

**God wants you to be happy**  
**1 Thessalonians 5 :16-18 & Philippians 4:4, 10-13**

**My beloved Asbury family**

I am so pleased to see you again and thankful that I can share God's word with you this morning. I hope the risen Christ guides us to experience true Joy in all situations.

I want to start with this question. Do you believe God wants you to be happy? (answer) Yes~!

As so many biblical passages witness, including today's scripture, our God wants us to be happy, blessing us with rejoicing. Amen?!!

But, as we look back on our lives, we can easily find that we sometimes have been unhappy.

We are not always happy, especially when things do not go as we planned.

In the same vein, we may feel that we are happy when we achieve something or acquire something we want. What makes you happy?

**Aladdin's example about our desire**

Recently, I watched the movie "Aladdin." You probably already know the story of Aladdin.

But for those who are not familiar with the story, I will summarize it and make some points from it.

The Genie is an omnipotent being but he is entrapped and has to live in a magic lamp. The Genie grants wishes to those who own the lamp.

This Genie had two owners, Aladdin and Jafar.

They each had three wishes and could choose different wishes according to their desires.

On the one hand, Aladdin, a good guy, had learned that possessions never made him happy so, he chose the Genie's freedom as his last wish.

On the other hand, Jafar was a deceitful person and wanted to be king.

He tried to possess the unlimited power that Genie seemed to have and eventually, he wished to be like Genie.

As a result, he was trapped in the lamp forever. Aladdin's story seems to reflect our own life stories.

We sometimes think that we will be happy when all our wishes are achieved.

But we know that nothing can satisfy our desires. If we wish only to fulfill our own desires, we never experience pure joy in God.

Even if God grants us all we wish for, we will never be able to satisfy our endless desires and can easily lose joy and happiness in our lives.

Saint Augustin said, "our heart is restless until it finds its rest in God." We will never be able to find true joy until we desire and love God over anything else.

### **Rejoice always even in the hardship**

Let's come back to today's scripture. "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."

"Rejoice always" means "always!" We should rejoice during times of success but we also need to rejoice even during times of difficulty.

Our lives often do not go as we wish but often go in the opposite direction.

We sometimes experience bitterness in our lives caused by painful illness or unexpected tragedy.

Sometimes we cannot feel the presence of God and ask where God is in times of trouble or why God allows these bad things happen to us.

### **Paul's example**

However, Apostle Paul invites us to rejoice. When Paul wrote this letter to the Thessalonian church, he was in prison.

Although he was in trouble, he invited his congregation to rejoice. How could that be?

We can find an answer in another letter Paul wrote to the Philippian church.

In Philippians 4, Paul said that “he has learned to be content whatever the circumstances and he can do all things through God who gives him strength.”

Because Paul knew that God was with him, he was able to endure whatever the circumstances were.

**Because of God, he could rejoice even in times of trouble...**

We easily become weary during times of trouble. Honestly, it's hard to rejoice during these times.

However, as Paul taught us, this joy is not an emotional feeling but it is a gift of the Holy Spirit.

We cannot rejoice if we only try to satisfy our own will.

We must listen and follow the Holy Spirit to feel the joy God gives in our hearts.

As you know, one of the fruits of the spirit is Joy and God grants us the Holy Spirit as a free gift.

That Holy Spirit helps us to rejoice even during times of trouble.

Then, how or when can we experience the presence of God in our lives?

The answer is “prayer.’ Prayer helps us to listen for God’s voice and discern God’s will and providence.

In our ordinary lives, if we could experience God’s providence through something beyond our imagination, it would be a very awesome moment~!

That is what happened through my desperate prayer.

A friend of my father introduced me to Yohan, before we got to know each other.

After the first meeting, I rejected his offer to see each other again. I think I was not ready to meet someone.

At the time, I had just come back from finishing my studies abroad in Germany and was struggling to settle down in my new environment in Korea.

However, when I accidentally saw him again at an Annual Conference of the Korean Methodist Church, it was a different story.

He did not see me, but I saw him more than three times, passing by near me. I could not control the beating of my heart.

My heart was beating so fast. (I thought it might be ready to meet someone. Hahaha)

But, I did not dare to greet him because I had rejected him on our first date...

I only hoped to meet him entreatingly again.

Unfortunately, there was no chance to see him again, and it was time to leave.

Before I left, I went to the ladies' room and **desperately prayed to God** while sitting on the toilet.

"Oh, ~~!! God, if he is the man for me, please, let me meet him again~!! Please~ Please~~ But if he is not the man, please, calm the beating of my heart."

After my desperate prayer, I came out,, but there was nobody and I was very disappointed...not to see him again.

So I trudged with heavy feet toward my car.

But, then there he was in front of my car!

We had coincidentally parked beside each other, and by happy chance, he came out to take something from his car at the same time I went to my car.

For me, it was a moment in which God said to me, "Yes~! it's him." This coincidental moment resulted from an inevitable moment of God's providence.

I still remember it vividly and am so thankful for this most memorable moment granted through toilet prayer in my life~!

If you want to deeply connect with God, please, consider praying even..on the toilet.

I know it sounds like a joke but it so happened that God's providence was revealed to me through this ardent prayer..

**Prayer..** is essential in our lives. Prayer is a direct path to connection with God.

So, Paul said "pray ceaselessly." And he continues to invite us to "give thanks in all circumstances."

Because he believed that "in all things God works for the good," he could endure his suffering and even praise God in prison.

He put his true hope in God, so that he could say "Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God."

So, he became our faithful ancestor and we have inherited his faith....

Our life situations may vary. Some are better and some may be hard.

Nobody can understand the suffering and the struggles in our lives. But God understands our pain and struggle, our sorrow and grief.

Our heavenly Father understands... God also invites us to be happy even in hardship.

As we know, during this Covid situation, xenophobia, hate crimes, and violence fueled by racism, have spiked in our country.

Many minorities are neglected and discriminated against based on their race, ethnicity, skin color, and economic situation.

You may have heard about how I felt while grocery shopping without Yohan.

As a small Asian woman in this intimidating situation, I could praise God because of you, Asbury family.

Since Yohan mentioned my fears about going out alone to you, we have received many phone calls and warm caring cards from you.

Some of you have even volunteered to be my body guard whenever I go out. God has sent me so many caring body guards.

Thank you very much for your warmth, embrace, generosity and kindness.

Because of God's love in sending faithful Christians like you to us, we can rejoice in any circumstance and endure these difficulties.

God is always with us and cares for us.

Trust God who is always with us. Develop an intimate relationship with God through prayer even on the toilet~!  
and give thanks to God in all circumstances. Let us rejoice together.  
Amen.

**Blessing:** Rejoice always, pray ceaselessly and give thanks to God in all circumstances. May you be blessed with great joy from God in your daily life.

Go in peace, the blessings of God be with you all now and forever.  
Amen.