



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

Are You Surviving or Thriving?

Relentless Joy, Philippians 3:1-11

Tim Badal | March 29, 2020

Please open your Bibles to Philippians. We've called our series "Relentless Joy," because Philippians is a book about finding joy amidst any of life's difficult circumstances. This morning we'll be looking at Philippians 3:1-11, but I want to begin by asking are you surviving or are you thriving?

Families all across our country have been in what's called "shelter in place." Two scenarios come to mind when we think about this. For some, it's an awesome moment for their family. They get to play board games and enjoy lots of family time. They're baking cookies and other treats. They're enjoying life through movie nights and household projects. This is their opportunity to slow down and be family.

For others, the words "shelter in place" are ominous. If they'll admit it, their family is in chaos. Instead of wanting to spend time together, they want nothing to do with each other. They're white-knuckling every moment of this season. Think of a room that is full of chaotic laundry items. Or perhaps a checklist that tells them how to stay sane during this time, such as:

- Drink coffee.
- Stay focused.
- Be positive.
- Don't freak out.
- Remember that stabbing people is wrong.
- Don't forget to wear pants.

Some of you are simply surviving. You're just trying to hang on. For the Badals, we've enjoyed our time. We love family time. We've caught up on all our homework. In fact, we're doing extra credit things. We've written letters to our pen pals and other people we know—even some we don't know—just to encourage them during this season of isolation. We've done some nifty crafts together. We just love doing family time together. Because we don't believe in TV or Netflix or any of those externals so many people rely on, we decided the five of us would serenade you with a song we came up with. I know you wouldn't believe it, so I've recorded it for your pleasure. [go to <https://villagebible.church/sugar-grove/resources/sermons/are-you-surviving-or-thriving/>] (Note: this is not Tim's actual family. He is joking.)

What best describes you today? It's the COVID crisis. Are you surviving or are you thriving? Let's be honest. With all kidding aside, these are difficult days. They're the days that try men's souls. We have moments of panic and worry, times even of anxiety and fear.

I'm glad we've been studying Philippians during this time. Paul, who loved both God and people, took time to remind the believers in Philippi that joy could be found even in the difficult seasons. God offers an unspeakable joy that can help us in times of chaos. For a long time, life for the Philippians had gone well. They had come to know Christ and had built a healthy church. But then things began to be more difficult. It was hard to be a Christ follower. They needed to know how to thrive, not just how to survive.

Surviving and thriving are two different things. Let's think about some of the differences:

- Surviving is essentially living a life of maintenance. On the other hand, thriving means living a life of abundance.
- Surviving is taxing, but thriving is terrific.
- Surviving is about duty, whereas thriving is about delighting in what God is doing among us.
- Surviving is like the children of Israel in the wilderness, while thriving is them living in the Promised Land.

I asked my third son, Luke, what he thought about those ideas of surviving and thriving. I love what he said: "Surviving in life is simply living life, while thriving in life means loving life." You see, the Bible is clear that as followers of Jesus Christ, we are called to thrive, not



simply survive. But it's not always easy. In fact, we're told by Jesus Himself in John 10:10 that the devil comes to steal, kill and destroy. But then He said, "That's not how I want you to live—just trying to survive the devil's schemes. I want you to thrive." So He went on to say, "*I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.*" In other words, Jesus does not want us to have just an ordinary, mediocre life. Rather, He gives us life with abundance. He has given us the ability to thrive.

I know living with COVID and the quarantines are difficult days. But let me ask. are you surviving spiritually or are you thriving? It's not about how you're doing bottled up together in your homes; . it has to do with how you're doing spiritually. ? God has created you and me to thrive.

In Philippians 3, the Apostle Paul gives us a road map, providing. guidelines for what it means to thrive as a follower of Jesus Christ.

1. Thriving in life involves learning an important biblical concept.

Let's look at our text, beginning in Philippians 3:1:

Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you.

The first way you and I can find a life that thrives instead of simply survives is we must learn an important biblical concept—we must rejoice. Paul said this over and over again. In fact, he said it nearly 20 times in this four-chapter letter. Why would he so often tell us to rejoice? He knew something we don't.

Especially when life doesn't go the way we want it to, it's easy to go into survival mode. It's a lot harder to thrive. The way we move from survival to thriving is the gift of God we call joy. That's why Paul could write, "It's no trouble for me to remind you again and again to rejoice." He saw it as a command for us, no matter what circumstances we find ourselves in. Paul knew there would be times in our lives when we would not feel joyful.

For some of us, that's now. We're living with cancellations, quarantines and many changes in life, so it's hard for us to be joyful. Paul would remind us that obeying this command to be joyful doesn't rely on circumstances, but on God.

Earlier this year I gave you a definition of joy. Sometimes we tend to think that happiness and joy are the same thing, but they're very different. Happiness is based on circumstances. When circumstances aren't going well, we're not happy. But joy goes deeper. It's more profound.

Kay Warren writes in her book Choose Joy, "Joy is the settled assurance that God is in control of all the details of my life." This is something I need to hear this morning. I need to remember that no matter what difficulties I'm experiencing, God is in control. Do you believe that? Kay goes on to say, "Joy is the quiet confidence that ultimately everything is going to be all right." Do you believe that today? Do you believe that no matter how bad the stock market is, no matter how much the economy continues to struggle, no matter what happens in our lives, God has a plan and He does all things well? We find our joy in the knowledge that God is going to take everything in our lives and use it for our good and for His glory (Romans 8:28).

Third, Kay says, "Joy is a determined choice to praise God in all things." That's easy when everything is going well. But as we as a country, as we as a world, struggle with these new challenges, will we make the decision to trust and honor God and allow ourselves to be filled with joy? This is the concept Paul wants to communicate to the Philippians and that the Holy Spirit wants us to know as well. We are to rejoice, not because things are going bad, but because we have a God Who makes bad things good.

When we get to Philippians 3:2, it's like storm clouds are beginning to gather on the horizon. It's as though ominous music is beginning to play. "Rejoice in the Lord always" is where Paul starts. But then he brings up two things that steal our joy—two killjoys, if you will, that can put us back into survival mode instead of causing us to thrive through our relationship with Jesus Christ. These two things are going to be my second and third points this morning.

2. Thriving in life involves looking out for counterfeits.

In verse two, Paul clearly was warning the church about counterfeits. Three times he warned, “Look out.”

² Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh.

Paul issued these warnings so his readers would be stopped in their tracks and so they would realize there was danger looming.

When I read this verse, I’m reminded of the old sitcom “Lost in Space.” It was the story of a space traveling family that found themselves on a deserted alien planet. There was a young boy named Will Robinson who would explore his new environment, encountering adventures along the way. Will was accompanied by a companion robot that was especially tasked with keeping young Will out of danger. The way this happened was the robot would begin to shake abruptly, announcing, “Danger, Will Robinson! Danger!” This is what Paul is trying to communicate. “Christian, there is danger coming and this danger will rob you of your joy. It will keep you from thriving in life.”

First, notice that Paul labeled the threat “dogs.” You need to get the picture out of your mind of the family dog you’re sharing the couch with right now; he was not referring to domesticated pets. These dogs had no homes or masters, but they ran in packs, roaming the streets in Philippi as scavengers. They went about looking for prey to devour.

Another aspect of these wild dogs was they were diseased. If you were bitten, the bite was the least of your worries. Rather, the resulting infection was the real danger. In the same way, the false teachers Paul was warning people about were selling the people a counterfeit means for thriving. What would actually happen is their teachings would result in destruction. This is significant and Paul used three slanderous descriptions for these men. He called them dogs, evildoers and he said they were mutilators. In other words, they would devour and bring about spiritual disease that only brought pain and sorrow—which are opposite to what Jesus Christ brought, including the joy Paul was preaching about. These false teachers had come into the Philippian church and were preaching lies that caused the believers to live a life of duty instead of delight. He warned the church to look out for them and be on guard. What they were teaching, however, is a little different from what we might be hearing in our day. Yet there are counterfeit teachings in our world today, things that will also rob us of our joy.

Be careful of teachers who maximize you and minimize Jesus.

The false teachers in Philippi were called Judaizers. They were Jews who had come to follow Jesus, but they had an issue. As Jews, they thought they were superior and had a right to malign other nationalities. As a result, they held the Grecian Philippians and other Gentile believers in contempt.

As we read the Old Testament, we see that God indeed blessed the Jews. He had a special relationship with them, but they had made this gift more about them than about God. God intended for the Jewish people to be a blessing to all nations. They were called to be a light in the dark world around them. Instead, they took His blessings and made it all about themselves.

Now, we have many teachers, even in Christian circles, who make Christianity about us rather than about Jesus. Even today, many people are listening to preachers who will tell them how great they are. They speak of our potential and our destiny. It can sound really good, making us feel good and special. But the Bible doesn’t teach this. Rather, the Bible says we’re all sinners who fall short of God’s glory (Romans 3:23). According to Romans 1, we are naturally God-haters, disobedient and evil. To be sure, because of God’s common grace there is also some good in us—we could be worse. The Bible still says our righteous deeds are like filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6).

So be careful of teachers who teach things that contradict the Bible. We must be taught that because of our sinful nature, we are at war with God and thus without Christ we’re helpless. Paul wrote in verse three that he had no confidence in himself, but instead realized that his glory was in Christ. So be careful of any teacher who makes you the important part of the story and Jesus a second-tier player. Biblical teaching always makes much of Jesus and little of us.

Be careful of teachers who say holiness is found in doing stuff instead of in what Christ has done.

Circumcision was a big deal with the Judaizers. It wasn’t the only thing, but it was a big one. Let’s be honest—to go through the process of circumcision meant you were all in, but it was just the tip of the spear. There were other things. They focused on celebrating the Sabbath. There were the dietary laws of not eating pork, shellfish and other things. There were many laws God had used back in Moses’ time to lead His people and give them the opportunity to obey, but Christ had come and fulfilled the law (Matthew 5:17). So now as followers of Christ, we no longer must obey these laws. Now we are to rest in what He has accomplished, rather than trying to work our way into favor and good standing with God. Again, we aren’t dealing with most of the Mosaic laws and traditions, but many preachers will still communicate that we get to heaven by doing good works.

Some of you who are listening to me may have the same idea about what is required to go to heaven. You have the thought that if your good deeds outweigh your bad ones, that's what it will take. But that's not what the Bible teaches. Paul makes it clear in Ephesians 2:8-9: *"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast."* It's about what Jesus has done for us.

Our part is to trust in this truth and rest in the reality that Christ's work on the cross has brought us into right standing with the Father in heaven. I love how the hymnwriter William Bradbury expressed it:

My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness
I dare not trust the sweetest frame
But wholly lean on Jesus' name
On Christ the solid rock I stand
All other ground is sinking sand.

What then does it mean to be a follower of Jesus Christ? It is to rest and rely on Him. It means believing that Christ came to earth, died on the cross for our sins, then rose from the dead. Through faith in this reality, we are able to enter into a relationship with Him. This is what Paul was referring to in verse three:

³ For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh.

A child of God, a follower of Christ, realizes, "It's not about me or the good things I've done. It's all about the grace and mercy Jesus Christ extended to us while we were still sinners." So be very careful to get this clear.

3. Thriving in life involves letting go of misplaced confidence.

Paul then went on to describe another killjoy, another counterfeit, which is my third point. We must let go of misplaced confidence. These Judaizers were bold to say, "I am holy and righteous. Let me show you my resumé that shows why I am a holy individual."

That's still going on today. There are many who use social media or their speech or their actions to communicate, "Look at me. Look at what I'm doing. Look at how holy I am." Yet there's very little change in their hearts.

Paul closed out this thought about false teachers in Philippians 3:4-6 by saying, "You're not going to thrive in life if you're dependent on your spiritual resumé." He realized this because he personally had come to grips with his own spiritual journey. He had a great resumé. He was the head of his class. He had gotten first place in his effort to earn God's favor.

⁴ Though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: ⁵ circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶ as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

Paul listed seven things that he had thought qualified him as a top follower of God. In other words, he had worked his way to God. He had toed the company line and even claimed to have done it blamelessly.

That's how all of us want to be described. We want the guilt taken away. We want to be vindicated. Paul said this was true of him, but it still left him unsatisfied. Even though he had done every holy act he believed to be important, he was left dry and empty. Essentially, he had come to realize he had missed the point altogether.

When did that happen? It was the day he met Jesus on the way to Damascus (Acts 9:1-31). He quickly realized that what he had thought about righteousness was actually sin. What he thought was the way to faithfully follow the law made him an enemy of Christ.

Some of you may also be doing a lot of religious things, thinking you're in a good place with God. But in fact all it's doing is making you an enemy of God. Anything done apart from faith and trust in Jesus Christ is worthless. Paul had come to realize that all his good works were rubbish (Philippians 3:8).

What makes these worthless things give us confidence in the first place? After all, we're not impressed with circumcision today. Being part of a particular tribe of Israel doesn't mean much. So a lot of what was important in Paul's day doesn't translate easily into our time in history. But let me give you three things that are the same today, things that cause many of us to misplace our confidence regarding our own righteousness.

This involves your categories.

First, we have a tendency to come up with our own categories for sin and holiness. We aren't finding these in the Bible. For example, we might play a kind of Jeopardy. This action is worth 100 points and this other one is worth 50. But isn't it interesting that all the things you do are in the 100-point category? Then on the sin side, there are sins worth 25 points, sins worth 50 points and sins worth 100 points, and every one of those becomes a negative that counts against the positive points. Is it surprising that you don't have any 100-point sins? You see, when we categorize sins, we tend to give other people the high marks, but on the holiness scale, we give them the low marks. Then when it comes to us, we score high on holiness and low on sin. "Of course I'm going to struggle with those little things, but look at the good I do."

In the long run, these categories do us no good. They give us a false sense of assurance, but regarding our relationship with God, they actually keep us from thriving because we're living a lie.

This involves your connections.

The second area where we have misplaced confidence is in our connections. "I'm close to God because my wife or my husband really loves Jesus. When the church is open, they're there. When I get up in the morning, they're reading the Bible. When I hear them talking, they're talking about Jesus. Surely because I'm married to them, I'm good with God."

Maybe a teenager is thinking they have a great relationship with God because their parents are strong believers. "I grew up in a Christian home, so surely my parents' righteousness is mine too." Or maybe it's because you attend a great church with wise pastors and elders and leaders. They have incredible ministry going on. Because the Word of God is being taught and you're hearing it, you think that will make you a devout follower of Jesus.

Paul negated this with what he said in verse eight. Rather than his relationship to anyone or anyplace else, it was all about him knowing Christ personally. Notice the phrase "...my Lord..."

⁸ Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.

You cannot have a relationship with Jesus Christ through anyone else. Paul told Timothy in 1 Timothy 2:5, "*There is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.*" On the day of judgment, your mom or dad or spouse or pastor will not be with you when Jesus asks, "Why should I allow you into My heaven?" You'll be on your own. You can come up with all the good things you did, all the wonderful notes you wrote during the COVID crisis and all the groceries you bought for people. But Jesus will respond, "Your righteous deeds are but filthy rags. They're not good enough."

If your assurance is based on your works, your eternal destiny will be impacted by this misplaced confidence.

4. Thriving in life involves loving Jesus Christ.

So where are we to go? If God wants us to thrive, how do we do it? The answer is simple. It involves loving Jesus Christ. In verses seven through 11 Paul makes this clear:

⁷ But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— ¹⁰ that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

Do you want to thrive in this world? Do you want to thrive spiritually? Get rid of the counterfeits. Get rid of any misplaced confidence. Instead, find the joy that comes through a relationship with Jesus Christ. What does this involve? Let me close with three ways we embrace Jesus.

This means embracing humility.

First, we embrace humility. Paul says, "Whatever I've gained, I count it as loss. Whatever I thought I could add to my account, it's rubbish. It's worthless." These are words of humility. Paul is saying, "I am nothing; He is everything." That's where it begins. If you and I want to thrive in this world, we need to realize there is a God—and we're not Him.

Instead, we must bow our knee to Him, worship Him and glory in Him, praising Him for all He is and all He's done. We must acknowledge that apart from Him, we can do nothing.

This means embracing a different priority.

Second, embracing Jesus involves a new priority. Our priority should not be, "How do I make myself better?" It's not, "Look at all the great things I can do." It's not, "How can I make myself great so I'll be known and remembered?" No, Paul says, "My new priority is to know Christ Jesus." Knowing Christ means experiencing Him and having a relationship with Him. It means going where He goes and doing what He does.

When I was a freshman in college I met my future wife Amanda. When we had been dating for a while, and because I loved her, I wanted to be with her all the time. So I picked out the classes she was in. What she majored in, I majored in. I forgot about my own agenda. My priority was to be with her as often as I could. I wanted to be as close to her as possible.

That's what we're called to do as followers of Christ. We are called to know Him and do life together with Him. As a result, we can experience and enjoy Him, along with the abundance and thriving He promises to give us, regardless of our circumstances or troubles.

This means embracing the best opportunity.

That then gives us the greatest opportunity to find, not a righteousness of our own, but salvation itself. When we humble ourselves and make Jesus central to all we are, in that moment of confession, Christ places upon us His righteousness, not His wrath. When we receive His righteousness, we then have the opportunity to partner with Him. Yes, that may mean we share in His sufferings, but on that glorious day we will also share in His resurrection and all the blessings that brings.

So let me ask are you surviving or are you thriving? God created us to be in relationship with Him. Stop trying to do it on your own. Stop trying the "do-good-and-fail syndrome" in life. Give your life to Jesus. When you do, God will give you joy. God will give you peace. And God will bring you the deep contentment the world is always seeking but never finding.

You see, it's in that moment when we give our lives to Jesus Christ that we experience for the first time what real living and real thriving is all about. The devil wants us to struggle, to go backwards. But Christ wants to give us joy and new life in Him. Will you give your life to Him? Will you bow your knees to Him and say, "It's all about You; it's not about me"? Jesus came to be our Messiah, to seek and to save those who are lost (Luke 19:10).

Before I have Pastor Steve come to pray, I want you to take some time to think through what I've shared with you. Are you making much of Jesus—or much of yourself? Christian, confess that. If you've never entered into a relationship with Jesus Christ, I pray you will now. Ask Him to come into your life so that you may be saved.

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

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