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***Joy and Peace
Philippians 4:4-9***

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, ***Rejoice***.^[c] ⁵ Let your gentleness be known to everyone. ***The Lord is near***. 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.

⁸ Finally, brothers and sisters, ***whatever is true***, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything ***worthy of praise***, ***think about these things***.

⁹ As for the things that you have learned and received and heard and noticed in me, do them, and the God of peace will be with you.

With ALL THAT WE ARE FACING—in our world, our country, our homes---
there is plenty of anxiety, fear and grief to go around, right?

We don't have to go very far to find something that worries us—every single day!

Which means, Paul's words can seem OUT OF TOUCH—

doesn't he realize how hard life is?

What he's saying seems almost crazy!

Paul says: REJOICE AND AGAIN I SAY REJOICE!

Don't be anxious,

Think about what is worthy of praise,

And peace beyond understanding will guard your hearts and minds!

How can he say that----and expect us to believe it?

Well, what if HE'S NOT CRAZY?

What if he is telling us the most powerful thing

we can do as followers of Jesus?

Paul's life wasn't easy—he was imprisoned, and persecuted as he wrote this!

And the church in Philippi had its share of trouble!

So what does PAUL MEAN when he urges us to REJOICE?

Is he telling us to just conjure up happy feelings?

Or, is he speaking about **JOY**?
 And Joy is *not based on good circumstances*,
 Or good feelings.
 It's deeper, more meaningful,
 And you can experience it *in good times, AND bad!*

Rejoicing is NOT ABOUT FEELINGS,
 It's about actions, decisions, and an attitude toward life!
 Feelings are important,
 but they are not the whole story.
 Feelings can change, but the love of God does not change.
 And God wants us to rejoice!

REJOICE comes from the Greek word charis,
 Which means grace—that amazing gift from God.
 Not something that we create!

So, if we want to UNDERSTAND Paul's telling us to rejoice,
 What if we thought of it as **CELEBRATION**?
 What if rejoice, means celebrate?

That would make sense in the LARGER CONTEXT of Paul's letter—
 Because he is not just writing to individuals,
 He is speaking to the whole church--
 He is telling us to *celebrate—TOGETHER!*

We saw this yesterday, at the great FALL FESTIVAL on our church grounds—
 Over 100 people visited, dozens of kids from church, neighborhood,
 PNS, food pantry families—
 came to enjoy games, food, fellowship, and dressing up!
 It was a time of rejoicing! Celebrating!
 Celebrating the joy of being a family of faith—reaching out into our community!

And you know what?
 We also celebrate *every single Sunday*, when we come to **WORSHIP!**
 We celebrate our faith, our loving God,
 Our Savior and his grace!

Regardless of what we are FEELING,
 Regardless of the troubles in our lives,

We can rejoice.

We can celebrate---and it's *so much easier when we do it together*, isn't it?
Sometimes rejoicing, worshiping, celebrating,
Helps us get beyond our pain, and away from focusing on our troubles.

As followers of Jesus, we can ALWAYS rejoice, always WORSHIP.

It doesn't depend on feelings or circumstance—
Because it's based on ***WHO we are, and who God is.***
We are Christians,
And our God is a loving God.

Rejoicing may evoke IMAGES of jumping, dancing, being loud!

But worship can happen even when we are quieter--
(which is great news for Presbyterians!)

Christians are PEOPLE WHO CELEBRATE—

because we have been forgiven,
and we have received the gift of new and everlasting life--from Jesus!
We are Easter people who believe in resurrection,
even when the world feels like Good Friday.

Even before Jesus, God's people celebrated!

God told them to celebrate the Passover, and their rescue from Egypt.
The Harvest, the Ten Commandments,
The many gifts of provision and providence.

Part of our faith is CELEBRATING—TOGETHER!

We have an *entire liturgical CALENDAR* based on celebrations--
like Advent, Christmas, Easter, Pentecost, and everything in between!

We are PARTY PEOPLE, my friends!

It's no mistake that Jesus was often seen at weddings, parties, dinners,
and gatherings with gifts, food, and fellowship!

And, we can ALWAYS CELEBRATE,

Because God is always good, always faithful,
God always has a relationship with us, through Jesus.
Life may change, but God does not!
God's love is everlasting, and our salvation is neverending!
New life starts now.....and does not stop!

Paul may SEEM CRAZY, OR UNREALISTIC---

but he is giving us the ***best ADVICE ever*** for a life of joy and faith!

So, how can YOU MAKE A DECISION to rejoice? And celebrate? And worship?

It might be in church, or in nature, with friends, or with family?

How can we find even more opportunities to rejoice as a church?

I texted many of the volunteers yesterday

that when we ***make church fun and joyful***, people want to join!

If we have ***joy, others want to know that JOY!***

And Paul doesn't just talk about us finding JOY---

He says we can also experience the ***PEACE of Christ*** beyond all understanding,

By focusing on everything that is ***GOOD!***

What IS THAT, IN YOUR LIFE?

What is good? What brings a smile to your face?

What lifts your heart, even when you are weighed down by grief or pain?

Tell me some things---what is good for you, right now?

JOY for Christians is NOT A FEELING---

It's not based on circumstance, or possessions.

Joy is found in ***relationships***---Like our relationship with Jesus,
and our relationships with others!

What are those relationships IN YOUR LIFE?

How can you nurture them?

When was the last time you made time, ***for friends and fellowship?***

How do you prioritize the relationships in this family of faith?

Jerry sent me a great article this week from *The Atlantic* by Ian Bogost,
called ***"The Missing Ingredient of Modern Life"***.

While he doesn't speak overtly about religious rejoicing--

His article points to what Paul is saying!

Ian Bogost, *The Missing Ingredient of Modern Life*, The Atlantic, Oct 2026.

He believes that what we need today---

The missing ingredient---is WONDER.

And not just the wonder of a trip up the Rocky Mountains, or standing at the shore,

But the wonder in our ***everyday lives.***

When was the last time YOU EXPERIENCED WONDER?

I saw a lot *yesterday*, seeing little kiddos try on costumes,
Or Barbara Devilbiss painting their faces!
Or watching them pick their own little pumpkin,
Or play in a kiddie pool, filled with kernels of corn
(Kind of the way kids have a lot of fun with empty boxes!)

Seeing the world through the EYES OF KIDS,

Helps us *notice* little things that bring wonder....
Like an ant carrying something on the sidewalk,
A chipmunk running around,
Or a beaver, fox or some deer walking around the church property!

Paying attention to a baby's smile,

Or hearing the giggles of kids,
Noticing the sunrise, or fall leaves...
All of this opens our hearts to wonder....and joy.
And that brings healing, and hope.

Bogost says that most of us have LOST THE CAPACITY FOR WONDER—

Because modern life is all about *speed, efficiency, and optimization*.
He refers to the “*maxxing*” trends today---
where every activity is designed to be done ‘*to the max*’,
especially if helps us get things done *faster*!

Our HEALTH is maxxed--- our smart watches count every step,
track every heartbeat,
and show us our calendar and texts, right on our wrists!

Our TRAVEL is maxxed---we don't stop to see things along the way,
because we have Ways and Google Maps, telling us the fastest route!

Our ATTENTION is maxxed---every ad is short and fast-paced,
because we don't have any spare time,
we're too busy optimizing the hours of every day!
I preach about 10 minutes less than when I started pastoring---
Because our attention is less!

Our TIME is maxxed---we use Instacart, Door Dash, Amazon,

so we can get what we want---right now!

And of course, HOLIDAYS are maxxed!

Lowe's is full of Christmas trees that came out in September.

Pumpkin spice has taken over the world,

And Dollar tree has the Fall décor right next to the Christmas stuff!

It's not even Halloween!

Almost every app 'TRACKS' OUR PROGRESS,

Whether reading on Kindle,

Or counting calories,

Even the Bible app keeps track of how many days you read in a row...

So you earn badges and can 'compete' with others on the app!

Wouldn't Jesus be so proud???

So, what is the ANTIDOTE to all this maxxng?

It's *wonder*.

It's *rejoicing*.

It's *paying attention* to the wonderful things in everyday life,

No matter how small or insignificant.

Wonder and rejoicing may not help our time, or finances,

It *won't help us do things faster*.

It might actually slow us down---

And be WORTH EVERY MOMENT!

Bogost writes: *Optimization is terrific if you want to get somewhere else in the future. But it's terrible for being where you actually are RIGHT NOW.*

When goals overtake experience,

you lose the freedom to encounter your life as it happens.

And when you lose that ability, you are no longer living in full.

We used to optimize work Now we optimize life

as though living were another JOB.

Too many of us are maxxng our way out of the experiences and perspectives that give us maximum MEANING.

Ian Bogost, *The Missing Ingredient of Modern Life*, The Atlantic, Oct 2026.

This is why we NEED God-sightings!

Because when we hear how someone else saw God,

It helps us pay more attention to God, right?

And paying attention to God's gifts,

Is the key to rejoicing, and celebrating, and worshiping!
And following in the footsteps of Jesus!

Think of the STORIES JESUS TOLD, and the sermons that he preached.

About ordinary life---Like the kingdom of God as a tiny mustard seed,
Or a pearl in a field,
Or birds, clothed by God!
He drew people's attention to the ***gifts of ORDINARY LIFE***,
Because he wants us to ***FIND GOD in ordinary life.***

In the time of Jesus, PEOPLE CELEBRATED LOCAL GODS AND CAESAR.

Paul directs us to a ***different kind*** of celebration---
Rejoicing and worshiping our living, loving God,
And our Savior Jesus.

The path to JOY---and REJOICING—is found in daily life,
And paying ATTENTION to all the little gifts that we encounter,
The little rays of light that we see,
And the wonder that we find.

Friends, hear the GOOD NEWS of the Gospel:

We can rejoice, we can find peace beyond understanding,
Not because everything is great—but because GOD IS GREAT!
Not because we feel good, or things are going well,
But because we have a good relationship with God,
and our siblings in the body of Christ!

And we have opportunities to worship, to share food and fellowship,

To dress up and laugh together, at a Fall Festival!
For the gifts of God, all God's people can say together, Amen!