SCRIPTURE:
“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 every situation, 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)

MEDITATION:
It has been said that every adventure starts with a single step or that the snail reached the ark through perseverance. There is value within these quotes; however, no one seems to share how extremely difficult some of these steps can be. Our lives are filled with steps, many of which can be filled with pain, doubt, and sorrow. For instance, during the pandemic, I had to move from New York City (NYC) to Florida to pursue a PhD in Philosophy. This step was indeed difficult, but it was more difficult since I had to travel alone to Florida without my wife. She was finishing her masters in NYC. We were both doing great things, but our steps did not always feel good. Therefore, it seems ludicrous or absurd to be thankful for all things, including the moments when one is going through difficult challenges.

When things seem dark and strenuous, and it feels that all hope has faded, it is asked of us in Philippians 4:4–7 to rejoice and be thankful always. This seems too much of a task, but amongst these circumstances, I realized the value of enjoying these steps. Rejoice in new friends, new surroundings, new experiences, and even new feelings. Enjoy the roads you take in life and rejoice in these very moments. I have met wonderful people in these steps, and it is hard to imagine a world without them. But more importantly, one surprising aspect of this is that God knows that some of these steps are difficult. It is not surprising to see, but it seems quite astonishing that God knows how we feel in such steps. For instance, Jesus crying shows that he knows what it is to be hurt or feel pain.

But above all this, one step that Christ has taken that has caused the most pain for himself is the step he took in the Garden of Gethsemane. For our sake, he chose to die for us and such a step in the Garden is the hardest step one can take. For this reason, when all hope seems to fade and one is going through such challenging times, it is comforting to know that Christ knows our pain.

I am not only thankful that he died for me but that he also chose to suffer for me, which is a step he did not have to take. Therefore, all my steps in life are
thanks to the step Christ took on the Cross. For this reason, I can declare that in all things, be thankful and rejoice always.

REFLECTION:
In what ways can you be thankful or rejoice in your difficult circumstances now? What have you learned from your difficult steps? What wonderful things have you experienced in these difficult steps? What would you say to your younger self in the difficult circumstances you have already gone through?

PRAYER:
Thank you, God, that you understand what each of us go through. Thank you for understanding us and being there for us. Thank you for loving us and thank you for allowing me to meet wonderful people. May you always remind us to always look to you and to cast our cares on you. Amen.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:
Joel Alvarez is a Philosophy PhD student at the University of South Florida. He also has a BA in philosophy with a minor in history and Latino studies. He has worked in the department of education for seven years and currently works as a graduate teaching assistant at the University of South Florida. Also, his paper “Christian Materialism, Logic and The Spiritual Realm” won the third prize in the Intervarsity Press and Tyndale House Cambridge for Early-Career Philosophers of Religion 2022 Essay Competition. Joel is a student member of the ASA.