

JOY

a study in Philipians

Sermon Series Devotional

Preface

This booklet is a companion to my upcoming series “Joy: A Study in Philippians.” Here is a synopsis: “We want to be happy. At the same time we understand that happiness always fades; it is blurred and erased by fear, anxiety, worry, insecurity, cynicism, addiction, sin, and all of life’s problems. Should we give up the pursuit? No, but we should pursue something more permanent—something that cannot be taken from us and remains even in the bad times. This series, on the book of Philippians, calls us to seek, and find, joy.”

With that purpose in mind, this booklet is meant to go hand in hand with my sermons. For the Sunday entires, there is no devotional entry, but only a place for notes. I hope you’ll come to church on those days, but if you can’t, I encourage you to listen or watch the sermons online. This can be done at Wilsonville.Church/Joy or via our app (Wilsonville.Church/App).

Jesus has brought me incredible joy and I do think Philippians contains the blueprint for how to be joyful. I truly hope this booklet will help you experience and express joy. Each day contains a short writing on small sections or phrases from the passages of Scripture I’m preaching on in this series. The series won’t cover all of Philippians; I’ve chosen to focus on the sections that are about joy. In the devotional entires, I’ve connected each of the passages, and sections, to joy. This task wasn’t hard; joy permeates all of Philippians.

Our church is giving this booklet to you free, but I have one request: please let me know if you have questions or have been impacted by what you’ve read here. You can do so by emailing Respond@Creekside.Me or by visiting Creekside.Me/Respond. It would be incredibly meaningful to me to hear from you. I’d also love the chance to interact with you if your response calls for it.

Thanks for reading!

With joy,

Chad Harms
Pastor

Pray with Joy

I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart and, whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me. God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.

And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.

Philippians 1:3-11

April 8, 2018

Notes:

April 9, 2018

“I thank my God...” Philippians 1:3

Throughout this devotional and the corresponding sermon series I will make a distinction between happiness and joy. These two feel similar, but happiness is temporary and based on circumstances while joy is lasting and untouched by our situation. Both happiness and joy are connected to thankfulness, people intuitively understand this. When people are happy they are thankful and typically when people are thankful they are happy. It stands to reason then, if you want to be happier, you should be more thankful. There is a problem with this reasoning though, life doesn't always give you a lot to be thankful for. This is one of the reasons happiness is transient and circumstantial. Thankfully, when your thankfulness is based on the gifts God has given you, it produces joy (permanent), because his provisions are unending. Because of what God has done through Jesus, you can have grace, forgiveness, hope, and love that will never be taken from you. If you want joy, be genuinely thankful for these things and spend time thanking God for them.

April 10, 2018

“...every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy...”
Philippians 1:4

It seems that people often think about the difficult things that come with relationships while rarely considering the joy they can bring. At the beginning of his letter to the church in Philippi, Paul tells the readers that he thanks God whenever he remembers them and that when he prays for them, it is with joy. Most people's tendency is to pray about the negative things in life. This seems especially true when it comes to how people pray for others. They may pray “God heal them” or “God fix them” or “God make them more _____.” Throughout the letter of Philippians Paul demonstrates an incredible amount of joy, joy that goes far beyond his circumstances. Part of this joy is found in being thankful for the people God put in his life. If you want joy you must learn to thank God for the relationships he's given you. If you want joy you must learn to celebrate the gift of others.

April 11, 2018

“...because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now...” Philippians 1:5

The word “gospel” has become synonymous with the story of Jesus. Originally the word simply meant “good news.” Happiness is easily found in experiencing good news. “You’re getting a raise”—happy. “You’re having a baby”—happy. “The Portland Trailblazers won the championship”—happy. Biblically what separates happiness from joy is that the prior is temporary and the latter is permanent. Why? Because the good news of the Bible is always good news. No circumstance or struggle can change it. Jesus died and came back to life. He did it because of God’s amazing grace and love. He did it so that everyone could have forgiveness and receive mercy. He did it so that humanity’s broken relationship with God could be fixed. He did it so that all people have the opportunity to spend eternity without sadness, struggle, fear, or failure. Happiness is found in gospel, joy is found in The Gospel of Jesus. If you want joy you must learn to cherish the good news of Jesus.

April 12, 2018

“being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.” Philippians 1:6

Reading the news makes it clear that life does not naturally produce joy. The world is filled with brokenness, sadness, tragedy, and loss. Just thinking about all that goes on in the world can leave us sad. Beyond that, people must deal with their own hurts, disappointments, and struggles. All of the bad in the world means that having joy requires faith. Biblically faith is being sure of what is hoped for and confident in what is not seen. Most understand that faith is required to believe God exists, that he loves, and that he wants people in Heaven with him. But few consider the idea presented in Philippians 1:6: No matter what difficulties Christians face, God is at work in his followers. In Romans it says that God is working all things for the good of those who love him. Part of having joy is understanding that no matter how bad things seem, God is still working in you and on your behalf. You are not alone. If you want joy, learn to trust that God is using all situations for your good.

“It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart and, whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God’s grace with me.”
Philippians 1:7

Verse 7 is where things get real. This is the first time Paul gives readers a glimpse into the situation from where he is writing—he’s chained up in a prison. It is easy to look at people who are joyful and think that they have easier lives or better circumstances. Paul’s situation is terrible. He’s been imprisoned for doing nothing more than telling people the good news of Jesus. Why does he still rejoice over those he loves? Why is he still joyful at all? The answer is all about God’s grace. Before Paul experienced God’s grace, his life was good. He was born into a good family, he was educated, fairly affluent, and well respected. After experiencing God’s grace, his life was difficult, but far more rewarding. Paul rejoiced because God’s grace was so much better than favorable circumstances. We will return to this, but for now you must understand that you cannot have joy apart from God’s grace. If you want joy, embrace God’s grace.

“God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus. And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, 10 so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, 11 filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.” Philippians 1:8-11

In Philippians 2:2, Paul says, “...then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind.” When reading Philippians it is obvious that Paul was joyful despite circumstances. Specific to this section is that Paul’s joy couldn’t be diminished by the lack of growth in others. That said, Paul is pretty clear that his joy would be increased by deep spiritual connection amongst the congregation in Philippi. For Paul, an increase in joy wasn’t tied to how well things were going for him, it was tied to the spiritual growth of others. Paul declares that his prayer is for the people to grow in love, knowledge, and insight so that they may know how to fully live for Jesus. Perhaps you would experience more joy if your focus was on the spiritual growth of others and not a better situation for yourself. Perhaps your joy would increase if your prayers were centered around the spiritual growth of others and not personal satisfaction. If you want joy, learn to focus on the spiritual growth of others.

Continue to Rejoice

Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel. As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. And because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear.

It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. The latter do so out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice.

Yes, and I will continue to rejoice

Philippians 1:12-18

April 15, 2018

Notes:

“Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel.” Philippians 1:12

A clear theme emerged in Philippians 1:12-18, Paul’s joy is based on the gospel of Jesus and its proclamation to those who had not heard it. It is important to consider the context of this passage. As mentioned last week, Paul had a “good” life before becoming a Christian. He was educated, respected, and probably made a good living. In his position of privilege he became obsessed with one thing, punishing anyone who was a Christian and claimed that Jesus had risen from the dead. This was true of Paul right up until he met the resurrected Jesus. Once he did, and experienced the forgiveness, grace, hope, and joy that Jesus offers, he had a new goal. After encountering Jesus Paul’s entire life was centered around telling others about Jesus. We cannot separate the joy of Paul from the story of Jesus’ death and resurrection. Once he had experienced the incredible joy of Jesus, he wanted everyone else to experience it too. If you want joy, center your life around all that the death and resurrection of Jesus offers you.

“As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ.” Philippians 1:13

The goal of Paul’s life was to spread the gospel of Jesus. The reason his joy couldn’t be taken by those who locked him in jail was that in arresting him they actually helped him achieve this goal. As Paul sat in a prison cell, everyone around him figured out that he was only there because he loved Jesus and wanted others to love Jesus too. This furthered his efforts. Maybe you are struggling with something right now. Perhaps life isn’t going the way you anticipated. Perhaps you feel trapped...imprisoned. It could be that God is using the difficulties to accomplish something in you or through you. Most of the time when God works through life’s difficult circumstances, it takes time to see how this could possibly be the case. If you pay attention though, you might see the fingerprints of God even while you are in the middle of your struggles. Take some time to consider how God is using a difficult thing to accomplish a spiritual thing in you and/or through you (or at least how he wants to). If you want joy, you must learn to recognize how God is using your hardships for good.

“And because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear.” Philippians 1:14

It would make more sense that Paul being locked up in a prison for preaching about Jesus would cause people to be scared to do the same. Yet, Paul clearly declares that his being in chains had made other Christians more confident in proclaiming the gospel without fear. Why? Perhaps it has something to do with Paul’s insatiable joy. Watching people go through difficult things while still maintaining hope, peace, integrity, and joy is infectious. At the very least it makes people wonder why. But it can also inspire others to follow suit. This is important on two levels: 1) If you are struggling to be joyful because of your circumstances, find a Christian who has successfully gone through the same thing while maintaining his/her joy. Too often people believe that they need to blaze their own path or suffer things alone. This isn’t true or good. 2) Remember that your joy can inspire and encourage others. This doesn’t mean we should fake or flaunt joy, but it does mean that we should be willing to share the reason for our joy with others. If you want joy, find others who have joy.

“It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. The latter do so out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains.” Philippians 1:15-17

For a lot of people, the biggest thing standing in the way of happiness is other people. Humans can be mean and when they are, it hurts. The pain others inflict comes in a variety of ways. It can be through words or physical or emotional. It can be from a recent event or something that happened in the distant past. It can be intentional or unintentional. When people cause hurt, it diminishes happiness. Joy though, cannot be touched by people because it is a gift of God. Consider Paul’s circumstance in this passage. He had been arrested for preaching the gospel and while he was in jail certain people on the outside were preaching about Jesus so that it would create more problems for Paul. This is cold; this is mean. It doesn’t affect Paul’s joy though. Happiness is connected to how others treat us. Joy is connected to the grace God gave us. The former can be changed in a minute. The latter is unending. If you want joy, don’t try to find happiness in how others treat you.

“But what does it matter? The important thing is...” Philippians 1:18

In Philippians Paul had joy even though he was locked in jail because his ambition to preach the gospel was being furthered despite his circumstances. A person's ambition will determine whether or not they have joy. If someone's aim is to make a lot of money, be super healthy, have everybody like them and have model citizens for children, they will be disappointed. Life often doesn't go as planned or as hoped. Sometimes disappointment comes despite prayer. When someone loses their job or is diagnosed with a disease, their joy will vanish if their ambition is to have a lot of money or perfect health. However, if someone's ambition is to grow in their relationship with God and see him honored, they can be successful no matter what. For a person with these ambitions, a lost job is an opportunity to learn to trust God more and a diagnosis of a disease provides a reason to share the hope of Heaven with others. If your ambitions are entirely centered around the things of God, no trial of life will take your joy. If you want joy, make godly pursuits your goal.

April 21, 2018

“...that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice.” Philippians 1:18

In Philippians 1:18 Paul uses the word “rejoice” twice. In a nutshell he says, “I do rejoice and I will rejoice.” Next week we will focus on why he will rejoice, but today it is important to consider why he is rejoicing. PreceptAustin.org¹, an incredibly helpful and free website full of biblical commentary, offers a summary of Philippians 1:12-18: “Why does he rejoice? With eyes of faith Paul sees worldly obstacles as divine opportunities—seeing God’s purposes in his problems, by making the Gospel his goal, by giving courage to other Christians and by making sure the message of Christ is all that matters.” The final phrase in this synopsis is important. You can have joy when you begin “making sure that the message of Christ is all that matters.” The famous hymn Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus wonderfully declares, “Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in his wonderful face, and the things of earth will grow strangely dim, in light of his glory and grace.” If you want joy, focus on Jesus—his glory and grace.

¹ http://www.preceptaustin.org/philippians_118-24

Progress and Joy

But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice.

Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and God's provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance. I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, so that through my being with you again your boasting in Christ Jesus will abound on account of me.

Philippians 1:18-26

April 22, 2018

Notes:

“Yes, and I will continue to rejoice...”
Philippians 1:18

At the beginning of Philippians 1:18, Paul expressed his present joy, but now he declares his future joy. The phrase “I will rejoice” is super important when considering joy, because it makes clear that joy is something that cannot be taken. The Greek word that translates “rejoice” (chairō) is simply the verb form of “joy” (chara). Sometimes people make the men and women of the Bible out to be super heroes, thinking of them as if they have some innate ability that normal people do not. This ought not be. Paul didn’t know the future and yet he still declared “I will joy.” He was in jail and didn’t know when he would get out. He had no idea how he would be treated; his life’s history suggests it would be bad. Despite this, while sitting there in chains, he wrote, “I will continue to rejoice.” You don’t need to know the future to know that you can rejoice when it arrives. Why? An old adage answers that question: “I don’t know what the future may hold, but I know who holds the future.” If you want joy, trust God with your future.

April 24, 2018

“...for I know that through your prayers...”
Philippians 1:19

Paul was able to rejoice because he knew his future was in God's hands. What specifically elicited this kind of trust? This verse says three things that are super important. First, the people in Philippi were praying for him. How and why God responds to prayer is difficult to understand, but it is clear that he does. Part of Paul's incredible trust in God, trust that produced joy, was his knowledge that he was being prayed for. You need to have people in your life that will entreat God on your behalf. If you haven't developed Christian relationships where people know your fears, struggles, and hurts, you need to. The tendency of most people is to keep secret the difficult things of life, because they think sharing them will lessen their happiness or prevent their sadness (we might be judged or mocked). The reality is that secrecy may prevent joy, because it may prevent other people from praying. Just the thought that people are praying for you can be comforting; knowing that God responds to prayer is even better. If you want joy, find people to pray for you.

“...and God’s provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ...” Philippians 1:19

The second part of verse 19 gives another reason for Paul’s trust, the “provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ.” The Bible makes clear that when a person becomes a Christian, God’s Spirit (aka The Holy Spirit) indwells them. What this means in a theoretical sense is a subject far too big for this space. Practically speaking though, this means that Christians have an intimate connection to God that comforts them, equips them with unique abilities, offers them wisdom, and produces positive virtues. When life is hard, people often feel alone. Paul was able to rejoice from prison, because he knew he wasn’t alone. In Romans 8:15 says, “The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, ‘Abba, Father.’” The indwelling of the Holy Spirit produces joy in the same way a good dad does when their children are struggling—by offering wisdom, comfort, and help. If you want joy, learn to listen to the Spirit inside you.

“...what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance. I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.”
Philippians 1:19-20

Paul has an insatiable belief that God will use his circumstances to deliver him. Deliverance is a vague term, but the context shows us what Paul means: Through his circumstances God will give him courage to use his life to exalt Jesus. Romans 8:28 has already been alluded to in this devotional, but now it is worth quoting. It says, “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” Through other’s prayers and God’s indwelling Spirit Christians can know/remember that God is using every situation for their good. It is important to make clear that this doesn’t mean God is causing every situation; that isn’t the point. Rather, God is using all of life’s happenings for the good of his people. Why does he do this? Partly because he loves us and partly so that we might exalt him (worship him, glorify him, honor him). Joy is found when we understand that God is working all things for our good so that we might exalt Jesus. If you want joy, remember that God is using every circumstance for your good.

“For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.”
Philippians 1:21

This is one of the most incredible statements in the Bible (history of the world maybe). Paul emphatically declared that if he was alive on earth it was so he could serve Jesus, but he also said that death would be his preference (because he longs for Heaven). Wow! It is no wonder that Paul had joy in all circumstances while most people only find happiness in a few situations—his thinking was radically different than most people. Living with the attitude Paul demonstrates in this passage is scary, but it is also freeing. He knows that his entire life’s purpose is to bring glory to Jesus and recognizes that no struggle or tragedy can derail him from fulfilling this purpose. You can exalt Jesus in any and every circumstance. In fact, it is often easier to exalt Jesus in the most difficult of situations. A lack of joy is many times a consequence of goals being thwarted, but the goal of honoring Jesus can only be thwarted by a response to a situation, not the situation itself. If you want joy, long for Heaven and make God’s honor your life’s purpose.

“If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, so that through my being with you again your boasting in Christ Jesus will abound on account of me.” Philippians 1:22-27

Paul has declared that his life’s intent was glorifying Jesus, but that he’d also rather be in Heaven with Jesus. In this passage he explains this tension further. He had experienced the grace, love, and forgiveness of Jesus and desperately wanted to be in his presence. This makes sense considering the struggles of his life. He had been mocked, arrested, tortured, beaten, and whipped for telling the story of Jesus. Heaven sounds way better than all of that. At the same time he understood that his life, and ministry, were important to people. His ministry was helping them in their “progress and joy in the faith.” For Paul, the combination of understanding how great Heaven would be, while at the same time knowing his earthly ministry was important, combined to help him be joyful. If you’re not joyful, reflect on how great Heaven will be when you get there. If you want joy, long for Heaven and live to help other people’s spiritual lives.

Rejoice With You... Rejoice With Me

Do everything without grumbling or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, “children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.” Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky as you hold firmly to the word of life. And then I will be able to boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor in vain. But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you. So you too should be glad and rejoice with me.

Philippians 2:14-18

April 29, 2018

Notes:

“Do everything without grumbling or arguing...”
Philippians 2:14

This statement connects to something important and spiritual in the next verse, but what if you just took it by itself? What if you lived your entire life without grumbling or arguing? You would be happier, right? Dr. Guy Winch² declares that people complain more now than ever. Then he says, “Take a moment to consider how many things you complain about in a given day. The weather, public transportation and traffic, your spouse, your kids, your friends, your boss, the movie you just saw and hated, the meal that arrived cold in the restaurant, the sandwich shop that got your order wrong, the elevator that took too long, the reality television show that booted off your favorite contestant, and the list goes on and on...This accumulation of frustration and helplessness can add up over time and impact our mood, our self-esteem, and even our general mental health.” If this world is all a person has to live for, it makes sense for them to complain and argue all the time, even if it makes them less happy. For Christians, whose true home is in Heaven, it doesn't. If you want joy, stop complaining and arguing.

² <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-squeaky-wheel/201201/does-complaining-damage-our-mental-health>

“...so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.” Philippians 2:15

Biblical morality and American morality are less aligned than they have ever been. At the same time, America seems less happy. Depression, stress, and anxiety rates are at an all time high. It isn't a popular idea, but perhaps the decrease in acceptance of biblical morality is connected to the increase in mental health problems. In this passage Paul calls Christians to live in obedience to God despite the culture around them. Generally the removal of grumbling and arguing isn't seen as connected to being blameless, pure, and without fault, but that is exactly what Paul does here. You need to stop arguing and complaining so that you can experience joy, but also so that we might more fully live for Jesus. It is the right thing to do. Thankfully, obedience to this command also helps people be joyful. Rick Warren³ says, “The secret to continual, abundant, and overflowing joy is obedience. It's doing what God tells you to do. Every time you do what God tells you to do, your life's going to be filled with joy.” Disobedience to God may be preventing you from experiencing joy. If so, repent. If you want joy, be obedient to God.

³ <http://pastorrick.com/devotional/english/obedience-is-the-secret-to-joy>

“Then you will shine among them like stars
in the sky...” Philippians 2:15

People may hate what Christians believe, but when they live as blameless, pure, and faultless children of God, who never complain, it will cause others to respect them. Why? Living like this is akin to how the stars shine against the dark night sky. Living like this will make Christians beautifully different. When a Christian lives a life that stands out, some will ask why they are different and be interested in Jesus when they are told that he is the reason. This same line of thinking makes joy a powerful force. America complains more now than ever in its history and more people suffer from depression, stress, and anxiety. Galatians 5:22-23 contains a list of traits God wants to produce in his followers. They are “love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” God wants to produce joy in his followers. Joy is a characteristic that ought to define Christians and it is a characteristic that ought to make Christians different from the norm. Joy is a trait that will make you positively stand out in a complaining and depressed culture. If you get joy, you’ll be beautifully different.

“...as you hold firmly to the word of life.”
Philippians 2:16

The “word of life” is synonymous with The Gospel. In other words, it is the story of how Jesus came to earth, lived sinlessly, died sacrificially for sin, and then rose triumphantly that all who believe might have life. This life doesn’t start when Christians die or Jesus returns, but instead at the moment they accept his gift of salvation. In Romans 6:4 Paul says that through the resurrection of Jesus “we too may live a new life.” The author of the Book of John constantly uses the term “eternal life” for something Christians possess now and will have more fully later. Jesus said, “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.” The apex of this new and eternal life won’t be realized until a Christian’s death or Jesus’ return. The benefits of it have already begun. If you want to shine like stars, being joyful despite circumstances, you must learn to hold firmly to the life Jesus offers. If you want joy, you must live in light of your new life and constantly consider the incredible gifts that come with it (forgiveness, love, a relationship with God hope, etc.).

“And then I will be able to boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor in vain. But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you.” Philippians 2:16-17

When Paul declared that he was being poured out like a drink offering, he was referencing his possible martyrdom. His life work was sharing the story of Jesus with others and helping them live for Jesus after they had accepted it. Because of this he was facing the proposition of death. If anything can take a person's happiness, it is facing negative consequences for doing something positive. Yet, Paul seemed unconcerned with this. Instead, he wanted his efforts to not be in vain and realized they wouldn't be if the church in Philippi would hold firmly to the word of life. It even seems he trusted that this would happen. Here's what is staggering, in the midst of this situation where Paul faces bad for doing good, he says “I am glad and rejoice with all of you.” More literally this phrase translates, “I joy and joy with you.” Paul was able to separate the negative consequences from the positive affects. For him the eternal impact outweighed the personal cost. If you want joy, take your mind off of negative consequences and focus instead on making a positive impact in the lives of others.

“So you too should be glad and rejoice with me.”
Philippians 2:16

Paul has already said that he would rejoice with those he was writing to. Now he asks them to rejoice with him. In Romans 12, as Paul is giving instructions for how people in a church should interact with others, he says that they should serve each other, love each other, and share with each other. Then, in Romans 12:15, he says, “Rejoice with those who rejoice.” Certainly part of sharing joy is simply rejoicing together. There seems to be more to this though. The phrase “rejoice with me” seems to refer to something more than just the two parties rejoicing simultaneously. The idea is closer to the two groups (Paul and the congregation in Philippi) sharing their joy with one another like children sharing toys. This is different. This is better. This is more beneficial. Joy can be shared and you should be sharing it. Perhaps you lack joy because you have not found anyone who will share their joy with you. Perhaps someone else lacks joy because you haven’t been willing to share your’s with them. If you want joy, find someone to share it with.

Rejoice In The Lord

Further, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord!
It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you
again, and it is a safeguard for you. Watch out for
those dogs, those evildoers, those mutilators of the
flesh. For it is we who are the circumcision, we who
serve God by his Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus,
and who put no confidence in the flesh

Philippians 3:1-3

May 6, 2018

Notes:

“Further, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord!” Philippians 3:1

Paul has made clear that his joy is present and future. He’s also told his readers that he will rejoice with them and that they, in turn, should rejoice with him. This time he adds something to it, “in the Lord.” It is obvious that this idea has been the underlying truth of all that Paul has said about joy, but now he states it explicitly. Throughout this devotional the focus has been on rejoicing in the Lord as it pertains to focusing on what Jesus has done for you, is doing for you, and will do for you. This is important, but not specifically Paul’s meaning in this verse. Instead, he uses the phrase “in the Lord” to describe the sphere in which joy exists. This sphere isn’t what Jesus does for Christians, but instead in their relationship with him. F.B. Meyer says, “...there is a fellowship with him so rapturous and exalting that human language can only describe it as unspeakable.” It is possible that you lack joy, because you’re not focused on developing your relationship with Jesus. If you want joy, develop your relationship with Jesus.

“It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you.”

Philippians 3:1

It is easy to dismiss joy as unimportant or secondary. Christians have a tendency to focus on avoiding sins, not adding virtues (especially the likable ones). In reading the Bible it is important to notice repetition. Paul has made absolutely clear that Christians should joy. He uses the word “rejoice” five times and the word “joy” four times in just two chapters. Plus, in Philippians 4:4 he will again call Christians to rejoice. The word “further” at the beginning of this verse indicates that Paul is switching gears. Some say that in chapter 3 he moves from writing about relationships in church to relationships with those outside of it. In the midst of this transition, Paul again drives home the point that joy is an important and essential part of the Christian faith. He even admits to writing the same things again! If repetition is important, you better take joy seriously! For Paul joy is essential, in fact it is a safeguard for the Christian faith. This makes joy super important. If you want joy, don’t diminish the importance of it.

“Watch out for those dogs, those evildoers, those mutilators of the flesh.” Philippians 3:2

Perhaps your past experiences with Christianity and/or church have lead you to feel, or even believe, that a relationship with Jesus doesn't produce joy. There are many reasons this might be true, but one possibility is that you've experienced legalism. Legalism can be defined as “dependence on moral law rather than on personal religious faith.” This rears its ugly head in at least two ways. First, some will claim that to be a Christian people must meet a certain set of behavioral criteria. This is exactly what Paul is warning against in this verse. When Philippians was written, there was a group telling people they needed to be circumcised to obtain salvation and become a Christian. Paul is emphatically against this idea and much of what he writes in the New Testament is an argument against it. In Ephesians 2:8 he says, “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this is not from yourselves...” People can only come into a relationship with God by placing their faith in the the sacrificial death of Jesus for sin. If you want joy, know that a relationship with God only comes through faith.

“For it is we who are the circumcision...”
Philippians 3:3

The second way that legalism taints true Christianity is that some are guilty of teaching (with words or attitudes) that the quality of a person’s relationship with God is dependent upon their following a certain set of man made rules. These rules are often passed down from generation to generation, causing non-biblical traditions to feel like they must be from God. Frequently accompanying this is the idea that certain people or certain groups must punish others when those man made rules are broken. This scenario was the case while Jesus lived. A group called the Pharisees, who were respected religious leaders at the time, had placed heavy burdens on people—burdens that people believed they had to carry if they wanted a good relationship with God. Jesus spoke against this, and them, often. He declared in Matthew 11:30, “...my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” Obedience to God is important for experiencing joy, but human rules can be a heavy burden that stand in the way of joy. If you want joy, avoid believing that man made rules affect the quality of your relationship with God.

“we who serve God by his Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus and who put no confidence in the flesh...” Philippians 3:3

Believing one must work to obtain a relationship with God or follow man made rules to improve that relationship, is a burden that prevents joy. The prior is impossible and the latter endless (like a hamster wheel). Removing the burden of these beliefs comes down to exactly what Paul says in this verse. Paul describes proper Christianity as serving God by his Spirit and boasting in Jesus, while putting no confidence in the flesh. When someone believes they can earn a relationship with God or improve upon it with rules that he did not give, their confidence is in themselves; and frankly, humans don't deserve much confidence. When a person lives by the Spirit and boasts in Jesus—his being, his life, his love, his grace, his death, his resurrection, his salvation—it removes their reliance on themselves and takes away the burden of legalism that prevents joy. The world tells you to be confident in yourself and to boast in who you are; God tells you to place all your confidence and boasting in Jesus. If you want joy, put all your confidence in Jesus.

“...though I myself have reasons for such confidence. If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more...” Philippians 3:4

In this verse Paul sets the stage for the following section, a section where he will tell readers many reasons he could have put confidence in himself. His call in the last verse to boast in Jesus and put no confidence didn't come because Paul had lived an unrighteous life (in terms of worldly standards). No, it came because he had found the true source of salvation and joy—Jesus. After listing the reasons he could have put confidence in himself, he says, “But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ.” Once Paul had encountered Jesus and experienced all that he offers, it didn't make since to value the things he could accomplish on his own—the things Jesus gave him were so much more valuable. If you want joy, value the things Jesus provides more than you value the things you can accomplish.

Rejoice Always

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

May 13, 2018

Notes:

“Rejoice in the Lord...” Philippians 4:4

Philippians 4:4 is the pinnacle statement about joy in the book of Philippians. This verse is vitally important to understanding joy. The first thing that must be noticed is something that has already been alluded to in this devotional. Christians are to rejoice “in the Lord.” Nine times in the four chapters of Philippians Paul uses this phrase. Three times in the first four verses of Philippians 4 he uses this phrase. Hope, confidence, perseverance, unity, and joy are all connected to “in the Lord.” For Paul, the good stuff of the Christian faith is found “in the Lord.” Too often Christians look for joy where it cannot be found, in the world, instead of where it can be found, in the Lord. As mentioned before, this phrase refers to the relationship Christians have with God. When this is considered, it only makes sense that this is where joy is found. The world is full of evil; God is perfectly good. The world is always changing; God is unchanging. The world is hurtful; God is gracious. If you want joy, look for it in the Lord.

“...always. I will say it again: Rejoice!”
Philippians 4:4

The second half of this verse contains two aspects that point to the same thing: 1) This is a mandate. Paul doesn't say “you should” or “I hope,” he commands readers to rejoice. 2) He says “always.” The fact that Paul commands rejoicing and says that it should be done always suggests that joy is a choice. Happiness isn't this way. It would be weird for someone to always be happy. It would be disingenuous to always act happy. If Paul were to command Christians to be happy, it would be outrageous. This isn't what he does. Instead, he commands Christians to be joyful. Joy is a choice. It isn't a choice like what color shirt to wear, but more like the decision to get a college degree. It takes a lot of work and you must keep deciding to do the work. Furthermore, choosing joy only works as long as you remember where joy comes from—“in the Lord.” Each day you must choose joy. Each day you must choose to rejoice in who God is, what he's done, and in the relationship you have with him. If you want joy, choose joy.

“Let your gentleness be evident to all.
The Lord is near.” Philippians 4:5

Joy is internal. It isn't something those around you can see unless you intentionally express it. Philippians 4:5 offers an external and observable characteristic that is connected to joy: Gentleness. The word that translates to “gentleness” in the NIV is a rare word in the New Testament. Author Matthew Arnold describes it as “sweet reasonableness.”⁴ Titus 3:1-2 uses this word when it says, “Remind the people...to be peaceable and considerate, and always to be gentle toward everyone.” On first glance it seems surprising that Paul goes from joy to gentleness, but when people's behaviors are considered, it is clear that a lack of joy leads to a lack of gentleness (“sweet reasonableness”). Being joyless, outwardly demonstrates itself in irritability and harshness. Joy demonstrates itself in a positive calmness. The Pulpit Commentary says, “There is no joy in a narrow selfishness; joy involves an open heart, a generous love. Joy in the Lord tends to make men gentle and mild to others.” Most don't need incentive to want joy, but if you do, remember that a lack of joy will cause you to be irritable and harsh. If you have joy, you'll be gentle.

⁴ W. Robertson Nicoll M.A. LL.D. (Editor), *The Expositor's Greek Testament*.

May 17 , 2018

“Do not be anxious about anything...”
Philippians 4:6

Anxiety is a great barrier to joy. Often when people feel joyless it is because they feel anxious. Paul offers a solution in this verse: “Do not be anxious.” Of course this is easier said than done. Paul will give a helpful anecdote to anxiety in the latter half of this verse, but today it is important to quote Jesus. In Matthew 6:25-34 Jesus says a lot about worry/ anxiety, you should read it all, but for now consider the first few verses: “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?” If God takes care of the birds, he will take care of his children. If you want joy, don't worry, but instead trust God.

“...but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.”
Philippians 4:6

If anxiety is a wall that separates people from joy, prayer is a sledge hammer. Most Christians spend very little time in prayer; Paul calls for something vastly different from what is normal in the American church today. First, he says to pray in every situation. Most people pray in certain situations, perhaps when things are really bad or they don't have other options. You must learn to pray constantly and consistently. Paul also says that people's prayers should be “with thanksgiving.” A person doesn't have to be a Christian to understand that thankfulness is a great antidote to anxiety (the Huffington Post knows⁵), but being a Christian gives people more to be thankful for! When you pray, you should spend a portion of that time thanking God for his incredible gifts. On top of all this, Paul says that when people pray, they should present their requests to God. Far too often people's prayers are vague. Removing anxiety is connected to asking God for specific things. Do you need more money? Ask. Do you need healing? Ask. Do you need wisdom? Ask. If you want joy, pray.

⁵ https://www.huffingtonpost.com/dr-colleen-georges/the-journey-from-anxiety-_b_7026946.html

“And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” Philippians 4:7

If anxiety is a barrier to joy, peace is the path. The promise in this verse is incredible. It says, if someone will pray with thanksgiving, presenting their specific request to God, God’s peace will guard their hearts and minds. What is even more amazing about this promise is that it isn’t dependent upon circumstances. It says that the peace of God transcends all understanding, which means that you can have peace even when it doesn’t make sense to. If God doesn’t give you all we ask for, you can still have peace. If life remains difficult after you pray, you can still have peace. When logic suggests you should freak out, you can still have peace. This is a joyous promise! But don’t neglect the fact that it is a promise dependent on your being obedient to pray consistently, to pray with thanksgiving, and to pray presenting your requests to God. Almost everyone wants peace, but only some will take seriously the prerequisite to have it—prayer. If you are serious about joy, you need peace. To have joy, you must have peace. If you want peace, pray.

Rejoice Greatly*

I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

Philippians 4:10-13

*Video sermon at Wilsonville.Church/Joy

May 20, 2018

Notes:

“I rejoiced greatly in the Lord...” Philippians 4:10

Already in Philippians 4, Paul has emphatically called for readers to “rejoice always.” It is important to iterate here that “rejoice” is simply the verbal form of “joy.” Christians should forever be striving for joy—the experience and the action. But if Christians are constantly working to experience and express joy, what should they do when God does something awesome in their lives? Does the call to rejoice always diminish the celebration of blessings? In Philippians 4:10 Paul adds a nuance about joy that is important. He says that he “rejoiced greatly.” The reason for this was a specific blessing Paul had received, a blessing he explains in the second part of this verse. Paul’s “rejoicing greatly” teaches that while Christians should rejoice always, they should do it greatly when God provides favorable circumstances. Often because of pride, or fear that it won’t last, people limit their joyfulness. This happens even when God has given given much to be joyful about. This shouldn’t be. When God blesses you, you should thank God, praise God (even to others), and celebrate the gift. If you want joy, rejoice greatly because of your blessings.

“...that at last you renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. ” Philippians 4:10

In the first part of this verse Paul says he “rejoiced greatly.” What elicited this joy is that church in Philippi had renewed their concern for him; this refers to their financial support of his ministry. Most of us like free money, but the money isn’t what caused Paul to rejoice greatly. Instead, he’s excited that the church wanted to help him. Part of the reason for this is that Paul saw financial support of ministry as an important part of worshiping God (Philippians 4:18-19). In Philippians 4:14 Paul shows another reason, there he says, “... it was kind of you to share in my troubles.” That phrase, “share in my troubles,” is awesome. It increases joy when someone desires to take some of the load of our struggles. This truth should lead you to do two things: 1) you need to find other Christians that will share your troubles. This is one of the things that makes a good church so important. 2) You need to build relationships that cause you to want to share someone else’s troubles. If you want joy, find someone to share your troubles.

“I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances.” Philippians 4:11

It has already been said that anxiety is one of the great barriers to joy. Here we see another barrier, one Paul had overcome—discontentment. You have now read through most of the book of Philippians and in it Paul has expressed joy over and over and over. None of what he said would have been possible if he had been discontent. Thankfully he wasn't, but instead he had learned to be content. Sometimes people rationalize being discontent by tying it to ambition or motivation. This only puts a positive spin on something that is inherently negative and prevents joy. Striving to be content though, is somewhat of a foreign idea; most believe that people are either content or they're not (as if humans are born one way or the other). Being content is not usually seen as a learned skill, but for Paul it was exactly that. In the next two verses Paul shows what he had come to understand that had helped in this area. None of it will matter if you don't take being content seriously. If you want joy, strive to be content.

“I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.” Philippians 4:12

Sadly, most people spend their entire lives being discontent. A 2016 Seattle Times article states, “Social science shows that Americans on the whole have found it harder to garner contentment, connection and optimism during these prosperous years...This fluke of modernity has come to be called the prosperity paradox: Beyond minimum level of material security and means, human contentment and happiness has not increased in proportion to increased material well-being — income, wealth, consumer options, luxury and ‘stuff.’”⁶ Many believe that getting what they want will make them content, but data seems to suggest this just isn’t true. Anecdotal evidence suggests the same thing. You, or someone you know, has probably thought that the next job or raise or child or spouse or car or house, would make them content, only to obtain or achieve that thing and feel the same discontent (at least after a little while). When people get what they want, they want something else. If you want joy, you must be content. If you want to be content, you must stop believing that it can be accomplished by obtaining more money, likes, stuff, experiences, or followers.

⁶ <https://www.seattletimes.com/opinion/our-struggle-to-find-contentment-and-optimism/>

“I can do all this through him...” Philippians 4:13

Here is the secret to Paul’s contentment. This is an often misquoted verse. People use it to pump themselves up for sports, to talk themselves into believing they will get a good grade, and overall to convince themselves of a false idea—the idea that with God on their side they will accomplish anything they set their minds to. This isn’t true. Sometimes people lose games, sometimes they get bad grades, and often they don’t accomplish what they want to. The context of this verse is one of contentment. The idea is that you can be content despite losing a game, getting a bad grade or failing. How? The secret Paul learned was that, through God, he could handle anything and everything he faced. Author Albert Barnes wrote of Paul’s words, “He could bear any trial, perform any duty, subdue any evil propensity of his nature, and meet all the temptations...”⁷ Paul had suffered much for Jesus and he’d been able to handle it all by God’s power. If you want joy, you must be content. If you want to be content, you must learn to trust that by God’s power you will be ok, no matter what.

⁷ Albert Barnes, Barnes’ Notes.

“...who gives me strength.” Philippians 4:13

Perhaps this devotional has left you frustrated. You’ve read the words, thought about the life of Paul, believed God, and yet joy seems out of reach. Don’t give up hope. You serve a strong God, a God who made Paul content in all situations—poor or rich, free or imprisoned, full or hungry, liked or disliked. This same God wants you to experience joy; he wants you to rejoice! You’re not strong enough to make this happen on your own (nobody is), but he is. Keep striving to live out that which God has called you to in Philippians (and hopefully through this devotional), but do it all while relying on the strength of God. Author Peter T. Obrien, in his commentary on Philippians, says of Paul, “When he was most conscious of his own weaknesses and inadequacies he became most aware of Christ’s power resting on him; for when he was weak, then he was truly strong.”⁸ Perhaps you feel weak when it comes to joy, don’t fret. Instead, if you want joy, keep striving for it, keep breaking down barriers to it, and keep relying on God’s power to help you have it.

⁸ Peter T. Obrien, *The Epistle to the Philippians*.



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