

Ladies and Gentlemen

Philippians 4:4-5

Extravagant Grace, Part 2

A magazine article begins with this quote in bold capital letters: “Half of all Americans are angrier today than they were a year ago.”

“From their views on the state of the American dream – which is dead – and America’s role in the world – which is not what it used to be – to how their life is working out for them – which is not what they’d expected, more people than ever are viewing life through a veil of disappointment.”ⁱ

Historian Daniel Boorstin suggests that Americans suffer so much disappointment because of self-centered, unrealistic expectations. In his book entitled, *The Image*, he writes: we expect anything and everything; we even expect the contradictory and the impossible. We expect compact cars which are spacious and luxurious cars which are economical. We expect to eat and stay thin, to be constantly on the move and yet good neighbors; to go to the church of our choice and yet accept its guidance over us; we expect to revere God and to play God. [No wonder so many people feel deceived and disappointed. Never have people expected so much more than the world will ever be able to fulfill.]ⁱⁱ

Into this culture of expectation and disappointment . . . frankly, into every generation, God has placed His church – His redeemed Bride. And we become demonstrations of an entirely different perspective; we pursue an entirely different set of expectations; in fact, we define everything in life by an entirely different dictionary.

We literally become to our dissatisfied world, a picture of satisfaction; we become to our deceived world a picture of reality; we become to our angry and self-absorbed world demonstrations of grace.

And for the believer, never is this more convictingly clear than in Paul’s rapid fire, staccato, delivery in *Philippians* chapter 4, where the believer finds Paul clicking off one imperative – one command – after another.ⁱⁱⁱ

And each of these commands, by the way, is a volume of study and personal application, yet Paul flies through them – and I will admit to you up front that Paul will write them faster than I can preach them.

Take your copy of the New Testament and turn to *Philippians* chapter 4; if you were with us in the opening study of this chapter, you may remember two women at odds with one another; Paul settles the dispute by asking that grace be demonstrated among the disagreeable in the church.

Now Paul moves on to talk about how we as Christians demonstrate grace in a disagreeable world.

And for today, Paul is going to touch on two subjects: our resolution and our reputation.

Let’s pick it up at *verse 4 of Philippians chapter 4, Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!* (exclamation point!)

1. **Number 1: Make it your resolution to be joyful!**

And you can't help but notice that there aren't any loopholes in this command.^{iv}

Paul repeats the command twice, and even adds the word – *always*. ***Rejoice in the Lord – on Sundays; rejoice in the Lord on happy days; no – rejoice in the Lord always*** – and if you didn't get it the first time, I'll say it again – *rejoice*.

Now watch this – if Paul is commanding us here, then joy can't be a feeling like happiness. You can't command somebody to be happy.

In fact, life is filled with unhappy moments and unhappy events and unhappy experiences and unhappy tears and unhappy feelings.

Happiness relates to what's happening . . . and what's happening isn't always warm and fuzzy.

Maybe you've seen the Charlie Brown cartoon that defines happiness as a warm puppy. I can remember growing up, our dog Wags seemed to have one litter after another. There were times when my mother woke us four boys up by putting one of those puppies in our beds . . . you couldn't stay asleep then . . . in fact, it was a great way to wake up.

If happiness is like a warm puppy, the question becomes, what happens when there's no puppy? Exchange puppy for money, beauty, health, promotion, success, straight A's, a boyfriend or a girlfriend; a new car; house, dress – you fill in the blank – and as long as you have that – you're happy. Happiness is circumstantial and it can't really be commanded; joy is internal; it is responding to the nature of God's Spirit within us.^v

Joy is the settled conviction that God is in control of every circumstance and every event in life – and even when trials come, we can follow the command of James chapter 1 to respond with joy because we know God has an ultimate purpose in it.

And keep in mind that when Paul is writing this command, he isn't sipping coffee in a seaside Café in Rome; he's chained to a Roman guard.^{vi}

And can you imagine his demonstration of grace through Paul's resolution to rejoice in his bonds . . . can you imagine the effect on those soldiers who guarded him?

You happen to be living in an unhappy culture; surrounded by dissatisfied, disappointed human beings – and you become a demonstration of the grace of God and the gospel when you face everything – always, Paul writes – with a resolution to rejoice.

Don't be like so many Christians who's joy is evidently so deep it never surfaces.^{vii}

Throughout the New Testament we're given several features of joy . . . let me give you 4 or 5 of them.^{viii}

a. First, joy is given by God to those who are saved.

In other words, joy is bound up in the gospel. At that very first announcement of Christ's birth by the angel to the shepherds – the angel said, ***For behold I bring you good news of great – what? – of great joy . . . for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior who is Christ the Lord. (Luke 2:1-11)***; and by the way, after the shepherds left that outdoor delivery room, the Bible tells us that they went on their way praising God.

Nothing about their dirty, difficult jobs had changed; nothing about their income had changed; nothing about their unclean status in religious life had been altered – but they had seen the Savior – and the gospel brought to them lasting joy.

As the gospel message explodes in the Book of Acts among the Gentiles, we're told that ***the Gentiles began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord . . . the paragraph ends, and the disciples were continually filled with joy (Acts 13)***.

It's impossible to separate salvation from joy.

b. Secondly, joy is an ongoing production of the Holy Spirit.

In his letter to the Galatians, Paul writes, ***The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness*** and so on. (*Galatians 5:22*).

In other words, happiness is human . . . joy is supernatural.

This settled conviction that allows us to rejoice that God is not only in control, but worthy of being worshipped and praised no matter what.

c. Thirdly, joy is the result of receiving and obeying the word of God

Jeremiah the prophet said this to God; ***Your words were found and I ate them, and Your words became for me a joy and a delight to my heart; for I have been called by your name, O Lord God of hosts (Jeremiah 15:16)***

John the Apostle writes his inspired letters so that, among other things, his reader's *joy may be made complete (1 John 1:4)*.

d. Fourth, joy is deepened as believers experience trials

You became imitators of us and of the Lord, Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit (1 Thessalonians 1:6).

What a convicting combination . . . tribulation with much joy. Paul wrote to the believers in Corinth that he was *sorrowful yet rejoicing (2 Corinthians 6:10)*.

What perfect balance and transparency . . . everything in life doesn't bring Paul happiness either – it even brought Paul sorrow.

But tears are mingled with this settled conviction that God is in control – and though sorrowing, Paul says, I can also rejoice.

To put it another way, our inner attitudes are not bound to outward circumstances; in fact, our inner attitudes do not *depend* on outward circumstances.^{ix}

Which is why Paul writes here in *Philippians 4 – notice again at verse 4 – we are to rejoice in – our circumstances? No – we are to rejoice in the Lord!*

We are to rejoice in the One who is our unchanging, unfailing, unwavering rock and refuge and our source of joy.

e. One more – fifthly – joy is motivated by thoughts of heaven.

Paul will arrive at this point here in his letter to the Philippians as he and the church anticipate seeing Jesus Christ face to face.

But let me allow the Apostle Peter to chime in as he writes, *Though you have not seen Him (the Lord), you love Him; and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory (1 Peter 1:8)*. Later he writes, *at the revelation of His glory you will rejoice with exultation (1 Peter 4:13)*.

Listen, the resolution to rejoice isn't natural . . . it's supernatural.

And to the depressed and despairing and disappointed human race around us, we demonstrate something so unique that it mystifies our world – because they see that Christianity has not vaccinated us from the same kinds of excruciating stresses and relational heartaches and frustrating and painful

sicknesses and financial losses and the heartbreaking deaths of parents and grandparents or children or grandchildren.

But they see us effectively roll up the sleeves of our faith when we don't understand it . . . we can't explain it . . . we didn't expect it . . . and we couldn't escape it.

Yet we resolved to rejoice in the trustworthiness of our Lord. A number of years ago I was handed a poem, which I kept in my files – I would later use it when I was asked to preach at the funeral for a precious little 4 year-old girl.

Before I chose to read the poem, I did a little research on it – the lyrics were deep enough to me to have been written by someone who knew what they were talking about.

I discovered that the poem had been written in 1932 by a pastor in Mississippi. He and his wife had three small children, and a fourth child was on the way. There were complications however and during her delivery, both she and the baby died.

During the funeral service, the young grief-stricken pastor was seen writing something down on a piece of paper. A friend asked him about it later and he said, "I wrote down this poem that just came to my mind."

This poem of deep, supernatural joy, written in the valley of despair, goes like this:

My Father's way may twist and turn,
My heart may throb and ache,
But in my soul I'm glad I know,
He maketh no mistake.

My cherished plans may go astray,
My hopes may fade away,
But still I'll trust my Lord to lead
For he doth know the way.

Tho' night be dark and it may seem
That day will never break;
I'll pin my faith, my all in Him,
He maketh no mistake.

There's so much now I cannot see,
My eyesight's far too dim;
But come what may, I'll simply trust
And leave it all to Him.

For by and by the mist will lift,
And plain it all He'll make,

Through all the way, tho' dark to me,
He made not one mistake.

It's as if Paul tells the church in Philippi, "Listen, all eyes are gonna be on you . . . does what you have make your responses any different?"

Will you choose today to demonstrate, in living color – a settled conviction that your God is worthy of worship and praise even when your heart is broken.

Make this your resolution . . . it isn't gonna be natural – it'll be obviously supernatural . . . a resolution to be joyful.

2. **Secondly, make it your reputation to be gentle!**

Now if you thought the command to be joyful was convicting – and it was to me – get ready for this one.

Verse 5. Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near.

Let your gentle spirit be known to all men . . . seriously? As one author wrote tongue in cheek, "The meek and gentle don't inherit the earth – they get walked on."

I mean, you'll never get a taxi if you're gentle . . . much less a starting position on the football team.

What in the world does Paul mean here? Well, part of the challenge over the past 500 years of English translations has been at attempting to translate an absolutely loaded Greek word.

And the English language has always found it difficult to translate the rich nuances of the Greek Language.

- In 1380, John Wycliffe translated this word "patience";
- William Tyndale printed the first English New Testament in 1525 and he translated it, "softness";
- The Geneva Bible in 1560, which was the first Bible to number the verses and chapters – in fact, William Shakespeare would quote from this Bible hundreds of times in his plays; it translated this word, "the patient mind";
- In 1582, Rheims translated it, "modesty";
- In 1611 The King James Bible used the word moderation and later added in the margin the word, gentleness.

- More recent translations have used, a forbearing spirit, or reasonableness.^x

Aristotle used the word in the context of not insisting on the letter of the law in a given case.^{xi}

During the days of Paul, the Greeks themselves used the word in contexts where people yielded their rights, where they patiently bore abuse; where they put up with other people's faults.^{xii}

An article I'd filed away several years ago by Stanley Carvell, included a report on the New England Pipe Cleaning Company in Watertown, Connecticut. The three man crew was digging twenty-five feet beneath the historic streets of Revere, Massachusetts, in order to clean a clogged 10-inch sewer line.

In addition to the usual mess they expected to find, this three-man team ended up unearthing 61 rings, several old, vintage coins and even several pieces of valuable silverware, which they were allowed to keep.

Carvell draws the moral of the story by writing, "Whether it's pipes or people, if you put up with some mess, sometimes you find real treasure."^{xiii} Not a bad analogy.

And if I could translate that analogy back into what I believe Paul is saying to the believer here in **verse 5**, when you're in the middle of a mess, *you* become the real treasure – the valuable vintage coin; *you* become sterling silver.

One recent author complains about our current spirit – which is anything but gentle; he writes, At the beginning of the 21st century, reasoned discourse is increasingly giving way to in-your-face sound bites. Playing hardball is the dominant metaphor for American public life. Our interchanges are confrontational, divisive, and dismissive. Balance and fairness are casualties on evening news shows as two, three, and sometimes four people contend simultaneously for dominance. Volume and disagreement are the new civic virtues.^{xiv}

This command has never been more difficult. Paul uses this same word in **Titus chapter 3** where he contrasts the gentle person with a brawler – a fighter – an argumentative person.

James uses the word in his letter to describe someone who is willing to yield (**James 3:17**).

Obviously there is an element here of humility, right? Who wants to yield to anybody?

We have an illustration of that right out here on Holly Springs Road. If you're coming back on Walnut Street – you're coming back from Chic Fill

A – Walnut Street turns into Holly Springs Road at the light; and what looks like a two lane is going to turn into a one lane just past the entrance into our parking lot. And people don't know that. And so they're driving along at 40 miles an hour and suddenly the road runs out – and they have to get over. And I have watched people over and over again not let those people over.

I've even done my own experiment . . . it's kind of fun. I've been coming back down and I've been in that right lane – which is going to run out – and I've watched to see if the people to my left are going to slow down and let me merge over – oh no . . . they speed up . . . and they know the roads going to end – and they speed up; and then I speed up too – and they speed up; I've had men and women literally floor it – and I floor it . . . then I slow down and pull into the church parking lot and work on my sermon.

The last thing we want to do is yield. As I studied all the different uses of this loaded word, it occurred to me that we happen to have – in our English language – a most appropriate use of this word – gentle. It's the word, gentleman.

It doesn't just mean meek and mild, or soft – it can mean strength of character.

What comes to your mind when you think of who a gentleman is, happens to be a great commentary on exactly the kind of reputation Paul is referring to here.

- A gentleman is courteous, kind, modest, yielding – opening doors for ladies – which is the English counterpart to gentleman.
- A gentleman doesn't come to blows; he doesn't lose his cool; he watches his words and his actions;
- A gentleman isn't off-color or rude; he doesn't demean a woman or disrespect his peers.
- A gentleman doesn't honk his horn because someone's driving too slow down Penney road while he's trying to get to church – so he can preach.

Never mind that one. Paul is effectively commanding us all – pursue a reputation for yielding . . . pursue a reputation of being gracious when you

might even be the one who's right and the other person is wrong.

Peter Marshall, the Chaplain of the Senate prayed years ago as the Senate opened, "Lord, when we are wrong, make us willing to change; and when we are right, make us easy to live with."

Be a gentleman . . . be a lady – which is the English counterpart to a gentleman.

There is a sense of decency and civility bound up in this command.

Do we ever need a fresh demonstration of what this means!

A recent poll underscored the real issue with the lack of civility in our culture. According to their poll, the percentage of Americans who:

- Think a lack of civility is a serious problem: 89%.
- Think mean-spirited political campaigns are to blame: 73%
- Think graphic, violent rock music is to blame: 67%.
- Think brash talk radio is to blame: 52%.
- Think their own behavior is uncivil: 1%.^{xv}

Listen, we happen to be living at the perfect time and in the perfect generation to resurrect and pursue a reputation for being civil, gracious . . . gentle.

Our resolution is to be joyful.

Our reputation is to be gentle.

Why? Because our expectation is going to be realized

Notice how Paul drops in this phrase – here at the end of *verse 5. The Lord is near.*

In other words:

- be willing to respond to abuse with patience;
- be willing to yield your rights when others are demanding;
- be courteous when others are discourteous;
- be gracious when the world treats you with cruelty.

James speaks in a similar manner when he writes, *Be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near (James 5:8).*

Paul is writing this letter, chained to Roman soldiers as he reminds us all – this isn't the end of the story.

The Lord is coming soon to right every wrong. So in light of that, be joyful . . . be gentle . . . and don't keep your eyes focused on your circumstances – keep an eye out for the coming of your Redeemer and Lord.

The Lord is near can certainly be interpreted in regards to time – in other words, ‘the time is short’ –

He is near, prophetically speaking. But you can also interpret this phrase, *the Lord is near*, in terms of His immediate, personal presence.^{xvi}

In other words, this isn’t just a phrase of prophecy, but proximity.

The Lord is near . . . to you . . . now!

In the best of times, one author writes, the Lord is near; in the worst of times, the Lord is still with us; in every changing circumstance of life – in all seasons of life, He is a friend for life; He is not only near when the sun shines; He is near with the storms rage and the hurricanes blow– the weather makes no difference to Him – He is near.^{xvii}

One of the driving principles that led Hudson Taylor through 50 years of pioneering work in China more than 100 years ago was this principle where he counted Jesus as never absent.^{xviii}

He counted Jesus as never absent. Following these two commands can only come when we live in light of eternity; when we live as demonstrations to our lost and despairing and disappointed world of these two qualities of life – a resolution to be joyful and a reputation to be gentle – because they need the gospel and because Jesus is near to us now and He is nearer than ever in coming for us one day.

One author writes that he was once speaking in Toronto on the subject of demonstrating grace; he writes, I asked the audience about their own experiences conveying grace to others. One woman surprised us all when she stood and said, “Well, I feel that I’m called to minister to telephone marketers. You know, the kind who call at inconvenient hours and deliver their spiel before you

can say, “I’m not interested.” How many times have we all, this author interrupted, responded rudely or simply hung up.

She continued: “You know, all day long these sales callers hear people curse at them and slam the phone down. I listen attentively to their pitch, then I try to respond kindly, though I’m not interested in buying whatever they’re selling. Instead, I ask them a question or two about their time on the job; I ask them about where they live and if they have any concerns that I might pray about on their behalf.

They’re totally shocked. Often they ask me to pray with them right then and there on the phone, and sometimes they end up in tears. They’re people, after all, probably underpaid, and they’re surprised when someone treats them with courtesy and grace.

The author went on to write, “I wondered how often I miss those moments in my own interactions with people. I marvel at this Toronto woman’s gracious response and think of the times I get irritated with employees on computer help lines who don’t speak very good English. I catch myself treating store cashiers and Starbucks baristas as if they are machines, not people . . . subtly or not so subtly, I communicate that I’ve been interrupted and I need to get back to work. In the process, I have been missing opportunities to dispense grace.”^{xix}

Isn’t that what Paul is commanding of us all?

To be joyful spills out . . . to be gentle spills over.

Imagine, the church could be known as an assembly of ladies and gentlemen – resolved to follow joyfully their Lord who is near and who’s coming is nearer than ever before.

Make this your resolution . . . make this your reputation . . . for the glory of God.

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ⁱ Esquire Editors, “American Rage: The Esquire/NBC News Survey” Esquire (1-3-16)

ⁱⁱ Barry Morrow, *Yearning for More* (IVP Books, 2013), p. 19

ⁱⁱⁱ Adapted from G. Walter Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians* (Apollos, 2009), p. 286

^{iv} R. Kent Hughes, *Philippians: The Fellowship of the Gospel* (Crossway Books, 2007), p. 165

^v Adapted from James Montgomery Boice, *Philippians* (Baker Books, 1971), p. 236

^{vi} Ibid

^{vii} Sam Gordon, *Philippians: An Odyssey of Joy* (Ambassador, 2004), p. 155

^{viii} The following features adapted from John MacArthur, *Philippians* (Moody Publishers, 2001), p. 10

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- ix Adapted from Life Application Bible: Philippians, Colossians & Philemon (Tyndale House, 1995), p. 108
- x Hughes, p. 167; William Barclay, The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians (Westminster, 1975), p. 75
- xi Gerhard Kittle, ed; Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: Volume II (Eerdmans, 1964), p. 588
- xii The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Vol. 12 (Zondervan, 2006), p. 252; Ralph Earle, Word Meanings in the NT (Baker, 1986), p. 345
- xiii Leadership Magazine, "Relationships" Christianity Today; Summer 1996, p. 65
- xiv Ronald J. Kernaghan, "Speaking the Truth In Love," Theology, News & Notes (Winter 2003); submitted by Dan Meyer
- xv U.S. News & World Report (4/22/96). Leadership, "To Verify."
- xvi Adapted from Hansen, p. 289
- xvii Adapted from Sam Gordon, p. 158
- xviii Ibid, p. 159
- xix Adapted from Philip Yancey, Vanishing Grace (Zondervan, 2014), pp. 75-76