



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH

SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

A Spiritual Checkup

Relentless Joy, Philippians, Part 2

Tim Badal | January 19, 2020



We've come back to where we started last week in our series on the book of Philippians. We'll be in Philippians 1, starting with verse three. Our goal is to learn from God's Word how we can live lives of joy, no matter the circumstances

or crises that come. Jesus told us that in this world we were going to have trouble (John 16:33). Many of us have experienced trouble this past week. As a pastor, I'm in tune with what's going on in the lives of the people I lead. Let me share a couple stories this morning.

One of our members lost the job they'd had for many years. Out of the blue they were told, "We no longer need you." That's a crisis. That family could easily lose their joy.

Another member of our church lost her mom this week, with whom she was very close. Saying goodbye in death is often something that robs us of our joy. I also learned of a family watching their child struggle with some life circumstances, which can bring parents to a place of tears.

Nor should we forget the medical issues, the financial woes and the relational distresses that are present among us. There are many concerns about the future that bring real anxiety. Many of us have experienced these things this week, leaving us tempted to throw away our joy because of the circumstances in our lives.

I don't want to be a prophet, but I've been a pastor too long—not to mention being a pilgrim in life myself—that some of us will be facing an unknown challenge and perhaps even a crisis this coming week that will seek to rob us of our peace. It could be something we don't even know to worry about yet. These moments, whether past or future, when we experience the troubles Jesus told us would come, are what keep us from living joy-filled lives. But let me remind you that when He said, "*In this world you will have trouble*" (John 16:33), it's not like He then just shrugged His shoulders and said, "Good luck. I hope you figure it out. It stinks to be you today." No, Jesus went on to say, "Take heart. Be of good cheer." That's literally what that phrase said. If I can use a little poetic license, He was saying, "Be of great joy, for I have overcome the world."

As we continue to navigate this idea of joy and the difficulties of life, how are those two opposing things merged together? As Christ followers, how do we bring them together? In the book of Philippians, the Apostle Paul gives us the answer. In this 104-verse, four-chapter letter, he declares two things we talked about last week.

First, he speaks of joy over 15 times in the text. We will see relentless joy amidst difficult circumstances. We need to remember that Paul wrote this letter of joy from a prison cell. That's why our graphic for Relentless Joy is "behind bars." The Bible makes it clear that wherever we are—whether slave or free, in prison or not, in bad or good times—we can experience joy. Yet that joy is connected to something else. That joy is rooted and established in something else. It's not just some aura that is hanging around that we need to tap into. It's connected and bound together with the person of Jesus Christ. You see, that's the central theme of the book of Philippians. Jesus Christ is mentioned over 60 times in these four chapters. Jesus is where we find joy.

If you want to know joy, then you need to know Jesus. We can change that to say if there is no Jesus, then there will be no joy. Therefore we need to continually connect our circumstances and challenges to Jesus, whatever they may be and no matter how horrific they may seem. When we make that connection, we can and will experience joy.

How do we go about this? We learned last week that joy is fleeting and difficult to find. We saw that the world gives us counterfeits that look like they will bring joy, but in the end, they leave us longing for more. So we need to ask what is authentic joy and how do we find it.

In her book [Choose Joy: Because Happiness Isn't Enough](#), Kay Warren writes this: "Joy is the settled assurance that God is in control of all the details of my life." You and I can have joy, no matter what we face, because we believe in a God Who is powerful enough to deal with all that concerns us, all that makes us anxious. Our God is in control and He knows us. He knows our struggles and limitations. He is also a God Who loves us and cares for us. Because of this, we can find joy.

Second, "Joy is the quiet confidence that ultimately everything is going to be all right." In other words, no matter what our circumstances are—loss of a job, loss of a family member, relational discord, financial concerns, sins we can't get beyond—whatever it is, the God Who is in control of our lives can use these things that are of concern to us now to become something beautiful in the end. He will make all things perfect.

For Paul, the trial was a prison cell. Yet he could say, "Because I know God is in control of my life, this prison cell will be used for my advantage and the advantage of the church at Philippi in ways I cannot yet see." I do not believe the Apostle Paul wrote this thinking, "People 2,000 years from now are going to find the secret of joy in my words." His hope was that the people in Philippi who read the letter would find joy. Little did he know that his prison experience would help people generations later to also find joy.

God takes things that are hard and uses them ultimately for good. In light of having a God Who controls all things and Who does all things well, a God Who uses our trials to benefit us and the world around us, then we can decide to praise Him in the storm. We can praise Him for whatever crisis we experienced last week and we can praise Him for whatever will affect us in the week to come. We choose to praise Him, because He walks with us in our trials and fills our hearts with joy.

The key to finding joy is modeled for us in Philippians 1:3-11. After a short greeting, Paul opens his letter with these gushing words. In fact, these verses in the Greek are one run-on sentence. This isn't because Paul doesn't know how to use good grammar—he was a brilliant man. I think Paul's pen just got away from him as he began to express his feelings of great joy.

Have you ever been part of something so great you want to share it with someone? You come home and it's all you can talk about. That's what's happening here. Paul was exploding with joy about what he knew about God, about the people of Philippi and even about his own life. Let's look at the text together:

³ I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, ⁴ always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, ⁵ because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. ⁶ And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. ⁷ It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. ⁸ For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. ⁹ And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, ¹⁰ so that you may approve what is excellent, and so 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.

Paul here was modeling for us how we can find joy, but we need to ask some questions that no doubt Paul had asked of himself. This prayer of Paul will bring us to ask five diagnostic questions. If we desire joy in the details of our lives, we need to answer these five questions.

1. How positive is my outlook?

The first question we must ask in order to find joy in life is this: how positive is my outlook? Take a moment, in your mind's eye, to envision Paul's circumstances when he wrote these words. As we put ourselves in his shoes, we can begin to understand a little more about what he was dealing with. Paul was in a gloomy dungeon. He was chained to imperial guards 24 hours a day, who went everywhere with him. When he ate, when he slept, when he bathed or changed clothes, when he used the bathroom, the guard was there. Hey, Tim, isn't that getting a little intimate? No, but we need to realize that Paul was dealing with something that would steal joy from any of us. We would not be feeling joy, but despair. He was writing while his chains were clinking, which would make most of us angry or bitter. It's our nature to see trials as justifying a lack of joy. Let's think of some of our normal responses.

We vent.

It would be normal for us in hard times to vent. But notice that Paul didn't open his letter saying, "Woe is me. Let me tell you how my day has gone, Philippians. Let me account for all the ways I'm being mistreated and abused."

All of us vent from time to time and there's nothing wrong with sharing our emotions with those closest to us. But can we not agree that this is a slippery slope? Often we have no intention of fixing our problem, but rather we find it therapeutic to bemoan our circumstances.

Paul didn't do this. He stated his situation, but then he immediately pivoted to what God was doing and what his readers were doing—and that brought him joy. Paul didn't vent, and we need to be careful, in our times of crisis, that we also don't simply vent.

We play the victim.

It's not just venting that gets us into trouble, but it's also playing the victim. I want to be careful here, because Paul in fact was a victim. He had been mistreated. As a Roman citizen, he should not have been imprisoned. He had no idea how long he would be there. He was a victim of the state's overreach and other bad circumstances, in spite of faithfully preaching Christ.

When I speak of playing the victim, I don't want to minimize the reality that there are real reasons to feel victimized. What I'm talking about is the time when we experience some mistreatment, but then elevate it to something more than it is. Yes, we all probably experience victimization at some point. People in this world will hurt us, either intentionally or unintentionally. But often we become melodramatic, as if we have more reason to be offended than anyone ever has. Paul could have said, "Look how I've been terribly mistreated. No one has ever had to go through something like this. Feel my pain, Philippians." We don't see that in this passage, do we?

We get vicious.

Third, we don't see Paul expressing viciousness, but that's what we often do when crises come. Paul could have been vicious by writing a manifesto to the Roman authorities: "I shouldn't be here rotting in this jail." Let me remind you that there was another leader who was put in jail, who also wrote a manifesto. His name was Adolf Hitler and his manifesto was [Mein Kampf](#). Hitler's words were not filled with joy; they were filled with viciousness. "I am wrongly accused, I am wrongly in this prison, and it's the Jews who are to blame. Here is my plan to eradicate my enemy from the face of the earth."

Paul could have said, "Rome is my enemy. Caesar is my enemy. It was the Romans who threw me into this prison and who have mistreated me." He could have written a revolutionary letter to stir rebellion in the hearts of his readers and improve his own circumstances, but Paul did not do that. Instead he decided, "I'm going to write about joy."

We are filled with venom.

Finally, we can be full of venom. What's the difference between viciousness and venom? Viciousness is directed toward our enemies, while venom is directed to those who are closest to us. Paul could have unloaded his misery on the Philippians: "Oh, dear Philippians. You, who are living in your homes, who are with your families on the holidays, who get to be part of a church—must be nice. I'm in prison, but you have a job. I'm in prison, but you're free. Why is it that you're not in prison, but I am? I'm preaching more effectively than you are. You're not doing enough. You're not holy enough. You're not trying to help me."

There are families who, instead of choosing joy, throw venom toward one another. We can even do this using sarcasm or joking. Instead of joy, we have chosen to follow our flesh. We're pronouncing judgment on people because we're unhappy about where we are. Have you ever had a family member who, when they enter the room, they suck all the joy out of it? They vent and are venomous. It's all about them. Or maybe even you're that person that sucks the energy out of the room, because it's all about you.

In light of all his struggles, Paul was able to write, "I thank God." Don't miss that. The starting line in the pursuit of joy is a thankful heart. If you're not thankful for what God is doing in your life, you will never find the joy you need to endure the hardships you face. When you find yourself with the loss of a job, the loss of a loved one, a troubled child, financial woes—whatever difficult circumstances you face—start from a thankful heart. "Yes, God, I may be broke, but I'm glad I have You. I may have a child who has messed up their life, but at least I have a child. I have a boss who's going to drive me crazy tomorrow, but thank You that I have a job."

You see, when we look at the positives and not the negatives, when we begin to thank God for what we do have and not only speak to Him about what we don't have, we begin to move on the journey toward joy. I'm not speaking of a Pollyanna approach, but surely there are things God is doing in our lives if we would just open our eyes to see them. Instead, the crises in our lives cause us to have blinders on so we only see the problems before us. God is telling us that a life of joy will pull down those blinders so we can see all He is doing. How positive are you?

2. How is my prayer life?

Let's ask ourselves the second diagnostic question: How is my prayer life? Paul continued in Philippians 1:3-4, "*I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy.*" It would have been possible for Paul, there in the prison, to focus on all the things he couldn't do. "I can't go from town to town sharing the news of Christ and expanding the Kingdom of God. I can't encourage the churches I've started. I can't visit my friends." But at some point, Paul obviously made the decision not to dwell on what he could not do, but rather to think about the things he could. One thing was clear to him: he could pray. Even though he couldn't go from town to town, he still could go from prisoner to prisoner and pray for them. He couldn't advance the Kingdom as he once had, but he could pray for it to advance in Philippi and through other churches, as we can see in some of his other prison letters.

Prayer represents a conscious dependence on God, the belief that our circumstances can only be handled by Him. One way to test the extent of your joy is to consider how much you are praying. I believe that those who are joyful are not simply focused on themselves, but are watching all God is doing in others' lives. This goes against our cultural habit of prayer being mainly for ourselves.

Paul told the Philippians he was praying for all of them. He could have spent time praying about his own trials and circumstances, but he chose instead to pray for others. I'm not saying here that we should not make personal requests as well. But it seems that in our American evangelical culture, our prayers are often much more self-centered than other-centered. It's true that our personal concerns can be significant, but in order to find joy, we need to look beyond our circumstances and begin to focus our prayer on others. I understand that you may have had a bad week, but who were you praying for who's enduring a bad week like you are? Are you having trouble with your kids? Who else is dealing with this and needs prayer?

One thing I've come to realize is I'm not the only one up at 3:00 in the morning, worrying and fretting. If I turn my attention to other people in prayer, I've learned that God will bring to mind how good things are for me. I just need to open my perspective, realizing that while my problems are real, they are actually, as Peter wrote, "light and momentary troubles" (2 Corinthians 4:17).

When I consider what's bothering me, after my venting, I will remind myself of a thought that has become something of a motto: "These are first-world problems." In other words, there are people around the world who have far worse troubles than my little American problems that seem so big to me. It's true that even in America we have troubling moments and difficult times. But most of the time the things that are bothering me, the things that are stealing my joy, are things I take for granted that other people in the world would give anything to have. I need to ask God to open my eyes and give me compassion for people who have worse troubles than I do.

But notice that Paul demonstrated his greater spiritual maturity. Paul was praying for people whose circumstances were actually better than his. He even thanked God that they had it better.

When was the last time you saw something on Facebook or Instagram that tempted you to covet what someone else had, then you stopped and thanked God for what they had and you didn't have? When have you prayed, "Thank you, God, for the victory in their lives, for blessing them as You have"? Our tendency rather is to think, "Where's my victory and my blessing?"

Paul instead says, "I'm going to pray for you and thank God for what He's doing in your lives. I've come to realize what it's like to have little, so I'm thanking God that you have a lot."

3. Who am I partnered with?

As we pray, we need to ask a third question: Who are we partnering with? Paul goes on to say in verse five that the reason he's filled with joy is because of their *"partnership in the gospel from the first day until now."* It was this significant partnership that was part of the reason Paul was able to write them a letter. Back in the Roman prison system, if you wanted to live, you needed someone on the outside to visit you and bring you what you need.

Remember when Jesus talked about ministering to those in prison? Those prisons had none of the amenities that are found in our prisons today. Prisoners were dependent on outsiders to care for them. Paul was dependent on those who partnered with him to sustain him during his imprisonment. The Philippian church was aware of Paul's situation and entered into his suffering. They remembered that he was the one who had led them to Christ and who had started their church. "That guy who witnessed to us, baptized us and helped us bring our families and friends to Christ—he's now in prison for preaching the gospel. What can we do to help him?"

So they gathered provisions and funds, then chose a man named Epaphroditus to carry these resources to Paul. Epaphroditus stayed in Rome, caring for Paul. That's why Paul was filled with joy in part because of the partnership he had with these believers *"from the first day until now."*

Paul continued in verses seven and eight, *"It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus."* Paul loved these people. Why? Because they didn't forget him, but cared for him. Even though they weren't connected by family or skin color, or by being part of some Philippian social group, Paul loved them because they were all connected through partaking of the grace of Christ.

You need to ask yourself who are you partnered with? If you're missing joy, it may be because you're living in isolation trying to do the Christian life alone. True joy comes especially through partaking of deep relationships with one another in Christ. When we care for each other, are honest with each other and care for one another, we will be filled with joy.

Let me give you three quick approaches to church community.

Co-belligerence

It's possible that we might be getting together primarily because we have a greater enemy outside; it's not so much that we're unified ourselves, but only that we share the same enemy. For example, this was the relationship that existed between Soviet Russia and the United States during World War II. Otherwise we hated each other, but we both hated the Nazis more.

Some of us may be gathered together this morning, not so much for the community it brings, but because we see what's going on in the world and want to join with like-minded people who are as angry about the ways of the world as we are. While we're here, we think, "No liberal is going to tell us what to do. Nobody is going to insist that we join in the world's vices. And quite frankly, I wish the pastor would talk more about the evils around us." But co-belligerency is not real community.

Co-dependency

Another approach to church community can be the pattern of co-dependency. "I will be connected to you because of what you give me. You have something I need so I can manipulate you to give it to me." There are those who attend church to receive, but never to give. They take and take and take.

In my marriage of over 20 years with Amanda, there were times when she was giving 100% and I was giving nothing. But that's not where I wanted to be as a loving husband. Those moments will happen. There are times when all of us need to receive things, but if that is what happens Sunday after Sunday, event after event, something is wrong.

You know you've become co-dependent when the people you're depending on don't perform as you want them to. "I don't like how that was done. I wasn't blessed today. Why did they sing that song? Why did they play that instrument? Why did he preach that way?" Unconsciously they're saying, "You're performing for me." Co-dependency does not bring joy in a marriage, a family or a friendship, and it will not bring joy in a church.

Gospel-centered community

So what does characterize this partnership Paul described in Philippians 1? First, it was gospel-centered community. They were partners who shared the same past. They were all sinners.

Second, they shared the same Savior, Jesus Christ. They all rejoiced that Jesus Christ had saved them from their sins. That brought them into authentic community, because that same Jesus gave them a same purpose. That purpose was not to live for their own glory, but to live for the glory of God.

It then led them to a same passion. They were to go into all the world to share with others the same gospel that saved them. It also gave them a similar hope because they were looking forward to standing before their Lord and Savior together, being ushered into eternity with Him. This "day of Christ Jesus" is mentioned twice in this passage and is a place where believers will experience unspeakable joy.

That's what also brings us together. It saddens me when I see gatherings when all we talk about is weather, sports and politics, rarely discussing the Person Who saved us or the passion He's given us. We don't think about how we're looking forward to the same place where we will spend eternity together in heaven.

So I'm asking, when you gather together, that one of you will lead the rest in this direction. "Isn't there something better we can talk about? We have far too much in common than simply the ordinary things people discuss. We have been saved by the almighty grace of God. Let's talk about how that is impacting and changing us."

4. What is my life pointing toward?

The next question we ask is, "What is my life pointing toward?" If you want to find joy, find purpose. Paul wrote in verse six, *"I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ."* In verse ten he added this goal: *"That you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ."*

What should our lives be pointing toward? The life of a joyful Christian is fixed on the moment when we will see Jesus Christ face to face. That's our north star. As followers of Christ, that is our true north. If we can focus on the Author and Perfecter of our faith (Hebrews 12:1-2), then whatever happens between now and when we see Him will be okay.

There's an old song that says, "Turn your eyes upon Jesus." It ends with these words: "And the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace." When we look into the face of Jesus, we will be filled with joy. If you haven't been living with joy in your life, were you looking forward with great confidence, knowing that one day you will see Jesus?

My parents lost their oldest son when he was 16 years old. Yet they have joy, because they know one day they're going to see not only Jesus, but they'll see their son again. It's that joy that pulls us out of our grief and despair.

What is your life pointing towards, if it isn't Jesus? Know Jesus, know joy. No Jesus, no joy. Let's look to Him and know Him.

5. What are my priorities?

In verses nine through 11, Paul lists some of his priorities: *"And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment."* What should our priority be? That we would grow in love. The only way you and I can grow in love is if we take our minds off ourselves and start focusing on others.

Paul wrote later in this letter, "Do not just look to your own interests but also to the interests of others." That's why I love you moms, because you have an uncanny ability to take your eyes off yourselves in order to care for your families. I'm amazed at my wife, because she's other-focused. Me, I'm mainly worried about myself. I get ready, I get in the car, and I say to her, "Where have you been?" She's always the last one there. She looks at me as if to say, "You walked out the door and got in the car. I'm glad you got one person together. I took care of the rest of the tribe." We need to be other-focused.

Our life also needs to be growing in our ability to find joy. How do we do that? Paul says it's done *"with knowledge and all discernment,"* so that as we grow and see God finishing His work in us, we might be *"filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God."*

You and I will not find joy on our own. We will not get through the crises of life on our own. We need Jesus Christ. May our prayer be that we will grow in love, knowledge and in the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23) so we will have what we need in this life. All this comes only from Jesus. My prayer is that, little by little this week, we might see the joy of the Lord truly becoming our strength.

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All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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