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## Winning Over Worry Part 1

“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” Philippians 4:4-7 (NIV)

The holidays are a very difficult time for many people – for many reasons. Following the thrill of the Christmas holidays and New Year’s celebrations, reality starts to sink in. The credit card bills arrive. The sun disappears and long, dark days string together like a heavy, suffocating blanket. Already broken resolutions for the New Year mock our commitment to discipline and the darkness of depression makes us want to crawl back in bed, to pull the covers over our head and wait for a better life to come along. Those feelings are all too familiar.

In 1995, I went through a devastating two year battle with clinical depression. While sitting at the bottom of that deep, dark pit, I discovered many truths and learned many lessons. One of the most important lessons is that the pit of depression is always full of waters swimming with worry. I worried about how I got into the pit and how I would or even if I could get out. I worried that depression would affect my family and our ministry. I worried about what people would think of me when they saw my weakness and failure.

In the darkness, worry made everything seem bigger and uglier than it really was! Worry helped usher me into the pit and worry was now one of the prisons guards. I desperately wanted to trust God, exchanging my worry for His peace. I read countless books on the subject, described in detail my favorite worries to those who would listen and constantly begged God to take away the anxiety and fear. Nothing worked. I was losing the battle with worry while sinking lower into the grip of darkness. There had to be a way to win over worry!

The journey began with a strong, clear look at the affects of worry in my life. It wasn’t a pretty picture. Worry permeates every area, invading peace, warping perspectives and impacting physical and emotional health.

I am reminded of the man hospitalized because of anxiety. For hours, he pressed his ear up against the wall, listening intently. When the nurse came in to check on him, he whispered a warning and called her over, motioning for her to be quiet. The nurse pressed her ear up against the wall and listened for a long time. “I can’t hear a thing!” she finally said. “I know”, the man replied. “It’s been like that all day!”

Worry is wasted energy. It is consuming, draining and unhealthy. Worry fits this world but certainly does not fit the picture of a joy-filled life, the life that Jesus came to give us. Nothing will rob you of joy quicker than worry. God came so that we would not have to worry and yet we continue to do so. During those dark years, I sat at His feet dumping each fear and worry into His capable hands, resting and waiting for deliverance. It came.

In the key passage, Paul gives us the promise of peace. However, there are conditions to be met and actions we must take in order to experience that peace and win over worry!

### **Action one: Choose joy**

Philippians 4:4 "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!" The Message says it this way: "Celebrate God all day, every day. I mean, revel in him!"

The author, Paul, is serious about joy, telling us twice in this passage to rejoice! The word "rejoice" means "to practice joy, to take delight in and be glad". Many times, life makes it impossible to be happy but we need to understand that happiness is not what Paul is calling us to. Happiness is a cheap imitation of true joy and totally dependent on the circumstances of life. Joy, however, is a deeply rooted confidence that God is in control no matter what the circumstances of life may be. Joy is a choice.

Paul's situation, while writing this letter, could make you wonder why he was even writing about joy, of all things. He was in prison under Roman house arrest, awaiting trial and almost certain execution because of his faith in Jesus Christ. Yet, he tells us to rejoice! Don't miss this! What Paul is really telling us is a life-changing truth! Our inner attitudes do not have to reflect our outward circumstances. In other words, we cannot always find joy in our circumstances but we can always find joy in the Lord of the circumstances.

You have probably discovered that there is absolutely no way in this world to escape pain, but we can avoid joy. The pursuit of joy is a matter of choice. Our first and most important choice is to come to the only source of true joy - Jesus Christ. We must also choose to rejoice in the midst of every circumstance - good or bad – and keep our focus on God, gladly accepting His plan for our lives. We must choose a joyful perspective. A little boy asked his friend. "Wouldn't you hate to wear glasses all the time?" "No-o-o," the other boy answered slowly, "not if I had the kind grandma wears. She sees how to fix a lot of things. She sees lots of nice things to do on rainy days and she always sees what you meant to do even if you mess things up! I asked her one day how she could see that way all the time and she said, 'It is the way I choose to look at things.' So it must be her glasses." When we choose joy, we are choosing against worry!