



MAY 30, 2021 | PASTOR PETER YI

“A Peace That Guards Our Hearts” (Philippians 4:4-7)

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! ⁵ Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. ⁶ Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

What advice would you give to a friend that was going through some really hard times? Let's say that this friend was in a different part of the world and he was part of a very tiny Christian minority. Less than .1% of the people were members of the group that your friend was in. And this group had existed for no more than a few years. It wasn't a group that had been long established for centuries. The group he was a part of also began tumultuously. Yes, there was an exciting beginning when a small number of them spontaneously formed this group, and slowly more were added to their number, but this group was seen to be a threat to the majority culture. These troubles came upon your friend specifically because of his affiliation to that group. He and his compatriots had already had their share of small and large attacks by the population, who truly did not understand what they were about. Even one of their own had nearly lost his life for the cause. So those were some of the external pressures that were coming on him and the group he was a part of. They didn't know if another mob would assemble outside their meeting place, or if the government would begin turning the screws tighter and tighter upon them.

However, on top of all of that, there were internal conflicts as well. There was a small faction that had formed from within, and they were disturbing the stability of the entire group. This faction seemed orthodox, they appeared to teach the same thing, but their motives were suspect. There were other internal conflicts as well. Two prominent women in the group were in strong disagreement about some matter and their strained relationship began to seep into the life of the community. It was really becoming an unhealthy distraction. So this was the situation your friend was in. What advice would you give him? Would it be, keep a stiff upper lip? Or one of my favorites, “Hey, just hang in there.” Or how about the ever popular, “Everything's gonna be alright.” Isn't it funny how trifle our well wishes could be?

Well, in today's passage the Apostle Paul presents us with three pieces of advice that can be applied to every difficult situation, to every trial, to every uncertain future, and to every experience of injustice. Whatever difficulty you are going through, these three things you must do. And we have to do them because they are commands from God. **They are Rejoice, Be Gentle, Do not be anxious.** Two positives and a negative. Just think about these three things for a second, before we take a deep dive into them. Rejoice, Be gentle, Do not be anxious. I don't think these would be the first three things that would come to our minds and out of our mouths, if a friend was going through really hard times. But here it is. So let's take a closer look.

First, we are to rejoice in the Lord always.

I think the most important part of this command are the words, “in the Lord.” That means that the foundation of our rejoicing, or the reason for our rejoicing, even the object of our rejoicing is because of Jesus and what he has done for us; because he is in us and we are in him. Our rejoicing is not primarily because our life situation got better.



The main reason for our rejoicing is because of the Lord and even when great things happen to us like dating the right person, or getting a new job, or buying a new house, our rejoicing is unto the Lord and in the Lord and for the Lord.

The second thing I want us to notice is how superlative, how over the top, Paul thinks rejoicing should be. The verb tense he uses implies the rejoicing is continuous. Then he says that our rejoicing should be done always. That is all the time, in every circumstance. Finally, our rejoicing is to be done forever. Paul says using the future tense, “And I will say it again: Rejoice!” Rejoice continually, rejoice in every situation, and rejoice forever. Now, why does rejoicing take such center stage to Paul?

If you remember, we had mentioned that one of the overarching themes of this letter was joy. Paul first mentions rejoicing in chapter one. There were these orthodox teachers of the Gospel, but they had motives that were insincere. As Paul looks over this situation he says, “The most important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice, Yes, and I will continue to rejoice (1:18)”

The next time he mentions rejoicing is a chapter later. There Paul is thinking about all the incredible Gospel work the Philippians were doing. He calls it “the sacrifice and service coming from your faith.” And on top of that he’s thinking about the final offering, the drink offering, which here represents, Paul’s final breath, that is, his faithful Gospel ministry to the very end, being poured out on top of the service and sacrifice of the Philippian Christians.” So, Paul says, even if the last drop of my life-offering is poured out, I rejoice!! And you also should rejoice with me!

Then when we get to chapter 3 Paul says, “Further, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you.” He’s telling them yet again to rejoice. And just in case the Philippians are wondering, “uh Paul, we get the point, you want us to rejoice,” he says, “It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again.” In fact, rejoicing he says, serves as a safeguard for you. It secures your faith. It protects your faith. It stabilizes your faith. How does it do that? Well first, we must remember that there are thousands of things that can de-stabilize our faith; is that not true? Here are the two big ones. Sin and trials. In fact, I think that everything that can destabilize our faith will fall under these two categories. So, it’s interesting that Paul tells us that in the midst of all the things that can destabilize and disrupt our faith, here is the one thing that can stabilize our faith—rejoicing. Isn’t that interesting? Here’s an Old Testament parallel from Nehemiah 8:10. He says, “The joy of the Lord is your strength.”

So, what forms does rejoicing take? Well, surely it must include corporate worship. Worship is about rejoicing in the Lord. It’s about God’s people coming together, because they are God’s people, and when they come together, they worship him, they sing to him, they rejoice in the Lord. As well, it must include private and personal rejoicing. Throughout the day, we rejoice in the Lord as the creator of this beautiful planet. We rejoice in the Lord as our baby takes her first step. We rejoice in the Lord for an edifying conversation. We rejoice in the Lord for his providential guidance. We rejoice in the Lord for answered prayer. Just think about it. The more you rejoice, the more your faith is protected. And just think about it even in your own life. The times when you rejoiced much, were times you grew most. And the time when you rejoiced little, is when you hardly grew at all. So rejoicing is no insignificant thing, which brings us to the next thing about rejoicing.

Our rejoicing is a command. At first it seems strange that rejoicing should be a command. But if we think about it more deeply, we’ll see that it’s not only good that it’s a command, but that it’s absolutely necessary that it is. Just consider every command from God. Are any of God’s commands, even a single one of them, not intended for our good? Is it good for us to have no other gods before us?



Is it good for us to keep the sabbath day holy? Is it good for us to not kill people? Is it good for us not to lie, cheat and steal? Is it good for us to gather as a faith community? Is it good for us to be sexually pure? All of them are for our good.

Therefore, in this light, it is no less good for us to rejoice than it is not to commit adultery. For example, when a man and woman get married and say their vows to remain faithful to each other, they are saying I will abide by the Seventh Command, you shall not commit adultery. What are these marriage vows? They are commands that the couple are agreeing to live by. Every day of your marriage you are in one sense saying, you are commanding each other, Do not commit adultery and aren't you also "commanding" each other, respect me, treat me as an equal, love me, talk to me, care for me, make love to me. You don't say, I command you, as you slam your scepter onto the ground, but it's implied. So, for God to say, "I command you to rejoice" we should not take it lightly and we should never view it as an option. Therefore, if rejoicing is a command, then what is it when we choose not to rejoice? That's right, it is a sin. That's why John Piper has this amazing title of his book, "The Dangerous Duty of Delight." It is a duty!

Let's look at the next one. Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.

Now, if you thought rejoicing was a strange command to give to a friend that was going through hard times, this one may be even stranger. If the walls were falling inward onto your life, and if the future looked uncertain, would you be expecting your most trusted mentor to say to you, "Peter, above all things, let people see your gentleness." I think I would say, "Get out of here. That's not the kind of advice I was looking for." So why does Paul say it here? I think I know why. You know, when life is full of uncertainty, or when the stress is really piling up, or there are problems on top of problems, or if you've experienced a grave injustice, you and I will make every excuse to legitimize sin. All of us will give ourselves a pass, an excuse to lash out, to be angry, to swear, to post something really volatile on social media. And not only will we tolerate that sin in our own lives, we will expect others to excuse us when we do sin. We will expect them to say, "Oh well, I understand why he did that to me, he was having a rough day." Or "I don't blame him for that behavior, after all, he did just lose go through that tragedy." And we justify that kind of behavior by saying, "I was just being real." Or "I have to be true to myself."

Really? Is that how it works? Is that how God's people are to be? Not at all. Rather we are commanded by God Almighty, by Christ Almighty, "Let your gentleness be evident to all."

What does it mean to be gentle? Well, first, it's a mandatory qualification to possess, if you are to be an elder. Listen to how an elder is described.

(1 Timothy 3:2) Now the overseer is to be above reproach, faithful to his wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, ³ not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. ⁴ He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him, and he must do so in a manner worthy of full respect.

Gentleness as opposed to violent. Gentle as opposed to being a drunk. Gentleness as opposed to being quarrelsome. Gentle, like being temperate, self-controlled, respectable, and hospitable.

Then in Titus Paul writes this to all Christians and here the word for gentle is translated, "considerate." Listen:

(Titus 3:1) Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, ² to slander no one, to be peaceable and **considerate**, and always to be gentle toward everyone.



That's a very helpful description of the demeanor of a Christian. Now, does that describe you?

There's another reason why we are to be gentle. It affects our witness. Paul says, "Let your gentleness be evident to all." That includes people within the church and outside the church. That means we are to be gentle when we are waiting in line at Costco, and we are to be gentle when you're about to get into a tussle with another soccer mom, and when commenting on a volatile article on social media. We will never win someone to Christ with aggressive language or even an aggressive tone. But we may gain a hearing, we may make a friend with our gentleness, with our humility, with our listening ear, with our serving, or with our love.

Now here's the most important reason Paul gives for why we should be gentle. "The Lord is near." What does that have to do with being gentle? Well to answer that question we need to understand what the phrase means. It can mean that the Lord is nearby. He's close at hand. He lives within you, so he's there to help you be gentle. He's there to keep you from sinning. So that's one meaning. The other meaning is that the Lord will soon return. He will return to earth. Now, of these two, I believe Paul is referring to this definition. Why? Well, the church is undergoing persecution. They are being unjustly treated. And like Peter the disciple, they may think, it's time to pick up the sword, to fight fire with fire, an eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth. And they could easily find a way to justify it. But if we know that the Lord is near, that the Lord is coming back, then we also know that the Lord is judge and judge he will. And not only is the Lord the judge, he is also the avenger of God's people. Consider the difference between judge and avenger. The judge is an impartial decider of guilt or innocence. The avenger is the one who pursues the wrongdoer. He's the one who pays back the wrongdoer for the wrong he has done. That's who Jesus is. So, in light of that, be gentle. God's in control. The injustice you endured didn't catch him off guard. The wrong that was done to you is not out of his purview. Every wrong done against us will be taken care of by Jesus, either through hell or through the Cross. So, all you need to do at this time is to be gentle, noticeably gent, and that to all people.

You know, this made me think about that one Polish pastor in Alberta who was arrested for conducting church services. Now, I have my own, very strong opinions on the legality of what the government is doing to religious gatherings, but that's for another day. But this pastor himself recorded the police knocking on the doors of the church and his angry tirade, yelling and screaming at the health officer and the police who had come. And yes we can say, he formerly lived under a communist, totalitarian state. We can say, yes his religious rights are being encroached upon. Yes, we can say all those things, but the way he responded, was not in any way, gentle. I am 100% certain that the watching world will not look at that and say, "Yes, sign me up! I too want to be a Christian like him." I would hope that he would re-think his posture; not his position, but his posture, and would portray a gentler tone, showing respect and speaking kindly, because it does indeed affect our witness.

Finally, do not be anxious about anything.

The first two were positive commands. Rejoice always. Let your gentleness be evident to all. But this final command is stated in the negative. Do not be anxious about anything. Now, let's be clear, not all worry or anxiety is wrong. But some expressions of anxiety are clearly wrong. Paul commends us to show concern (same word as anxiety) for the Lord's affairs. We are to show concern, to be anxious for the well-being of someone in our faith community. We are to show concern for the spiritual growth of those around us. So not all anxiety or worry is wrong.

Then what kind of worry is the wrong kind of worry? It's the worry that forgets the presence and love and care and sovereignty of God. Listen to the powerful words spoken by our Lord.



(Matthew 6:25) “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? ²⁷ Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?

(Matthew 6:28) “And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. ²⁹ Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. ³⁰ If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? ³¹ So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ ³² For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. ³³ But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. ³⁴ Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

There it is. Jesus tells us what the bad kind of worry is. It’s the absence of faith in God. Worry, anxiety, again, same Greek word, comes about because we are not trusting in God. So, Paul tells us here, “Do not be anxious about anything?” Why, because God is in control of everything. He’s aware of every situation, every unexpected event, every uncertain future. He knows already. Now, look at what Paul doesn’t say. He doesn’t say, God’s in control so do nothing. Sit back, hold tight, and enjoy the ride. He doesn’t say that. What does he say? Pray, pray pray, pray. Four times he says pray. Where is the four times? Prayer, petition, thanksgiving, requests. Four times. Are you anxious about something? Are you worried about something? Don’t do nothing. Don’t just sit there. Pray pray, pray, pray! Lift your concerns to God. Share your pain with God. Tell God about your fear of the unknown. Cry out to him for justice. That’s what we should be doing.

Here’s what’s going to happen when we do this. Are you ready? The most amazing thing will happen. Peace. You will receive the peace of God. The peace that comes from God. In light of the immediate context, it must be peace to relieve the anxiety. It’ll be a peace that transcends all human understanding. That means to most people, it will make no sense as to why you are so at peace; why everyone is screaming their heads off, but you are quietly at peace. It won’t make any sense. I’ll give you an example.

Paul was on his 2nd missionary journey and he arrived at a certain city, and they encountered a lady who was a slave, was demon possessed, and had a supernatural ability to forecast the future. Her owners loved that she had this ability and made a good profit by exploiting her. Paul exorcised the evil spirit from her, and with that she lost her ability to tell the future. Well, her owners were enraged, and dragged Paul and his companion Silas to the authorities, and accused them, not of healing a woman, not of ruining their little business, but for disorderly conduct, civil disobedience, inciting a riot. They were severely flogged, and thrown into prison, and the jailer was to guard them carefully in the inner cell, while their feet were put in stocks. I’m sure it was incredibly uncomfortable and painful to be in this predicament and here’s how the story continues,

(Acts 16:25) About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them.

What were they doing? Well, they were rejoicing, weren’t they? They were singing hymns to God. And what else were they doing? They were praying. So, do you think they were anxious? I honestly don’t think that they were. Do you think the peace of God had come upon them? I would think that it had. So here we see rejoicing always. We see no hint of being anxious, and instead praying. Now, where’s the gentleness? Well, let’s read on:



²⁶ Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everyone’s chains came loose. ²⁷ The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. ²⁸ But Paul shouted, “Don’t harm yourself! We are all here!”

Ahh, there it is. Gentleness. He could have said. Let’s RUN!! Or forget about the jailer, he’s the enemy. No, even though they could have escaped and left the jailer and the rest behind. What does he do instead? He cares for him. And what did that gentleness lead to? Well let’s read on and find out.

(Acts 16:29) The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. ³⁰ He then brought them out and asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”

(Acts 16:31) They replied, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household.” ³² Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. ³³ At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his household were baptized. ³⁴ The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole household.

Paul’s gentleness aided his Gospel witness, with some help from a miraculous prison break. Now try and guess where this event occurred? That’s right, in Philippi. It was in Philippi, in a prison, that Paul put into practice these three things. Rejoicing, Gentleness, and Prayer rather than anxiousness.

Now, let’s close by looking at the final phrase about what the peace of God will do. “It will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” This tells us that our hearts and minds need to be guarded. To guard something means there are enemies trying to get in. That’s why we have guards. Anxiety is a great enemy. Anxiety that may come from a great trial can be a great enemy indeed. That anxiety seeks to get into your mind. That’s where it begins doesn’t it? And then it gets into your heart. And it doesn’t want to leave. Anxiety desires to settle down in our minds and hearts because anxiety has the tendency to break down the walls that protects our minds and hearts. That guard, that soldier, that watchman, that wall is the supernatural peace of God that we have because of Christ Jesus. It’s only available to those who are in Christ.

How can you get in on that peace? You must first turn from your sin, reject your sin, reject your rejection of God. And as you turn away from your sin, turn toward Jesus Christ. He died for you and for your sin. Pray to him. Ask him to come into your life, and he will.

So church, rejoice always. Be gentle toward everyone, don’t be overcome by anxiety, but rather pray, and wait for God’s peace. It will come and it will guard your hearts.

Let’s pray.

Father great commands you have given to us today. To rejoice in the Lord always, to be gentle to all people, to not be anxious, but to pray. We obey them gladly and help us to obey them better. In Jesus name, Amen.

Benediction:

Num. 6:24 “ ‘The LORD bless you
and keep you;
²⁵ the LORD make his face shine on you
and be gracious to you;
²⁶ the LORD turn his face toward you
and give you peace.” ’