

# Philippians 4:4-8 Brother Stephen Decker

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[ 0 : 00 ] Amen. Al's friend Ed worried about everything. You may know some people like that. He worried about the economy. He worried about his job. He worried about everything you could possibly imagine. Worry had plowed deep furrows into his brow. And if there had been an award for being the most pessimistic, Ed would have won by a landslide. He was a worrier.

So when Al met Ed walking down the street with a spring in his step and a smile on his face, twinkle in his eye, Al couldn't believe it. This didn't look like Ed. Ed, I've never seen you this way. What has happened? He said, I've discovered the solution to worry. What? What is it? I found a man I can pay to worry for me. And he said, well, how much do you pay him? A thousand dollars a week. Ed, you can't afford a thousand dollars a week. Hey, that's his problem. And a lot of us wish we could get rid of worry that easily, don't we? I think if worry could be boxed as a weight loss program, a lot of us would be invisible because we tend to worry and that's part of our lives. And we worry to our spiritual and even our physical harm. And at times we drain every ounce of our energy climbing mountains that are really just molehills. But then when the situations come about and the mountains really are there, Mr. Anxiety comes skiing down that mountain like an Olympic champion. I imagine worry as a gangster with a face like the Joker.

A double-breasted black pin-stripe suit. White spats. Head thrown back with a wicked laughter. Finger slowly squeezing the trigger about to riddle us with distress. Anybody ever met that fellow worry?

[ 2 : 31 ] He's out there, isn't he? We worry about our financial future. We worry about unexpected bills, loss of income, perhaps loss of job, imminent surgery. All of those things come into our minds. Loss of relationships.

That bothers us. Children leaving. Sometimes children who are leaving the church and no longer following the Lord. And that's a concern for some of us. Difficulty with a job or at home. Impending death.

We think about that in our minds. Best I can tell, death is running at about 100% now. We think about that from time to time. Getting older. Looking older. Being too fat, too thin, too whatever. We worry. To get some of us to stop worrying would be like trying to pry a tooth out of a rabbit gorilla. We just love to hang on to it. And we do.

And it harms us. It accomplishes as much as sawing sawdust. It doesn't really accomplish anything, does it? It just hurts our own spirit and the people that are around us.

[ 3 : 53 ] That's what worry does. So how do we calm that troubled spirit? Well, Paul gives us an answer. Actually, four answers.

In Philippians chapter 4. If you have your Bibles, you're welcome to turn there. Philippians chapter 4. Philippians chapter 4. And in Philippians chapter 4, beginning at verse 4, we'll look at some of the verses and some of the answers the apostle gives to us.

Verse 4 begins like this. Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I will say, rejoice.

Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication.

With thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

[ 5 : 19 ] 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. So we'll look today at four ways that Paul recommends for us to overcome worry.

And the first is this, to overcome worry, we need to rejoice in every circumstance. The text in verse 4 says, rejoice in the Lord always.

And you say, but Paul, I mean, that's impossible. You don't know what I'm going through. You don't know my boss. You don't know the situation I'm in. You don't know my health condition. You don't understand. These are really big preface. It's impossible to rejoice in every circumstance. But notice something very carefully in the text.

[ 6 : 30 ] And this is what we want to observe this morning. Rejoice. And then the little phrase in the Lord. In the Lord.

Now, Paul is saying, do not base your joy on agreeable circumstances or upon anything that is around you that is affecting your life.

Rejoice in the Lord. Rejoice in the fact that you have a relationship with God. And that is where the joy comes from.

Now, in circumstances, most of us know that at times we get pretty heavy hearted. And that's normal. It's practical, actually. We can't help that. Sometimes we experience pain, emotional pain. We have broken relationships. And all of those are heavy upon us. But Paul says, don't focus on the circumstance. Focus on the God with whom you have this wonderful relationship.

[ 7 : 41 ] Now, Paul wrote this book from a prison in Rome. He awaited a verdict. Or were they going to set him free?

Or were they going to execute him? And I'd say, if anyone had the right to worry, it was Paul. Now, let's think about his life for a minute. Shipwrecked.

A day and the night in the ocean. Beaten with stripes many times. Stoned. He lived a life of deprivation, privation.

And here is Paul in prison, waiting for the verdict. And he says, rejoice in the Lord. Rejoice in your relationship with God.

He exhorts us to a holy joy and delight in God. He presents it as a duty.

[ 8 : 40 ] You notice it's not a suggestion here. He said as a command, rejoice in your relationship with God. Enjoy him at all times, at all situations, at all conditions.

When we suffer, when we are afflicted, and we have that as part of our experience, don't we? Somebody says, well, Steve, I haven't suffered any. And I say, well, just be patient. You know, it's coming.

It'll be here before you know it. He had said it before in Philippians 3.1. He said, finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord.

And here he says, rejoice in the Lord always. And he says, just in case you didn't get it, again I say it, rejoice in the Lord.

Now, this duty that we have has tremendous consequences for you and for me in our lives. It affects our ability to cope with life and the challenges that it brings.

[ 9 : 45 ] And we're called to do it and to do it faithfully. So don't put off rejoicing. Not rejoice in the Lord occasionally, but rejoice in the Lord always.

Always. Not just when the bills are paid, not when the income is up, not when the family's not sick or everybody's doing fine. Rejoice in the Lord always.

And I don't know about you, but I need that reminder from time to time. I do. I tend to forget it. And we need to bring that thing back to the front of our mind and the top of our faith.

And say, well, how do we do that, Steve, when I'm up to my eyeballs in the quicksand of worry? Well, you know the secret to that. It's really by faith, isn't it?

It's by faith. we rest in the God who perfectly influences, we call this the providence of God, the affairs and the very details of our lives.

[ 10 : 59 ] He's in control. Now, if he's not in control, he's not sovereign. There's nothing that gets or surprises God that's going on today.

He knows what is happening and he knows what's happening in your life and he knows the challenges that you are going through and that I am going through. Charles Stanley is one of my favorite preachers and I heard him say, give his testimony.

This was a short time before he passed away and he said, you know, I was in church and I was an associate pastor and I was getting a lot of criticism. There are a few people who really just didn't like me and I had a hard time preaching.

I knew they were out in the auditorium and it just weighed heavy on my heart and one day I was praying and the Lord said to me, hey, stop worrying about this.

I did this. This is part of my plan for you and he said, he got back in the pulpit the next Sunday and preached with the joy that he hadn't experienced in a long time.

[12:04] Listen, dear people, God is in control. of the circumstances that you and I are experiencing and he knows what he's doing. He knows just the right trial, just the right difficulty to bring into our lives to conform us to the image of his dear son.

Now often I pace the deck of the ship of my life and I forget that God God is the pilot at the wheel. He's controlling things. Maybe the waves crash over the deck but then I begin to think God's at the helm. He's got this thing under control and I don't know about you but that brings peace to my heart. faith in the Lord enables us to rejoice always in our relationship with him. That relationship with God is secure and will never be broken.

It's based on his promise not our faithfulness. He is faithful and so we have that relationship. Somebody said at best if worry is causing you to have wrinkles well you need a faith lift and I think sometimes we really do.

[13:28] People want to experience joy. They're looking for it desperately. Comedians make millions of dollars getting people to change their state of mind and they pay to go see these folks because basically they have unhappy lives.

You can drive around any city and find a sign advertising happy hour four o'clock or whatever time it is. Had a rough day?

Come up to the bar. Have a few drinks. You'll find happiness. That's what you're looking for. Well you'll change your state but it won't be very long.

It'll last about as long as a worm in a chicken coop and we just can't find joy in those things. They're empty. People are going to empty wells.

A friend of mine Mark White was sharing with me he had trusted the Lord and he was saying Steve you know when I was in my teens and early 20s I tried everything to fill up this emptiness inside of me and I was frustrated.

[14:42] I tried alcohol and drugs and sex and making money and gaining popularity I tried all of those things he said but Steve the bucket didn't have a bottom in it.

You see we've got an infinite space inside of us that only can be filled by an infinite being. Only God can satisfy those needs. So people throw their money at rock stars.

One of my students came in and she was talking about a concert that she had attended and I said well who was it? Well they the kids in college talk about music people I've never heard of so I didn't know who it was.

And I said well how much was the ticket? And she said five hundred dollars. I almost fell out of a chair five hundred dollars. Do you know what you can buy with five hundred dollars?

More than a couple hours of entertainment? And she said oh yeah I go to concerts all the time. She was looking for a way to change the way she felt.

[15:51] She was going to the wrong place. In fact many do. They throw their money at these people at concerts and they look at evil I think evil looking creatures who douse them with ear splitting noise just so they can change the way they feel.

You see people desperately want to feel peace and joy in their lives don't they? So the first thing then in the text that Paul has given us here is rejoice in the Lord always.

In the Lord always. the second thing is to develop a gentle spirit. Look at verse 5 if you have your text.

Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand. Well how do we define a gentle spirit?

It might be translated reasonableness in your text but the word suggests forbearing or a non-retaliatory spirit.

[17:05] Now you and I know that the majority of the stress and worry we have comes from people in our lives doesn't it? And that's the condition that we face.

Our bosses, husbands, relatives, wives, children, neighbors, they are the ones that bring a lot of anxiety into our situation.

But who demonstrates the spirit of gentleness? Well no one better than the Lord Jesus. In Philippians chapter 2 it says have this mind in you which was also in Christ Jesus who though he was God thought it not robbery equal with God thought it not robbery to become a man bear our burdens and become a bond servant and die in our place.

Now that's the attitude that Christ had and guess what Christ lives within you and Christ lives within me if you're a believer and he has the ability to bring us that joy.

I can't do that on my own. Can't do it but listen there is one within you who is totally capable of helping you have peace even in the roughest circumstances.

[ 18 : 26 ] It goes back to that deal of having faith. What motivates us to do this? And in the last part of verse 5 he says the Lord is at hand the imminent return of Christ.

The way things are looking now in the world we think man it may be any day right? He's coming back. Will he find us living consistently? Will he find us living peacefully and in unity?

Will he find us living in faith and trust in him even though things around us seem to be out of control? That's the second thing Paul says. Develop a gentle spirit.

It's an unselfish spirit. It's a merciful spirit. It's a gracious spirit. It's giving people what they don't deserve.

It's considering others their rights more important than your own. That's a gentle spirit. It's tolerance. It's not tolerance of evil.

[ 19 : 30 ] No. It's tolerance of when people mistreat you and treat you unjustly. You tolerate that even as Christ did. He reviled when he was reviled.

He reviled not again. So that was the second thing. Rejoice in the Lord. Always develop a gentle spirit. What about the third suggestion that Paul gives us?

And he says this, get addicted to prayer. Get addicted to prayer. Let your gentleness be known.

And then verse 6, be anxious for nothing. Notice he's not giving us the option here. He's saying be anxious for nothing.

But in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God and the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

[ 20 : 33 ] Be anxious for nothing. So when we feel the tendrils of worry creeping into our thinking and bothering us and making us uncomfortable and distressed we need to go to prayer.

We need to pray to the Lord. Austrian composer Franz Joseph Haydn was in the company of some distinguished guest and the conversation turned to how to restore mental energies when you've been exhausted by a long day of studies and work and one said well I drink a bottle of wine.

Another with him said well I try to get around the company of good friends and that kind of helps me overcome this hard labor and Haydn revealed that it was his practice to retire to his study and engage in prayer.

He says nothing he explained exerted more a more happy and effective influence on his heart and mind than the power of prayer.

And if you want to read a very strong book on that by an old theologian E.M. Bounds The Power of Prayer it's probably one of the best books you can read I've read it multiple times.

[ 21 : 55 ] So be anxious for nothing. What is anxiety? Well it's unnecessary worry about the future. It's like working out on a treadmill. You wear yourself out but you don't go anywhere.

And so when worry robs you of your joy it's an inside job. It's an inside job. Here's the difficulty. Worry questions the goodness of God.

It does. It questions the goodness of God in your life. It declares hey I'm not really sure all things will work out together for good. Notice he doesn't say all things are good.

He just says they'll work out for good ultimately. Wars, money, problems, recession. How about the culture that we live in today?

1965 it was the sexual revolution and up in the 70s or 80s it was the homosexual revolution and now it's insanity. It's just insanity.

[ 23 : 01 ] Isaiah 5 tells us that when people call evil good and good evil that is a sign of the judgment of God on a culture.

Frankly I believe we're in that right now. The judgment of God is on this country because look what has happened. So we look all around us and we say what do we do about that? Well we worry about it but we have to believe that God keeps his promises.

He has a purpose. He's in control. He's not taken by surprise by any of this and it will ultimately come to his glory.

So Paul says or God says to you I will be a friend that sticks closer than a what? A brother. That's a promise.

God doesn't break his promise like you do or I do. He keeps his promise. He'll be with us. He'll be beside us. I'll never leave you. I'll never forsake you. I'm with you. I know what's going on and I am working out some good purpose in your life and in the world.

[ 24 : 12 ] So what do we pray for then? We go to God in prayer. We pray for everything. Be anxious for nothing but in everything by prayer and supplication.

Those two words can be combined to say petition. Petition God. Lord I've got this problem and here it is and you spell it out specifically.

I have a child that is leaving the church and has no interest in spiritual things anymore. I'm worried about that. I can't bear that burden myself.

but I know you can. Your shoulders are strong enough to handle that. So prayer means petitioning God specifically.

You identify the problem and you transfer the problem to God's shoulder and when worry knocks on the door you say Jesus I can't handle that.

[ 25 : 10 ] You answer the door. This is your deal. But you say I can't stop dwelling on the problem. I was listening to a person the other day just going over and over again about a problem they were going through and they just were dwelling on the details of that so much and we needed to turn that around a little bit.

Wait a minute. Let's not focus on the circumstances. Let's focus on the God who controls the circumstances. And we tend to do that. I can't stop dwelling on this.

Well if you rehearse the problem over and over in your mind you'll become bitter for one thing. That will ruin your Christian testimony. And then you'll feel sorry for yourself.

Well we got to refocus. I suppose the train comes through every Sunday about this time right?

That's a new experience.

for me. So what do we do? Be anxious for nothing but in everything by prayer and supplication. And look at this next part. This is Lord how in the world can I do this?

[ 26 : 26 ] With thanksgiving. With thanksgiving. Can we thank God for things that are happening to us? You make specific requests known to God and you thank him with praise.

thanksgiving implies praise. So we thank God for his wisdom. God you know what's going on.

You're all wise. You're perfectly in control.

I thank you for that. God I thank you for your grace. I thank you for the pleasant things you bring into my life. I was talking to a lady yesterday and she had her daughter had had a heart transplant.

Her son just had part of his leg amputated. She was going through debilitating back pain and having more and more difficulty walking.

walking and you know one of the things she said to me as we were talking she says you know I have these Canadian geese that come up and around my deck and that just gives me joy.

[ 27 : 42 ] you know where did that come from? Is it not God that gives us those pleasant things to enjoy? He does. How about birds singing in the springtime?

You hear them they start going wild right about the beginning of spring. Or the delicate beauty of a rose. That's God's grace.

That's God's grace to you and to me. A sunset turning the clouds a brilliant scarlet. How about a pristine blanket of newly fallen snow?

The quietness and the beauty of that. The aroma of flowers that bloom in your garden. The glory of a wonderful piece of music.

Here's one that I enjoy. A baby's smile. Anybody got grandchildren in here? I see a few gray hairs out there. Those babies give us joy don't they?

[ 28 : 41 ] The joy of laughter. A baby's laughter. Can there be anything better than that? We have a couple of great grandchildren and we really enjoy them and we keep them.

And I enjoy them for a couple of hours. My wife's a little more enduring than I am. The stunning grandeur of a mountain.

heaven. How about the mountain stream dancing over stones and that sound of the bubbling brook? You know, think about it.

That's God's grace. Thank him for his grace. Praise him for his grace. These are all pleasant things that exist that God has given to us to give us peace.

Sometimes when we're really, really troubled. And listen, on your best day and on your worst day, you are blessed every day with pleasures that God has graced you with all around.

[ 29 : 42 ] Thank God for his grace. Thank God for his grace. And enjoy that. Thank him and praise him. Thank him for his power that he can do all things and all things are working according to his will.

Thank him for his purpose in your life. Thank him for the result that this trial, this difficulty that he's allowed into your life will cause some good result.

The pain will birth something that is for his glory. He's the divine carpenter. And he has a blueprint. And the blueprint includes the hammer, the saw, and the furnace.

We have to go through all of those things because he is changing us gradually to reflect the character of his own son. It takes suffering to do that.

Sorry, that's just the way it is. So he's working and playing a major role in our lives. Theologians call it progressive sanctification.

[ 30 : 52 ] He's changing us, isn't he, every day. Lord, I'm thankful that you have a plan for my life. I don't understand it. Your ways are not my ways.

But I've got faith in you. I know I can trust you. That is where we have to go. Job had major problems, didn't he? Lost his wealth, lost his family, lost his health.

He complained. And finally, God revealed himself in Job 38, 39, and all the wonders of nature. He said, Job, can you do any of these things? He said, no, I cannot. Job said, I repent in dust and ashes.

I've heard of you, but now my eye has seen you. We need to ask God to give us a bigger vision of who he is so that we can trust the greatness of our God.

Pray, with praise and thanksgiving. That's the third thing. Instead of letting your problems overwhelm you, let the infinite power and grace and goodness of God overwhelm you.

[ 32 : 02 ] So I don't know how, I still feel heavy, but inside I've got peace because I know you and I have a relationship with you. What is the result then of our praying?

Well, it is peace. Let your request be made known to God and the peace of God. The peace of God. What a phrase.

It's a mysterious phrase, isn't it? Have you experienced the peace of God in your life amidst the turmoil that you're going through? It's there for us.

It's there for you. It's there for me. It surpasses all understanding. You can't even comprehend it. How in the world can you give me peace in this situation? That's what Paul is saying here.

A submarine was being tested. It was submerged many, many hours. The captain woke up and asked the officer if the storm had bothered him last night.

[ 32 : 59 ] And he said, what storm? I didn't even notice it. The sub was so deep in the water that the storm had no effect.

it had reached a depth where the fury of the waves did not even affect it at all. Sailors call this the cushion of the sea.

The trusting soul prays with thanksgiving and praise. And that soul enters the depths of the peace of God which we can't even describe with words.

And the disturbances on the service are there. We're aware of them. But inside there's peace. And what results when we pray with praise?

Well it guards us. It's a military term isn't it? It guards us. We are in a spiritual battle. It's raging on. The battle is going on in the minds of your mind my mind the minds of the world.

[ 34 : 00 ] Satan is in a mind battle. That's what's going on. But he says when you do this when you pray with thanksgiving and give thanks for everything I'll put a military guard around you and I'll keep you safe.

In wartime guards were preventing or would prevent hostile and hostile invasion and praying with praise and thanksgiving sets up a guard and keeps that toxic worry from overcoming or overwhelming you.

The guards also kept the inhabitants inside didn't they? Because what that was is hey you need to focus on God not on the enemy outside the walls but the God who's protecting you.

Focus on God. Remember rejoice in the Lord. If you do not guard your hearts and minds with prayer and thanksgiving you leave yourself open.

You leave a weak spot where Satan world and flesh and the devil can attack. I'm kind of a Civil War buff. Stonewall Jackson was asked about his philosophy of warfare and he said this never fight against heavy odds.

[ 35 : 18 ] If by any possible maneuvering you can hurl your own force on only a part and that at the weakest part of your enemy and crush it.

such tactics will win every time and a small army may destroy a large one in detail and repeated victory will make it invincible.

Throw your army against the weak points. Now that's what our enemy does. He uses the very same tactic and when we fail to pray and we focus on the circumstances and we worry and we're anxious and we're distressed we leave a weak point in our lives for God to attack.

Praying with thanksgiving eliminates the weak points. It puts a military guard around us and keeps that toxic influence out of our lives and keeps us focused on the Lord.

So what has Paul told us so far? Rejoice in the Lord. Ask for a gentle, tolerant, non-retaliatory, forgiving, unselfish spirit, gentleness and then pray with thanksgiving and praise for everything that comes along.

[ 36 : 40 ] And lastly to overcome worry meditate on the positive. What does Paul say to us here finally? And he said remember he says it will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

The captain of the guard is Jesus himself. fighting for us. Finally brethren whatever things are true and 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 focus on it center your mind on it what is true God's word is true now dear people you and I need to be in the word of God we need to be reading it every day if you don't have a daily reading plan to read through the Bible get one truth for life is a wonderful website you can go to and they'll send it to you every morning and you can read through the Bible in a year but what are things are true what things are noble what's worthy of respect and are just what things conform to God's standard or confirm God's standards if they don't

Paul says don't focus your mind on those things how about lovely worthy of being loved of good report things that have a good reputation there's something out there he said that can have a good reputation we need to stay away from that and things that have virtue they build us up and they're strong and they help us to develop strong character and praiseworthy not newsworthy if you listen to the news all the time you're going to be depressed you need to focus on things of the Lord and he says think about these things meditate on them deliberate over them evaluate them over and over again read and reread scripture and it will be a part of your mind you realize that Solomon said as a man thinks so is he what you let me translate that in today's English what you think about comes about see what you focus on garbage in garbage out right but you focus on the word of God and the character of God and the person of Jesus Christ that begins to transform you in the very image of your son and people look at you and say man only God can explain the way they're living and our lives become a testimony don't they and that will attract people to the Lord Jesus Christ so how do we overcome worry rejoice in the Lord in every circumstance as that's in your relationship with God develop a gentle spirit develop the habit of prayer and praise with thanksgiving and then focus on the things of the Lord things that are true and honorable think about those things center your mind on those things the greater your God the smaller your problem the smaller your problem the greater your peace

I like this in closing there is a quiet place far from the rapid pace where God can soothe my troubled mind sheltered by tree and flower there in my quiet hour with him my cares are left behind whether a garden small or on a mountain tall new strength and courage there I find then from my quiet place I go prepared to face a new day with love for all mankind may God help us to transfer our trust and cares and worry to him so we can enjoy the peace of God that surpasses all understanding Jamie are you coming now if anyone would like to just say

[ 41 : 08 ] Lord I'm going to transfer my anxiety and my worry and trust to you I'm going to have more faith I'm going to get a faith lift and depend on you to get me through these difficulties depend on you to give me peace if you would like to make say that publicly you're welcome to do that but we'll sing one or two verses of this and then we'll be finished thank you so Thank you.

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[ 44 : 50 ] Thank you.

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