

Grace to you and peace from God, our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

[Introduction]

For the past several weeks, our epistle reading has been from Paul’s letter to the Philippians. When reading this letter, I imagine hearing the sound of kids joyfully playing in the background. This joy isn’t necessarily the theme, but it does make for a great background picture. A picture of joy. And an atmosphere of rejoicing.

“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice” (Php 4:4). These words have been put to many different melodies and songs. However, they don’t really explain the reason for our joy. Let me try and explain the reason through three stories of my kids. Through these illustrations, you will see why Paul is able to rejoice in the Lord, because the Lord is at hand.

[Story #1: *The Parent Arrives*]

Story number one. My children love to play in our family room while waiting for Daddy to come home. On some days, Eden and Faith (our girls) will be engrossed in a tea party with their dolls, while Isaac (our 2-year old) is engrossed with throwing balls into the tea party. Noise levels stay high as Eden, Faith, and Isaac try to compete for who gets to be talking, laughing, or roaring. Not to be left out, our Dog, Kal, will also add his own howls to the mix. Needless to say, when my wife, Hope, yells down at them to cleanup or to behave they barely seem to notice over all the noise.

However, when I come in and say, “Daddy’s home.” Inevitably one, two, or all three of them come running up to me yelling joyfully, “Daddy, Daddy, Daddy!” as they crash into my legs. Or they’ll scream and yell as I pick them up and tickle them. The same thing happens when my wife, Hope, comes home. They rejoice at their parent’s arrival.

Young kids love to joyfully receive their parents. And young kids rejoice when their parents draw near to them. They love their Mommy and Daddy, the lords of their house, and can’t wait for their Lord’s return.

Likewise, the apostle Paul rejoiced with childlike joy because His Lord, Jesus Christ, was near and at hand. “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand;” (Php 4:4–5). He was at hand in Philippi. And He was at hand in Paul’s gospel message.

However, we often forget that the Lord is at hand.

How many times have you anxiously fretted over the concerns of this world?

How many times have you done something selfish instead of waiting on your Lord?

How many times have you done something dishonorable, because you forgot to honor the Lord?

How many times do we need to look at young children for life lessons? A young child doesn't anxiously fret over worldly concerns, instead they simply ask their Mommy or Daddy for it. They trust that their parents will take care of them. In fact, they trust their parents so much, that they fear the absence of their parents. When parents try to leave, the child anxiously cries and begs Mommy or Daddy to stay. They trust, that when their parents are around, they'll be safe. They have faith in the love of their Lord.

They rejoice in the Lord, because the Lord is at hand.

[Story #2: *Thanksgiving and Requests*]

Story number two. One way to see the faith of a young child is to observe how they trust the love of their Mommy and Daddy.

After I come home to my joyous herd of children, the next things I tend to hear are thanksgiving and requests. Admittedly there are a lot more requests than thanksgiving, but the conversation might sound something like this...

Daddy, can I have a snack? Daddy, can you play dolls with us? Daddy, can you play catch with me? Daddy, thank you for fixing my necklace. Daddy, what are we having for dinner? Daddy, can we make a dessert? Daddy, Daddy, Daddy...

While being bombarded with thanksgiving and requests, I put down my things and see how their day went. I answer their questions and try to bring peace to their hearts and minds. Once they run out of requests (or once they are satisfied with the answers) they head back downstairs to continue their playful antics. All the while, trusting in the love of my wife and I to fulfill the promises and answers that we have given them.

Paul, likewise, tells the Philippians, "do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God." (Php 4:6). Paul encourages us to bombard God with thanksgiving and requests. Like children asking their earthly father, Paul tells us to joyfully make requests and give thanks to God out of faith.

Out of the faith that God established by Jesus coming down to us. Jesus' is present here on earth with you. And just like a parent's presence brings peace to young children. Jesus' presence brings peace and guards our hearts and minds. The peace of God that is with Jesus surpasses all understanding. And it gives us the faith and trust necessary to say, "Thy will be done."

It also gives us the faith and trust necessary to rejoice in the Lord, because the Lord is at hand.

[**Story #3: Admonition to be Good**]

Story number three. As my kids head downstairs and begin their playful antics they quickly forget that Mom and Dad are present. Instead they start acting out of selfishness.

Eden (my oldest) tries to get Faith (her younger sister) to play the way Eden thinks she should play.

Faith screams and yells at Eden. Forgetting to use her words or explain to Eden why she doesn't want to play that way.

While they argue, Isaac starts handing out foam swords to his sisters and they ignore him. However, Isaac starts swinging his foam sword around anyway while yelling, "En garde!" Isaac eventually hits his unarmed sisters and they get mad at him too.

So Isaac starts roaring and yelling at his sisters. This gets the Dog to start howling again. Eventually someone gets hurt and starts crying. At this point (or possibly earlier) Hope and I stop our supper preparations and run downstairs to remind the kids of our presence.

To remind them that we do not act selfishly. We do not yell and scream. Instead "whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise" (Php 4:8), they should think and act out of these things. In other words, they should act like they are in the presence of the Lord. Because to them Mom and Dad are the lords of the house.

Paul said the same things to the Philippians. He even modeled the correct behavior to them. He encouraged them to practice the things that they "have learned and received and heard and seen" (Php 4:9) in Paul. Paul can rejoice in the Lord, because the Lord strengthens him. Paul can rejoice in the Lord, because the Lord is at hand.

[**Conclusion**]

You also can rejoice in the Lord, because the Lord is at hand. By prayer and by action you can practice your reasonableness and gentleness in the presence of the Lord.

Jesus creates joy with his presence.

When Jesus was born a man, he brought with him the peace of God and the joy of the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus lives in perfect submission to the will of God so that by his life, death, and resurrection you too have been given the righteousness of God through faith.

By Christ's body and blood, you are forgiven your anxiety.

Although you might not always feel joyful, you are forgiven.

Although you might not always rejoice in Jesus' presence, you are forgiven.

You are forgiven for fretting over those worldly concerns. Like a child who repents of acting selfishly, you are forgiven.

Not only that, but to give you a visible and tangible presence, Jesus comes in body and blood through the Lord's Supper. By the grace of God, Jesus' body and blood are given to you in communion for the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation.

Thanks be to God for sending Christ into your presence. Your lives are now served by a picture of joy and an atmosphere of rejoicing.

Therefore, with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God" (Php 4:6-7) your Father.

Because, through Christ's presence you have been given the faith and trust necessary to say, "Thy Will be Done." Amen.

"Now may the God of peace... equip you with everything good that you may do his will, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen." (Heb 13:20-21)
