

Philippians



Day 272

“Joy In The Faith/Joy In Christ Jesus”

September 29 - Philippians 1: 1-26

What A Day!
I had such joy when...
...I got my first base hit in an organized baseball game.
...I caught a wave body surfing in the Pacific Ocean.
...I heard the Beach Boys live.
...I played tackle football one-on-one with Tony Palombo.
...I bought a pack of baseball cards and got my favorites.
...my family ate out at the Pizza Show restaurant.
...I wrestled with my Irish Setter named Zach.
...I drove off in my first car, a Ford Maverick.
...Babette held my hand all the way home from school.
...I stood on the Mount of Olives and saw Jerusalem.

What does your list look like? Isn't it kind of funny that most of our "joys" are really the simple and inexpensive things? Sometimes we forget about those things that have had significance because we are too busy looking for happiness. There is a lot of truth to the old adage about stopping to smell the roses. It might be a good idea to pull out a piece of paper or a journal and make a list. As I wrote those things above, my heart was really warmed.

I will never forget a heart-to-heart talk I had with a friend while sitting in my VW one day. For some reason I was feeling so satisfied with my life that I told him that if I died today, I could say that I had lived a good life. I'm sure I'm not the only one who has made a statement like that. The problem with it was that my

greatest joys were still ahead of me. I was oblivious to them at the time, and I had no inkling that in just a short time I'd be experiencing the goodness of the God who created me.

The joys associated with a relationship between you and Jesus are hard to pen. Peter said, "Though you have not seen Him, you love Him. Though you do not now see Him, you believe in Him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls," (1 Peter 1: 8,9). God's joy is experienced more on the inside than the outside. It's not like riding a wave or hearing a great band or holding a girl's hand; God's joy is more like the feelings of a criminal who hears that he is pardoned for all of his crimes. Total relief. Favor that was not expected. Or, maybe it can be illustrated by the joy a cancer patient has when he hears that his cancer is in remission. He is relieved. He is grateful. He is at peace, knowing that he has a new lease on life.

The Greek word for joy is a derivative of the Greek word for grace. The word rejoice is also attached to this very important biblical word. God's favor, given freely and lavishly in the work of Jesus, is the foundation for joy. Grace is expressed through the gospel, the good news. Free forgiveness through the cross, plus the resurrection of Jesus, equal the power of God that brings salvation, inner healing, to the lost sinner.

Paul says to the Philippians that he is united to them in a "partnership in the gospel." Once a person receives the gospel he is made new on the inside. To define that experience by comparing it to the other joys I have had in life is to do it injustice. No words can accurately describe the love of Jesus. Joy is in Jesus. I

have heard someone say that the word JOY prioritizes the road to joy: J = Jesus (put Him first); O = others (serve Jesus by serving others); Y = you (put yourself after Jesus and others). Following this order you will maintain joy.

Do you have this type of joy? Are you still looking for inner peace? Have you been saved from your sins,

and yet you tend to take that for granted and look in other directions for peace and joy? Paul says that there is "joy in the faith" and "joy in Christ Jesus." Let's make Jesus the Leader of our lives today and rejoice in Him.

God's blessings bring joy,
Pastor Steve



"Wanted: Servants (Like Jesus/Pro Jesus)"

September 30 - Philippians 1:27-2:11

Good Day, My Friends,
The greatest joy is serving Jesus. However, in order to serve you will have to come to terms with a couple of important prerequisites.

First, you have to admit that you are not the center of things. You cannot serve the Lord and simultaneously be consumed with self. Jesus' message to those who followed Him was "deny yourself." In the Sermon on the Mount He said that it was the humble, the "poor in spirit" who would inherit the kingdom of God. Second, you must use the gift that the Lord has given you to serve Him. This trusted gift will be your most reliable source for service. It, like salvation, is given freely and will make you an effective servant in the King's business. It would be a mistake to try to be a spiritual hero by doing what others are equipped to do. Your gift will open doors for you to serve Jesus.

I see serving Jesus as a privilege. It would be like being the president's personal assistant or bodyguard. Imagine how excited you would be to learn that you would be side by side with the most powerful man in the land. How much greater is it to be associated closely with the Lord of lords and King of kings? Jesus said, "Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves

me, the Father will honor him," (John 12: 25,26).

Jesus' own example of servanthood is a powerful motivator for us to serve as He did. We have the privilege to walk in His shoes. Jesus said in the gospels, "For even the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many," (Matthew 20:28). Jesus served. He laid down his own conveniences for us. How can we do differently and expect to follow Him? Can being a servant be a brutal pathway? You bet. But Jesus took that road and we have the opportunity to follow Him.

It is so tempting to look for the easy way out. Our spirit is willing but the flesh is weak. We want to do the right thing, but we are pulled down by sinful attitudes that speak to us of "our rights," and "our problems," and "our aches and pains," and "our glory." Remember Romans 7? Welcome to the club. Serving God is no easy proposition because we tend to get in the way of the very thing we want. Thankfully, if we have a willing heart, the Holy Spirit will work in us and through us to serve Jesus.

He humbled Himself and eventually He was exalted again. In the same way, Jesus promises that He will exalt the humble. It may not be today or tomorrow or in this lifetime, but one day those who serve the Lord will be exalted. Servants of Christ are not measured by the world's standard. They are measured by how

dirty their hands and knees are.

Join me in getting dirty for Jesus' sake. We can trust that our service for Him will not be in vain (1

Corinthians 15:58).

God's blessings will eventually meet the humble,
Pastor Steve



"Friends Make The Difference"

October 1 - Philippians 2:12-30

Dear Friends,
Tell me about friendships that have made a difference in your life. What do they mean to you? Did they ever save you when you were in a pinch? Once upon a time I had parked my car, pushed on the emergency brake and went into the store to pick up a few things. When I got back into the car and released the emergency brake, the whole thing came undone in my hand. Now what was I going to do? Well, I have a friend who is a mechanic at a local dealership and he insisted on coming down and releasing the brake for me. He said if I did it I'd probably break my arm when the lever snapped back. I listened to him, and in no time he was there for me. Oh, how good it is to have friends.

I think Paul considered all believers his friends. He addresses the Philippians as "dear friends." I have experienced that camaraderie among believers myself, even ones I have never met before. A few years ago I was making plans to go up to Vancouver, B.C. to take in a hockey game with a friend of mine, and I remembered that a young fellow that I had met down here lived up there. I called his home and his dad answered. I explained the situation and asked if he wouldn't mind if we crashed at their place the night after the game. He said that wouldn't be any problem and he insisted that we eat dinner with his family when we arrived. Before we hung up he said to me, "What was your name again?" I don't think he had any clue who I was or how I had known his son. Yet, because we had the Lord in common, he was willing

to open his home to me. By the way, the dinner was awesome and we had a nice visit.

Paul mentions two very special friends in this chapter, Timothy and Epaphroditus. Timothy was Paul's personal assistant and trainee in the work of the gospel. Epaphroditus appears to be connected to the Philippians originally and was at some point looking to help Paul in some way. After falling ill and then recovering, Paul speaks in very endearing terms about how grateful he was that his brother in the Lord and friend was spared so that he could carry on the work of the gospel.

Both men were in love with the church. They risked their own comfort to reach out to the church and make things better for her. These were the kind of men that Paul needed in his work because of the demand of his own schedule. They were trustworthy, with the same kind of heart for others that the apostle had. He could count on their willingness to do the work with a determination like his own. Paul mentions that there were few like Timothy, who was sold out to the work of the gospel. He says that most men were more interested in their own things than in the work of the Lord.

I hope that you have solid Christian brothers and sisters like Paul did. If you haven't experienced this enrichment, I wish it for you. A friend in Christ can be as close as a brother or sister. Christian friends will care for you and pray for you and always wish the best for you. If this has been a weakness in your Christian life, now is the time to venture out and join a small group,

where you can meet some fellow believers and get to know them better. You have to be a friend to make a friend. Put yourself out there and see if the Lord doesn't weave your heart together with a believer you can serve with in the ministry in some way.

One last thought. People will be more attracted to

you if you take Paul's advice in verse 14: "Do everything without complaining or arguing." People shy away from whiners. Be a builder and you will have more friends than you can shake a stick at.

God's blessings will make you friendlier,

Pastor Steve



"Remember Lot's Wife"

October 2 - Philippians 3:1 - 4:1

Today you and I will have 24 hours to use. Many of them will be used for work and sleep. But we still have a good number of hours left over to do good. When I get home in the evening and nothing is planned, I can very easily waste several hours watching TV. Sometimes my wife will coax me off of my easy chair to go for a walk. To her credit, she goes almost every evening. My first thought is that I'm too tired to get my lazy you-know-what off the seat. But if she is successful and I get up and going, you know what happens? I usually find more energy that I didn't know I had. Where in the world did it come from? I'm not sure, but there it is, waiting for me to prime the pump by taking a step forward.

How motivated have you been lately? How much humph do you feel right now? Do you wish the coach would take you out of the game? Do you need a breather? Have you felt physically and mentally tired?

One energy-robber is backward thinking. When we dwell on the past, either victories or defeats, we can get bogged down in the mud of what was. Some may sit around and talk about the glory days and others may mope and complain about all of the bad breaks they have had, but they are both wasting their time.

Paul had reason to dwell on his past. What a life! He went from persecutor to persecuted, from darkness to light, from Pharisee to Apostle, from

anti-Christ to Christ. If you met up with him at the local pool hall he'd be the guy in the corner with quite a story to tell. Despite this, Paul knew that what was behind was behind and that he needed to press forward. He needed a future vision. He knew that he couldn't see where he was going by looking in the rear view mirror.

What is your dream for your future? Bruce Wilkinson has a book out called "Dream Giver." In it he states that God has put in all of us a "dream." All of us have a destiny from God and in God. He goes on to talk about the obstacles that keep us from taking hold of and fulfilling that dream. Much of the time it is voices in our heads from the past that tell us all of the reasons why we cannot achieve it. What's your dream? Think about it, and then ask yourself, "Why not?" Think about what it would take to fulfill that dream.

In the meantime, are you looking back too much? Do you need to find a way to let go of the past and focus on the future? God says, "Yes!" This is such a good subject to be praying about. If God has a dream for each of us, then don't you suppose that we will fulfill it by first going to God in prayer and seeking His direction? Of course.

Remember Lot's wife? She was warned not to look back on the city of Sodom, but she couldn't help it and looked anyway. She turned into a pillar of salt.

Why was it so important not to look back? Be-

cause the old life kills. It kills motivation. It kills drive. It kills moral integrity. It kills a godly influence on our children. It waters down our commitment to moving forward with God. If you sit around dreaming of the way things used to be, you will never move ahead. Solomon said, "Say not, 'Why were the former days better than these? For it is not from wisdom that you ask this,'" (Ecclesiastes 7:10). If you dwell on the past, you will not see clearly where you are going today. The victories and defeats of the past are short-lived. What's in store for today should occupy the front burners of our minds.

Jesus said, "He who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is not fit for the kingdom of God." If we are not plowing our own field, we will always wonder why others are getting ahead while we seem stuck. God has a field for you to plow. If you look back you will probably end up with a team of oxen in another man's field. How often do we try to live our lives in the shadow or work of another? How often do we fantasize that the grass will be greener on the other side of the fence? Our side would be just great if we'd work it today. Let's put our hands to the plow!

How does your field look? Lots of weeds? Well, it's time to start pulling them up and planting good seeds. God will help you. He will show you the significance and value of your field. Some people dream of property ownership. Well, whether you own a home or not, you still have a piece of property to till. It's your life. God gives you a plow and a field and wants you to move forward.

Remember the parable of the Sower and the Soils? Those who produce fruit produce it in different

quantities. Some produced thirty-fold, others 60 and still others 100 times more. Are you content with 30? If not, what do you need to do today to get it in gear and move on to 60?

First of all, evaluate how much of your time you spend living in the past. If you find that the past occupies a lot of your energy, forget it and move into the future. Don't let it drag you down. If you need to, talk to a friend who could pray with you about this. Let them know that you don't want to dwell on that failed job or marriage or what a good ball player you were in high school; you want to move on. Maybe they can help you identify the kind of talents you have to plow your field superbly.

I can visualize your field. It can be lush and green and full of good crops. These fruits of righteousness will produce a crop of food that will have eternal significance.

God's blessings come from calloused hands,
Pastor Steve

P.S. When was the last time you went in for a physical check up? Sometimes our inner life is influenced by how we feel physically. If you ache or have pains, go see your doctor and let him scope you out.

P.S.S. I can hear the history teachers out there saying that I'm giving their students an excuse not to study history. That is not true. I believe that studying history helps us to appreciate where we are and to hopefully avoid the blunders of the past.



“Prayer Matters”

October 3 - Philippians 4: 2-23

Hello Friends,
A couple of the pearls of truth Paul brings up today can be life-changing. The first has to do with worry and the other with contentment. Is either of these subjects applicable for you this week?

Worry is dissolved by prayer.

Contentment is gained by faith.

Pray specifically. For example: “God, I am so concerned about Sally’s job interview tomorrow. I commit it to you and pray that you will help her. Thank you for promising to be with us in every circumstance. Lord, Sally needs your help. Please be her strength. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.”

That is a specific supplication. I am praying for Sally’s particular interview. I have handed it over to the Lord.

If I sense something is wrong in my home I would need to pray more generally: “God, I am feeling a bit anxious and am not sure why. Give me your strength and wisdom to be able to deal with what is going on. God, you know what is going on and I commit it into your hands. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.” That is not as specific, but is a prayer for a general area of my life.

By faith, begin to give thanks to God for His answers and His peace. It will be that peace, Paul says, that will put keep guard over your anxious heart and mind.

Paul said in another place, “godliness with contentment is great gain,” (1 Timothy 6:6). If you have God, you have all that you need. “The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want (or, ‘I have everything I need’),” (Psalm 23:1). If God is in your life you’ve hit the big payday, so to speak. You will not need one single thing more to truly satisfy. Even if you ran out of food and money and died, with God, you’d be OK.

We live in an age of discontent. People whirl around us without stopping to enjoy life, and they just scoop us up and carry us along on their merry-

go-round of busyness. I guess misery loves company. People driven by discontent can be described by a word I heard just the other day—“cutthroat.” The “need” to succeed is rampant today. Materialism is the god of our age. If you have stuff to spend your time and energy on, then you’re told you must have done well. Despite all that, it’s no secret that the rich and the poor are equally discontent.

Paul says he was content with little or much. The Lord was his Shepherd. He said that he could do all things through Christ who gave him strength. The Creator of the universe was energizing him. He was a content man. Paul could certainly speak bluntly when needed, but he was not a complainer. He put up with much inconvenience to do the work of the Lord. He also believed that the Lord Himself was supplying his needs. Paul knew that God had resources beyond his imagination.

Are you feeling content today?

Are you still looking for something else to bring you fulfillment?

To whom do you turn when you need satisfaction?

The greatest appetite-pleasers do not even compare with the beauty of a moment or two in prayer. While you talk to God, something beautiful happens that cannot be described. God makes Himself known to you and works in you. Let that knowledge ruin worry and produce the fruit of contentment.

God’s blessings are gripped in prayer,
Pastor Steve