

Wouldn't it be great if you and I could reach the point to where worry and anxiety never kept us awake at night, or glued to the television, never left us fatigued of ~~body~~ or distraught of ~~mind~~, did not haunt our attitudes and activities. **BREATHE**

What a feeling that would be right! **BREATHE**
look @ Paul in our reading from philippians
 I mean really take a look at Paul in our reading from

Philippians. Paul is sitting in a prison cell and has every reason to be bitter and angry, ^{yet} he calls on the Philippians and us to "Rejoice in the Lord always: again I will say, Rejoice." "The Lord is Near." **BREATHE**

While Paul could be thinking that the second coming of Jesus is near which is ^a very Advent kind of thought. It could also mean that Jesus is there with him in the cell. It's Jesus presence with him through the Spirit that gives him the strength despite his situation. Jesus is Emmanuel, God with us always, even to the end of time. **BREATHE**

In other words Paul is saying no matter what our own own circumstances, ^{our worries our anxieties} we can always find joy in Jesus, his love, his mercy, his promises, his presence with us. The ground of our rejoicing is not in our outward circumstances but the spiritual ground of joy is in the Lord. **BREATHE**

If the joy of the Lord becomes our strength, then nothing and no one can take it away. That is the first thing Paul says, “Rejoice in the Lord always.” **BREATHE**

We cannot see Jesus but the evidences of his presence are all around us. **BREATHE**

~~And~~ later Paul says in Philippians 4 is “Do not worry about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.” **BREATHE** *the worries*

Let God know your concerns. Let go of the anxiety that keeps you from experiencing the joy of the Lord. ~~Once again, Paul is not a pie-in-the-sky optimist. He’s a realist. He knows what it means to live in a dangerous world.~~ **BREATHE**

quote from

Martin Luther suggested: “Joy is the natural fruit of faith.”

BREATHE

If we live with this joy that Paul speaks of, we can live lives defined by gentleness and welcome. When we experience true joy we can open ourselves up to others rather than follow the human instinct to pull ~~inward~~ *away* when times get tough or we feel threatened. **BREATHE** *vice advice right*

But wait Paul is not finished ~~with us~~. He reminds us that when we make our requests known to God, we needn’t worry

about things. Instead, he tells us that “the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” **BREATHE**

A quote from Karl Barth “The peace of God is the order and security of the kingdom of Christ among those that are his.” He writes further that “it is in giving thanks and so bringing your troubles before God, in the act of thanksgiving—for only in that act are you really ‘in Christ Jesus’ —that the guarding in question takes place.” [Epistle to the Philippians, p. 123]. **BREATHE**

^{break} This peace, allows joy to start growing in our life again.

BREATHE

What are you anxious or worried about today? Bring it here to the Lord in prayer, and find God’s peace for your life.

The Lord is near to each one of us; our job is ~~to draw near to the~~ Lord. **BREATHE**

*to let go, give it to God
and peace and joy.*

As Luther reminded us, joy is the natural fruit of faith.

Faith is by definition a matter of trust. **BREATHE**

While I have yet to master this simple set of instructions, because I do get anxious and I worry about things, I appreciate this reminder to keep the faith. In that, I will find my joy in life.

and I do hand it over to God

but!

Yes, the world might be in disarray, but there is still the possibility of hope. **BREATHE**

So, let us pursue the path of joy by dwelling on those things that are true, honorable, just, pure, pleasing, commendable, excellent, and worthy of praise. If we do this, then “the God of peace will be with you” (Phil. 4:8-9). **BREATHE**

A little further down in the concluding chapter of this letter, Paul writes: “I can do all things through him who strengthens me.” (Phil. 4:13). **BREATHE**

This doesn't mean life is easy, but it does mean we can find joy in the Lord since we do not walk this path alone. God is near and we are here. **BREATHE**

For tomorrow we can plan and propose. But tomorrow we cannot possess. However, we can leave it to God, be glad and rejoice in this day. Rejoice then, give thanks. The peace of God will guard your hearts and your thoughts. Do not be anxious about anything. **BREATHE**

We have lit the pink candle that signifies joy. We've heard the call to rejoice always and to pray rather than worry about things facing us. We can take comfort in the knowledge that Jesus is standing nearby. And, is this not the message of Advent?

That God is present with us in the person of Emmanuel, which means God is with us. **BREATHE**

I'll end with this: a poem-prayer from retired pastor Steve Garnaas-Holmes, called "Rejoice Always." He begins:

BREATHE

Seriously? Even with all the crud in the world? Yes. In the rock-paper-scissors of life joy cuts sorrow, crushes despair and swallows crud. Grieve first... and joy comes with the morning.

BREATHE

These are hard days. But joy is bigger than these days. Joy is not happiness with present circumstances, but harmony with the goodness of God and the overflowing of God's delight in us.

BREATHE

Joy includes the universe, and all its beauty and sorrow. Joy dances with gratitude. Joy plays with hope, which is trust in the unseen. Joy sings with love, which is self-giving for another, who is the self—a return to wholeness. What joy! **BREATHE**

Yes, people are suffering, and others don't care. But some do. Rejoice! You can rejoice during a pandemic. You can give thanks at a funeral. You can be joyful in prison. You can lament suffering and injustice, and rejoice. For joy is the healing of

broken hearts, the breaking of chains, the opening of graves, the coming of God. **BREATHE**

Christ does not come to make us happy, but to stand with us in the pain of life until joy like a seed rises. All is swallowed up in joy. Thanks be to God. **Amen.**