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CHURCH**  
EDINBURGH

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# Total Joy

## Philippians 4:4

### “Rejoice”

What does rejoice mean? Pretty much the same as “be happy”, but perhaps a key difference is that we tend to think of happiness as being based on what’s happening to us right now, whereas joy in the Bible is still there even when everything around us is miserable. There is a happy confidence in something beyond present circumstances which has the final word in our emotions.

In the Psalms we are commanded to rejoice (5:11, 32:11, 97:1) – and this is a command that God enables (Psalm 4:7, 30:11) because He is the source of joy (16:11). Psalms contains many other emotions: so does God, so do we, but they do not veto joy. A comedian can make you laugh, a friend can cheer you up, a loved one can comfort you, but God is the source of joy.

Jesus brought joy everywhere He went: He performed His first miracle at a party, He healed people, children wanted to be with him, He said His followers couldn’t fast while He was with them, His stories are full of joy (eg Luke 15). We even find joy in the horror of His suffering (Hebrews 12:2). As in Psalms, this joy of God was to be shared (John 15:11). Joy was a distinguishing feature of His people, the church (Acts 8:8, 13:52, Romans 14:17, Galatians 5:22). Paul writes to the Philippians from prison, with lots of things to trouble him, but he’s full of joy (Philippians 1:4, 8, 25, 2:17, 18, 3:1, 4:1, 4).

### “In the Lord”

How do we ensure that being joyful is not hyping ourselves up, and how can you get and keep joy when life is horrible? We are to *“Rejoice in the Lord.”* Joy is Jesus.

## Here are three key highlights for our joy.

**1. Rejoice in the Lord coming to be with us.** God is not distant, He is not uncaring, He is not ignorant of what life is like. He knows us and loves us.

**2. Rejoice in the Lord dying for us.** Taking the punishment for all that we've done wrong, our rejection of God which leads to miserable punishment.

**3. Rejoice in the Lord rising from the dead.** Death couldn't hold Jesus, He rose to new eternal life which He gives to any who ask Him and follow Him. He gives this to us now (hence metaphors like “new birth” and “new creation” to describe Christians) and promises to give us an eternity of joy with Him in the life to come, which will so outweigh all your present trouble you won't even be able to make the comparisons.

## “Always”

This joy comes from God, which means we can encourage its growth in our lives, or diminish it. We need what has been described as “joy fuel”.

## Together

Remember Paul is writing to a church community when he says to rejoice in the Lord always. We need others to help with this, and they need us. We gather on Sundays to celebrate God and all His goodness: singing songs that encourage and reflect this exuberant joy that we've seen throughout the Bible, learning about the goodness of God, serving each other so that we can bless and encourage each other's joy.

Midweek small groups do similar things, but with a much greater degree of personal involvement so that we can be real about what's going on whilst still looking to rejoice.

Good friendships should be a key part of this too, and we gather together for meals and parties and celebrations, all of which are in the Bible as illustrations of God's joy and means for us to experience it!

## Personal

**Routine = making time to rejoice.** George Müller: *“I saw more clearly than ever, that the first great and primary business to which I ought to attend every day was, to have my soul happy in the Lord.”*

I get my Bible out, turn to the book in the Old Testament I’m reading through, then the book in the New that I’m reading through, and I ask God to show me wonderful things – so that my joy in Him would increase. Some days I feel a bit blind but many more times I recognise something amazing, or experience His love and care through the perfect timing of what I’m reading with something else that’s happening in my life. My evening journaling when I thank Him for whatever good things He’s given me that day is part of this too. I make habits of other things that stir my joy. See *Sacred Pathways* by Gary Thomas for an exploration of the many different ways we can do this.

**Opportunism = finding moments to rejoice.** The world’s still a mess, so we have to find moments of joy whenever we can. Seeing things through “gospel goggles” will do this: we identify God’s love and care for us, how undeserved every good thing we get is, and the far better future hope that we have is.

## Questions

- How would you define biblical joy?
- Would you consider not rejoicing to be sinful, given that we are commanded to rejoice?
- How do we ensure that we are finding joy “in the Lord” and not through happy circumstances or relentless positivity?!
- What grows your joy? What could you make into a routine for deepening joy, and how can you be an opportunist using “gospel goggles”?



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