When Faith Gets Real

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[0:00] This is the First Mustang Pulpit Podcast, a podcast of the weekly preaching and teaching at First Mustang.! Thank you for joining us. I wonder if something has stolen your joy lately.

! For some, maybe nothing comes to mind, but my guess would be for many of you, there just may be. Maybe something that's happened to your family.
Maybe something with your health or finances. Maybe a relationship that's broken your heart.
Maybe unfulfilled longings in your heart. Desire for a friend that hasn't yet been met.
Desire for a spouse that hasn't yet been met. The reality of it is, every person in this room knows what it's like to struggle.
[1:22] We know what it's like to face hurt. And the question comes for us, what will we do in those moments?

When the things of life or circumstances you face threaten to rob you of your joy? Do we meditate on the trial?
Do we let our mind fixate and dwell on the hurt? Do we cling to God's Word? Do we look at God's Word?
And what often comes into our life when we go through trials where circumstances are painful and less than what we would hope for?
We tend to get very, very anxious thoughts. Anxious thoughts can become burdensome.
[2:23] They can become all-encompassing. Overwhelming. If we're not careful, the anxiety of the day becomes the first thought we have when we wake up each morning.

And it dominates and permeates our mind throughout the day. It becomes the last thought on our mind as we go to sleep. And even worse than that, sometimes it robs us of our sleep because we can't seem to get our mind off of what it is that has caused us so much grief or concern.
And admittedly, we live in a world and a culture where this is honestly a bit of a complexity today. Because terms like anxiety get thrown around so often to where it almost becomes the norm that people would feel anxious.
In a similar way in our culture, it's basically the norm that if somebody asks you how you're doing, you're just supposed to reply, I'm just super, super busy.
[3:48] Now, there are lots of things we do in life. And we don't just sit at home on a couch staring at the wall for hours on end. But it's almost become a badge of honor in our culture to just talk about being busy.

In a similar way, it's almost become an expectation that you've got something that you're just overwhelmed by or burdened by. And it has become completely the norm that we would describe ourselves as being filled with anxiety.
That's just the norm in our culture. And I do certainly want to be aware of and sensitive to the reality that there are many people, not hypothetically, many people right now in this sanctuary, people I love and care for dearly.
And you would describe yourself that you feel today overwhelmed by anxiety. I don't in any way want to make light of that. It's actually the opposite. I want to help you with that. That's my whole goal today is through Scripture to help you in this situation.
And I'm aware there are things that we go through. There are problems we face. There are things that can happen outside of us. There are things that happen internally inside of us that have a lot of sway over how we feel physically.
[5:04] And how we feel physically holds a lot of sway to how we feel emotionally. But I do stand upon the truth of the Word of God who tells us in Philippians 4 verse 6, do not be anxious about anything.

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In a culture that not only expects, but oftentimes almost demands that its people be anxious and anxiety ridden.
The Word of God tells us do not be anxious about anything. Well, there's some challenges to that, isn't there?
Because on the one hand, finals week in college is stressful. There's no way around that. On one hand, your high school senior graduating and getting ready to move out of your house is stressful. The thought of taking your child to school just two to three months from now for the first time and dropping them off at school for the first time, that causes us some things to have to think through and work through.
[6:40] And we could go on at infinitum of all kinds of life situations that can be difficult. I just want to put before you that in our life, there are always challenges.

There are always things that we have to face. And life is rarely, if ever, easy. That's always the norm on this earth, in this life, that there are things that are going to be a challenge for us, a struggle for us.
But those struggles and challenges need not make us weary and anxiety laden. They make us, we pray, trustful, hopeful, turning to the Lord.
And there are some things that people face and they don't want to face and they don't ask for them. They're not trying to feel that way.
Sometimes it's hard to make yourself feel something different than you feel. You don't want to feel that way in the first place. And there are other habits and patterns that people partake in that it's no wonder they're so anxiety laden.
[7:55] I mean, this is pretty clear and obvious to all of us, but if all you do all day long is just watch news and just scroll through your social media feed, I will just almost guarantee you will be anxious about everything.

How could you not? But I stand on the Scripture, I have nothing else to do.
I have nothing else to stand upon except to give you God's Word. Which is to His people to say, verse 4, Rejoice in the Lord always.
Again, I will say rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand. Do not be anxious 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. We either believe that, or we don't.
[9:08] That's either true for every believer in every situation, or it's folly. Here's our temptation.

Our temptation is to say, I believe Philippians 4, 4-7. It's true. It's right. Except, in my case.
I believe we should be anxious for nothing. I believe the peace of God will guard our hearts and minds. Except, I've got this roommate at college that just, you don't understand.
I believe that we should rejoice always, and be anxious about nothing, but you don't understand my work situation.
I believe the peace of God will guard our hearts and minds, but you don't understand what's happening in my family. And what we tend to do, is affirm that the Scripture is hypothetically true for others, while not actually true for ourselves.
[10:16] And I just want to say to you today, that as believers, the Word of God is the rock upon which we put our feet and build our lives. We believe this.

Amen? We believe this. It's not always easy. Sometimes we do better at this than others. Sometimes the cares of the world creep in a bit too far, and sometimes our faith gets a little wobbly and shaky.
But that's why we gather on the Lord's Day, Sunday after Sunday, to remind and reorient our lives around that which is always true.
It's always true. I read an article six weeks ago about how the world's economy was going to collapse within 48 hours.
It did not. And the follow-up said, well, it will. I suppose it will. But I'm glad I didn't let the last six weeks rob me of my joy.
[11:31] Or you say to yourself, I feel good today, but something's coming. I'm going to get sick one day. I'm going to get something. And you probably will. And when that happens, Philippians 4 is still true for God's people.

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So we're going to look this week and in the second week, I trust here at this passage as we work through Philippians 4 here in verses 4 to 7.
When faith gets real, really tested, and really has to work itself out. Psalm 94 verse 10 says, Isaiah 26 says, You keep in perfect peace him whose mind has stayed on you because he trusts in you. Trust in the Lord forever. The Lord is an everlasting rock. So if there's something today threatening your joy, something today that's a struggle for you, this word is for you.
And if you say, I don't have anything bothering me today. Hold on. Your day will come. And when it does, this truth will meet you there.
[12:58] How do we deal with this? Write down number one, the word rejoice. Rejoice. We'll just let the text outline our thoughts this morning from verse 4.

Rejoice. It says this, Rejoice in the Lord always. And again, I will say, Rejoice. Now, here's one of the reasons why it's so helpful to read and study and preach the Bible verse by verse.
Because if we just picked a verse this week, and a different verse that week, and a different book of the Bible that week, and a different verse that next week, what we would tend to do when we preach on Philippians 4.4, is you would tend to think, well, sure, rejoice, Lord, always.
Again, I say rejoice. And you would think, well, that's just, it's just talking about circumstances that are great. Of course, we rejoice in the Lord, you know, when we have our Sunday morning face on. But what does this verse have to do with real life and the struggle I face? And the context reminds us that this promise, this command, this word in Philippians 4.4, is right in the midst of real life struggle.
[14:03] When he says rejoice in the Lord always, again, I say rejoice. Let me remind you that Paul, as he writes this letter, is under house arrest, chained to a Roman guard 24 hours a day.

This is not someone whose life is working out beautifully in the world's eyes. The human author who says rejoice in the Lord always has lost his freedom, his privacy, and cannot do what is in the burden of his heart to do to go out and to preach and to minister and to plant churches.
He has no idea exactly how these things are going to work out for his good. He trusts that they will, but he doesn't know the results yet.
And to this man, under house arrest, chained to a guard 24 hours a day, come the words, rejoice in the Lord always.
And, this comes right after verses 2 and 3, which talk about real conflict in the church. We've got these two ladies, we've looked at the last two weeks, Euodia and Syntyche, true believers, love the Lord, love the work of ministry, but the relationship is just filled with friction.
[15:39] In the midst of the reality that churches can struggle, and people can struggle, and friendships can be strained, right in the midst of that reality, he says rejoice in the Lord always.

Regardless of circumstances. Rejoice in the Lord always. Don't let your mind convince you today that your situation is the exception to Philippians 4.
Rejoice in the Lord always. He repeats the command, rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I will say, rejoice.
Why do you think he doubles up? Because the people who are reading the letter do the same thing you and I do when we read it. We convince ourselves we're the exception. So he doubles up on it. Rejoice in the Lord always. And, because I know, he's thinking here, you're prone to not believe or to let your mind stray. Again, I will say, rejoice.
[16:53] Rejoice. Incidentally, the word for rejoice here is in the plural form in the original text, which means this is not only an individual response to our trials, this is to be a collective and congregational response to our trials.

This isn't just you rejoice, this is you rejoice. This is a reminder that the way you respond to adversity influences and impacts all of us.
Mom and dad, the way you respond to trial impacts your kids. Teenagers, the way you respond to difficulty impacts your parents.
And certainly in the church family in the body of Christ, the way one deals with something influences the way all of us deal with something. And so he says to the entirety of the congregation, rejoice in the Lord always.
Again, I will say, rejoice. If we take the original text tense and put it into how we might phrase it today, I think it would be fair to translate it this way.

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[18:11] All of the congregation is to rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I will say to all the congregation, rejoice. The command is hard enough just to hear him say rejoice in the Lord, but it's even harder than it sounds when you consider the word he adds at the end, rejoice in the Lord.

What's your next word? Always. Always. So you're not the exception. Your grief is real, but your situation is not the exception to how we're to live.
Your struggle, your pain, the burdens of your heart, they're real and they matter.
And the Lord cares and your church family cares. But there's no exception here. Rejoice in the Lord always.
I think if you took always out, I could do this pretty well. How about you? Rejoice in the Lord? That's pretty easy for believers because most days are pretty good.
[19:44] Most months are pretty good. Most seasons are pretty good. it's the always part that I think is really challenging for us.

Rejoice, Lord, always in the spring times of your life when things are new and growing and good and sweet and in the winters of your life where they are cold and hard and difficult.
Rejoice in the Lord always. When your family is healthy and when a loved one is sick. When your job is rewarding and when it feels like a dead end.
When ministry is flourishing and when you don't see much fruit. When friendships are growing and even when you feel isolated.
Rejoice in the Lord always. Well, if we were honest this morning, we would probably need to stop for just a minute and say, how is that possible?
[21:13] how do we rejoice always? How do we be thankful always? How do we have joy and hope and delight in our heart always?

But the answer is actually right in the verse and we've heard it and read it so many times we probably skipped over it too quickly in our minds.
how do you rejoice always? Well, it's what's in between that allows us to do that. In the Lord. Rejoice in the Lord.
So when you're sick, you rejoice always. How? In the Lord. By reminding yourself of the Lord.
By being focused on Him. By considering His promises. By considering His word. By considering His nearness. And when you're lonely, you rejoice always.
[22:19] How? In the Lord. By redirecting your mind and your thoughts and your heart toward Him.
By being in His word. Believing His truth. Resting in His promises.

Longing for His return. The way to rejoice always is always to lift your eyes off of yourself and to focus your heart on the Lord and in His word.
And when you say, that feels hard for me. Is there something wrong with me? Understand, there's a reason why He states it and restates it. Because this is hard for all of us.
us. But this is what we believe. That we are to rejoice always. Again, I will say rejoice.
We've seen this all throughout this letter as we have been walking through this book together. This reality that we are to rejoice always.
[23:25] Philippians 1.4 always in every prayer of mine for you, making my prayer with joy.
Chapter 1, verse 20, as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always, Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death.

Chapter 2, verse 12, therefore my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now not only my presence, much more my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.
The Scripture just doesn't give us an escape clause. It's either true or it's not. We either believe this and are committed to this and cling to this or we have nothing to put our feet upon.
rejoice in the Lord always. And again, before you're tempted to say, I could do that, but not in the current situation I'm in, just understand this, in this room are real people with real troubles and real struggles.
I know that and I feel for that. but every one of you in this sanctuary are free. The one who wrote this is not.
[24:58] Every one of you in this sanctuary can move as you please, come and go, walk, privacy.

The one who wrote this has none of that. so don't conclude that this is somehow an empty promise if you're going through a real trial.
The very one who penned this is going through a trial as severe as we can consider. We do this in the Lord.

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I think it's been well said by others and I think helpful to remember that when you think about how to rejoice in the Lord, let me give you three quick words that have been helpful for me to consider of what that means.
How do I rejoice in the Lord? I think it means that we look at these three things, His presence, His promises, and His power. We rejoice in the Lord by thinking of His presence.
[26:03] He is with us. He is always with us. And His promises that He is praying for us. The Spirit is at work in our life. The promise of Romans 8.28 that God is working all things together for good for those who love Him and are called according to His purpose.

And His power, the Bible says the same power that raised Christ from the dead is alive and at work within you. So whatever trial or storm you're facing today, as real as it is, and as difficult as it may seem, in the Lord, rejoice.
And you set your mind on the Lord and think of the things in the Lord by reminding yourself of His presence that's always with you, His promises to always care for you, and His power to see you through.
Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I will say, rejoice. Can I go back to my first question?
What has stolen your joy lately? Rejoice in the Lord always. And again, I will say, rejoice.
[27:26] not when your circumstances change, not when the pain is removed, even right now in the midst of it.

Set your heart on the presence and the promises and the power of Christ and rejoice in the Lord.
Number two, write down the word reasonableness.
reasonableness comes right from verse five. Rejoice, Lord, always. And again, I will say rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone.
The Lord is at hand. Let your reasonableness be known. The NIV translates it, let your gentleness be known.
The Legacy Standard translates it, let your considerate spirit be known. It means to have a graciousness. It means to live with a spiritual strength. It means to have the quality and the poise of godly character.
[28:33] Let that be known. So, joy in Christ is expressed as joy when in your interaction with others you are reasonable.

When in your interaction with others you are gentle. when in your interaction with others you have the strength of godly character no matter what you face.
In other words, you consider God's word and then as a reasonable, gentle, careful person respond accordingly.
time to say to people and do that it is when you see somebody who something small happens to them and they just explode and you think that's not reasonable.
What you're saying to them is back up look at the situation honestly and respond to that situation not in anger but respond to it with thoughtful consideration.
[29:44] Well, as a Christian, we want to respond to every situation we face with Christian reasonableness.

Thinking about what is true and then responding accordingly. This takes us back to chapter 2, verse 12.
Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. Take what's true of your salvation and work it out. Apply it. Take what you know to be true and with reasonableness, with a gentle spirit, act accordingly.
Respond accordingly. But anxious thoughts does the opposite. Anxiousness makes us unreasonable.
Anxiousness makes our thinking and our reactions and our interpretation of events unreasonable.
You start to think somebody's upset with you and so you're saying, well, he, I mean, the way he looked at me, I mean, I knew it.
[30:53] He's mad at me, but she, the way she responded or like I hear many people say in text messages, there's no punctuation. It just said, thank you.

How many times have I heard this? I won't tell you where it comes from. I'll say I hear this all the time. There's no punctuation. Yeah, he said that's good, but he didn't say there's no punctuation. Just be reasonable.

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Every woman here thinks I'm wrong. Every man understands. Teach their own. Be reasonable. If God is with you, and if he cares for you, and if he promises to sustain you, take that truth and face your struggle reasonably based on what you know about God.
Which is why we rejoice in the Lord, and now reasonably, gently, with character and strength, we respond.
Otherwise, you will live your entire life in the anxiety of what may be. I think it was Mark Twain who famously said, I've experienced many terrible things in my life, a few of which actually happened.
[32:28] That's how most people live their life. Most people have died a thousand deaths before they ever take their last breath. Most people have been diagnosed with 15 diseases before they ever get one in their mind.

You've played out every worst case scenario. You've let your mind dwell on a thousand things, most of which never happened.
And you say, yeah, but what if one of them does? And I would say, what if one of them does? How does worrying about this a thousand different ways for ten different years, how does that make anything in your life better for you?
Yeah, but I may get sick. I could lose my job. They may hurt my feelings. And that's all true. And why would you let what you can't control destroy what you can enjoy?
Rejoice in the Lord always. And again I say rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known. Let it be known.
[33:45] We just had graduation last weekend. Others will be taking place this week. Friday night, Marsh and I were out of town.

And then Nises graduation. And, you know, the graduation is interesting because some are graduating with a thousand. The graduation I was at Friday night had 33.
Given the choice. I'll take the 33. It's much quicker. Unless it's your own kid. But at graduation, a name is called off.
And you've got about one or two or three seconds. Another name is called off. And you've got a couple of seconds. Another name is called off.
And if you know these students, if they're your friends that you're graduating with, or if you know the students as parents because you've known their families, when their name is called off, you just have a second.
[34:52] And my question is, what comes in to people's mind when they only have a second to think about who you are? When they don't have time to think through all the complexities and nuances of your life, when somebody just sees your face, hears your name, and all they have is the first thing that comes to mind.

Do they think of you? This is someone who rejoices always. This is someone who lives with joy. This is someone with a gentle spirit.
This is someone who magnifies Christ. Or is the first thought someone would have of you is they're always depressed. They're always worried. They're always complaining.
It's always about them. It's always drama. It's always something. And I'm just saying, let's live our life in a way that makes us different from the world.
And if you want to be different from the world, rejoice always. And let your reasonableness be known to everyone.
[36:05] Have you noticed we don't live in a very reasonable world anymore? So be different. Stand out. Not in a way that people would be amazed by you, but that when people think of you, they would say, that person serves a great God.

It's the only explanation for how you can rejoice with what you've been through. It's the only explanation with how you can rejoice with what you're facing is because you are that convinced that your God is that great.
This has nothing to do with minimizing your circumstances. It has everything to do with maximizing the glory of your Savior. Rejoice in the Lord always.
Tomorrow is Marston I's 30th wedding anniversary. 1996. 1996. 30 years is a long time. And one of the things that has shaped these three decades we've spent together was a conversation she and I had right before we got married.
We were in the car and our wedding was just a few days ahead. And, you know, through 30 years, there's not a lot of conversations I remembered. Life just kind of goes by in a blur.

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[37:35] But this one I will never forget. Right before we got married, three decades ago, Marcy said to me, Michael, wherever we live, in an apartment, in a house, or a cardboard box, if we are together, that will be home to me.

I've never forgotten that. What she was saying was, if we're together, what we have will be indestructible.
And the security that gave me, and the assurance that gave me, and the peace that gave me 30 years later, remains. In an even far greater, far more meaningful way, let the promise and the security of what the Lord offers to you, who is perfect and flawless, and He says, I will never leave you, and I will never forsake you, and my mercies will be new, every morning.
Don't ever stop living, in the joy of that truth. It was 1907, a man named Henry Van Dyke, wrote the words of a poem, that would eventually be known, as the hymn of joy.
Most of you have sung it, many times in your life. The poem says, Joyful, joyful, we adore Thee, God of glory, Lord of love.
[39:15] Hearts unfold, like flowers before Thee, opening to the sun above. Melt the doubts of sin and sadness, drive the dark of doubt away, and fill us with immortal gladness, fill us with the light of day.

Whatever you face today, I know it's real. And for many in our congregation, you're facing very real challenges, with very real hurts and griefs.
And we want to weep with those who weep. And we want to hurt with you, and grieve with you, and recognize there are things you have faced, and things you're facing today, that are very real trials.
And we don't want to dismiss those things, or make light of those things. what we do want to do, what we do want to do, is sit right beside you, with our arm around you, and say, I know this hurts, and I know this is hard.
but because of the goodness of Christ, because of His promises, and because of His power, even in the middle of what you're facing, rejoice.
[41:03] Rejoice. If it needs to be rejoicing with tears, rejoice with tears. If it's a kind of rejoicing, that can't even sing the songs, you just think and take them in, then think and take them in.

It's not that your problems are small. It's that our God is big. And in spite of whatever you're facing, rejoice in the Lord always.
And again, I will say rejoice. And because your mind is fixed and stayed upon Him, let your reasonableness be known to everyone.
Not so they'll be impressed with you, but that through you, they would see the radiance of a God more amazing than the human mind could ever conceive.
And it may just be through your pain that somebody else comes to know your Savior. And in that, we would have even one more reason to rejoice.
[42:35] Lord, Your Word is true. We believe it. We confess that at times it's very difficult. We confess that there are challenges we face and the world does not make it easy for us.

But Your Word does make it clear for us. And I pray that whatever hurts, anxieties, or burdens exist in hearts this morning, that they would respond to them with reasonableness by thinking of Your Word and living in the light of the truth that You have given to us.
In the name of Christ we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
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Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.

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