



Rejoice!

(based on Philippians 4:4-9)

Paul was a follower of Jesus. He traveled to lots of faraway places to spread the good news about Jesus. Many people who heard Paul speak about him became followers of Jesus too. Paul started churches, baptizing people and teaching the new followers about God's love, Jesus, and how to live as he taught. After Paul left a place, the Christians would meet together to worship and learn and help others. One place where Paul told the story of Jesus was the city of Philippi (fih-LIP-eye).

Paul ran into some difficulties in Philippi. He and Silas were put in jail for telling people about Jesus. Later, after Paul left Philippi, life was not easy for the new believers. Some people didn't want them telling others about Jesus. Then they heard that Paul was put in prison in another city.

The people were sad that Paul was in jail and life was hard for them in Philippi. They were discouraged and wondered if they had enough faith to keep living the way God wanted them to live. Paul heard that the people in Philippi were discouraged, so he wrote a letter to them. He wanted to encourage them in their faith. He wrote:

My dear friends in Christ,

I love you and miss you so much. You bring me such joy. Be strong in the Lord.

Rejoice in the Lord always! Again, I will say, Rejoice!

Show everyone that you are gentle and kind. Jesus will come again soon.

Do not worry about anything. Instead of worrying, pray. Let God know everything. And when you pray, be sure and give thanks to God. It is then that God's peace will settle upon you, calming your hearts and your minds, knowing that Jesus is with you. It's hard to understand, but that's how God works.

Finally, my brothers and sisters in Christ, whatever situation you are in, focus your thoughts on the good and not the bad. Instead of worrying, think about things that are good and true, that are right and bring honor, that are beautiful and worthy of praise. Practice what you learned from me. Do what I have told you and what you saw me do. And the God who gives peace will be with you.

The believers in Philippi were so happy to read Paul's words. They knew that, even when Paul was in difficult situations, he trusted God to be with him. Paul knew God's peace, and he wanted them to know it too. Yes, they would practice what they had learned from Paul. They would rejoice and give thanks in all things!



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Use one or more activities from each section to explore grace and gratitude with your children this week.

Recognizing God's Grace

- Read and enjoy the story with your children—imagine and wonder.
- It's time for school! For some, that is a joyful time to see friends and be in a new grade learning new things. For some, going back to school produces worry about new schedules and teachers. Read Philippians 4:4–9 together. Make up hand or body motions for rejoicing and for letting go of worries. Each morning before school, invite your child to name a joy and do your joyful motion, a possible worry and do your motion for letting go of worry, and one more joy with your joyful motion. You could share the same. It's important that children see that adults can express joy and have worries too. End by saying, "Thank you, God!" together.



Responding to God's Grace

- Paul's letter to the Philippians reminds us to pray, especially if we are worrying about something. Do an internet search for "five finger prayer." Choose one of the images and use the directions to focus prayers and concerns. After praying, rejoice and give thanks to God by using your hands to clap, snap, pat, and any other motions you can use your hands to do.
- Picture this: You are making a yummy salad with all sorts of good things in it. What ingredients would you like to put in your salad? Now imagine adding a rotten tomato or a moldy carrot. Yuck! Our thoughts are like that. We don't want the rotten or moldy thoughts in our brains. That's kind of what Paul is saying in Philippians 4:8. Wonder together what are the opposites of these words and actions. Have each person choose one of Paul's suggestions. Pay attention to your actions and share how you are focusing on the good, not the bad. How did that change your day?

Celebrating in Gratitude

- Watch and listen to some YouTube video songs about being happy, not worrying, and rejoicing: "Okaidi & Playing For Change 2014 : "Don't Worry, Be Happy" (bit.ly/GLDontWorry), "Lion King (1994) ~ Hakuna Matata ~ Sing Along Video ~ 720p^{HD} ~ 2017 ~ W10" (bit.ly/GLLKHakuna), "Rejoice In The Lord Always - Bible Songs For Children with Lyrics" (bit.ly/GLRejoice). What other songs do you know that are joyful?
- Pray this prayer each day this week:

Dear God, take my worries of today and give me peace. Help me to focus on what is good and true and worthy of praise. Thank you, God! Amen.

Note: bit.ly web addresses are case sensitive.