



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

How Do You Spell Relief?

Relentless Joy, Philippians 2:19-30

Tim Badal | March 22, 2020



Turn in your Bible to Philippians 2. We've entitled this series "Relentless Joy," which began in January. We're studying this four-chapter letter written by the Apostle Paul to a church in the city of Philippi, which is located in modern-day Greece. Paul had a deep affection for the people of Philippi. He had started the church around A.D. 70 and had seen it grow into a healthy and vibrant congregation that was impacting many lives in their community. Paul wrote this letter during a time when the church was experiencing great hardship. He himself, as their founding pastor, was in prison. Persecution was taking place all around them and they were being viewed by their friends and neighbors with increasing suspicion. It was becoming more and more difficult to walk with God. As a result, they were losing their hope and joy. So Paul wrote this letter to a church he loved to assure them that they could again find joy.

Here at Village we too are on a journey to find this "relentless joy." We want to honor and serve God in the best ways we can no matter what life brings to us. We want to find a true and lasting relationship with Jesus Christ. As you know, it's not always easy to find a joy that transcends all of life's circumstances. Isn't it amazing, though, that God has us in a series like this—focusing on finding joy—amidst these troubled times? For many of us, the process of watching the tumbling markets, social distancing and total shutdowns has been discouraging. Whether you are well or sick, whether you are employed or not, whether you have a bright future or everything is up in the air—I want you to know without a shadow of a doubt that you can find joy in a relationship with Jesus Christ. Paul wanted to share that kind of joy with the people he loved and I want to assure you that you too can find relentless joy even in the middle of this COVID crisis.

Where do we turn when we have questions? Where do we turn when things seem hopeless and we feel joyless because of the circumstances of our lives? We turn to the Word of God. In today's passage—Philippians 2:19-30—we're going to read about two individuals who lived lives of joy in the middle of hard times. They will give us a model of Christlikeness to people in need.

Some years ago, when I was young, I remember a certain advertisement directed at people with indigestion. The ad asked, "How do you spell relief? If your stomach is hurting, where do you go?" The makers of an antacid called Roloids said you spell relief "R-O-L-A-I-D-S." In other words, they were offering help for those who had digestive issues. If your stomach was in pain, their product could bring you the relief you sought.

My friends, I wish there was a pill we could take today, something that would take away our troubles. I wish there was something that could take away the panic and would help when our lives become unsettled. I realize much has happened overnight. Many of you are struggling with fear and anxiety and even dread. That feeling of isolation, that feeling of the unknown, weighs heavily on all of us. Maybe today you're wondering what the future holds and where you should turn. I want you to know that we need to turn to God in this time.

We'll see in our text a prescription for what ails all of us. No, it's not a vaccine for COVID; it's greater than that. It's something that transcends all earthly afflictions and ailments. We find this prescription at the beginning of Philippians 2 where Paul said we can have comfort. Why would Paul tell us we need comfort? Look back at Philippians 1:29 where he reminded us that as followers of Christ, "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."

When we first come to Christ, we gain some great things. As we believe and trust in Him, we delight in the good things God brings to that relationship. Some of these are blessings in the here and now, but there will be many more throughout eternity. Paul also makes it clear that while the life of a Christian will be blessed, we will also at times experience suffering. Some of us are suffering today. But we can't just take God's blessings and reject the hardships. We can't just receive the comforts without also embracing those parts of life God uses to make us grow. I want to remind you that God saw today's troubles coming. He knew about COVID long before we had any idea of what it was and how it would impact our lives—and He wants to use this now to grow us.

You might be thinking, “Wait a minute, Tim. I’ve just lost my job this week. How does this help me grow?” Others might be thinking, “All our plans have come to an end. You’re saying that will make me grow?” Still others are saying, “My future is completely unknowable and you’re telling me God is going to use that?”

Yes. God wants to use the hardships in our lives to make us grow. Paul explains that God meets us in our hardships. When the times are difficult, He will draw near to us. Even though we might walk through the valley of death, not only will we not fear evil, but we will be filled with joy because of His presence.

1. We can find relief by remembering these biblical commands.

Paul tells us that, as followers of Christ, we’re going to suffer. The reason for this is that God wants us to grow. But what is the prescription? What are the commands that make this possible? Turn to Philippians 2:1 to see what Paul says. God wants to give us encouragement, comfort, love and affection. He also wants us to know that sympathy is available to us.

These benefits, however, become ours as we take certain actions. We want encouragement, love and sympathy, so to get these, Paul gives three commands through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

We need to tough it out together.

First, God’s Word tells us that in tough times, we need to tough it out together. We’re in the middle of this COVID crisis and we want the benefits listed in Philippians 2:1. We want love, encouragement and sympathy from God. But this will require the prescription found in verse two. Paul says we need to be *“of the same mind, having the same love, and being in full accord and of one mind.”*

As followers of Jesus Christ, we need to realize we’re in this together. That’s what’s so amazing about the crisis we’re facing today—we’re all in it together. Not only are we together as Christians, we’re together with non-believers as well. We’re together with Americans, but we’re also together with the rest of the world. And in order to alleviate this trouble, we’re going to have to figure out how to work together.

As followers of Christ, we’re told not to be in isolation from one another and that’s what makes these days so difficult. My prayer is that we will recognize in this there’s no better place on earth than to be with God’s people. We were never intended to live in isolation. Christian life is done in community.

I’m learning this in even greater ways as our staff has been working overtime to “reinvent” church. I’ve been blown away at how they’ve been rethinking what we should do. As they work together, I’ve seen how the strengths and abilities of one person fills in the weaknesses of another. That’s what the Christian life is about.

We need to put others ahead of ourselves.

Paul then mentions that when the going gets tough, we’re going to want to focus on ourselves, thinking only of our own issues and concerns. Yet he tells us we need to put others ahead of ourselves. We read in Philippians 2: 3-4, *“Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.”*

Who would have thought that a couple weeks ago a 24-pack of Charmin would have greater value and be in greater demand than the stocks of Chevron? But that’s where we find ourselves today. Why? Why do we see so many pictures of chaos in grocery stores, with empty shelves and full carts? Some of those carts would take care of a family for months.

In times of crisis, we choose ourselves over others. God’s Word tells us, however, that when times of suffering come, we should put others ahead of ourselves. When we begin to live this out as Christians, we will help instead of hoard. Instead of grabbing, we will be giving. As the church of the living God, we have a great opportunity to be the hands and feet of Jesus.

We need to follow faithful examples.

We need to tough it out together, we need to put others ahead of ourselves, and third, we need to follow some faithful examples. The rest of Philippians 2 gives us insight into how we do this. Paul gives us wisdom about how to react when times of difficulty come. He leaves the chalkboard of the classroom and goes out into the street, where he gives us four examples of those who have done this right, using the principle of the greater to the lesser.

In Philippians 2:5-8 he gives us the best model of how we should live in the middle of suffering for the glory of God—Jesus Himself.

⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Jesus “*made himself nothing*”—willingly suffering and dying. He’s our highest model. But I have to wonder if there might have been some in the Philippian church who responded, “Wait a minute. Time out. We love Jesus. We worship Him. He is the King of kings and Lord of lords. But He’s God. Of course He would excel. I’m not God. How can I follow His example? He’s perfect and I’m sinful.” Paul would have told them, “Yes, Jesus is the model *par excellence*. But let me help you with another model. If you want to know how to follow Jesus, then follow me.” We read in Philippians 2:17, “*Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all.*” And in other places in his letters, Paul specifically told the church to imitate him as he imitated Christ.

I wonder then how the Philippians might have still reacted to this example. “Paul, you’re an apostle of Jesus. You met Him on the road to Damascus. You’ve seen the risen Savior. You were personally commissioned by Jesus Himself to proclaim His good news. You have advantages we don’t have. You’re at another level. You’re a Hall-of-famer. We’re just lowly Philippians.”

So Paul continued with another example in the crux of our text this morning. After mentioning Jesus and then himself, in Philippians 2:19-30 he provided a couple earthy and local models they could follow—Timothy and Epaphroditus. In these two men we see the final two elements of how we can find relief in our troubled times.

In Philippians 2, beginning in verse 19, Paul wrote this about Timothy:

¹⁹ I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be cheered by news of you. ²⁰ For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. ²¹ They all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. ²² But you know Timothy's proven worth, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel. ²³ I hope therefore to send him just as soon as I see how it will go with me.

In his introduction of Timothy, Paul told the Philippians this was a man of proven worth. He had been faithful both in good times and bad. Oh, how the church needs people with proven worth like this in the world around us. In the good, the bad or the ugly, we need to be faithful to God.

2. We can find relief by reaching out to our community.

Paul was specifically sending Timothy to Philippi because he wanted to reach out to that community. When we’re seeking relief, instead of just thinking about ourselves, we should remember what Jesus taught us, what Paul showed us and now what Timothy is modeling for us. We need to follow in their footsteps by serving our community, even when we ourselves have become discouraged. That’s what Paul sent Timothy to do.

So Timothy headed to Philippi, but for what reasons? Paul realized the Philippians had needs. He knew they were becoming discouraged. He knew there were outer forces preying upon them with wrong teachings. He knew there was a lack of unity between two of the women in the church. He realized that because he could no longer be there, they had a leadership vacuum that needed to be filled which Timothy was qualified to do.

Here’s the amazing thing. Paul had his own issues. He was in prison. He couldn’t go anywhere. Does that sound familiar? But he still sent the man who could help him to instead help others who were in crisis. So what do we know about Timothy? We’re told Timothy was a younger man whom Paul had disciplined. He came from a mixed marriage—his mother was a believer and his father was not. But what especially qualified him to fill the needs of the Philippians?

Our community needs compassionate people.

First, the believers in Philippi needed someone who had compassion for them and Timothy was a compassionate person. We read in Philippians 2:20 that he would be “*genuinely concerned for your welfare.*” This young disciple had a heart for people. When he saw someone struggling, he had compassion for them. He joined them instead of running away. He met them where they were in their need. He made other people’s problems his problems. Timothy made it his daily priority to alleviate the needs of those around him. He had compassion.

I know much has happened in our current world. There is a lot of confusion and fear in our church right now. But let me ask how compassionate are you in this moment? We know our world is hurting. More than 200,000 people that we know of are sick with this virus. Thousands have died and there’s no known cure yet. Are you a cynic? Are you a critic? Do you find yourself complaining, even though other people have it way worse than you do? Are you complaining because your spring break got ruined? Are you complaining because maybe there’s a hiatus at work and you don’t have anything to do? Or do you recognize with compassion that our world is hurting right now?

People are scared, so it’s our job to put on compassion and meet needs. Paul sent Timothy to Philippi because he was compassionate. And Jesus is sending us, in the middle of our own struggles and concerns, to show compassion to others.

Our community needs committed people.

There's a second reason why Paul chose Timothy—he was committed. Compassion goes beyond caring thoughts or feelings. "I'm sorry you're having a bad day." That's not real compassion. Compassion is an attitude that leads to actions. Compassion starts in the heart, then moves to the hands. It's not just something we think; it's something we do.

Timothy was so committed to the cause of Christ and not his own personal needs that he went to Philippi to minister to the people there. I imagine that he was like us. He had his own plans. There were already things going on in his life. He may have had his own issues or struggles, but he left that all aside and went to help others. He was committed to the cause of Christ. Rather than being self-centered, he was other-centered. Why? Because Timothy was like Jesus.

What our world needs right now, even more than it needs a COVID vaccination, is they need to see Jesus. Just as Timothy brought Jesus to Philippi, we can bring Jesus to our communities, neighborhoods and families, by reaching out with commitment. So let us open our eyes and hearts to the needs of those around us. Let us pray like we've never prayed before, not only for our own wellbeing, but for those who are being ravaged by this disease in other parts of the world. Let us allow our compassion to move us to action, so that we may show our commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ. We need to let the world know there's an answer to not only this problem, but every problem they face. And that answer is Jesus Christ. That's what I'm praying that we as a church will be committed to.

What happens, though, when things don't go the way we want them to? Paul sent Timothy—that was the plan. But then something happened. Have you ever had a plan in place, but then things didn't go anywhere close to your plan? Truth be told, I shouldn't be in Sugar Grove today. I should be down in Disney World. Up until about seven or eight days ago, our plan was to be gone on vacation, enjoying time with my family. But I find myself here with you—why? Because there are times when circumstances change. So what are we to do when this happens?

3. We can find relief by rolling with the changes.

My third point is that we need to roll with the changes. Yes, I did just quote REO Speedwagon. We need to roll with the changes. In the whole book of Philippians, Paul's focus is on finding joy in the middle of life's circumstances, even in the middle of life's crises. Can I add one more "C" for you alliteration fans? Paul would tell you and me to find joy in the middle of the COVID life.

This means giving our circumstances to God

So what happens when everything changes? When troubles come—as they have—we need to give our circumstances to God. That's what Paul did. Look at Philippians 2:24. Paul said something we need to hear loud and clear this morning: *"And I trust in the Lord..."* Let that sit for a moment.

Do you trust the Lord? We do when the stock market is at an all-time high. We do when our relationships are all going well. We trust Him when everything at work is going just fine. But what about now? What about in this moment? Let me share another truth with you.

For those who may not know, my job is not just being a pastor. I've also had the great privilege for almost 25 years of running a family catering business. It's been very successful. Since 1979 we've served over a million people. We have wonderful employees and wonderful customers. Do you know what has happened in the last seven days? I went from a fully ramped up business to zero. Every one of my jobs over the next six weeks has cancelled. Social distancing is a death knoll, not only to restaurants, but also to caterers. I need groups to run my business. So I had to let my employees go this week. I've never had to do that before. The reason I'm telling you this is not so you'll feel sorry for me. I just want you to know we're in this together. These are difficult times. The job of the Christ follower is to trust God in all circumstances, even when changes and crises and COVID come our way.

We see that plans changed for Paul, beginning in verse 25:

²⁵ I have thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, and your messenger and minister to my need, ²⁶ for he has been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill. ²⁷ Indeed he was ill, near to death. But God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. ²⁸ I am the more eager to send him, therefore, that you may rejoice at seeing him again, and that I may be less anxious. ²⁹ So receive him in the Lord with all joy, and honor such men, ³⁰ for he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me.

Epaphroditus was one of their own and was probably a deacon in the church. We know nothing about him beyond this passage. What we do know is he took the gift the Philippians had collected to minister to Paul while he was in prison. But then we're told he got sick. And not run-of-the-mill sick, but so sick he nearly died. Does that sound familiar? This illness changed everything. He probably wanted simply to go to Rome to bless Paul. But then it turned out that Paul blessed him, because he was so sick he nearly died.

Then there was another change. Not only do we read about this medical illness that almost killed Epaphroditus, but he was also “distressed.” He was feeling extreme anguish—why? Because he was homesick. Let me put it this way. What Epaphroditus was suffering from was a longing for things to go back to normal.

How many of you are feeling that this morning? Maybe you’re not sick with this horrific virus, but you’re just ready for things to return to normal. You want to “go home” to the way things used to be. Each night you say to yourself, “I’m going to wake up and this will all be one bad dream.” I know this, because that’s what I think when I go to bed. I want to wake up with everything back to normal. School will be in session. Jobs will be okay. The economy won’t be crashing.

This means showing care to those closest to you.

Let me finish my last two points quickly this morning, but they’re so important. What Paul did for Epaphroditus is what we need to do for those closest to us—we need to care for them. The medical and emotional illness that Epaphroditus was experiencing changed everything for Paul. Notice what he did and think about how it might apply in your situation regarding those closest to you—those who are in your home with you right now. Paul spoke positively.

We find five positive truths about Epaphroditus in this passage. Paul said, “He’s a brother, a fellow worker, a fellow soldier and a minister.” He then tells the Philippians to honor him with great honor, because he was a model Christ follower.

“Wait a minute, Paul. Didn’t he let you down? When the going got tough, he lost it. Not only did he get sick, which wasn’t his fault, but he became emotionally distressed as well. He wanted to leave you and head home. What about that?” Paul was patient and positive.

Let me apply this attitude to our lives now. Right now you’re sharing your home with others in quarantine. Right now, maybe you love this. It’s great having the kids home. It’s great to have everyone around. You’ve played more board games and had more family time than ever before. But can I tell you, the day will come when you start getting on each other’s nerves. You’re going to find yourself being less than positive with those around you. Instead, like Paul, you need to share love and good words with them, affirming them in what they’re doing.

But what happens if everyone goes crazy? What happens when they start losing it emotionally? Be patient. Moms, dads, be patient with those kids. They don’t want to be home; they want to be at school and with their friends. They want to be participating in sports or in that spring show or concert. They’re looking forward to their senior year. They didn’t plan this. This isn’t how they wanted their spring semester to go. We all need to be longsuffering when things get a little wacky. We’re living in crazy times.

Kids, be patient with Mom and Dad. Be positive and affirming with them. These are some of the craziest moments I can remember. In some ways this is even crazier than 9-11. Your mom and dad are trying to care for you. They want to protect you. It’s not their choice to keep teenagers in the house, but that’s what they’ve been asked to do. Be patient with them.

Spouses, don’t allow all this negativity and despair to destroy your marriage. Share words of love and affection like Paul did with Epaphroditus. We need to be patient with one another and help one another, so that however long this crisis goes, we may shine like stars in our generation.

This means choosing joy no matter what.

Paul closes this section of his letter in Philippians 3:1 with, “*Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord.*” So let me close this message to my church that I love, across all five of our campuses, with this thought. This series and these truths have reminded us that joy is a choice. Whether things are good or bad, whether we get out of the house or not, each day we have a decision to make. Will we choose joy?

The way we choose joy is by remembering the faithfulness of God we learned about last week. God is in this. We can have joy, because He Who began a good work in us is faithful to see it to completion (Philippians 1:6). This is one step in that journey. By choosing joy, you’re deciding to find joy means finding Jesus, serving others, then taking care of yourself. Jesus—Others—You.” That’s the secret to J-O-Y.

My prayer is that amidst all of this difficulty, our communities, neighbors, friends and families will see a relentless joy that brings hope and peace to our troubled world. So let’s turn to the Lord in our hour of need, asking Him to fill us with His joy and peace.