

A Devotional Journey to Discover JOY

Daily Devotions
September 14 - October 9, 2020



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Welcome to a Devotional Journey to JOY

This Fall we are inviting our whole Church to join together in reading Paul's letter to the Philippians. It contains Paul's own secrets to finding JOY in Jesus Christ. Not just in some abstract theological way; but in everyday life, with practical nuts and bolts reality.

We find out how to have JOY in despair. We discover sources of JOY when things aren't going our way. We taste JOY when we put into practice the truths that we find here.

So please do join us – fully. Make a commitment to engage each day's reading. Find a system to remind you – put it by your bed, on your desk at work, or on your dinner table. And then read that day and do that **JOY** challenge.

It may seem odd that something so simple could actually work. But don't forget that what we are counting on is God – and God's deep desire for you to know real JOY. So please - join with us in reading Philippians, and finding JOY.

This reading plan breaks Philippians into a section for each weekday. That gives you the weekend to catch up if needed. Here's how I do my daily reading.

1. Begin with prayer asking God to speak through the word.
2. Read the passage and the devotion for that day.
3. Underline phrases that stand out to you. Jot down notes and remember what you've learned at least once through the day.
4. Take a moment to do the **JOY** exercise at the close of each reading. Then pray to ask God for more JOY in your life and in the lives of people you love.

Day One: September 14

^{1:1} Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons:

² Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ³ I thank my God every time I remember you, ⁴ constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, ⁵ because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. ⁶ **I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ.**

JOY in the Gap

One of the biggest obstacles to JOY in my life is what I call the “Gap.” That is the difference between who I want to be and who I am; the difference between me at my best and me stressed. I easily see the ways I fall short. Maybe you do to.

My problem with the Gap is that I have a hard time giving myself grace in it. I tell myself that I should be better, that I ought to try harder, that I need to work more. You see, I focus on the Gap and there is zero JOY there.

Which is why I need Philippians. In verse 6, Paul gives us an antidote to the Gap. He says, *“I am confident of this, that the One who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ.”* There are two key truths here that we need to know.

The first is that God started this work in us. God envisioned it, birthed it and God has been carrying it on to this day. And God’s work in us is always called *“very good!”*

The second is that God, *“will bring it to completion.”* Not me by beating myself up or trying harder. But by God working in us – and in those we love – to close the Gap; to bring our possibilities to reality. And all of it in God’s time – not mine.

JOY – Where is one specific Gap in you today? Take a moment to thank God for how far you’ve come in that area. Then ask God to “complete” it a bit more this day.

Day Two: September 15

^{1:7} *It is right for me to think this way about all of you, because you hold me in your heart, for all of you share in God's grace with me, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel.* ⁸ *For God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the compassion of Christ Jesus.* ⁹ ***And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more*** with knowledge and full insight ¹⁰ *to help you to determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless,* ¹¹ *having produced the **harvest of righteousness** that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.*

Yes but...

So God is at work in me to close that Gap. Great. I want it gone. But I can't help thinking, "Yes, but what's my part? Do some exercises or read some great self-help books?"

And the answer is no. Paul doesn't give us a class syllabus for studying to be better. Paul says, "*God will bring it to completion.*" What a relief. God is the one at work in you and in me – which is cause for JOY all by itself.

But we do play a part. Paul is clear about that. Our part is to Pray. We see that in verse 9, "*And this is my prayer.*" For Paul, prayer was the work. It is our part of the process, our opportunity to participate in God's work to close the Gap in us and the world.

Then Paul tells us what to pray for. It's not for success, or for our pet plan on how to fix things. It's for three simple things spelled out in verses 9 through 11. They are:

- 1) Pray for LOVE to "*overflow*" in us.
- 2) Pray for "*more and more*" KNOWLEDGE of what to do.
- 3) Pray to DO what is best for a "*harvest of righteousness.*"

JOY – Make a list of five people you care for. Then pray these three things - Love, Knowledge and Action – for them today.

Day Three: September 16

*^{1:12} I want you to know, beloved, that **what has happened to me has actually helped to spread the gospel,** ¹³ so that it has **become known throughout the whole imperial guard** and to everyone else that my imprisonment is for Christ; ¹⁴ and most of the brothers and sisters, **having been made confident in the Lord** by my imprisonment, **dare to speak the word with greater boldness and without fear.***

Half Empty? Half Full?

So which are you? Are you a glass half full, or a glass half empty? All of us have a bent to how we see. Neither is wrong. But our viewpoint does impact our JOY.

We see that in Paul's situation. This letter is written from prison. He's wasting away. No end in sight. No fair trial. No freedom. No comforts. No hope. Most people would be thinking half empty – or worse. His mission journey is canceled, with no churches getting planted and nobody getting saved.

But in these verses Paul shows us his secret to JOY. And it's not having a "get out of jail free" card. His JOY comes from seeing his challenges as opportunities for God to shine.

Look at the verses again. "*What has happened to me has actually helped.*" The news has, "*become known throughout the whole imperial guard.*" Others are being, "*made confident in the Lord to speak boldly.*"

Paul is overflowing with JOY because God has it handled. In fact, being in prison isn't a problem to God. Being locked up can't slow God down. Challenges that come our way – aren't fun – but they are used by God for his glory and our good. Half full or half empty doesn't matter. But seeing God working in our situation does. It's the key to JOY.

JOY – What is your biggest struggle today? Ask God to show you how God is using it for good. Then take JOY in what you see.

Day Four: September 17

^{1:15} Some proclaim Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from goodwill. ¹⁶ These proclaim Christ out of love, knowing that I have been put here for the defense of the gospel; ¹⁷ the others proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely **but intending to increase my suffering** in my imprisonment. ¹⁸ What does it matter? Just this, that Christ is proclaimed in every way, whether out of false motives or true; and **in that I rejoice**. Yes, and **I will continue to rejoice**, ¹⁹ for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance.

Rejoice is a Verb

We keep talking about JOY. And it's a good topic, but it's easy to think that JOY is something we have to find. Like a buried treasure. Or finding ourselves after a long quest. But it's not.

In these verses Paul shares his problems. He's not just locked up in jail. He's also got people out there actively undermining him. People who are jealous of his gifts and success; taking advantage of his imprisonment. Paul's locked up and his enemies are, "*intending to increase my suffering.*"

Which means that Paul is stuck, helpless to set things right. But in verse 18 he chooses JOY. First, by shifting his thinking from being problem-focused to being God-focused. He lets it go, trusting that Jesus Christ is in charge – even when Paul isn't.

Then he makes a choice to REJOICE. It's in the end of verse 18. He says, "*in that I REJOICE.*" Then just for good measure he says it again – this time making it clear – "*I will continue to REJOICE.*"

We get to do the same, looking at what's happening around us we can still choose to REJOICE. Because the same things are true for us. Jesus is in charge and that is good enough for me.

JOY – Name one or two people who are making life tough for you. Now give them to God. Pray blessings upon them, for God's grace and power in them. Then leave them with God today.

Day Five: September 18

^{1:20} *It is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be put to shame in any way, but that by my speaking with all boldness, Christ will be exalted now as always in my body, whether by life or by death.* ²¹ *For to me, **living is Christ** and dying is **gain**.* ²² *If I am **to live in the flesh**, that means fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which I prefer.* ²³ ***I am hard pressed between the two: my desire is to depart and be with Christ**, for that is far better;* ²⁴ *but to remain in the flesh is more necessary for you.* ²⁵ *Since I am convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with all of you for your progress and joy in faith,* ²⁶ *so that I may share abundantly in your boasting in Christ Jesus when I come to you again.*

“A or B?”

Do you remember when the eye doctors asked you that question? If you've had glasses you've heard it. They flip lens then ask you which is clearer. A or B? And you are supposed to pick.

Sometimes it was easy. I mean when A was blurry and B crystal clear, it's a no-brainer. But the hard ones were when A and B looked exactly the same. I couldn't tell them apart and wondered if the doctor was playing with my head. I couldn't choose. My problem was that both were better than nothing. I mean going from legally blind to 20/25 who cares? I'll take it, just let me see.

Paul has one of those A or B dilemmas in this passage. Only for him it's not clear vision or fuzzy. For him “A” is to “*Live in the flesh*” while B is “*to depart and be with Christ.*”

Which shouldn't be a hard choice, but it was for Paul. He writes, “*I am hard pressed between the two.*” Not because he had a death wish, but because he had no fear of death. He understood that dying was “*to be with Christ.*” The “*gain*” was to be with the one who loved him. He was ready to be with Jesus or ready to get back to work. A or B, Paul was good, which freed him up to live with more JOY than ever before.

JOY – Paul is convinced he “will remain” to do God's work. What work might God have for you to do TODAY? Be sure to do it.

Day Six: September 21

*1:27 Only, live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that, whether I come and see you or am absent and hear about you, I will know that you are **standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel,** ²⁸ and are in no way intimidated by your opponents. For them this is evidence of their destruction, but of your salvation. And this is God's doing. ²⁹ For he has graciously granted you the privilege not only of believing in Christ, but of suffering for him as well— ³⁰ since you are having the same struggle that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.*

Undefeated

When I was eleven, our Little League football team won the city championship. We were undefeated for the whole season. In fact, we were unscored upon except for a six point touchdown in the final championship game. We were awesome.

Our secret wasn't that we were bigger or tougher. It wasn't that we had all superstars. Our secret was that we played as a team. It was our 3rd year together with the same coach. We had practiced and scrimmaged and won and lost together. Everybody synched. It felt like we were "*striving side by side with one mind.*"

Our life together in Christ is supposed to be that same way. Not playing football but reaching the world. As Paul puts it the church at its best is "*standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel.*" And when that happens it's pure JOY. It's a gift to be with these people who care and who strive with us. It's been more than 45 years and I can still remember what it felt like to be on the field with that team. Jim Lance, Carl Buffington and 20 other players were there right alongside of me. That's how it's supposed to work all the time for you and me.

JOY – What challenge do you face today? Name one person who could "*strive side by side*" with you to beat it? Call them today and ask them to stand firm with you.

Day Seven: September 22

2:1 If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, 2 make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. 3 Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. 4 Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.

Facebook Announces New Rules of Conduct

Wouldn't it be crazy if Facebook published new rules that all users of their social media platform had to follow? Especially if the new rules were like this:

- Don't be conceited.
- Practice humility.
- Look out for others first.
- Be compassionate.

That'll never happen, but it'd be neat. Facebook won't do it because there would be a major uproar. People would call for a boycott. There'd be a congressional hearing.

People would be confused, unsure how to do it. I mean it's not like we get classes on it in school. Others would be offended that someone would dare tell them how to behave. Some would just think it's stupid and keep doing whatever they wanted to do.

But these are the rules that Paul is challenging you and me to follow. Not just at church on Sunday but in every single moment of every single day. Even on Facebook.

Do you see how crazy Christianity is when we take it seriously? It's a completely different way of being. Not just to comply with rules of conduct or because it's a great way get ahead – but because it's what Jesus did. It's how Jesus lived every day of his life and it changed everything. When we do that it changes us. And who knows, someday it might even change Facebook.

JOY – Read the verses again and circle the one practice that stands out most. Now ask God to help you keep that virtue in mind and to show you how to concretely live it out all rest of today.

Day Eight: September 23

^{2:5} *Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,*
⁶ *who, **though he was in the form of God**, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but **emptied himself**, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being **found in human form**,* ⁸ *he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death— **even death on a cross**.*
⁹ *Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name,* ¹⁰ *so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,*
¹¹ *and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

Being One of Us

Legend tells of a King who disguised himself as a beggar to walk amongst his people; to “become one of his people.” Then he’d go back to the castle and make wise laws. It’s a nice story but it didn’t really happen. It couldn’t.

To become one of us you’d need to go all the way. You can’t dip your toe in the water and claim to know what it’s like to be us. You’d need to lay aside your royal privilege and power. You’d need to lose the bodyguard, live poor, experience oppression, know pain and then die a pauper – perhaps the victim of violent crime. I mean to really be one of us, you’d need to experience all the brokenness of this world. And that’s a lot.

But Jesus did that. “*Though he was in the form of God,*” Jesus, “*emptied himself,*” of all royalty to become one of us. And not just for a visit, he was in it for a lifetime. He was, “*found in human form,*” and experienced, “*even death on a cross.*” He became one of us.

Which makes him worthy of honor and glory, as the only King that truly stepped into my world, experienced my life, and then died my death. He did that in order to set me free and make it possible for me to become “one of him.”

JOY – King Jesus became a “*slave,*” to serve others. Name one person you could serve today like Jesus did. Then be sure to do it.

Day Nine: September 24

*2:12 Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; 13 for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure. 14 Do all things without murmuring and arguing, 15 so that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, in which you **shine like stars in the world.** 16 It is by your holding fast to the word of life that I can boast on the day of Christ that I did not run in vain or labor in vain. 17 But even if I am being poured out as a libation over the sacrifice and the offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you— 18 and in the same way you also must be glad and rejoice with me.*

Two Stars Named John and Helen

I wouldn't be married if it hadn't been for John and Helen Stein. In those days, married people averaged 7 years to divorce. I didn't want that. In fact, I'd never seen a marriage filled with JOY so I wasn't going to even try.

Until I met the Steins. They were friends of Jill's, members of her church in Detroit. They were amazing. Not wealthy. Not fancy. Not super educated. But 150% in love with each other – even after 30 years. He held her hand. She kissed him goodbye. He smiled as he watched her talk. They were in love and full of JOY.

John and Helen Stein, *“shone like stars in the world.”* The way they lived inspired me and gave me hope. Not that JOY was guaranteed or that my marriage would turn out that way. But that it was possible. It could happen.

From that point on I decided I could marry Jill – if she'd have me. And that we would create a life that had that same love in it. That we would *“shine like stars”* and have JOY. Will you?

JOY – Who have been the *“stars”* in your life? Not for marriage specifically, but for anything. Make a list of what you saw in them. Now ask God to make that shine more in you today.

Day Ten: September 25

^{2:19} I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I may be cheered by news of you. ²⁰ I have no one like him who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. ²¹ All of them are seeking their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. ²² But Timothy's worth you know, **how like a son with a father he has served with me in the work of the gospel.** ²³ I hope therefore to send him as soon as I see how things go with me; ²⁴ and I trust in the Lord that I will also come soon.

All That Work Taught Us Something

My Dad worked us on the farm every day – caring for the animals, working on the barn, planting something, you name it. And we hated it. We complained all the time – most kids do – it was unjust, it was unfair, not fun. You know the story.

But years later I see it differently. I've learned what a gift it was to have that time with him. Not that I'd wish it on anybody, but the truth is that I learned a lot working with my Dad. Much of it the stuff that I still use today. Things like:

Attention to details, Perseverance, Just plain hard work

Working alongside my Dad shaped who I am and how I live my life. He helped me to be who I am today.

It's the same for Paul and Timothy. In verse 22 Paul commends Timothy as a worker of great worth. He values him as a companion and fellow laborer. And then tells us why. Timothy, *"like a son with a father has served with me in the work."* They'd been in the work together. They'd experienced storms together. And they'd found Jesus faithful in the midst of it all.

None of us get to now without someone who has walked alongside us and showed us the gospel in real life. We might not have liked it at the time. But in hindsight it should bring us JOY.

JOY – Name a "Paul" in your life. Someone who taught you about faith. Now who is a "Timothy" for you? Someone who looks to you for that same thing. Pray for them both and then call them today to say thanks!

Day Eleven: September 28

*2:25 Still, I think it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus—**my brother and co-worker and fellow soldier**, your messenger and minister to my need; ²⁶ for he has been longing for all of you, and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill. ²⁷ He was indeed so ill that he nearly died. But God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, so that I would not have one sorrow after another. ²⁸ I am the more eager to send him, therefore, in order that you may rejoice at seeing him again, and that I may be less anxious. ²⁹ Welcome him then in the Lord with all joy, and honor such people, ³⁰ because he came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up for those services that you could not give me.*

Reunion Joy

I am on Facebook sometimes. Mostly it's to stay connected with family and friends. But I also use it to watch the videos Jill sends me. My favorites are those airport reunions between soldiers and their families. You've seen them. They are awesome.

The soldier gets off the plane and comes out the gate. She sees her family at the same time the family sees her. Eyes get wide, breath is held, it seems unreal. In the videos you can see something clicks in their heads. And pure JOY begins to spread across their face until they can no longer contain it. They run to Sgt. Mom and they mob her, almost knocking her over in the onslaught. There is nothing but JOY in her too. Tears flow, hugs held. They are together experiencing Reunion JOY.

Paul imagines that same scenario for Epaphroditus. He's had his friend helping for a long season and it's time to send him home to his family. It was time for his Reunion JOY. And Paul wanted that for him. He writes to the Philippians, "*welcome him then in the Lord with all JOY.*" Embrace him, encourage him, pile on him. Then let him tell you the whole story of all the ways that he has seen the JOY of Jesus in people far beyond Philippi.

JOY – Who would most bring you the blessing of Reunion JOY today? Facetime or call them and tell them why today!

Day Twelve: September 29

^{3:1} Finally, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is not troublesome to me, and for you it is a safeguard. ² Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of those who mutilate the flesh! ³ For it is we who are the circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and boast in Christ Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh— ⁴ even though I, too, have reason for confidence in the flesh. If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: ⁵ circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶ as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. ⁷ Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. ⁸ More than that, I regard **everything as loss** because of the **surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus** my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard 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 one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith.

Rubbish, I Say!

Paul was a radical. Clearly. He's got a Harvard resume and he says that he counts, "everything as a loss." He's living the Hebrew dream and says that "I regard them as rubbish." See what I mean by radical? It just wasn't normal.

But perhaps it should be. I mean, if you and I truly glimpsed the "surpassing value of knowing Jesus Christ," then perhaps it would make sense, maybe even be obvious.

Paul wasn't blind or ignorant of what he was giving up. It's just that he knew a good deal when he saw one. Having Jesus was worth more than anything else this world had to offer. When Paul got clear on that, the rest was easy. And it changed his whole life.

JOY – What is it you value most? Where do you find your worth? If it's not Jesus then ask him to show you more of the "value of knowing Jesus Christ" today.

Day Thirteen: September 30

^{3:10} *I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead.*

¹² *Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. ¹³ Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal **for the prize of the heavenly call** of God in Christ Jesus.*

Jackpot

This week the Lottery is worth \$75 million. Somebody is going to win it. They always do – eventually. But it’s been bigger. The largest jackpot ever was \$1.6 billion. Yeah, let that sink it. \$1.6 billion. Wouldn’t that be awesome?

But hold on, Paul is talking about a big prize in this passage too. Did you notice that? Only it’s not the lottery. Paul’s jackpot is the gift of eternity with God, of being with the one who has always loved you fully. He calls it the, “*prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.*”

That’s a prize better than any jackpot. Not just because it’s worth infinitely more than \$1.6 billion. But also because it’s a guaranteed prize. Sure Paul talks about, “*pressing on to make it my own,*” but he is also clear that the prize is in the bag, “*because Christ Jesus has made me his own.*”

You see, the prize of heaven isn’t a prize with a 1 in 300 million chance to win. It’s a prize we gain because Jesus has WON us. That’s the point of the cross. On it, Jesus conquered death and broke the curse of sin. On it Jesus won the best prize of all – you and me, and every other person who is willing to, “*make it their own.*” When we grasp the enormity of that “prize” then how could we not feel JOY?

JOY – Make a list of the top ten “prizes” that God has given you in your life. Then thank him for each in turn.

Day Fourteen: October 1

^{3:15} *Let those of us then who are mature be of the same mind; and if you think differently about anything, this too God will reveal to you.* ¹⁶ **Only let us hold fast to what we have attained.**

¹⁷ *Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us.* ¹⁸ *For many live as enemies of the cross of Christ; I have often told you of them, and now I tell you even with tears.* ¹⁹ *Their end is destruction; their god is the belly; and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things.* ²⁰ *But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.* ²¹ *He will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself.*

“You Know Better Than That”

Has your mom or dad ever said that to you? My Mom always did. We’d get caught doing something stupid and out would come the line. “You know better than that.”

And she was right. We did know better. Which meant that our problem wasn’t knowing what was right. It was doing it. Two different things. In Paul’s words, our problem is that we “*didn’t hold fast*” to what we already knew was right. See the difference?

That’s always been true. Moms have been telling kids that from day one. Which means we don’t need more theological discussions. What we need is to do what we know is right. And if you wonder what that is just keep reading this book. It’s stuff like:

***Praying for each other, Practicing humility,
Standing firm, and Rejoicing in the Lord.***

The good news is that we may not have it all down pat already, but if we do what we know, we will get better at it and along the way discover the fullness of JOY that God has for us.

JOY – What one thing do you know you should do today? Perhaps something you’ve been putting off or avoiding? Ask God to help you do it today.

Day Fifteen: October 2

^{4:1} *Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, **my joy and crown**, stand firm in the Lord in this way, **my beloved**.*

² *I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord.* ³ *Yes, and I ask you also, **my loyal companion**, help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of **my co-workers**, whose names are in the book of life.*

“That’s My Philippians!”

Near the end of the “Music Man” the town kids finally got to play their instruments. They were horrible. But suddenly one of the moms stands up and shouts, “That’s my Barney!” Other moms do the same, each pridefully claiming their kid. And the ragtag band is transformed into shining marching heroes.

I love that scene because that’s how God loves us. You see, for the mom it’s not how good the kids play. What mattered was that Barney was her beloved child. Barney “belonged” to her.

Paul feels the same way about the Philippians. He’d spent so much of his life with them, loving them as if they were his own. And in this letter he stands up before all creation and shouts, “that’s my Philippians!” He calls them his, “*joy and crown*.” He calls them, “*my beloved*.” He calls them, “*my loyal companions and my co-workers*.”

And that brings him JOY. He finds it in their love for each other, in their work and ministry, in their faith being lived out in spite of trials. He finds JOY in who they had become. They were his crown, his legacy.

When we love someone their success is like that for us. And us for them. You and I are that kind of legacy for someone else – folks who have gone before us. But you and I also have legacies of our own. People that we’ve helped along the way. People of whom we are proud – not because they are perfect but because they are trying.

JOY – Who is your legacy? Who have you helped form into loving people? Make a list and then take JOY in each one of them.

Day Sixteen: October 5

*4:4 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, **Rejoice**. 5 Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. 6 Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication **with thanksgiving** let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

Rejoice! Rejoice!

Paul seems adamant in these few verses. In fact verse 4 says it twice – Rejoice, Rejoice. And both times the word in Greek is - **χαίρω** - pronounced as “Kai-Roe.” It means to be JOYFUL. It is an imperative verb - a command to do it. Paul is telling the Philippians, and us, that our job is to be filled with JOY.

But how do you do that in the face of adversity? How do you find JOY stuck in a prison like Paul was? Or after the death of a loved one, or in the midst of loneliness? In the struggles of our life JOY seems elusive.

So Paul gives us the answer that worked for him. The antidote to our worry and distress is gratitude. It is to give thanks to God. We see that in verse 6. Paul says, “*by prayer and supplication with **thanksgiving** let your request be made known to God.*” He commands us to REJOICE and then tells us how – by giving thanks.

And it works, because God designed us that way. Gratitude crowds out worry. Try it. Next time you are worried about anything, stop and give thanks. It’s like trying to cry at the same time you laugh. Or frown with a smile on your face. They don’t mix. They are mutually exclusive.

So in whatever struggles you face, REJOICE. Just start saying “Thanks!” For that breath you just took. For the blue of the sky. For our hope in Jesus Christ. For today. And for so much more. Then let JOY fill you.

JOY – Make a list of 20 things that you are thankful for and then start saying “thank you” for each one. Feel free to keep going.

Day Seventeen: October 6

*^{4:8} Finally, beloved, whatever is **true**, whatever is **honorable**, whatever is **just**, whatever is **pure**, whatever is **pleasing**, whatever is **commendable**, if there is any **excellence** and if there is anything **worthy of praise**, think about these things. ⁹ Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.*

Keep Your Eye on the Ball

You've heard that before. My baseball coach used to say it all the time. "Keep your eye on the ball." Then he added, "because that's where you are going to swing." And he was right.

Not just in baseball, but in life. Paul tells us the same thing in these verses. Only he says something more like "keep your mind on the ball." Stay focused on the good stuff. Concentrate on what you want your life to be filled with. Things like:

***Truth, Honor, Justice, Purity, Pleasing,
Commendable, Excellent, Praiseworthy.***

His point is that if you want to become these things then you need to focus your mind on these things. You can't fill your mind with weeds and expect to grow crops. As they say, "garbage in, garbage out." So stay focused on what is noble and true.

Which is not easy since the media bombards us with the exact opposite; conflict, injustice, dysfunction, fear, uncertainty, disease. You name it – 95% of the time – it's garbage. And that steals your JOY. Think about it. It's hard to have JOY when you are filled with worry about the mess in our world. And so "keep your eye on the ball today!"

JOY – Today take a media fast. Find a way to avoid all social media and news – at least for today. Instead focus on GOOD stuff and watch for JOY.

Day Eighteen: October 7

^{4:10} ***I rejoice in the Lord greatly that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned for me, but had no opportunity to show it.*** ¹¹ *Not that I am referring to being in need; for **I have learned to be content with whatever I have.*** ¹² *I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need.* ¹³ *I can do all things through him who strengthens me.* ¹⁴ *In any case, it was kind of you to share my distress.*

Vacation

My idea of vacation isn't a place we go or a location we visit. My idea of vacation is to sit with Jill and be "content."

Our deck is a good place for that. We sit in an armchair, on a pleasant sunny day and watch the trees shimmer green against the blue of the sky. And we just enjoy right now.

I think that is a good definition of "content." It's when we lay down all of our agendas and our plans and our deadlines and our projects and our.... you fill in the blank. Contentment comes when we lay it all down to be here now. What a rare gift it is, but it can be found anywhere, and when I do that always feels like vacation. It's truly my happy place.

Paul knew that. He'd learned it like I am still learning it. In fact, he says in verse 11, "*I have learned to be content with whatever I have.*"

That in itself is a miracle, because Paul was as driven as any of us - always striving, working out the next big thing, getting things done. But Jesus changed him. Jesus focused Paul on "content." And that contentment led to JOY. It always does. That's why he writes, "*I rejoice in the Lord greatly!*" He was content.

JOY – Find 10 minutes today to sit somewhere quiet, take a deep breath and just relax. When distractions arise in you, jot them down and get back to focusing on being content.

Day Nineteen: October 8

*4:15 You Philippians indeed know that in the early days of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you alone. ¹⁶ For even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me help for my needs more than once. ¹⁷ Not that I seek the gift, **but I seek the profit that accumulates to your account.** ¹⁸ I have been paid in full and have more than enough; I am fully satisfied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. ¹⁹ And my **God will fully satisfy every need of yours** according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. ²⁰ To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.*

Spiritual ROI

ROI is business talk for “return on investment.” It’s the benefit we receive for investing resources into something. Bottom line - what do I get out of it?

ROI applies to our faith journey too. Paul wrote about the benefits of practicing faith. Jesus even said it, “whosoever believes in me shall have eternal life.” ROI.

But here Paul is talking in financial terms. The giving of the Philippians had made his ministry possible. The book of Philippians is actually one long thank you note. And in this passage Paul describes their ROI.

First, is the blessing God gives them for their sacrifice. He says it like this, “*I seek the profit that accumulates to your account.*” When we give, God gives back – not always in cash but blessings. There is a “*profit.*”

Second, God will, “*fully satisfy every need of yours.*” When we give to others in faith, God takes care of us. Not necessarily everything you want, but God gives us what we “*need.*”

JOY – Today, give someone a financial gift without them knowing it. Try making it to someone other than the church. It can be any size.

Day Twenty: October 9

^{4:21} *Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The friends who are with me greet you.* ²² *All the saints greet you, especially those of the emperor's household.*

²³ *The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.*

Saint Bob, Saint Angee, Saint Harper...

The other day someone asked me if I believed in Saints. I said I do, very much so. Now they were probably thinking about the kind of saints in stained glass windows. Saints like Paul and Peter. But I was thinking much bigger than that. I was thinking about you. Saint Jan, Saint Laura, and Saint Dow. What I mean is that I believe you all ARE the saints.

So does Paul. In these three verses Paul says so twice. In verse 21 to the folks at Philippi he says, "*Greet every saint in Christ Jesus.*" Then in verse 22 he does about those with him. "*All the saints greet you.*"

In each case Paul is talking about ordinary church going people who are in Christ Jesus. That's his definition of "saint." Mine too. The word saint literally means a holy one. When we are in Christ Jesus then we are marked as holy – Saints.

Now, all of this could just be theological semantics except for one thing. When you and I begin to see ourselves as saints, then you and I will begin to feel the motivation to live like one. Not in a monastery necessarily, but in real life, at work, or at school, or at home. And that's the whole point. Jesus Christ gave his life so that you and I might be deemed holy – saints. Now our job is to go and live like that is true.

JOY – Write your name in the blank below:

I Am Saint _____

Then read it aloud five times. Tell yourself that it is TRUE! Then read it again at least five more times later today and see how that feels. It's true because Jesus makes you so.

