of understanding, Philippians 4:4-7 makes it sound like I should be rejoicing and giving thanks to everything going on in my life, the GOOD and the BAD. Is this what Paul is really saying?

When things are going well, it is easy to rejoice and give thanks. When work is going smoothly, when everyone is healthy, when the heater and A/C are working as they should and our vehicles are fully functional, I would read these passages and say, “Thank you LORD. God is GOOD!”

What happens when life is NOT going smoothly? What happens when a loved one is ill, it’s 40 degrees out and the heater is on the fritz, or when your daily commute requires a vehicle and it won’t start?

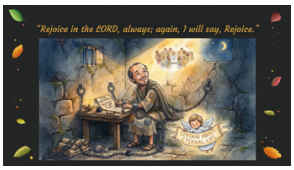
During those times, that beginner level of understanding of Philippians 4:4-7 sounds like an impossibility. It makes it sound as if Paul is sharing some Theological Concept that sounds good on paper, but it is NOT achievable.

Can you imagine going to Pastor Paul and sharing about your vehicle issues or a health concern, and he happily replies, “Give thanks that your car doesn’t work” or “Find joy in your illness.” I would likely walk away thinking, “Uh, what just happened?” I might then send an email to Tim James and Sandy saying, “I think Pastor needs a vacation. I’m not sure he’s thinking straight.” (haha)

As a side note – I may use phrases like “Baby Christian” and “Mature Christian.” These are not meant as a derogatory remark. I have found during my own Spiritual Formation that I have areas that fall within that whole spectrum. I believe it is important to realize that we all might fall within that spectrum in a great many areas. I may have thought about a specific area in greater detail because the LORD convicted me in a way that led to deeper research. I can then read a passage or story, share during Bible study and realize, I need more discernment. I wanted to mention that because I find people comment that they “should know more,” yet they know a great many things.

Back to Paul. Is the Apostle Paul really telling us to be happy and find great joy in these worldly situations, or was my shallow understanding causing me to misunderstand and misrepresent what Paul is telling the church?

The truth is the later, and I would like to take a little time to dive deeper into that context.

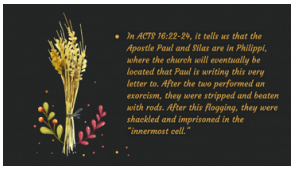


Apostle Paul:

It will help to start by looking at the Apostle Paul and review what has happened to him during his journey after meeting Christ on the Road to Damascus.

Take the Letter of Philippians, which we are reading from today. It was written to the church in Philippi around A.D. 60. It also happens to be written during a time when Paul was imprisoned!

That is important to remember, because when we read verse 4, “Rejoice in the LORD, always; again, I will say, Rejoice.” We can understand that this is not some abstract, theological concept that Paul is sharing with us. One that NO ONE can live by. When Paul writes this, these are words coming from a man who is currently imprisoned, unsure if he will be starved, beaten, or killed. These words are written from a man who’s worldly life is uncertain, but he IS certain about his ETERNAL life. This is written by a man who KNOWS that God is faithful, KNOWS that GOD is loving and IN control! AMEN



I also think it is important, for context, to share that this is NOT Paul’s first hardship he has suffered for his faith.

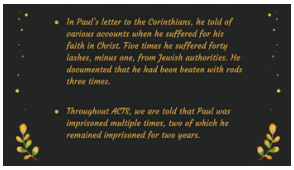
In ACTS 16:22-24, it tells us that the Apostle Paul and Silas are in Philippi, where the church will eventually be located that Paul is writing this very letter to. After the two performed an exorcism, they were stripped and beaten with rods. After this flogging, they were shackled and imprisoned in the “innermost cell.”



In ACTS 21:27-36, in Jerusalem, the Jews stirred up the crowd, who dragged him out and beat him until the Roman guards arrived.

In ACTS 24:19, the Jews from Antioch and Iconium persuaded the crowds to stone Paul and drag him from the city, where they presumed he was dead.

Those Jewish leaders, they sure like to use the crowds for their sinful acts.



In Paul's letter to the Corinthians, he told of various accounts when he suffered for his faith in Christ. Five times he suffered forty lashes, minus one, from Jewish authorities. He documented that he had been beaten with rods three times.

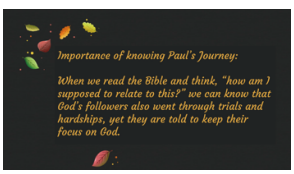
Throughout ACTS, we are told that Paul was imprisoned multiple times, two of which he remained imprisoned for two years.

So, why is this important? Why do we need this context for understanding Philippians 4?

We can now read the writings of Paul knowing HOW much he suffered for his faith in Jesus. We can also personally relate to more with Paul's writings. While we may not have faced the same trials and tribulations as the Apostle Paul, we can know that Paul KNOWS what it is like to suffer.



For me, this context not only allows me to relate to Paul's writings more, but it also helps me recognize the importance of context when reading difficult passages. Is anyone here like me, when I read the Bible and I come across a difficult lesson, I immediately think, "That sounds good, but HOW am I supposed to live that out?"



If we do not dig a little deeper, that mindset can snowball into the idea that the Bible has concepts and teachings that sound good, but practically, are impossible to live out. We do NOT want our Spiritual Journey to lead us to that conclusion.

Again, easier said than done.

If you are like me, and someone is telling me about their difficult situation, but they are cheerful and at peace, I think, “Wait until you have a difficult month, or a whole year that seems to have went completely off the rails. Will you still be this confident, faithful and thankful?”

When I have those initial reactions, I pray for the LORD to correct my posture and set me straight. That was not always the case.

My first year married to Tonya was one of those “off the rails” years. Two weeks before we were married, my father passed. The day after we were married, we moved my sickly mother into our spare room. Over the next few months, my grandfather passed and my dog died! Then, one year to the day of my father’s passing, my mother passed. That year left me reeling, and I was NOT even a believer! I know the bitterness I had as a non-believer, so I can just imagine a believer, new to the faith or even one that has grown, having their faith challenged by continual struggles.

That is what is so important about knowing Paul’s journey. When we read the Bible and think, “how am I supposed to relate to this?” we can know that God’s followers also went through trials and hardships, yet they are told to keep their focus on God.

During difficult times, rejoicing in the LORD may seem impossible, and being thankful or glad about anything while you are during a difficult season is just as unattainable.

Knowing scripture, in context, allows us to see that while we are here in this flesh, there is suffering and there will be hurdles, yet we can find solace in knowing THIS is not the end.

Let’s go back to Philippians 4:4-7. I hope I didn’t take us too far off the beaten path.



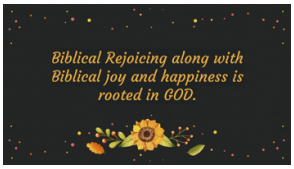
"Rejoice in the LORD, always; again, I will say, Rejoice."

Initially, I did not realize that rejoice centers on GOD and His promises. In my mind, rejoice here was more focused on the things God is providing and the things happening to me.

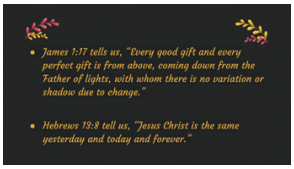
That is not what is written and part of my confusion came from reading my own understanding into scripture instead of letting scripture dictate the meaning. We call that eisegesis, when we read our own meanings and bias into scripture.



Biblical Rejoicing is more than a fleeting joy or happiness. Biblical Rejoicing is grounding our joy and our happiness in GOD. In WHO God IS, and what GOD has DONE. When we read the Psalms and when we go back and read the stories of the Prophets, we can see repeatedly the language, "Rejoice in the LORD."



Biblical Rejoicing, Biblical joy and happiness is rooted in GOD.



James 1:17 tells us, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change."

Hebrews 13:8 tell us, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever."



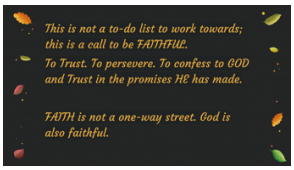
Why is this important when reading Philippians and when reading the Bible? Because happiness and joy do not come from the world, they come from God. If they came from the world, they would be fleeting and ever changing.

We see this everywhere we look when people are focused on the World and not God. How often do we hear about those with an abundance of worldly "riches", yet we continually see interviews talking about how depressed and suicidal they are. If we are honest with ourselves, every one of us likely struggles with that worldly view of joy and happiness from time to time.

In Philippians, Paul says he's had much and he's had little, and his happiness is not grounded in those things. As we continue reading, Paul says, "I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need."

And what is that secret? "I can do all things through him who strengthens me." He is grounding his joy, his peace, his happiness in the one who will not change. In the one who is Eternal, is Love, is Just and IS in control.

Once I understood where Paul was directing his focus and why he phrased it the way he did, passages like Philippians 4:4 started to make a lot more sense.



Now, you might say to me, "Robert, I get it, but dude … I'm still struggling! HOW can I find happiness and joy with what is going on around me?"

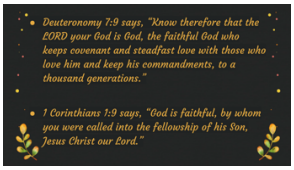
To that, I say, reread verse 7. "The peace of GOD, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

That's the good news of these passages; I don't need to know! Guess what, you don't need to know, either! That is NOT our concern. When you read this, realize, it is not saying, "figure out how to be happy in your situation."

It is saying, “The peace of GOD, which you DO NOT UNDERSTAND, will guard you.”

This is not a to-do list to work towards; this is a call to be FAITHFUL. To Trust. To persevere. To confess to GOD and Trust in the promises HE has made.

You see, FAITH is not a one-way street. God is also faithful.



Deuteronomy 7:9 says, “Know therefore that the LORD your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations.”

1 Corinthians 1:9 says, “God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.”



Paul is saying, within his writings, that GOD was FAITHFUL first, and it is through THAT faith that we can come to Him in Faith. God is GOOD so we can know GOODNESS. God is LOVE so we can know LOVE.

Listen, Biblical Faith that scripture references is not about feeling good in the moment, it is about who you are putting your loyalty and trust in. Are you putting your faith in an ever-changing World, or are you putting it in a God with steadfast love?



Did I lose anyone? I’m almost done! “I can almost hear Tonya saying, Thank the LORD!” (haha)

Going back to Paul and Philippians, we will conclude by addressing, “In everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving!”

Supplication here reflects giving it over to God, because we are acknowledging our own limitations. Through prayer and supplication, we are taking a posture of TRUST and SUBMISSION.



That prayer might sound something like,

“God, I don’t know HOW or WHY life is like it is right now, but I know YOU are Merciful, Loving and In Control. Your will be done. Thank you for saving a sinner like me.”

Closing:

To wrap up, I would like to revisit the story about my year of hardship and remind everyone that God is in control. At the time, I was not a believer. I did not know the status of my father’s salvation, but my mother was a believer in Jesus. Fast forward to today, I can now see how that situation, despite being so difficult and so stressing, also brought with it blessings. Looking back does not answer all my questions, but I can see where I was blessed along the way.

What affect did my mother talking about Jesus have on me? Did not knowing my father’s belief, or lack of, help bring me to Christ? Did my unbelief negatively impact my father’s Spiritual Journey? These are questions I still wonder about.

What I do not wonder about is how Good GOD is. Despite being an angry atheist, I was still blessed with the opportunity to care for my mother and have a whole extra year with her.

Despite my unbelief, my path crossed with a wonderful woman who I married, despite her Biblical warnings against getting hitched to a non-believer.

Despite my hardened heart and being unworthy of God’s Grace, HE allowed me into His family anyway.



This Holiday season, be thankful for that … knowing we are all unworthy, yet He loves us.

Our closing will be a bit different. Throughout scripture, we read that people rejoice in the LORD with Prayer and Song, so we will end with a few hymns and close with our prayer.

My wonderful wife got the plague on Thursday and has been in bed for a few days. She thinks she is well enough to lead us in the hymns. I chose two hymns off YouTube so Diana did not need to stay to the end of both services.

Feel free to stand if you would like. Thank you all for allowing me to preach today. God bless.

Songs:



