



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

In It to Win It

Relentless Joy, Part 5

Philippians 1:27-30

Tim Badal | February 9, 2020

Let's look to God's Word this morning as we continue our series on the book of Philippians entitled "Relentless Joy." We've been seeking to understand that God has commanded His people—you and me—to be people of joy. We're told we can be filled with a joy that transcends all our circumstances and all our difficulties.

Paul didn't just preach about joy in his letter to the Philippians, he also lived it. It wasn't a Pollyanna view on life, looking through rose-colored glasses. As we saw, Paul wrote this letter from prison where he endured significant hardships. Nevertheless, he exudes in every verse the reality of a life filled with joy. He had learned how to find joy even in times of hardship. Paul loved the church at Philippi, which he himself had planted some ten years earlier. For this reason, he wanted them to realize that as they too were experiencing hardships and opposition, it was their turn to find joy in suffering. It's as though Paul is saying, "Tag—you're it. It's now your opportunity to live lives of joy."

Because Paul was communicating to them on behalf of the Holy Spirit, we can also see that this is our calling as well. So as we read these words, we as Christ followers are also commanded to live lives of joy—no matter what we're dealing with, no matter what the good, bad or ugly of life brings. So regardless of how our week has gone, no matter what opposition we've faced, you and I are called to joy. Maybe today you're in some kind of prison cell. Perhaps it's medical, financial or a relational issue that has you concerned. Paul is telling you that in the middle of your struggle, you can find joy.

Paul was writing to a church that was experiencing increasing hardships because of their loyalty to Christ. He knew that when the opposition came, it would sap the joy from their lives. For this reason he was encouraging them to stay close to one another so they wouldn't face their trials alone.

Paul had already explained his own situation and how he had been able to find joy even in it. He was then warning them that they too would have to encounter some sort of prison. Perhaps it would not involve bars and chains, but it would be hard just the same. But regardless of what it looked like, Paul wanted them to be in unity so no opposition could tear them apart. In order for them—and for us—to do this, we need to know about ourselves, we need to know about God and we need to know what God has called us to in our lives.

Let's read Philippians 1:27-30:

²⁷ Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, ²⁸ and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God. ²⁹ For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, ³⁰ engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

In the Badal home right now, we are living and breathing basketball. All three of our boys are playing basketball, so the games fill much of our schedule. I have no idea how many games Amanda and I have attended. The other night, we were at a conference tournament high school basketball game that Noah was involved in. We were sitting on the bleachers behind a small team that was playing against a big team. The big team had a player who was six feet six inches tall, strong and muscular. They had the height and athletic ability to win the game. With a higher seed, that team was favored to win.

In the first few minutes of the game, it went as one would expect, with the bigger team scoring more. Nothing the little team could do seemed to work. Their shots didn't fall in and their plays failed. When a player would leave the court to have a sub come in, his head was down and his shoulders were slumped.



We sat there thinking, "Boy, this is going to be an ugly game. There's no chance this team will survive." At halftime they were down by a lot of points and it was a preview of what the second half would be like. We could see they were agitated and frustrated. Some of them were pointing their fingers at their teammates; even the coach was animated in his frustration. As they walked off the court, we saw a perfect example of a losing team.

But then they came out in the second half and little by little, basket by basket, they began to close the gap in the score. Their comeback was so gradual that I'm not sure the team that was expecting to win realized what was happening. Then in the closing minutes of the game, that team that earlier had been so frustrated and dejected did the unthinkable: they won the game.

I had just finished my sermon outline and I love it when God puts illustrations right in front of me. It's as though God was screaming to me, "This is My church. Right now My church feels beat up. They see their opponents in the world and conclude the world has the upper hand." Sometimes it seems that every play we make gets thrown back in our faces. We're marginalized. We're called bigoted and intolerant. We're the butt of jokes. But God has told us through His Son that the Kingdom of God is like a mustard seed. This smallest of all seeds still grows, little by little, day after day, into a huge tree.

This is what the Kingdom of God is like. Even though the church is beaten and battered, frustrated and agitated, pointing fingers at one another, still little by little, inch by inch—unbeknown to their opponents in the world around them—the church of the living God is winning. When the horn will sound, God's Kingdom will be victorious.

But we forget this and the Philippian people who were about to endure suffering were also prone to forget this. That's why Paul was writing to them. Because he couldn't be with them, he wanted to give them wisdom on how to deal with what they would encounter. Basically he was saying, "Church, if you want to be in it to win it, certain things need to be done."

Here's how he put it in Philippians 1:27: "*Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ.*" This was the stated goal. He was speaking of their manner of life, or in other translations, their conduct. The Greek word is *politeuo*, from which we get our English word politic. The Greek word, however, has a dual meaning. It's both a person's affiliation and their allegiance. Thus when we say we're a Democrat or a Republican, we're expressing the group to whom we have allegiance. This is a statement of where we stand. Paul told them that, as believers, their allegiance would be different from that of the world around them. And because they would take that stand, opposition and suffering would come.

We who are believers are going to be the minority. We're going to be that team that, throughout the game, is beat up and abused. But God says that in the end, He Who began a great work in us will be faithful to see it to completion (Philippians 1:6). But our *politeuo*—our allegiance—will be different.

What was the allegiance of the people of Philippi, and for that matter, of the Roman empire? There was a saying that all Roman citizens repeated over and over again. Many times these words would open conversations among the people. Instead of "Hello, how are you?" people in the empire would begin with, "Caesar is lord." After that, they could continue their talk. As Roman citizens, they were required to show strong allegiance to Caesar. In a more contemporary setting, we might hear someone in Great Britain say, "God save the queen." Or back in Nazi Germany, it was, "Heil Hitler."

The problem for the Christians was they could not confess that Caesar was their lord, because they knew there was only one true Lord Whose name was Jesus and He was to be forever praised. Their confession was not "Caesar is lord," but "Jesus is Lord." They kept their affiliation and allegiance separate from the rest of their culture. "I'm not with Caesar; I'm with Jesus."

We live in a world where we don't make this kind of statement. We don't say, "Obama is lord," or "Trump is lord," or any other government figure is lord. In our culture, we don't say any person is lord. Our lords instead are things like possessions, pleasures, prestige or position. We would fill in the blank, "___ is lord," with a tangible thing.

The Christians in Philippi were standing in opposition to their culture's allegiance. We need to see what our culture's allegiances are. Maybe it's, "The Cubs are lord. The Bears are lord. Money is lord. Sex is lord." Our world doesn't see anything wrong with these affiliations. Their response might be, "Good for you. To thine own self be true." But then if they hear us say, "Jesus is Lord," their response will be different.

Recently I was with about 600 people in a gathering where questions and answers were being exchanged. I needed to introduce myself before I asked what I wanted to ask. I identified myself as a Christian. When I did that, there was a palpable angst in the room. I said, "Hi, my name is Tim and I'm a Christian." The response was, "Bluuuh—who let him in? Who gave him the mic? It's not one of those guys. They're intolerant. They're bigoted and small-minded. They think Jesus is Lord." When you get scorned or mocked for Jesus, what they're really saying is, "Get the name of Jesus out of here. Make something else your lord."

Paul said, "You need to make Jesus your *politeuo*, your allegiance, your affiliation." What's more, that "*manner of life*" is to be "*worthy of the gospel of Christ*." In other words, your life needs to be in accordance with and look like Him. As Christians, we're good at talking about what we believe, but we often fail to live it out in our everyday lives.

Paul told the Philippians, "Don't just preach or simply profess Jesus as Lord' live as though He is." That can be hard, but that's what he was saying in verse 27. "If you say Jesus is Lord, great. Now live it. Live it both in word and deed, so the world can see the gospel of Christ as being attractive, even though they're set against you."

He also told them that as they do this, people would come after them. Verse 28 mentions being frightened by their opponents, then in verse 29 he said they would suffer for Jesus' sake. When we view Jesus as Lord, people will oppose us, causing us pain and sorrow, all because we're followers of Jesus Christ.

So what was the Philippian church supposed to do? How could they find joy when they were professing something that was totally opposed to their culture's allegiance? Paul gave them—and us—three things that can bring joy as we stand opposed to the thoughts and systems of the world.

1. We have to stick together.

His first instruction was to tell them they needed to stick together. Verse 27 says, "*Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel.*"

The phrase "*standing firm*" is the Greek word *steko*. It was almost exclusively a military term, referring to a soldier who stays in his position regardless of the opposition. He would not retreat or surrender, but stood his ground. Why would Paul use this military word to describe the Philippian believers? Because Paul knew his audience. Ancient Philippi was filled with retired military men. These people would recognize *steko* as the command given by the superior officers: "Stand firm." Similarly, as followers of Christ we're like soldiers who must stand our ground. I remember when I was young singing "Onward Christian Soldiers." That metaphor definitely works. Paul later told Timothy to endure hardship like a good soldier in 2 Timothy 2:3-4.

We're soldiers in the same division.

So in the church today, if we're going to find joy in the midst of opposition, we need to remember we're soldiers in the same division. We are accountable to the same General. If you were to ask the privates, corporals and sergeants on a military base, "Hey, who's in charge here?" they would all point to a general. "He's our leader. When he says we go into battle, we go into battle. We don't question what he says." Think of the hundreds of thousands of men who put themselves in harm's way when General Eisenhower said, "Today is D-Day." Why did they do it? Because their general told them to.

As soldiers, we all have the same General. We're all accountable to Him and He gives us our marching orders.

As soldiers, we march together.

Another way we're soldiers is that we all march in the same direction and in lock step with one another. Are all soldiers the same? No. In fact, in every war movie—like "Saving Private Ryan" or "Band of Brothers"—you'll see, when they get into the lives of the guys who are fighting, almost always they tell you how different every one of them is. The men come from different places, they have different faiths, they represent different socio-economic groups, yet they're all going on the same mission.

Likewise those of us who are accountable to the same General are called to march on the same mission. We're working against the same adversary. Again, going back to war movies, we'll see how at times the soldiers will bicker with one another. But what stops that? It's when the enemy starts shooting at them. "Who cares who stole my cigarettes? Who cares who stole my girlfriend? They're trying to kill us!" That's when the soldiers work together to fight their common enemy.

But sadly in churches today, there's so much "friendly fire" and infighting going on that we are unable to see the true enemy, because we're calling the person in the pew next to us our enemy. We need to realize that being part of a church is something more than Sunday morning attendance.

A soldier is always on alert.

Peter wrote in 1 Peter 5:8, "*Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.*" We need to be alert, both for ourselves and for each other. Is that person over there vulnerable to the enemy's attack? Is the enemy about to lay him down

without him even knowing it? We need to cover one another. We need to be each other's eyes and ears, because we're in an intense battle for our very souls.

That's why Paul wrote, "*Steko*—stand firm. Stand side by side, arm in arm, locked together, because if you are unified, you're not easily broken." But there are things that disunify us, things that erode unity within a church or within a team.

I coach my middle son Josh's basketball team. They're a bunch of 14-year-old eighth grade boys—a great group. Would you believe that when we're winning, there's great unity? There's unity when we get a trophy at the end of a tournament. But when things aren't going right, the story is different. We had a game yesterday when things weren't going right in the first half. The guys came over to the huddle and fingers started pointing. "He's not doing what he's supposed to do." "How could you have missed that pass? I got it to you. It was in your hands." They were bickering back and forth. A good coach will stop this kind of talk and tell them, "We win as a team, and we lose as a team. Let's pull this thing together."

Paul was telling the church, "Whether I'm with you or not, I need you to stand side by side, sticking together. Unity isn't a problem when everything is going well, but Philippi, suffering is coming. Opposition is coming. You're going to start pointing fingers at one another."

What does the opposition cause us to do? There are three things that can disunify a church. First is preferential agendas. We all have preferences. These are what make us individuals and we need them to be a good, full-orbed church. We're not all the same. We're not cookie-cutter people.

I love to see people using their gifts in ways I never could. I told Josh Caterer a couple weeks ago, "I'm really excited about this Philippians series. I would love to have a song to go with it." He came back two days later, "Here's a song." I asked him, "Do you go to Walmart to pick those up?" But we've now sung the song and I'm thinking, "My goodness. I'm so glad Josh has been gifted in ways I never would be." We're a better church because of that.

But our differences can also produce disagreements. Instead of being unified, we can separate. We can come to church and find things we don't like. "I don't like the paint on the wall. I don't like the music we sing. Why do they keep playing those drums? Why is it so loud? Why does he preach so long?"

Paul addressed this more in later chapters. He wrote in Philippians 2:4, "*Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.*" At 43, I'm now old enough to think, "We never used to do things that way. Back then, those were the glory days." I'm beginning to have those kinds of thoughts. But when those thoughts rise up, Paul says, "Stop looking at your own interests and start looking at the interests of others." Why? If we're all about us when we gather together, we will never be unified. When we're focused on our own interests, that can result in anarchy. We have to look to the interests of others.

"I can't stand that pink color; it drives me nuts when I see it. But you know what? It's bringing in the kids. They seem to like it. I don't know why." Or "I don't understand this music we sing, but I'm sure glad to see the younger people in here. They seem to like it." Or "I don't understand why we do things this way, but the old people like it so I'm going to consider their interests and not just my own." Be careful with preferential agendas. What about personal agendas? These are a little deeper than our preferences. Personal agendas say, "It's all about me."

This last week my son Noah made the paper. I was so excited. Someone in our community put a couple newspapers in our mailbox. I was showing someone, "Hey, Noah's in the paper."

In the book of 3 John, a man named Diotrephes is called out. How would you like to be him? Diotrephes could say, "Hey, Mom, Dad, I'm in the Bible." But then he looks at 3 John. He sees his name, but he also sees this description: he likes to put himself first. That's all we know about him; it's all about him.

Can I ask you something? Is your Christianity all about you—your needs, your desires, your preferences? If it is, you're no longer part of a church—it's just an exercise in vanity.

I'm going to go even farther and say churches used to revolve around the people in the pew, because they were there first. But in the evangelical world we've switched that. It's no longer so much a problem in the pew. Instead, it's a problem in the pulpit. We have churches where the pastor has become such a celebrity that it's all about him. It's about the books he's written, the sermons he's preached. So when someone asks, "Where do you go to church?" instead of naming the church, you might say, "I go to so-and-so's church." "Oh. You go to his church?"

Listen. This will never be "Tim Badal's church." If it is, I will kick myself out of this place. It's not about me. It's not about Josh. It's not about Mario. It's not about Phil. It's not about our pastors.

The church in Philippi wasn't about Paul. It was about Jesus Christ. We need to realize that whatever our agenda is—whether in the pulpit or the pew—it is about Jesus crucified, Jesus resurrected and Jesus getting all the glory.

Let me ruffle your feathers now with one more unity issue. It's not something we find in the book of Philippians, but it's something I'm seeing more and more as we move on in our context. It's something that goes beyond preferences or personal agendas. The agenda I'm concerned about—and I'm sharing this for you to think about with discernment—I'm worried about political agendas.

I'm reading more and more about churches being described by who they do or don't like in the White House. We have Christian publications that are saying, "Kick the President out." Others are saying, "Keep him in forever." They're arguing with one another. As a pastor who loves politics and is engaged in the political realm, it saddens me. I hear that the church is either for or against someone, but do you know what I never hear? I don't hear that we're about Jesus. So be careful not to let your political agendas be more important than all other things. The only thing that matters for the church is not who's in Washington, DC. It's not who's on the Supreme Court. It's not who's in the legislature.

It's that Jesus Christ is the One enthroned in glory. He's the King of kings and Lord of lords. When people ask you, "Who are you for?" you can tell them, "I'm for Jesus." That's what it means to stick together and live a manner of life that is worthy of the gospel.

Now, I see some of your faces. Let me give you a few disclaimers. Does that mean you can't have preferences? No. Have your preferences. Does it mean you can't have some level of personal agenda? We all have personal agendas. Does it mean we cannot be involved in politics? No. Be involved. But none of that should supersede what we focus on. Here at Village Bible Church, our focus is on Jesus Christ and His Kingdom work. Let's make that our major concern. But we can't just stick together, singing "Kum Ba Ya." We also need to do something else.

2. We have to strive for the faith.

In Philippians 1:28, Paul went on to say, "Now that you're sticking together and standing firm, I want you to strive for the faith in one mind and one spirit, side by side."

The word "strive" he used is an important Greek word, *sunathleo*. This word combines two other words: sun, which means "as one" or "together," and *athleo*, from which we get our word athlete. We are to strive as athletes who are one.

Why would Paul write from prison about athletics? Was he watching ESPN in his prison cell? No. But he was aware that Philippi was a city in Greece. Just as there were Roman citizens in Philippi who would have understood military terms, so also the Greeks there were all about the Olympics and athletics and competition. That's why Paul could call them to be *sunathleo*—one team working together for the Lord.

How are we to live in a manner worthy of the gospel of Jesus Christ? We do this like an athlete would.

We need to practice.

In order to live a life worthy of our Lord, we need to practice.

Again, I coach a team. We've had five games so far, but we've had twice as many practices. Why? You always need to practice more than you play. You have to learn the plays, understand the goals, fix your deficiencies and strengthen your strengths. That's why any good coach will have his players practicing more than they're playing.

Remember the motto: "You will play like you practice." Our practice indicates our performance in the game. It's important to remember that practice always happens with the team; the actual game takes place against the opponent. The team works together in practice to make each other better, but the opponent seeks to beat them.

Whenever we gather as a church—as a team—this is practice. Right now you're a part of Sunday morning practice. It's a 90-minute practice and like it does in sports, the practice seems to go longer than it actually does. Here, your coaches are your elders who have put together a game plan of how we're going to make ourselves better, how we'll follow Christ in a deeper and more godly way. That's because we've got some games coming up and we need to be ready for them.

What are our games? They start when we leave this building. This morning, we're practicing for them. You might say, "I didn't do anything; I just sat there. It was the easiest practice in the world." No, we ran our plays. What does it mean to worship God? Here it is: We sing and we talk about the beautiful name of Jesus and the victory we have in Christ. We think about how He has conquered sin and death.

Why do we remind ourselves of these things? So that when we leave this place, we can worship on our own. Why do the elders pray? So they can model for you what prayer looks like, how to lift our supplications to the Lord. That way, when you're by yourself, out in your game, you know how to pray.

Why do we talk about service? Why do we do “Week in Pictures”? Why do we have Darnel up here talking about orphan ministry? It’s so you know how to serve. You’ll know what it means to be the hands and feet of Jesus, not just here during practice, but out in the world.

Why does Tim preach? My job of preaching is to teach you how to study God’s Word. I want you to go home and do the same thing there. Take what you’ve learned in practice and put it into game-time situations. Our problem is that many of us come to practice unprepared to do the hard work here, so when we go out into the world, we’re wondering where our opportunities are. They’re there.

Yesterday we ran a new play with my basketball team. We went over and over it. Then in the game, our player got a basket. It worked! The team took what they had practiced into the real game and pulled it off! But if we come here ill-prepared for practice, we’ll have nothing when we get into an actual game.

We need to perspire.

To live a life worthy of the gospel of Jesus Christ means having to work hard. We can’t just say we’ll do something and have it happen. It requires hard work. Paul will say later in Philippians 2:12, *“Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.”*

It isn’t a vacation or even a short break—it’s work. We’re going to have to say no to some things and yes to other things. We have to turn away from temptations and sin so we can follow God.

We need to persevere.

We get out on the court and practice and prepare. We’ve done the hard work. But now the game is on. We’re out in the world, in our workplace or our community. An opportunity comes for us to be the hands and feet of Jesus and we’re ready for it, because we’ve prepared for it. Perhaps an opportunity will come up to proclaim the gospel of Christ in your workplace or school, then all of a sudden the words start coming out of your mouth. You’re wondering, “How did that happen?” It’s because you took practice seriously.

How great would it be if we here at Village Bible Church saw our times together as a practice that launches us out for game time? Wouldn’t it be wonderful if we leave this huddle and run out into the world saying, “Whatever they throw at us, we’ve got what we need not only to defend against it, but to find victory”?

3. We have to struggle together.

We stand together, we strive together, and finally, God may call us to struggle together. Paul went on in Philippians 1:28-29, *“...and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God. For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer...”* It is God’s plan that His people suffer.

In the first service, we had a family who knows my dad really well. They said, “Boy, you look like him and you sound like him. You even laugh like him. You tell stories like he did. You are your father’s son.” I actually appreciate that, because my dad is a good man. We’re alike because we carry the same DNA.

In the same way, the DNA we carry from Christ is evident in our willingness to suffer. The thing that connects us to Him and tells us we are “of Christ” is suffering. You might be thinking, “I’m not really suffering. There are real martyrs out there who are suffering.” The way Paul used this term actually covers a spectrum. He told them he was suffering, which we can understand because he was in prison. But he also told the Philippians they were suffering, but they were just living life in the Roman empire, in the city of Philippi, in a church.

Suffering comes any time you face opposition because of your faith in Christ. If you are laughed at during school, that’s suffering—assuming you’re being laughed at because of Christ. If you are losing opportunities at work because you’re standing for Christ, you’re suffering. Whenever you’re marginalized because of Him, you’re suffering. In other words, we don’t have to lose our lives to be a martyr. Paul says clearly that in this world, we’re going to have opponents. For that reason, we need to stick together and stand together. This will show the world that their fight against us is futile. In fact, their way will lead them to destruction.

In other words, little by little, moment by moment, word by word, God’s Kingdom is growing. Not only that, but God’s Kingdom has already sealed the victory. On the cross of Calvary, Jesus said, “It is finished.” Paul, reflecting on the cross and empty tomb, wrote in 1 Corinthians 15:55, *“O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?”* It has all been swallowed up. God says, “I win. My people win.”

So when you leave this place, when you go to your school or workplace or community, don’t walk on or off the court with your head down and your shoulders slumped. Instead, go there saying, “Yes, I’ve got opposition, but greater is He that is in me than he that is in the world (1 John 4:4). I’m victorious because I’ve got a conquering King Who is leading and guiding me. I’ve got a conquering Spirit within

me Who is going to allow me to stand firm as I stick together with followers of Jesus and as we proclaim His gospel through lives that are lived worthy of this gospel.”

Take joy, my friends. It's halftime. Maybe we feel like we're down. Maybe we feel like the first half didn't go our way. But let's be reminded: Jesus says victory is already ours. In fact, "Victory" is His name. Let's go out like champions and let's live this life to win it. Amen?

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

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