

Date: October 11, 2020

Scripture: Philippians 4:1-9

Title: ATTITUDE AND THOUGHTS

Our Bible passage for today has one purpose. It offers us clear and practical instructions on how to find joy in our lives. Stop and think for a minute: when was the last time you experienced true, undisturbed joy? Have you ever experienced it?

Comedian Paul Jensen shares a beautiful story about his four-year-old son. They were out walking when they found a small rubber ball, the kind you get from a cheap vending machine. His son asked if he could keep the ball, and Paul said yes. Paul says, “When I told my son that he could keep the ball, he looked up at me, very excitedly and said, ‘This is the best day EVER!’” Then Paul Jensen adds, “And at that moment, I hated everything about being an adult.”

Why is it so hard, for adults to find joy? When was the last time you got excited like Paul’s son did over the ball? Why is it so hard for us, to sustain a mindset, of complete peace and overflowing joy?

Catholic spiritual director Frederick von Hugel says, that when candidates are considered for sainthood, they’re examined for evidence of joy. Because, as he says, “there is no such thing as a sad saint.” Think about that for a minute, there’s no such thing as a sad saint.

If evidence of joy is one of the criteria for sainthood, then I don’t know if some of us would make the cut. And that’s why I appreciate these clear and practical instructions Paul gave us in Philippians 4. Paul doesn’t just tell us how to find joy. He *commands* us to be joyful, and then repeats the command, in case we weren’t paying attention. Paul writes: “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!”

Notice: he tells us what to do, **rejoice**; and then how to do it, **in the Lord**, and how often to do it, **always**. Paul says, there are three essential steps, to take us from where we are now, to a life of rejoicing.

The first step, is to replace worry, with trust in God. Paul writes, “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!” Then he tells us how you do that. “Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. **Do not be anxious about anything . . .**” Wouldn’t that be great? “The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything . . .” But, how do you do that?

It’s difficult. Our minds **were not** made to be empty. We experience thousands of thoughts each day. And, unless we’re a very special person, some of those thoughts are not pleasant. How do we go about choosing, only positive thoughts?

There’s a Bible App, by a company called YouVersion. Every year, the producers of this app, announce the most popular Bible verse, chosen by its readers’ searches (about 4 million readers).

In 2019, the most popular verse, in this online Bible was, Philippians 4:6, in the New Living Translation. It reads like this: “Don’t worry about anything; instead pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank God for all God has done.”

Verse 6 is written as a command. This how we're to live. "Don't worry about anything; instead pray about everything."

Ask yourself this question: If there's a God, which there is, and if that God is all-powerful, which God is, and if God is the embodiment of love, which God is, then what in the world do we have to worry about? I'm talking to myself, as well as to you.

Worry comes from two sinful beliefs: They are, God's character and God's purposes, cannot be trusted. God's character consists of goodness and love. When we doubt God's goodness and God's love, and doubt God's plans and purposes for us, then we get twisted up, in worry and anxiety.

It's very true, in times of disappointment and heartbreak. Worry says such things as, "God couldn't possibly be in this situation. God couldn't be walking with me through this, God couldn't be teaching me anything through this. And God couldn't possibly heal my heart from this." So, when we can't see God in our circumstances, then we lose hope.

Trying not to worry, is like trying not to think about green elephants. Instead of trying to force the anxiety away, replace your worry with thoughts, focused on God's goodness.

Bethany Hamilton began surfing as a child, and she believed God was calling her to a career, as a professional surfer. There was no doubt, she had the talent. At one time, she was ranked the #1 amateur teen surfer, in Hawaii.

But at age 13, Bethany was attacked by a tiger shark while on her surfboard. She survived the attack, but lost her left arm just below the shoulder.

Most of us would be devastated, if we suffered a disabling injury, that could end our life's dream. But Bethany didn't lose her faith. She believed God could work through her pain and disability. Instead of looking inward, and letting fear dominate her thoughts, Bethany decided to look for ways to help others. Soon after the attack, she began to raise money to restore a man's eyesight. While visiting New York City, she gave her ski coat, to a homeless girl. When asked about the gift, she said she had more than she needed in life.

Bethany's pastor, Steve Thompson, said, "She's looking forward to the future. She's asking herself, 'How can I show the world, I still have a life, that I enjoy my life, and that my life is filled with joy?' She has an underlying trust, that God is taking care of her." That's the first instruction, for walking the path to joy. Stop worrying. God is taking care of you. Trust God.

The second instruction, for walking the path to joy is, to develop a gratitude attitude. Notice that sixth verse again: "Don't worry about anything; instead pray about everything. Tell God what you need and thank him for all he has done." Do you thank God every day for everything, God has done?

Best-selling author and speaker Tony Robbins, tells of interviewing the billionaire investor Sir John Templeton. Tony asked Templeton, "What's the secret to wealth?" Templeton said, "Tony, it's what you teach . . . Gratitude! You know Tony, we've both met people who have a billion dollars, and they're miserable. So they're

truly poor. And we both know people, who seemingly have nothing, yet they're grateful for the breath of life, for everything. They're rich beyond compare."

According to Templeton, a gratitude attitude, is the source of wealth and happiness. It sees possibilities and opportunities in all circumstances. More importantly, an attitude of gratitude reminds us, that God is present with us in all our circumstances. We are children of God, and we take God's Spirit with us, into every circumstance. If we can see God in every circumstance, good or bad, then we can move forward with hope.

And that brings us to the final instruction for walking the path to joy: First, replace worry with trust in God. Secondly, develop a gratitude attitude. **And finally, focus your thoughts, on that, which is noble and praiseworthy.**

Beginning with verse 8, Paul writes some of the most beautiful words in the scriptures saying: "Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, if anything is excellent or praiseworthy, think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me, put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you."

Are your thoughts noble, are they pure, excellent or praiseworthy? Have you noticed that as a society, we have become increasingly crude, in our language, in our entertainment, in the things we value? I think, our values reflect those of our neighbors, rather than those of God. In the language of psychologist David Reisman, we have become an outer-directed society, rather than an inner-directed society.

When you walk with God, and trust in God, your thoughts will reflect the character of God. It doesn't mean, that your life will magically change. Your circumstances, your outside world, may remain the same. But your ability to see God, in your circumstances, will change your inside world. And that's where joy comes from.

Ken Lindner is CEO of Ken Lindner & Associates and the author of the book, *Crunch Time: 8 Steps to Making the Right Life Decisions at the Right Time* (2004). Ken is also a championship Paddle Tennis player.

A few years ago, Ken's team lost in the final round of a national Paddle Tennis tournament. Ken was determined to learn from this disappointment. So he decided to go up into the stands and watch the winning team play a few rounds.

Ken got an entirely different view of the game, and of his opponents, when he saw them play from the stands. From up there, he could see the Big Picture. He recognized the other teams' techniques, their strategy, their weaknesses. As Ken sat there and soaked up a whole new perspective on his opponents' game, he realized that he could apply this wisdom to every part of his life. As he writes in his book *Crunch Time*, "The lesson was: Far too often, while fighting our day-to-day battles on the ground, we never look beyond ourselves, or the immediate moment, situation, need or craving at hand. Therefore, we fail to view things from the fuller, richer, wider context of the Big Picture."

When we walk with God, we are able to take a Big Picture view of our lives. We are able to replace worry, with trust in God, choose a gratitude attitude, and focus our

thoughts on those things that are noble, pure, admirable, excellent and praiseworthy. And the result is joy.

A Catholic priest named (Yo ha nas) Johannes Tauler tells of meeting a poor man along the road one day. Tauler said, "God give you a good day, my friend." The poor man answered, "I thank God, I never have a bad day." Tauler, astonished, kept silent for a moment, then added, "God give you a happy life, my friend." The poor man answered, "I thank God, I'm never unhappy." Tauler cried, "Never unhappy! What do you mean?"

The man replied, "Well, when it's sunshine, I thank God, when it rains, I thank God, when I have plenty, I thank God, when I'm hungry, I thank God; and since God's will is my will, and whatever pleases God pleases me, why should I say that I'm unhappy when I'm not?" Tauler looked upon him with awe and asked, "Who are you?" The man said, "I'm a king." Tauler asked, "A king? Where's your kingdom?" The man smiled and answered, "In my heart."

As followers of Jesus, we carry around a kingdom in our hearts. We are children, of Almighty God. We are the recipients of God's promises, and God's incredibly gracious love and mercy. If we really understand that, our joy will overflow. If you want to be set free from your circumstances, your stresses and your worries, then follow the instructions God gave us, to live in joy: replace worry with trust in God, develop a gratitude attitude, and focus your thoughts, on those things that are pure, noble and excellent. The God of peace, will then be with you, and you, will be able to rejoice in the Lord always, "and again I say, rejoice!" So, Trust, Believe, and have an active Faith in God making disciple of Jesus Christ in the transformation of the world. Amen.