

What Brings You Joy

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[0 : 00] How many of you are disappointed that it's cold and raining instead of snow? I am. I think there's more people this year looking for snow, warning snow, than I can remember in a long time.

And I'm on that list. I would have liked to see us. And it's not too late. We've got a whole month of February to go. Maybe it will. But I'm glad that it didn't prevent us from being here today.

If you think about what brings you joy, like snow, just about everything you think about, you put on a list of what brings me joy.

You could also say, that's what makes me happy. It brings happiness to me. Almost everyone thinks of the words joy and happiness as synonyms.

Most dictionaries even do that. Most dictionaries define joy along this line, a feeling of great pleasure and happiness. We use that word joy in the English language very similarly, at least, if not identically, to the word happiness.

[1 : 16] But that is not how Paul used the word in New Testament Greek. The New Testament is written in the Greek language. And while we use that word joy and happiness synonymously, that is not how the word joy is used in the Bible and especially the New Testament.

Happiness is an emotional feeling, isn't it? It's a feeling of delight. That depends on what's happening to us and around us.

You know, we're happy when everything goes our way. When you walked in this morning, people spoke to you, they smiled. It brings a little bit of joy, a little bit of happiness, doesn't it?

When you feel good, you have that sense of joy, that kind of happiness. But we know that every day is not that way.

Life is not always happy. It just sort of comes and goes in our life. I say all that to say, that's normal. That's happiness.

[2 : 26] That's joy as we use it in the English language. Put that on hold now. Christian joy. The word joy that's found in the New Testament, that we're going to be looking at today and throughout the book of Philippians really, it is more of an attitude.

It's something more like a character quality than it is an emotion. It's not without emotion, but that's not basically what it is.

Joy is similar to the qualities of contentment or peace in your soul. Here's something I did not really bring out much last week, and I want to emphasize it.

Christian joy is the inner sense of peace. Of rightness that comes from knowing that I'm right with God. I'm close to Him.

Things around about you may not be going well. People may be disappointing you. You may not be in the best of health. But when you have that right relationship with God, you're just close to Him, there's this sense of contentment.

[3 : 44] There's just peace in your soul. That's Christian joy. It will not be found in any other person. Other people can make you happy.

But they can't give you this kind of joy. You're not going to find this in any situation, any circumstance. No matter how well your job goes, this kind of joy is not going to be found there. It's going to be found only in our relationship with the Lord. That's why Paul can write so much about it in the book of Philippians. It appears from reading Paul's letters in the New Testament that the church at Philippi was his favorite church, or at least where he had the fewest problems. And so he talks about joy and rejoicing more in this letter than in any of his other letters. But consider this.

Every time Paul dictated this letter, every time he said the word joy or rejoice, he was chained to the Roman soldier, confined to the house he was renting.

[4 : 58] He was under house arrest. He was awaiting his trial before Caesar, the most powerful man in the world at that time. He didn't know what the outcome would be.

He didn't know if he would live or die as a result of that trial. Yet he could talk about how he was rejoicing. He found joy in his relationship with the Lord in the midst of those circumstances.

I want you to turn in your Bibles, if you will, to Philippians chapter 1. We're going to begin again in verse 18. And we're going to see how Paul was able to rejoice in spite of his circumstances.

Now as we go through what's going to be verses 18 through 26 today and next week, I want us to note three things that should make us, if we're Christians, at least some of the time, have a sense of joy.

Now let's be real honest here. There were days that Paul would have been down. He's a human being. He's not a God. He's not the Son of God like Jesus.

[6 : 15] Paul was a human being just like us. He suffered. He had his bad days. And so there were days that he didn't really feel like rejoicing in the Lord. No doubt, his real focus wasn't on how everything's right with God through faith in Jesus.

And you and I don't either. There's some days that the last thing we think about is our relationship with God. Let's just be honest. There's some days that they're just miserable emotionally, spiritually even, or physically with our bodies, or with other people and problems.

So when we go through this, three things that should provide every Christian with at least some sense of joy at times in our lives.

The way I want to do this, I want us to ask three questions. Number one, do thoughts that God will always take care of you bring you joy? I want you to look at verses 18 through 20, what we looked at last week actually.

And I want you to think, do thoughts that God is always going to take care of me no matter what. Does that bring you a sense of joy?

[7 : 35] Of peace in your soul? Because you're trusting Him. Not that you feel good. Not that you feel close to everybody.

But do you get this kind of joy? Inner peace because I know God's going to take care of me. Let's look at this.

Verse 18 that I left off the screen. The last part says, Yes, and I will rejoice. For I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, this will turn out for my deliverance, as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not at all be ashamed, but that with full courage, now as always, Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death.

Paul describes one of the sources of his joy as, look at this, my deliverance in verse 19. We saw last week the word deliverance here is translated more often in the New Testament, salvation.

See, Paul is writing in Greek. And the translators use the word deliverance here, but more often than not, they're going to use the word salvation when this word comes up in other places. It's all according to the context.

[8 : 56] That means Paul may be talking about, may be thinking about as he writes this, his deliverance from prison. He's rejoicing because this will turn out for my deliverance.

Or he may be thinking about, this is going to turn out for my deliverance into the presence of the Lord in heaven. He may be thinking about his final, complete salvation when he stands before the Lord, free from sin and the difficulties that we experience in this life.

But either way, we don't know. Either way, Paul found joy in knowing that no matter what happens to me, no matter what happens in my life, God is going to take care of me.

I'm trusting Him. Now, do you have that kind of joy in your soul? At least some of the time. Well, you will if you have a relationship with God.

You will if you have a close relationship with God. If we truly know God as our Heavenly Father I'm talking about, we will have confidence in His ability to take care of us by delivering us through our difficulties or by delivering us from our difficulties by bringing us into His presence in heaven.

[10 : 25] Now, I know that most of us in this room, we don't think about being delivered into heaven right now. But you know, if you're in prison, chained to a Roman soldier, going to be tried before the emperor, you know I may die.

And so, it's a real fact. And so, he finds joy knowing that if that happens, I'll be okay. There may come a time in your life where your health is so bad, the pain is so bad, that you'll be ready to die.

You'll pray to die. And in that moment, if it comes for you, wouldn't it be great that you have this sense of peace that when I breathe my last and close my eyes, I'm going to open them again immediately in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ and there will be no more suffering, no more pain.

Some of you in this room, like me, you've watched your parents or your grandparents get to that position. And I hope you heard from some of them like I heard from my mother.

Never forget the way she said it. She looked at me one day, she'd been in the hospital, didn't want to be in the hospital. I've told you this before. She looked at me one day, she said, I'm an old woman, I've lived my life and I'm ready to die.

[12:03] Don't let no more doctors do anything to me. And we talked a little bit about that. And she said that she did have faith and trust in Jesus that when she did die, she'd be in His presence.

And she didn't want to linger on and completely lose her memory and use of her body. And so, while right this minute, I don't know if any of us in here can really identify with the idea of having this sense of peace, that God may bring me into His presence anytime.

But in time, we may be in a situation where we need that kind of peace, that kind of joy.

and we can if we have a right relationship with the Lord. Now, if you don't have a clue what I'm talking about, you think to yourself, I hear the words but I'll understand it, I've never experienced it. I've never sensed this sense of peace and rightness, this kind of joy in a relationship with God. That means in all probability that you're not a Christian.

[13:24] You may have professed faith, you may have been baptized, but if you don't have this sense of rightness with God, never experienced it at all, it's just a foreign concept to you, you can't be right with God. You can't have a relationship with Him rather.

And if that bothers you, you don't want it to be that way. Admit to God that you don't know Him. Turn from your sin.

Put your trust in Jesus as your Savior and Lord. calling Him to save you now. And when you do that, one of the first things you ought to experience is a sense of peace with God through faith in Jesus.

And also, then start experiencing the peace of God. This is the first step toward experiencing real Christian joy. Now, if you do know what I'm talking about, but it's not been your experience very much lately, you know what I'm talking about.

You have to have this sense of just closeness, rightness with God that no matter what else, no matter who else was not happy with me, I really had this joy in my soul, peace in my heart, but it's not there now.

[14:45] Could it be that you've drifted away from the Lord? Maybe you never thought about it, you didn't just openly rebel, but you just got busy. You know, life is such we can just get busy.

There's so much in most people's lives, there's so much going on to take our attention, take our time, that we can just do a lot of good things with people that we are responsible for and drift away from a close relationship with the Lord because we don't continue it.

It could be that you just rebelled against God. It could be that you know right now you're not where you used to be, you don't experience this kind of joy anymore and you know exactly why. Well, I want you to understand the only way you're going to rekindle that kind of joy and peace is to come back to Him on His terms.

That may mean you need to confess sin and seek God's forgiveness because you've rebelled against Him. It may be that you just need to sort of wake up and realize I've got to rearrange some priorities in my life.

I've got to start spending some time with God to develop, to cultivate my relationship with Him. in His Word and in prayer. So you may need to make some changes in your life that way.

[16:11] It may be that right now this morning the reason you're here is to be encouraged as a Christian to renew your commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ as the real Lord of your life.

joy. And if we will live that way joy will be a byproduct of having a close relationship with Him. You know Paul also rejoiced over the way that God worked to take care of him.

Last week we looked at two ways that God works in our lives to take care of us. I want to expand on what we looked at last week. I was trying to cover more last week and just there's some things I want us to look at that's important that we didn't look at last week.

So here let's look at it again. God works through people's prayers. God works in our lives through other people's prayers. Look at it again verse 19 last part of verse 18 Yes and I will rejoice for I know that through your prayers this will turn out for my deliverance.

Paul rejoiced over the fact that people loved him enough to pray for him. He just brought peace to his soul joy to his heart to know that other people were praying for him and that God was working in his life in response to their prayers.

[17 : 36] We saw last week that it is vitally important that we pray for our Christian family members Christian friends people in this church or church family members in more ways than just their physical health and well-being.

But that doesn't mean we don't pray for people's health or job or school or other situations that they're concerned about.

Over the years my children and grandchildren have played countless ball games. I have and will continue as long as I'm alive and have a mind prayed for their safety.

God keep them safe. Lord don't let them get hurt. That's just something that I want to do. That's nothing to do with being Christians or anything like that.

I just pray for their physical safety. I'm going to say something else because this service is not being recorded today. We're not live streaming.

[18 : 43] We can't do that in this room. And so this is the end of it. It won't be on tape anywhere. I have prayed for my children's cat to come home.

Now you know that's a big step for me. I wouldn't admit it on tape. Let me tell you this though. my grandchildren have two cats and I like those two cats.

You know why? They are just like dogs. You call them and they come. They'll sit there and let you pet them. The best cat is the one that acts like a dog.

You know? Well one of those cats is named Bruno. Bruno's a hunter. Bruno stays out in the edge of the woods and the edge of the yard in the woods.

He hunts. He kills moles. Bruno is a great cat. Well one day he didn't come home. He disappeared.

[19 : 50] And they told me as sincerely as I've ever prayed for anything I said Lord please bring Bruno home safely to those kids.

I prayed I got out and rode around looking for the cat and God answered a lot of people's prayers. Bruno just walked home. I don't care truly about cats very much but I care about my grandchildren and I care about what they care about.

And I think it was very important to pray that Bruno come home that day. And so I want you to hear me clearly. Pray about everything.

Pray for people's physical well-being. Their job situation. Their school. but your family your friends me.

[21 : 00] We all need the prayers for our spiritual well-being more. So I want to encourage you people you pray for pray that God will work in their life if they're Christians to help them to grow mature to become more like Jesus.

Pray for their spiritual protection. They'll be able to resist temptation things like that. As you pray about other things if there's people in your life that you know you really care about they're not Christians pray for their salvation.

I want to encourage you do that yourself and encourage other people to pray for you that way as well. You know I'd like for you to pray for me Monday through Saturday that I'll be able to study and know and develop the message that our church family needs to hear and when you wake up on Sunday morning pray that I'll be able to communicate it in a way that's understandable and that people can actually apply to their lives.

Pray for me that way. Ask people to pray for you in ways that you have needs to be prayed for. No second way God works in our lives God works through his indwelling Holy Spirit.

He says yes and I will rejoice for I know that through the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance. Paul rejoiced over how God worked his power, God's power in him and through him.

[22 : 36] The Holy Spirit is really and truly the spiritual power source for every Christian for you and me. I want us to think about how the Holy Spirit works in our lives. This is something totally new from what we looked at last week.

Something that I think is very important that we need to be praying about for ourselves and for other people. First, the Holy Spirit indwells every Christian. You know that.

If you've been coming to this church for any length of time you know that I mention that a lot because the only way we can live faithful Christian lives is in the power of the Holy Spirit. We can't do it on our own. Christian life cannot be lived by just doing your best, trying harder.

That's not Christian growth. Christian growth is when God works in us and through us through His Holy Spirit. Helping us to think. Helping us to know what to do, how to do, that kind of thing.

Well Paul says it is impossible to be a Christian and not be indwelt by the Spirit. Look at this from Romans 8. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to Him.

[23 : 42] It can't be any plainer than that. Every Christian, God regenerates us, brings about a new birth by the power of the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit indwells us from that point on.

Now, the Holy Spirit indwells every Christian at all times, but there are times when a Christian experiences the Spirit's presence in greater power as Luke tells us in the book of Acts.

Luke is the author of Acts. I want you to look at some examples. Peter, he experienced greater power when he testified before the hostile Jewish council.

They were telling him, you don't preach anymore. Threatening his life and the other apostles. Look at what Scripture says. Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, the Holy Spirit indwelt Peter already.

But at that moment, it was sort of like a new, fresh filling, empowerment of the Spirit to say what needed to be said to those enemies of the gospel.

[24 : 59] Later on in that same chapter 4 of Acts, a large group of Christians, not just the apostles or leaders, a large group of Christians, received power after a prayer meeting.

Look at this. And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the Word of God with boldness.

See, this was a crisis time in the life of the church. The leaders were being arrested, put into prison. A little bit later on, killed. And in that prayer meeting that you can read about earlier in chapter 4, they were really serious asking God to work in their midst to help them and God answered their prayer by filling those church members in a new and fresh way with the Holy Spirit to enable them to actually share the gospel themselves.

God's promise. Not be afraid. Not hold back. But to share the gospel or to speak the Word of God with boldness. Next one, Stephen.

Stephen received the power to die a martyr's death for his testimony from Jesus. Look at this.

Testimony about Jesus. Look at this. Acts chapter 7. But he, Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.

[26 : 27] See, Stephen was in a very hostile environment. And he preached the true Word of God and they didn't like it. And they picked up stones to stone him, to kill him, to execute him.

And God filled him afresh with his spirit to enable him to stand there and look him in the eye and die as a faithful Christian witness.

Paul. He was empowered to confront an enemy of the gospel, Elimus, the magician. It says, but Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him, that magician, and said, you son of the devil, and other choice words to that enemy of the gospel.

I'm pointing out all these examples to say, all these people, these were Christians in whom the Holy Spirit dwelled before these situations.

But the Spirit of God gave them greater power, greater courage, greater insight, just that when they needed it, to face their special trials.

[27 : 57] We need, all of us in this room, we need to develop the habit of asking God to fill us afresh with his spirit and empower us, equip us during our times of need.

We all need that kind of help at various times, don't we, to resist certain temptations. Every one of us in this room, if we're Christians, we have certain temptations that are stronger, more powerful over us.

You may think to yourself, I fail more than I want anybody to know in this way. The next time you're tempted that way, I want to encourage you, ask God, Lord, fill me afresh with your spirit.

Give me the ability to keep my mouth closed. Give me the ability to walk away. Give me the ability to not continue thinking this way. Give me the ability, your God, to not sin against you in this way.

Ask God to do that. Sometimes you have a difficult decision you need to make. Ask God, Lord, fill me afresh with your spirit and give me the wisdom to understand what's going on, to see the facts, to know the best way to make the right decision.

[29 : 12] Don't pray for a feeling. Some people think about praying for guidance and you go about how you feel. That's not right. That's not good. Ask the Holy Spirit to give you wisdom, to understand better, to have better insight, to find better counselors, whatever, to make the wise choice, not the feeling choice.

sometimes you're going to need, like them, you need courage to face opposition. Sometimes there's people, maybe people in your life at work, at school, they resent you being a Christian. They don't like you because you're a Christian. You're sort of tempted to sort of shy away, avoid them, compromise, not really take a stand. Ask God, Lord, help me to give me the power that I need to stand firm, to not back down, not be intimidated.

Maybe you need special powers and times to share the gospel with a certain person. You want to, you've been thinking about it, maybe you've been praying about it. Say, Lord, help me. Give me what I need right now to share the gospel with this person.

We all need to pray for ourselves this way. We need to pray for our Christian family members and friends. They would experience the Spirit's special power during their times of need.

[30 : 34] Let's look at one more. Paul rejoiced over the way God enables us to stay faithful. Look at this. God works through our faithful efforts. Verse 20, As it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage, now as always, Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death.

Paul rejoiced over the thought, God is going to enable me to remain strong, to stand firm. He uses that word in his letters quite a number of times. As he stood before Caesar at his trial, he was just confident.

I'll be able to stand strong because God's going to enable me to do that. The charges against Paul, the charges are going to be brought before that emperor. We're all related to the Jewish opposition back in Jerusalem.

You can read about that in Acts chapter 21 through the end of Acts. Acts 21 through 28. But the Jewish leaders oppose Paul in his preaching the gospel to the Gentiles.

[31 : 50] And so, that's going to be brought up before Caesar as Paul stands there. And a part of his defense is going to be, he's going to explain the gospel. He's going to explain what he was preaching.

He's going to explain the resurrection of Jesus. And the emperor couldn't care less. So he needed God's enablement to do that in what's going to be before the most powerful man in the world who will probably be angered that such a religious matter was brought before him and took his time. Look at verse 20. Paul is confident that God is going to provide what he needs to honor the Lord no matter what happens. He describes himself as having eager expectation and hope.

Eager expectation means intense expectation that something is going to happen. The word hope in the New Testament always means confident expectation not wishful thinking.

You know, a lot of us hoped it would snow this weekend. Cold temperatures, moisture, but it didn't. That's not biblical hope. Paul fully expects that he will not be ashamed, but will have full courage to explain the gospel of Jesus Christ when he defends himself for that emperor.

[33 : 21] Here's what the important thing we need to understand is. Paul's real goal is that he honored the Lord. Whether he lives or dies, that's not the number one goal. Certainly he doesn't want to be executed.

But he is most concerned that no matter what, when I go before that emperor, I want to honor the Lord whether I live or whether I die. That needs to be our goal as well.

Now thankfully, none of us are concerned about the possibility of facing death over our Christian faith. There are Christians throughout the world who are right now.

You've probably read about Christians being killed in Nigeria and other places in Africa, in China, other places because of their faith. Be thankful we don't have that kind of fear. But are there some things, some situations when you are tempted to sort of back away, not take a stand as a Christian out of being ashamed to be associated with Jesus or being afraid of what might happen because you are?

Do you ever fear being made fun of? being left out? And so you sort of back away.

[34 : 50] Are you ever ashamed to be too closely identified with Jesus? Because you don't want people to think you're some kind of religious nut? Or because you don't want to stand out too much from the regular people of this world who are not Christians.

See, you know what scenarios sometimes come up where you have a temptation to be ashamed, back away, or you're just afraid.

God will supply us with the power to stay faithful and to truly honor Him if we will ask Him and then if we will use the ability that He gives us, the resources that He gives us to do it.

Even though we have these temptations, we can be confident witnesses of the Lord Jesus Christ, you and me. You can do it in your circle of friends, of acquaintances.

Jesus Christ, you can do this and not be ashamed or afraid to be identified with Jesus. But that will only happen when you make honoring the Lord, not disgracing His name, the number one priority of your life.

[36 : 23] Think about it. in that work situation, among those certain friends at school, are you more concerned that you honor Jesus Christ, that you don't disgrace Him, or that you don't get laughed at or left out, or call some kind of religious nut.

God will supply us with the power that we need to stay faithful and honor Him if we'll ask and if we'll use it with the understanding that my goal is to honor the Lord.

Do you want to experience heartfelt joy, such heartfelt joy, that unhappy circumstances won't touch it, won't destroy it?

If you do, then draw close to God. Stay close to Him. Spend time with Him every day in His Word.

Talk to Him in prayer. Talk to Him throughout the day in prayer.

Christian joy can only be experienced by living in close fellowship with our Heavenly Father and with our Lord Jesus Christ. That's true.

[37 : 47] That's a fact. God. So you decide. Am I going to be a Christian who truly rejoices no matter what my circumstances are?

Let's pray together. Father, show us now how You want us to respond to this message. Create within us, we don't already have it here, God, a strong desire to experience Christian joy.

True peace within our souls. Because we're right with You. We're close to You. We're serving You.

We're loving You. We're honoring You. Father, so move, work in us to make it clear how that will occur in every life.

Show us what sins to confess, what priorities to change. Show us how we need to pray.

[39 : 10] Show us how we need to obey You. Show us, dear God. Help us to make the commitments to live in close fellowship with You.

Now let's just all continue to pray, listen to the Lord and respond to Him in the next few minutes. And leave here ready, able to experience Christian joy in your life.