

Willow River Parish: Clear Lake, Deer Park, and Faith Family**Title: Joy in the Lord****Lesson: Philippians 4:4-7**

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! ⁵ Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. ⁶ Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Today is the Third Sunday of Advent. As we light the third candle, symbolizing joy, we wait for the joy that is to come into our lives and celebrate the joy that has already arrived within us.

When you hear the word joy, what comes to mind? Are you waiting for joy? Is your life already filled with joy? Or, despite your desire for joy, are the circumstances in your life making it difficult for you to rejoice? Where do you find yourself today?

(Slide 1) I once read an article about the connection between laughter and health. According to the article, people who think positively and laugh out loud regularly are healthier in the long run than those who don't. Even if you don't feel like laughing, the simple act of intentionally laughing for just 10 seconds a day can lower stress and anxiety, promoting physical and emotional well-being.

With that in mind, let's take a moment and laugh out loud for 10 seconds. Ready?

Now let's add clapping. Studies show that clapping stimulates your hands and improves circulation, enhancing your health. So, let's laugh and clap for another 10 seconds. Ready?

You see, we don't laugh because we're happy; we become happier because we laugh. Laughter is one of the joyful gifts God has given us. Even when life feels difficult, the fact that we can still laugh is evidence that God's love is always with us. I hope you'll intentionally try to find moments of laughter, happiness, and joy in your daily life.

Why is it so important to intentionally seek joy? It's because we are naturally inclined to focus on bad news rather than good news. It's often easier to worry or feel sorrow than to rejoice.

Think about the world today. In this season, many of us are facing grief—mourning loved ones who have passed away or worrying about friends battling illness. We hear distressing news about events in our communities, nation, and world, like the unstable political situation in South Korea, the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine, and the conflicts in the Middle East reflect a brokenness that leaves countless people struggling with anxiety, fear, and hunger. These things make this season feel colder, darker, and more overwhelming.

(Slide 2) I will say it again: Rejoice!... Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation..."

These verses challenge me deeply. How can we rejoice and not be anxious when we are surrounded by a buffet of sad and negative news, worries, and concerns? When I read these verses, I initially thought they were too much. It felt as if they didn't acknowledge or empathize with our sadness. To put it more strongly, I felt as though they were trying to suppress our grief.

Philippians is a letter written by the Apostle Paul to the church in Philippi. As I continued to reflect on these verses, I wondered why Paul wrote this to them. What does he mean in verse 5 when he says, "Let your gentleness be evident to all"?

As Christians, as people who believe in God, the Creator of the world, the Alpha and the Omega, this means that we believe everything in our lives depends on God.

Friends, what do we usually worry about? We don't tend to worry much about things we can solve with our own strength because we can handle them. When we're hungry, we don't worry, we simply open the fridge to grab food, go to the market to buy groceries, or eat at a restaurant. Such problems don't usually trouble us. The things we often worry and feel anxious about are those beyond our control, things so significant that they shake the very foundation of our lives.

However, in times of hardship, we must remember that God is the Creator of the world. This means that before creation, God already existed. Through creation, God made the world and all life within it. It also means that God has created the world beyond our physical death, one we haven't seen or experienced yet. Everything beyond our control is under God's reign.

If God were not in our lives, if we came about by chance and everything in our lives happened by coincidence, there would be no hope. If that were the case, our lives would end with death, and it would be right for us to worry and be anxious.

But the God we believe in is the ruler of every part of our lives. He created everything, sent His Son Jesus Christ to save us from death, died on the cross, and rose again on the third day to show us that life doesn't end with death for those who believe in God. Beyond death, there is an eternal life filled with joy and freedom from suffering in the presence of God. Our faith is rooted in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

That's why Paul tells us not to grieve but to rejoice and find joy in trusting God's promises—because death is not the end of life but the beginning of a new life in the Lord.

(Slide 3) Do you enjoy solving puzzles? Imagine you're working on a jigsaw puzzle, and someone hands you the final piece. You might struggle for a while, trying to figure out where everything fits, but with that last piece in your hand, you know the picture will be complete. I believe that living a life of faith in Jesus Christ is like holding that final puzzle piece. No matter how confusing or chaotic life may seem, we don't lose hope—because we know that when the picture is finished, everything will come together perfectly.

Of course, we feel sadness when we lose loved ones. That's natural and right. We should mourn together when we hear sad news. But at the same time, we must remember that with death, eternal life in the Lord begins. While we may not understand why sadness comes into our lives now, when we stand before the Lord and look back, we will see that God has always been righteous and good. God is good all the time. All the time, God is good. That's why Paul

invites us to embrace gentleness, an open heart that receives what is of God instead of insisting on our own desires.

The Bible tells us that God is the Creator, our Savior, and the giver of eternal life, and all who believe in Him will enjoy salvation and eternal life in His presence.

(Slide 4) Let us close with the words of Isaiah 12:2:

12: ²Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid.

The Lord, the Lord himself, is my strength and my defense; he has become my salvation.”

³With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. ⁴In that day you will say:

“Give praise to the Lord, proclaim his name;
make known among the nations what he has done,
and proclaim that his name is exalted.

⁵Sing to the Lord, for he has done glorious things;
let this be known to all the world.

⁶Shout aloud and sing for joy, people of Zion,
for great is the Holy One of Israel among you.”

Even though all of us face difficulties in our own unique circumstances—burdens that often feel overwhelming and lead us to worry, fear, or anxiety—it’s essential that we bring and lift up these honest emotions to God. When we lay everything down before Him, embrace gentleness, and try to find joy in trusting God’s promises, the Holy Spirit works in our lives, turning our worries into joy and our mourning into dancing.

Today, I want to give you a practical challenge for this week: intentionally laugh out loud for at least ten seconds every day. Don’t worry at all if your family or friends look at you strangely—just laugh anyway! Through this simple practice, you can experience God’s presence as the one who brings us joy.