What is real joy? Maybe a better question is what does real joy look like? Is it the face of child opening a present they really wanted on Christmas morning? Or is real joy found in the heart of the person watching the child open the gift. The real joys in my life have come from shared experiences. Those moments when we laugh so hard, or when our hearts are overflowing with love and joy. I think of the time in college, where my fraternity brother Brien, who was from a southern state, was driving us around after it had snowed in Owensboro. Of course he had cleared off the windshield but as we were driving, the whole sheet of ice that was on his hood came off and up at the windshield. Brien, our southern driver, freaks out and lets go of the wheel, arms crossed over his face. While the rest of us were worried about the driver not holding the steering wheel, he was worried about the ice that was coming off the hood towards his face. Of course the ice hit the windshield and fell off the car. Brien lets out a sigh of relief, then everyone burst out laughing. It was a shared joy that Brien survived the ice, we survived Brien’s driving and this funny moment was shared by all.

I think we all have had those little moments of joy that we have shared with friends and family alike. Funny moments that give us a brief glimpse of a moment of pure joy. Pure because in that moment it is the only thing on our hearts and minds. But those are just small moments and life keeps on chugging. We would return to our dorm rooms with books to read and tests to prepare for. Worried about finances, girls, and life after college. Our lives were not continually joy filled, maybe rarely joy filled, but I enjoyed my college experience and those little moments that are now memories still bring me joy to this day.

In Philippians, Paul is writing to the church of Phillipi which has many good christian attributes but also had deficiencies like arrogance, pride, and conceit. After naming the good and the bad of the church in previous chapters. Paul says this in

Philippians 4:4-7 :

Be glad in the Lord always! Again I say, be glad! 5 Let your gentleness show in your treatment of all people. The Lord is near. 6 Don’t be anxious about anything; rather, bring up all of your requests to God in your prayers and petitions, along with giving thanks. 7 Then the peace of God that exceeds all understanding will keep your hearts and minds safe in Christ Jesus.

Be glad is also translated as rejoice, depending on your translation. There was a song that the Pentecostal church I grew up in sang that came from these verses. Rejoice in the Lord always again I say rejoice. Paul goes on saying Let your gentleness show in your treatment of ALL people. Why? Because the Lord is near. Rejoice in the Lord always and let your gentleness show in your treatment of All people. Do you also hear a reframing of the greatest commandment here? That we should love the LORD our God with all we are and love our neighbor as ourselves being translated by Paul as rejoice in the Lord always and let your gentlessness show in your treatment of all people.

We have talked a lot about the greatest commandment but Paul adds that we should do this because the Lord is near. The children of God, baptized into the family of God, needing to be reminded that we should follow the greatest rule that God the father gave us? (Smile) That is like children isn’t it. I bet even Mrs. Glinne and Mrs. Becky found themselves not following the rules when the parent was not around to watch. I know Mr. Steve had that problem. But all children test the boundaries of rules when they feel like they aren’t being watched, even the children of God. Free will gives us the choice to follow or not follow Gods rules, including the greatest commandment. Paul recognizes this and reminds the church in Philippi and is reminding us now in the season of Advent, that the Lord is near.

In taking seminary classes, it is interesting to learn about how near Paul and the disciples thought the 2nd coming was. Jesus ascends with the promise of the 2nd coming assured to the disciples by angels. Why wouldn’t the disciples think that the 2nd coming of Jesus would be during their life? Believing that the kingdom of Heaven is near probably inspired their evangelism to the world to be more fervent. IF you believed that the Lord is near and that in your lifetime you would see the earth robed in the glory of God’s kingdom wouldn’t you spread the Gospel message as best you could?

So Paul writes his letters including this one to the church of Philippi believing that the Lord is indeed near to returning. Paul continues his letter saying, “Don’t be anxious about anything; rather, bring up all of your requests to God in your prayers and petitions, along with giving thanks. 7 Then the peace of God that exceeds all understanding will keep your hearts and minds safe in Christ Jesus.” If God is near then we need to keep working on our relationship with God. Paul tells the Phillipians to not be anxious but instead, bring up all of your requests, all of them to God through prayers and petitions while giving thanks. If you keep good communication between you and God then you have not need to be anxious, for as often as you communicate with God, God communicates with you.

Are we communicating with God as if we believe God is near? Or do we find ourselves only giving God prayers and petitions when it most benefits us. Most Christians cannot say they send God all of their requests, and most Christians would also say they find themselves anxious at times. Do we believe that the amount of time we spend with God translates into a lesser amount of time being anxious? William Loader writes and I would have to agree that: Paul is not just advocating the power of positive thinking. This is about more than technique and persuasion. It is about filling one's mind with what Paul sees as the signs of God's life - not so that will feel good, but because this is another way of filling oneself with God's life and so allowing God's life to flow through us to the world around us."

The more time we spend communicating with God whether it be through prayer, petition or in thanksgiving, them more we are filling ourselves with God’s love and life. The more God’s love and life fills us, the more we love and light of God we can show the world. The more time we spend letting God speak and work in us, the more Christian, the more Christ like we become. With any relationship we are in, we have to continue to communicate and continue to work to make the relationship better. God wants to continue to work in us and letting God work in us we will have more reason to rejoice in the Lord always for God’s joy in us as God’s children will be better known to us and we will also rejoice for knowing God better.

How often do you rejoice? I was unsure of the answer for myself and even looked up the definition to provide a better answer today. To rejoice is to feel or show great joy or delight. I don’t think I often show great joy or delight, I’ve gotten in trouble with Alicia for the amount of times I show very little emotion. Rejoicing is something I need to work on, for Paul says I should rejoice in the Lord always. But I come from a life that was not easy and I believe that I developed my emotionless, or delayed emotional responses as a way to protect myself. I know that I am not the only one who has experienced disappointments in life, whether those disappointments come from friends, loved ones, or the world. Those disappointments, rejections, and hurts add up on a person and I believe todays video was correct and humanity and Christian alike settles for less than what God has for us. We settle for contentment.

Have we given up on real joy? Do we find ourselves settling for contentment? Are we choosing to be content instead of unhappy, content is better than pain, loneliness, and depression. Content breeds staleness. We wall ourselves up not letting much in or out, like a room with little air movement. You know one of those rooms where you open the door and it smells, and feels of stale air. We were not made to merely be content. Our lives were not meant to feel stale.

We were created to feel love, acceptance, hope, peace, and joy. Not just from God but from each other. Those hurts, rejections, and disappointments can end up stealing our ability to fully feel love, acceptance, hope, peace, and joy because in those times of hurt we build up layers of protection. But in protecting ourselves from those pains those layers also protect us from feeling all of the joy and love in life. Its like windows with those layers of very dark tint on them. The tint protects those inside the window from being seen by those on the outside but it also makes it harder for the people inside the window to see everything outside of it. Or like a strong pair of sunglasses that protect your eyes from all of the light of the sun but they also prevent your eyes from seeing all the colors that the light illuminates around you. We have to let down our guards to fully experience God as well. It starts with giving God all of our prayers, petititions, and thanksgivings. It continues by allowing God to work in us and through us as we walk closer to Jesus. Then we can rejoice for we are experiencing the joys of this life that God has us. Joy is like air rushing into that stale room when the window is opened. It causes not just a smile but an excitement of the soul. A joy filled person is infectious to be around and causes others to feel that joy as well. God wants you to feel more than content with this life, God wants you to know the joy that this life was meant to have, the joy of being a child of God surrounded by God’s wonderous creation. The joy of participating in the Will of the Father. The joy of being in relationship with God and neighbor. God wants you to know the fullness of Joy.

Let us pray