



Joy, Even in Difficult Times *by Chaplain Mark Westrich*

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

This has long been one of my favorite Bible passages. In my daily life as well as my work as a chaplain, I have experienced periods of happiness, the good times and good things in living life. I have also personally known the trials and difficulties of living; things like a health crisis, family divisions, loss of loved ones, and even difficulties in my work career. Often in the moment of these trials, there is anything but happiness going on within me. But in reading and reflecting on Paul's words to the Philippians, we realize that happiness is not the same thing as joy. We will all have periods of happiness in our lives, those times of success at an undertaking such as education or career advancement, or perhaps the personal milestones of finding the love of our life, marriage, and family that lend a wonderful fulfillment to our being. In any positive event in our lives, we find happiness. But happiness is really a temporary feeling or emotion of that moment of success. Joy is a deeper, more constant state of being that we develop from within. That is what Paul is telling his followers, is telling us. When we place our trust in God, through his son Jesus, we find the peace of God that allows us to be joyful, to be able to rejoice in any situation. We might find it hard to be "happy" amid hardship, but we can find peace and strength in the joy that, even in the most difficult times in our lives, God is with us. Our God is the source of our joy, and that joy can be present to us even when our experiences leave us feeling unhappy. Happiness in good times and sadness in difficult times will ultimately pass, but our joy in living a life in relationship with God is the source of our strength and remains with us and in us for all our days.

Journaling:

Think about a recent time when you experienced difficulty, stress, or loss. In that moment, what emotions did you feel?

How might you have experienced *joy*—not happiness, but the deeper assurance of God's presence and peace—amid that situation?

Reflect on how trusting in God, praying with thanksgiving, and remembering that “the Lord is near” might shape the way you respond to future challenges.

