



Joy > Happiness

Encounter Prayer:

Dear Loving God,

We adore you. We give thanks for the abundance of your grace and mercy. Our words cannot fully express our thanks. They fail to capture the depths of what only our souls can articulate. Forgive us for the times we have missed the mark. Use us as ambassadors of hope, messengers of your good news for humanity's bad news, and helpers those who are most vulnerable.

In the name of Jesus Christ, we pray.

Amen.

Encounter God:

Where have you seen God at work in your life this week?

Encounter Neighbor:

What good have you done for someone else this week?

Encounter Scripture: Philippians 4:4-8

"Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, 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. Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things."

Everyone wants to be happy, but happiness is not always possible in every area of our lives. Happiness is based on what happens, meaning it is based on circumstances and external factors that may or may not be in your control. If I lost my family, friends, home, car, or my profession, I would not be happy. My educated guess is that neither would you. No amount of sunshine pumping could turn that frown upside down. Happiness is situational and fleeting.

None of us are happy about the COVID-19 pandemic, but we can rejoice in the midst of it; not because of it. We rejoice because the joy we have internally comes from the gift of life we possess eternally. We rejoice because our God is big enough to turn our tears into the water for our garden of victory. We rejoice because God can turn

our trials into triumphs, and our dead-end streets into happy highways. Simply put, as Easter people, we believe that God will redeem our suffering.

Paul wrote the letter to the Philippians while he was on house arrest in Rome. A few weeks ago, I was lamenting the difficulty of doing ministry while sheltering in place. Then BJ Landers, Encounter Group Communicator, and partner in the ministry said “Ramon you can do this, this is exactly what Paul did while on house arrest. He was able to effectively spread the gospel.” For two years, Paul was able to do effective ministry while on house arrest. He did not allow his circumstances to shape his treatment of others or diminish his capacity to spread the gospel. When he writes these words to the church at Phillip, he writes with an unquestionable authenticity because it was known that he practiced what he preached. So what Paul just practicing positive thinking? No, positive thinking is a form of self-help. There is absolutely nothing wrong with being a positive-minded person. However, there is nothing uniquely Christian about it. Did Paul reject the reality of his circumstances? No, he knew the facts, but he also knew the truth. The truth is that the world cannot give joy. Joy comes from God. Joy is the blessed assurance that we are children of God, and God is working for our good in and through all things. Rejoicing is an outpouring of the joy from our hearts.

In worship, that outpour may come in the form of tears, shouts of praise, or lifting our hands in total surrender. But what does that outpour look like in our daily lives? It comes in the form of gentleness and generosity. Since we recognize that God is at work we do not have to be in control. We are content with God’s protection and provision.

Have you ever noticed that control freaks

lack both gentleness and authentic generosity? People who NEED to be in control often resort to extreme measures to seize power from others. They do not have time for gentleness or to consider the feelings of others because they are too busy making power plays. When they do appear to be gentle or generous, often they are doing so with the expectation that they will receive something in return. Their need for control stems from fear and worry.

Joy comes from faith in Jesus Christ. Our faith instructs us to assume a position of submission, which is a posture of prayer. There is an African American gospel hymn that says, “Now let us have a little talk with Jesus, having a little talk with Jesus makes it right.” When we bend our knees, bow our heads, or lift up our hands with our eyes cast towards heaven, we acknowledge that whatever it is, it is in God’s hands. Not only do we place our prayer petitions in God’s hands we acknowledge that we are in God’s hands. In God’s hands, we are protected, shaped, sheltered, and provisioned. In God’s hands, there is peace amid the storms of life because we know it is well with our souls.

Encounter Heads:

What is the difference between happiness and joy?

What have you given up in the pursuit of happiness?

Has joy cost you anything?

Encounter Hearts:

When you hear the word “joy” what thoughts come to mind?

How does the peace of God surpass all understanding? How is the peace of God different from worldly peace?

Do you have an active prayer life? If so, was it easy to establish the practice of prayer? If not, what are the challenges?

Encounter Hands:

Did you cause harm in word or deed to someone this week? (self-examination). If so, confess your sin to God, then seek to reconcile with your brother or sister.

Share your prayer concerns and celebrations.

Ask a member of the group to pray for the concerns and give thanks for the celebrations.

Notes Sections

Prayer Concerns:

Celebrations:

Daily Reflection Questions

Where have I seen God at work in my life today?

What is one thing that I am thankful for?

What is one thing that broke my heart today?

What is one good thing did I do for someone else today?