

Elements of Joy, Part 1

Scripture: Philippians 1:3–5

Code: 50-2

INTRODUCTION

A. The Passage

Philippians 1:3-8 says, "I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all, in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now. For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect until the day of Christ Jesus. For it is only right for me to feel this way about you all, because I have you in my heart, since both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers of grace with me. For God is my witness, how I long for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus."

B. The Perspectives

1. Paul's Perspective

Paul's irrepressible and constant joy in the face of suffering is the heartbeat of his letter to the Philippians. The joy that Paul or any Christian experiences is not a transient emotional feeling that lifts you up one moment and drops you the next. It is not dependent on circumstances, but is an unwavering constant in the Spirit-filled life. It does not depend on external tranquility, comfort, or safety. It is produced by the indwelling Holy Spirit, and can be maintained even if one is sitting in prison waiting for news about one's own execution, as Paul was.

Paul's joy was the result of his eternal relationship with the living God through Jesus Christ and the ministry of the Holy Spirit within him. Because he was near to God he was full of joy. Paul experienced an inexpressible and irrepressible joy--an abiding feeling of peace, calm, tranquility, contentment, delight, and satisfaction that flows from within. It is the expression of the presence of God imprinted on the soul and the product of a conscience void of offense toward God.

The joy Paul had in his heart spilled over when he thought about the Philippians. They were a special group of people. Paul wrote of them, "I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all. . . . I long for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. . . . I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith" (Phil. 1:3-4, 8, 25).

Paul instructed the Philippians to "conduct [themselves] in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ" (v. 27). He wrote, "Make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself" (2:2-3). In 4:2 it was

necessary for him to write, "I urge Euodia and . . . Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord." Paul was not blind to their imperfections, but rejoiced at their level of spiritual commitment. They loved the Lord. They cared for Paul with an unusual zeal--more than any other church. They continually sent him generous gifts to meet his needs, even though they were not particularly wealthy (2 Cor. 8:1-5). Their love and care for him was such that he wrote, "I have received everything in full [from you], and have an abundance" (Phil. 4:18).

Trials don't touch a believer's joy if it's the joy of a Spirit-filled life. Instead, trials are occasions for an increase of joy because they increase the believer's dependency on God and remind him not to focus on circumstances. Real joy is found in the depth of a believer's relationship to God. William Kelly wrote, "Think of [Paul] in prison for years, chained between two soldiers, debarred from that work he loved, and others taking advantage of his absence to grieve him, preaching the very gospel out of contention and strife; and yet his heart was so running over with joy that he was filling others up with it" (Lectures on Philippians and Colossians [Denver: Wilson Foundation, n. d.], pp. 14-15).

2. A contemporary psychiatrist's perspective

Not long ago I found a book on my desk entitled The Way Up from Down, written by Priscilla Slagle, M. D. (N. Y. : St. Martin's, 1988). It is a book on how to overcome depression. According to Dr. Slagle, a 70 to 80 percent effective way of overcoming depression is through amino acid, vitamin, and mineral supplements. I found myself drawn into the book so I read it. Initially the author's theory is that depression is caused by a deficiency in certain chemicals in the body. A person who is depressed can be tested through examination of their bodily fluids to identify various chemical deficiencies. These deficiencies are identified in the book as the chemical markers of depression. A depletion in those various chemicals are said to result in distorted mental functioning.

The author also points out that in the brain there are neurotransmitters. They pass message impulses from one cell to the next, which is a chemical process. When various chemicals become depleted the ability of one cell to communicate with another cell is impaired. That tends to create depression.

The two neurotransmitters we know about are serotonin and norepinephrine. Depletion of those neurotransmitters go along with depression. So according to Dr. Slagle, depression can be relieved by replacing serotonin and norepinephrine by amino acid, vitamin, and mineral supplements. Three chapters explained all that, and then came over a hundred pages on the program Dr. Slagle recommended to overcome biochemical deficiencies. In chapter after chapter she described the various substances to be taken and how to get them.

Then came the last part of the book. It begins, "Even though you follow the biochemical program, if you continue habitual negative thought patterns you will seriously undermine this treatment" (p. 215). Now that caught my attention. She continued, "Persistent negative attitudes can lead to constriction and bondage, whereas consistent positive thoughts and expectations create expansion and freedom. Someone has said we suffer because we don't see things they are, but as we are" (p. 215). And she said, "We can only learn to see differently by wanting to see differently" (p. 216).

In light of what she had said previously in her book, that statement is amazing. The implication is that all her recommended treatment will do is help people who aren't already depressed. It will only help people who aren't thinking negatively. But if a person was not thinking negatively, it would appear that he or she wouldn't need the treatment. That would seem to cancel the whole purpose of the

book.

She apparently realized she had painted herself into a corner, so she closed with a section entitled "How to Reprogram Your Conscious Mind." Her first suggestion is that every time you have a negative thought, shout, "Cancel." If in the next few months you find people at your workplace going around shouting, "Cancel," you'll know they've read this book! Second, Dr. Slagle suggests that you develop the art of creative visualization. Also, you are to do sleep programming by playing a tape recording all night that contains lots of positive feedback, and are instructed to listen to a lot of positive music. Also, get some exercise and stop being focused on the future. Another suggestion is that you read the book, Be Here Now, by Baba Ram Dass. That book is supposed to teach you how to focus on the moment and ignore the future. You are also to release all your anger.

Dr. Slagle also thought it would be helpful to cultivate a meaningful spiritual philosophy. You are to find a belief system that works for you--anyone will do if it works. And be sure to avoid people that talk about sin and guilt. Her final point was that you are to find the light in yourself. She summed that all up with a free-verse poem:

And remember--

We are not here to experience mental and existential bondage.

We are to here to rejoice, to give and receive joy,
To see and experience the true essence
Not superficial appearances

To perceive beauty, order, and harmony
Not ugliness, chaos, and discord
To see color, to vibrate and flow with the rhythm
Of time

To germinate, come to fruition, and ultimately fade
To be swallowed, then spewn into the
Next river of life, new energy, new form
Beyond our current level of reckoning
With unwavering gradual beckoning to cross

The horizon of time
Exchanging dimensions
Expanding, uniting--
--Bon voyage.

The Bible has a better idea: follow Jesus Christ and He'll give you His Holy Spirit, and you will be full of joy. The world at its best can't produce joy. Dr. Slagle has suggested a convoluted attempt to produce joy that will not produce anything close to the joy of those in Christ.

LESSON

Paul had the joy of recollection, intercession, participation, anticipation, and affection.

I. THE JOY OF RECOLLECTION (v. 3)

"I thank my God in all my remembrance of you."

A. The Cause of Paul's Joy

The very thought of the Philippians brought Paul jubilant memories. Paul S. Rees wrote, "His whole soul is a carillon, and the first bell to be struck is that of thanksgiving" (The Adequate Man: Paul in Philippians [Westwood, N. J. : Revell, 1959], p. 18). Paul had an inventory of memories, and the Holy Spirit within him always focused him on the positive ones.

The Greek verb translated "thank" is eucharisteo. The English word eucharist refers to "a service of thanksgiving". Paul said his thanksgiving went to "my God," which reflects the intimate communion he enjoyed with God. It is a phrase we find elsewhere in Paul's letters (1 Cor. 1:4; Philem. 4). Paul was on an intimate basis with God--a condition that should also be true of us as well.

The Philippian church wasn't perfect. There may have been disunity in the church, since Paul made unity a major issue in his letter (cf. 1:27; 2:1-4; 4:2). But the Philippians still brought him joy. All churches fall short. All believers in this life struggle against sin. Yet the Spirit caused Paul to dwell only on those memories of the Philippians that brought him joy.

B. A Catalog of Paul's Memories

1. Lydia

Paul would surely have remembered the Sabbath day when he went to the riverside outside Philippi and found some women at a place of prayer (see pp. xx-xx). There the Lord opened the heart of a lady named Lydia and she and her entire household was saved. Lydia was the first convert in Europe. She showed hospitality to Paul and Silas before and after their imprisonment, and the church probably met at her house.

2. The demon-possessed girl

Paul would also have remembered the slave girl whom he cleansed of demons by the Spirit's power. Perhaps she too was born again and became part of the Philippian church.

3. The Philippian jailor

Paul could not have forgotten being thrown into the Philippian jail and put in stocks after he had been stripped and his back beaten into a bloody pulp. But out of that experience the jailer and his household were converted to Christ and had shown compassion to Paul and Silas by caring for their wounds and feeding them.

4. Past Philippian gifts

Paul remembered the many times when the Philippians sent money to help him. Those times are

mentioned 2 Corinthians 8:1-5, where it is said that the Macedonian churches sent generous gifts out of their deep poverty (Philippi was in Macedonia). Their gifts were given from loving hearts and went beyond Paul's needs. Their gift told Paul where their hearts were. And Paul knew God would supply their needs according to His riches in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:10-19).

5. The present Philippian gift

The Philippians' most recent gift, delivered by Epaphroditus (and even consisting of Epaphroditus), would also have filled Paul with loving thoughts of the Philippian Christians. Though his present condition was difficult--physically, legally, and spiritually--his heart was unaffected and filled with sweet thoughts and memories.

A key to joy in the Christian life is to be able to recall the goodness of people--to look past imperfections to capture broader and sweeter realities. A heart dominated by the joy of the Holy Spirit remembers the sweet things in life without dwelling on the distressing things. It savors thoughts of another's goodness, kindness, love, compassion, gentleness, sacrifice, and care. It forgives the rest.

A heart where the Spirit of God is not in control tends to focus on everyone's unkindnesses, ingratitude, faults. Such a heart must learn to walk in the Spirit. Bitterness, unforgiveness, and a constant dwelling on evil are the works of the flesh. Paul's joy was expressed in pleasant memories, which is a work of the Spirit in the hearts of believers.

II. THE JOY OF INTERCESSION (v. 4)

"Always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all."

A. The Cause of Paul's Joy

The joy of intercession is something no believer should miss. When the Spirit of God is in control of your life and you're living in obedience to God's Word, you will delight in praying for others. The Greek word translated "prayer" (deesis) contains the idea of petition for another--asking God for something for someone else. A heart that walks in the joy of the Holy Spirit is not concerned with its own possessions, but about praying that God would pour out His blessing on others.

B. The Circumstances of Paul's Joy

Paul was a prisoner--a negative circumstance both physically and in terms of ministry. He had been criticized unfairly by rival preachers who bore animosity towards Paul (Phil. 1:15-17). But those negative circumstances did not effect his joy. Paul's joy was Spirit-produced, so he was wrapped up in the delight of praying for the needs of others, even when he had needs that were far greater.

Often our prayers for others are made in painful circumstances. In Philippians 3:17-18 Paul says, "Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us. For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are

enemies of the cross of Christ." But Paul's joy was expressed in love, and even in the midst of pain and difficult circumstances he joyfully asked for others to be blessed. As he says in Philippians 2:4, "Do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others" (Phil. 2:4).

Paul's prayers for the Philippians were especially joyous because he knew that the spiritual state of those he prayed for was good. Even the two women who were a problem in Philippi (4:2-3) couldn't steal Paul's joy. Right after mentioning them Paul said, "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!" (v. 4) and, "I rejoiced in the Lord greatly" (v. 10).

Few Christians seem to know the authentic joy that the Holy Spirit gives to a fully obedient Christian. Their lack of joy shows up in two ways: negative thoughts toward others and lack of delight in praying for others. They're self-centered and hold grudges when offended. All those things are the result of pride.

William Barclay noted that George Reindrop in his book No Common Task tells how a nurse taught one man to pray and in doing so changed his whole life. A dull, disgruntled, and dispirited man became a man of joy. Much of the nurse's work was done with her hands, and she used her hand as a scheme of prayer. Each finger stood for someone. Her thumb was nearest to her, and it reminded her to pray for those who were closest and dearest to her. The second finger was used for pointing and stood for all her teachers in school and the hospital. The third finger was the tallest and it stood for the V. I. P. s, the leaders in every sphere of life. The fourth finger was the weakest, as every pianist knows, and it stood for those who were in trouble and in pain. The little finger was the smallest and the least important and to the nurse it stood for herself" (The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians, rev. ed. [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975], pp. 13-14).

III. THE JOY OF PARTICIPATION (v. 5)

"In view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now."

A. Experiencing the Joy of Salvation

Here Paul uses the Greek word koinonia, which can be translated "participation," "partnership," or "fellowship." Paul rejoiced over the participation of the Philippians in the gospel. In its broadest sense, Paul was referring to their salvation, and was grateful that they were believers. That partnership had been "from the first day [of their conversion] until now."

B. Contributing Toward the Needs of Others

Koinonia is also used in the New Testament to refer to monetary contributions. In Romans 12:13 it speaks of contributing to the needs of the saints. A gift to meet the needs of a brother or sister in Christ is an expression of unity, partnership, and love (cf. Rom. 15:26; 2 Cor. 8:4; 9:13; 1 Tim. 6:18; Heb. 13:16).

The Philippians were Paul's partners in the spread of the gospel through their gifts. Therefore he said, "You yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the gospel, after I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone; for even in Thessalonica you sent a gift more than once for my needs" (Phil. 4:15-16).

C. Helping Spread the Gospel

Also, the Philippians had cooperated with Paul in the development, growth, support, and spread of the gospel. That partnership with Paul existed from the beginning of the church in Philippi.

D. Enjoying the Fellowship of the Saints

A person in whom the Spirit of God has produced joy rejoices in the fellowship of believers. He loves to be with Christians and has a heart that reaches out and says, "I bless you for your participation, fellowship, and ministry with me."

William Hendricksen wrote an exceptional section on the fellowship of believers in his commentary on Philippians (Exposition of Philippians [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1962], pp. 51-52). Distilled and supplemented, his thoughts gives the partnership of believers poignant definition.

1. A fellowship of grace

It is a fellowship of grace--not a natural, platonic, or man-made partnership. The church is a divine fellowship effected by God in Christ through the Spirit by grace. Apart from the work of the triune God the fellowship of believers would be non-existent. It would be impossible to form on a human level because it transcends time and space, and will endure forever.

2. A fellowship of life

The partnership of believers is a fellowship of life. We all share the same common eternal life that was made ours in Christ. We are one with the Lord Jesus Christ, the Father, the Spirit, and with each other.

3. A fellowship of faith

Believers share a fellowship of faith. Just as the Father draws the sinner near to Christ (John 6:44), the sinner draws near to God in living faith. We participate in a fellowship of faith in that we have believed in the same God and agree with the same truths found in His Word.

4. A fellowship of prayer

Believers belong to a fellowship of prayer because we all come before God on each other's behalf.

5. A fellowship of praise, thanksgiving, and love

We participate in a fellowship of praise, thanksgiving, and love. It is natural for us to enshrine other Christians in our hearts and desire the best for them out of love.

6. A fellowship of service

Christians share a fellowship of service. We together shoulder the work of the ministry, and contribute to each other's needs.

7. A fellowship of evangelism

Christians share in spreading the gospel through preaching, teaching, and witnessing.

8. A fellowship of separation

Our separation from the world and attachment to Christ marks our special fellowship with each other.

9. A fellowship of warfare

Ours is a fellowship of warfare and conflict. We wage spiritual war side by side against a common enemy.

A person filled with the joy of the Holy Spirit rejoices in Christian fellowship. In fact, there is nothing in the world as wonderful as Christian fellowship. Those in the church who spend their time looking for what isn't perfect demonstrate an absence of spiritual joy. They need to consider the partnership they have--the people who pray for them, enable them to serve Christ, care for them, meet their needs, work with their children and family, nurture them in spiritual truth, and who are available for them to minister to by the use of their own spiritual gifts. If a Christian can't rejoice in that, the problem is not on the outside--it's inside.

When Saul was made king, "the valiant men whose hearts God had touched went with him" (1 Sam. 10:26). When Nahash the Ammonite came to injure the people of Jabesh-gilead, the Holy Spirit came mightily on Saul. In response to Saul's strong message to join him in the fight, "the dread of the Lord fell on the people, and they came out as one man" (1 Sam. 11:7). The Philippians and Paul had that same unity of spirit. God had touched their hearts from the first day, and through the years they had become like one man in heart.

CONCLUSION

How is the joy in your heart? You may be wondering how to obtain the joy of the Lord. Start by recognizing that it is produced only by the Holy Spirit. That means you must deal with sin in your life by confessing it to the Lord. You must be yielded to the Spirit of God so He can produce joy in your life. And you must consider who you are in Christ--chosen by God to salvation before the foundation of the world. You've been given glorious life in Christ, and given the privilege of intercessory prayer and access to God at any time. All those things should cause you to be constantly filled with joy. If you don't have joy, don't blame your circumstances. The issue is not what's going on outside you but what's going on inside.

Focusing on the Facts

1. What is the meaning of the word eucharist?
2. Was the Philippian church perfect? Why or why not?
3. Who were some of the Philippians Paul would have remembered with joy?
4. Where in Scripture does Paul refer to the generosity of the Philippian church toward Him?
5. Describe one key to joy in the Christian life.
6. How does a heart where the Spirit of God is not in control give itself away?
7. When the Spirit of God is in control of your life and you're living in obedience to God's Word, what will you delight in?
8. Did Paul's circumstances effect his joy? Why or why not?
9. The Greek word koinonia can be translated _____, _____, or _____.
10. In its broadest sense, what was Paul referring to when he spoke of the koinonia of the Philippians?
11. The Greek word koinonia is also used in the New Testament to refer to _____.
12. Is the fellowship of grace a natural, platonic, or man-made partnership? Why or why not?
13. How is it that Christians participate in a fellowship of faith?
14. How does one obtain the joy of the Lord?

Pondering the Principles

1. Paul's joy extended not only to those he served, but also to the Lord whom he served. Much of Ephesians 1 is a paean of praise to God because of all Paul had stored in his mind concerning his great Savior. The Puritan writer William Gurnall wrote, "The reason why so many poor souls have so little heat of joy in their hearts, is that they have so little light of Gospel knowledge in their mind. The further a soul stands from the light of truth, the further he must needs be from the heat of comfort" (cited in The Golden Treasury of Puritan Quotations, I. D. E. Thomas, ed. [Edinburgh: Banner of

Truth Trust, 1977], p. 158). Are you serving God and storing His Word in your mind so the Holy Spirit may kindle in you the joy of remembrance from a constant supply of memories?

2. In 1642 pastor William Bridge preached, "A praying man can never be very miserable, whatever his condition be, for he has the ear of God; the Spirit within to indite [generate], a Friend in heaven to present, and God Himself to receive his desires as a Father" (A Lifting up for the Downcast [Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust], p. 55). Believers have joy in the act of intercession and in the company that prayer provides--Spirit, Son, and Father. Take time now to pray for the interests of others to Him who is most interested in you.

Available online at: <http://www.gty.org>

COPYRIGHT (C) 2026 Grace to You

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (<https://www.gty.org/about#copyright>).