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|  | By **Martha Rodman** on December 19, 2024 |

*4 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Philippians 4:4 ESV*.I read this verse in the NLT this week. It says: *Always be full of joy in the Lord, I say it again--rejoice.* What a challenge! Paul writes about many things through his letters, but to tell us to always be full of joy, or rejoicing? Many of my friends and family members face challenging situations. These situations are not ones that would naturally lead them to be full of joy. Or are they?I will admit that many in my life are surrounded by life's difficulties: financial, health and relational. But, so was the church at Philippi! Paul founded this church during his second missionary journey and developed a close relationship with them. The book (letter) is so encouraging, even though Paul is likely writing this letter from prison. As I ponder what makes him capable of encouraging them to rejoice always? I realize, once again, it is his own relationship with Jesus.My friends, when we forget to focus on Him, it is easy to fall into discouragement and depression. Last night I heard some test results that are not trending in the way we want. My heart said, "no, Lord". I began to focus on her numbers and grew sadder. But then the Holy Spirit stopped me, and I had to say, Lord, I choose to trust You. I choose to know you are bigger than these test results. In the midst of this battle, I reminded myself that the government is upon His shoulders, not mine. He rules and reigns over all things. We do not have to walk this alone, but with Him and His plan.Peace was restored. I can't rejoice at this point in the test results. However, I can rejoice in the fact that God is in charge. All night I thought about this encouragement by Paul. *Always be full of joy.*"*Father, I am not full of joy, I only am about 25% joyful right now. Please help me."* I deliberately reminded myself of who our Savior is and what He has done for me and others. Joy started to grow. My friends, this continues to be a learning process in my life, rejoicing always isn't for our natural man!Today I read through the book of 1 Peter. These gentile believers were living in Asia Minor and were suffering persecution because of their beliefs.3*All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is by his great mercy that we have been born again, because God raised Jesus Christ from the dead*. *Now we live with great expectation, 4 and we have a priceless inheritance—an inheritance that is kept in heaven for you, pure and undefiled, beyond the reach of change and decay. 5 And through your faith, God is protecting you by his power until you receive this salvation, which is ready to be revealed on the last day for all to see.* 1 Peter 1:3-5. NLT. I don't know about you, but sometimes I forget to live with "great expectation". The things of this world become so real, I forget they are temporary. What joy to know that God is protecting us by His power. Our enemy would like us to quit trusting Him. To think our faith is in vain, but in actuality, we have a living faith. A living faith that He wants to grow and develop so we can be overcomers, no matter what we face. James reminds us to *count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, 3 for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness*. James 1: 2-3.There is that word again, joy. It isn't easy to "count it all joy". Maybe our first response is to whine or feel fear. Once we finish with that, we need to "count it all joy". To learn to rejoice in all things, we need to find Him in our circumstances. We have to search for Him in each situation. Where is He? What is He trying to do in and through it? We can't do that until and unless we apply His Word to our circumstance.  I searched my concordance for all the verses containing the word "rejoice". There are a lot! Just reading them, cause my joy level to increase.Remember, this is Paul, writing through the Holy Spirit, that wrote this encouragement to *always be full of joy.* He endured so much more than most of us can even imagine. I believe he must have found a secret in getting through them, and that secret was rejoicing. I would like to encourage you to start to look at your situation. Then start to thank God (the beginning of rejoicing) for the most difficult thing in your life. Bring Him into it. Thank Him for what He has planned. Follow the Spirit and you will find heaviness and sadness fleeing away. Joy will come. Do it out loud. Something about declaring and thanking Him (the person we trust!) out loud begins to break through our old thought patterns. I did this for the situation I talked about above. I realized that person belongs to Christ, and she is in His hands. He only wants what is best for her. I am not stopping praying for healing for her, because that is the children's bread. However, I am choosing not to be influenced by the test numbers either.Often we think the word "rejoice" is a spontaneous reaction to circumstances. Where we laugh out loud or possibly jump up and down in glee. However, to a believer, it is a response to knowing that God is working His salvation in it. He is also working His salvation through it. There is an anticipation of what He is going to do in and through it. Expectation of His moving becomes our focus and trust.Friends, rejoicing is something that often must be a choice. But, as we choose to rejoice, faith will arise and we will see His handiwork in our situation. Try it! It works.*Father, please teach us how to rejoice. There are so many reasons to doubt, dread, and fear in our lives. But the good news You have brought to us, gives us even more reason to rejoice! In Jesus' Name, amen.* |