

The Sermon: Rejoice In the Lord

Today anxiety is running high with people around the world. Social isolation, economic hardship, and protecting ourselves and our families' health are all battles we face every day in 2020. Ongoing stress and anxiety can cause many health problems. So, it's important to develop and maintain healthy habits like exercise, eating right, and connecting with the natural world to protect against the effects of stress in our daily life and in these unprecedented times.

In the New Testament reading, the apostle Paul recommended a remedy for anxiety. Paul says in Philippians 4:4, "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near."

Paul teaches us that we have to acknowledge the presence of God. Paul says, "Rejoice in the Lord always." He does not say, "Rejoice always," but "Rejoice in the Lord always... God is near." God's presence is in our lives. We have seen God's hand at work in miracles as well as in the strength provided in trials. We have to be willing to see God and listen for His voice. Like the knowledge of the presence of loved ones even when their physical presence is not immediately felt, God is with us in every place and in every moment. Pray to God from your heart and ask Him to reveal Himself to you. We have to acknowledge the presence of God in our lives.

Paul also says, "Let your gentleness be known to everyone." The second remedy for anxiety is kindness. We have to practice kindness, especially in our troubled times. The Mental Health Foundation says, "If you help a friend through a tough time or help a stranger solve a problem, you will feel a sense of purpose and will be aware of your own good fortune in relation to others." As a result, kindness makes us feel like we belong to a community. As I shared in the newsletter, generosity as one of the acts of kindness teaches us that our security comes from God and connects us with others' needs.

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Kindness opens our hearts to others. If we want joy in our lives, we need acts of kindness.

Paul continues to say, "Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God." Gratitude is a powerful anecdote to worry, fear, and anxiety because gratitude helps people refocus on what they have instead of what they lack. When we cultivate gratitude, we can feel joy and contentment, no matter what we have or don't have in our lives.

Paul finishes his teaching on joy and gratitude with this promise in verse 7, "And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." Worldly Peace is based on an absence of conflict, and it is in short order in these pandemic times. But the Peace of God, which Paul describes as guard and protection against worry and fear, is based on trusting in God's promise. Jesus promised peace to His disciples in John 14:27, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid."

As we choose to rejoice in the Lord by acknowledging the presence of God in our lives, practicing kindness and gratitude, and trusting in God's promises, we will experience the presence of God and a peace that surpasses all worldly understanding and endures in these times of struggle.

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