

TRINITY EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH  
MINOCQUA, WI  
SERMON FOR OCTOBER 25 & 26, 2020

*<sup>4</sup> Rejoice in the Lord always! I will say it again: Rejoice! <sup>5</sup> Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. <sup>6</sup> Do not worry about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. <sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

*<sup>8</sup> Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if anything is excellent, and if anything is praiseworthy, think about these things. <sup>9</sup> The things that you learned, received, heard, and saw in me: Keep doing these things. And the God of peace will be with you.* (Philippians 4:4-9, EHV)

Mirror, Mirror on the wall, who's the most emotionally stable of them all? How are you doing right now, emotionally speaking? That depends, doesn't it? Depends on what's going on in your life, depends on who's involved in your life. Let's be honest: there are people who add value to life, who are emotionally uplifting. This person could say to you, "Hey, let's go to the dump/let's watch paint dry/watch C-Span at 3 am and you honestly can't think of anything you'd rather do because you get to be with that person. On the other hand, there are people who just drain the life right out of you. People like this could offer to buy you an expensive dinner, followed by great tickets to a great show, and in all honesty you'd rather stay home and watch Jello harden.

There's something else that helps determine your emotional stability. Psychologists, forever in search of new terms, call this emotional intelligence/IQ. It's the ability to manage your own and others' emotions. If you have high emotional IQ, you can navigate through the minefields of emotional problems better than most. Regardless of circumstances or people, high emotional IQ people remain steady, stable and avoid the roller coaster ups and downs that affect most others. Such people are also able to accurately perceive emotions by looking at people's faces.

Let's try this out. Take a look at this picture of a famous celebrity and see if you can find the emotions I mention. Chuck Norris: Happy. Sad. Angry. Bored. Excited. Afraid. Intense. Relaxed. Either you're not very good at perceiving emotions or Chuck Norris is an amazingly stable, even-keeled, unemotional person.

Our focus here isn't psychological, it's spiritual. And how we are spiritually has a lot to do with how we are emotionally, physically, really, how we are in every aspect of life. And how healthy we are spiritually impacts our relationships. Let's look beyond what we can see in the mirror, beyond facial expressions, into our hearts and souls and seek the balance and stability provided by the power of God's Word.

The words leap out at us: ***Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: rejoice!*** But is this a vapid, air-headed joy, a naïve state of mind oblivious to the problems around and within us? Is this merely an outward thing, paste on a happy face even if it hurts because we're Christians, and we're supposed to be joyful, at least look like it, right?

Paul is not in happy circumstances. He's not enjoying the TV preacher life. He's under house arrest for preaching the Gospel. But he is filled with joy. He rejoices – in the Lord always. And he says it again. Rejoice! Some of you are thinking, he can't really mean that. Always seems like a lot. Rejoice in the Lord on Saturday or Sunday – that must be what it means in the original language. No, ***rejoice in the Lord always.***

How? Why? Perhaps the most overlooked words in this section are these: ***The Lord is near.*** Oh, yeah, I know. I know you know, but do you really know. Do you and I really take this to heart? The Lord IS NEAR. He's not just near geographically – at say, County Road J and Hwy 51. He's not just near mentally, or spiritually – in our minds and hearts like a pleasant memory. He's not just a phone call away. He's here, literally. He came

near, he came here to this earth, physically to be with us, to be one of us – that OT name Immanuel, God with us.

Many people visualize a God who sits comfortably on a distant throne, remote, aloof, disinterested in the lives and needs of puny, petty, insignificant people like you and me. The Bible shows us a God who long before it even occurred to mankind to turn to him, while we were still lost in the darkness of sin and unbelief and an eternal fate worse than death, God took the initiative, rose from his throne, sent his Son, who set aside his glory, and offered himself as the sacrifice for all sin and the righteousness for all unrighteous lives. Our Savior died for us, rose again for us, revealed this to us by his Word, and gave us the faith to believe it. And in doing so, he fills us with joy. Joy that is ours regardless of circumstances – joy that can never be taken away. Joy that runs deep and true and forever. Rejoice Always.

A second reason for rejoicing: ***And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*** This is the closing blessing many pastors speak at the conclusion of the sermon. I use it. God's peace – military term meaning cessation of all hostilities, the end of war – not a negotiated peace, but a unilateral peace won and declared by Christ on the cross, the peace of forgiveness – this peace guards our hearts and minds. This isn't just peace from God, this is the peace that God himself has, the serenity that characterizes God's eternal state of mind. And, "guard" is a military term, a reference to a military guard, an elite force assigned to guard a target of immense priority and importance – YOU!

This rejoicing/focus on the Lord provides balance to our spiritual and emotional well-being and serves as an antidote to the things that can throw us off, especially emotionally. Paul mentions a biggie: ***Do not worry about anything*** – Easier said than done. Is there enough in checking to cover the debits I've processed over the weekend. How will I pay for dental work for the kids. When will I find the time to get all my work and school obligations done, and done well. We've got deadlines, bills, conflicts – stresses large and small, enough to give birth to a whole colony of ulcers and medical conditions far worse and fatal, and Paul says do not be anxious about anything?

Anything? Nothing at all? What if I have a good reason? You and I don't. But Paul doesn't understand my life – I have a terrible commute, work in a cubicle, have in-laws, so much going on, carrying a lot of stress. He doesn't understand. Actually, he does. He's in prison, looking at possibly dying. He gets it.

Paul encourages us to act. He doesn't tell us to go buy the latest how-to book at the Christian bookstore, he doesn't offer ways to strengthen the inner self. He doesn't say you need behavioral therapy, cognitive therapy, anti-depressants, exercise, aromatherapy, and acupuncture.

He says, look outward, go outside of yourself – ***"in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God."*** Go to God with prayer. Go to him with thanksgiving. Thank you Lord for my blessings. Thank you for my challenges. Thank you for your promises. Thank you for your power. Thank you for your presence.

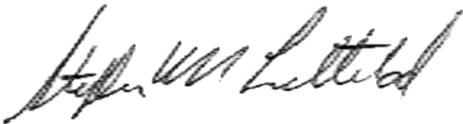
Rather than be anxious about anything, take everything to God thus choosing to be anxious about nothing. Nothing. You can choose not to be anxious. You can say, "Lord Jesus, I'm going to talk to you, be with you, think of you, work it out with you, and I choose not to be anxious. I choose not to be stressed. I'm not going to ignore it. I'm not going to diminish it. I'm not going to pretend that things are great. I'm also not going to let one thing ruin everything. Because you are with me. And I can rejoice in you. Always."

Another action to take for spiritual and emotional health: Paul says, "When anxious, say or do whatever..." Well, more than just that, and not in such a flippant way. It's vv. 8.9 of chapter 4 " ***8 Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if anything is excellent, and if anything is praiseworthy, think about these things. 9 The things that you learned, received, heard, and saw in me: Keep doing these things. And the God of peace will be with you.***"

What is excellent or praiseworthy? There are many fine things to think about when stressed/anxious: A sunset, a favorite novel, the sound of birds singing in the early morning, the face of someone you love. Music that makes you dance. All of these fit under “whatever.” But what fits the description of every adjective here? Jesus. Jesus is... And his Word is... A favorite passage or comfort and strength, a promise, an image of Jesus as Good Shepherd or Mighty Warrior.

When anxiety comes upon you, it isn’t so easy to think about Scripture. It’s much easier to throw a pity party, to become absolutely consumed with the conflict, the person, the circumstance, to lose perspective. But Paul says, “There’s a better way. Think of Jesus. Think of joy in Jesus. **“whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if anything is excellent, and if anything is praiseworthy.”** Practice these, and when anxiety comes, your default/automatic response will be to respond to Jesus rather than your circumstances.

Mirror, mirror on the wall, who’s the most emotionally and spiritually stable of them all? Those who look to the Lord. You. Me. Finding joy, not just joy as in a burst of happiness, but joy in Jesus. Words for joy and rejoicing are all over this book of Philippians and in this passage in particular, but do you know what’s even more prevalent? God – names for him. In just vv. 4-7 here, 2 words for joy, 5 names for God – Lord 2X, God 2X, Christ Jesus. This God, the God of immeasurable, indescribable joy will be with you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Stephen W. Luchterhand". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Pastor Stephen Luchterhand  
Minocqua, WI