



Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again—Rejoice! Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." Philippians 4:4-7

Dear Grace Family,

As we conclude our study of the Book of Joshua, we see how Joshua led the Israelites through valleys, rivers, and moments of doubt, all while maintaining their commitment. Likewise, the Lord Christ, our new Joshua, continues to guide us through the challenges and crises in our lives as we navigate our faith and spiritual life in the wilderness of the 21st century .

This is the reason behind Paul's encouragement to the Philippians. He wanted them to immerse themselves in joy—not in things, occasions, or people, but in the Lord. This is because the joy that descends from above is rich and limitless. Was Paul suggesting that as Christians we should live without worries? Of course not. Paul knew, as he himself was in a Roman prison cell, that there is something beyond our dark days; there is joy beyond suffering, strength beyond fear, and hope that surpasses confusion. He wanted them to be joyful "always" because we are limited, and our time on earth is short. We live here temporarily and should be mindful of how we spend our precious time—because “the Lord is near!” Christ is coming, and beyond our worries, he brings hope, joy, love, and peace.

As such, this reminds us that life is lived in anticipation—we live in joy as we await the advent or coming of Christ Jesus. If we do so, we can never lose hope and joy but can await His appearance patiently, hopefully, and graciously. Christian joy is a delight, and there is elation to be found in Christ and in the presence of God during our weary times. We are asked to draw near and surrender ourselves to God in the season of Advent, where we anticipate the coming of the Redeemer, our city of refuge, as symbolized by Joshua's cities of refuge in ancient Israel (Joshua 20). As you celebrate Thanksgiving and welcome Advent this month, remember that the Lord comes to you as:"

"Bezer"—*Fortress for the weak*

"Golan"—*Refuge in times of trouble*

"Hebron"—*Friend of the sinners*

"Kadesh"—*The Holy One of God*

"Ramoth"—*Exalted in the highest*

"Shechem"—*Mighty shoulder*

As Paul urged the Philippians, may we too rejoice and keep rejoicing in our sufferings, drawing near to God in prayer and meditation during this season of Advent. Remember that our joy is “independent of all things on earth because it has its source in the continual presence of Christ." William Barclay. *Happy Thanksgiving!*

Pastor Owar