

In what areas of your life are you most tempted to seek approval from others rather than resting in God's approval through Christ?

Paul describes his religious achievements as garbage compared to knowing Christ. What accomplishments or credentials are you tempted to rely on for your identity instead of Jesus?

How does the truth that salvation is a gift of grace rather than something earned change the way you approach your relationship with God daily?

The sermon warns against adding requirements to the gospel message. In what ways might modern Christians be guilty of adding works or rules to faith in Jesus for salvation?

Paul says he wants to know Christ and the power of His resurrection. What does it practically look like to pursue knowing Jesus more deeply rather than just knowing about Him?

How does understanding that your approval before God is already secured in Christ protect your joy when you face failure or disappointment?

The Judaizers followed Paul to undermine his gospel message. What false teachings or cultural pressures today threaten to rob believers of their joy in Christ?

Paul uses shocking language to describe human efforts at righteousness. Why do you think God views our attempts to earn salvation as offensive rather than commendable?

If someone asked you why you are confident about going to heaven, would your first answer be Jesus Christ alone or would you be tempted to list your good works?

How can serving others and spiritual disciplines be expressions of joy in Christ rather than attempts to earn God's favor?

Small Group Guide: Joy in Jesus Alone

****Philippians 3:1-11 | A Guide to Joy Series****

Opening Prayer

Begin your group time by thanking God for His grace and asking the Holy Spirit to guide your discussion and help you understand where true joy comes from.

Ice Breaker (5-10 minutes)

Share about a time when you accomplished something you were really proud of. How long did that feeling of satisfaction last?

Key Scripture

****Philippians 3:8**** - "What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ."

Sermon Summary

Paul warns the Philippian church about finding joy in the wrong places—specifically in religious accomplishments and personal achievements. He shares his own impressive

resume, then declares it all worthless compared to knowing Jesus. True, lasting joy comes not from what we achieve but from who we know—Jesus Christ.

Discussion Questions

1. Joy Protected (Philippians 3:1-3)

****Question:**** Paul warns about people who add requirements to the gospel of grace. What are some modern-day examples of "gospel additions" people might teach or believe today?

****Follow-up:**** How does understanding that we're "already approved" in Christ protect our joy? Have you ever felt like you needed to earn God's approval?

2. Joy Misplaced (Philippians 3:4-6)

****Question:**** Paul lists his impressive religious resume. If you were to list your "spiritual accomplishments" or life achievements, what would be on your list?

****Follow-up:**** In what ways are we tempted to find our identity and joy in these accomplishments rather than in Christ? What happens to our joy when these things slip or fail?

3. Joy Fulfilled (Philippians 3:7-11)

****Question:**** Paul uses shocking language, calling his achievements "garbage" (or worse) compared to knowing Christ. Why do you think he uses such strong language?

****Follow-up:**** What does it mean practically to "know Christ" versus just knowing about Him? How would you describe the difference in your own life?

4. Personal Reflection

****Question:**** If someone asked you, "Why are you confident you're going to heaven?" how would you answer? Would your first response be about what you've done or about what Jesus has done?

****Follow-up:**** How does this sermon challenge or affirm your understanding of salvation and grace?

Key Takeaways

1. ****Joy is found in grace, not in the grind.**** We cannot earn God's approval—it's a gift freely given through faith in Jesus.

2. ****Performance-based faith is exhausting and ultimately empty.**** Even our best religious accomplishments are worthless for earning salvation.

3. ****True joy comes from knowing Jesus personally.**** This joy isn't based on circumstances but on the unchanging character of Christ.

4. ****Our salvation is complete in Christ alone.**** Nothing needs to be added—Jesus said "It is finished" on the cross.

Practical Applications

****This Week's Challenge:****

****Option 1 - Rest in Grace****

Each morning this week, start your day by declaring: "I am already approved by God through Jesus Christ. Today I don't have to earn His love—I already have it." Journal about how this changes your perspective throughout the day.

****Option 2 - Examine Your Resume****

Make a list of the things you're tempted to rely on for your sense of worth or approval (career success, parenting, ministry involvement, moral behavior, etc.). Then pray through the list, surrendering each item to Jesus and acknowledging that your worth comes from Him alone.

****Option 3 - Share the Gospel****

Practice answering this question with someone this week: "What makes you confident you're going to heaven?" Focus your answer entirely on Jesus and what He's done, not on anything you've done.

Prayer Prompts

- ****Confession:**** Confess areas where you've been trying to earn God's approval or finding your joy in accomplishments rather than in Christ.
- ****Thanksgiving:**** Thank God for the gift of grace and that salvation is complete in Jesus alone.
- ****Intercession:**** Pray for anyone in your group who may be struggling with performance-based faith or who doesn't yet know Jesus personally.
- ****Petition:**** Ask God to help you find your joy, identity, and security in Christ alone this week.

Looking Ahead

Before next week, read Philippians 3:12-21. Consider: What does it mean to "press on" in our faith while also resting in God's grace?

Closing Thought

****"Joy begins where striving ends. Joy begins when we rest in what Jesus has already done and we need to do nothing else."****

May you experience the freedom and joy that comes from knowing you are fully loved, fully forgiven, and fully His—not because of what you've done, but because of what Jesus has done for you.

5-Day Devotional: Finding Joy in Jesus Alone

Day 1: Joy Protected by Grace

****Reading:**** Philippians 3:1-3; Ephesians 2:8-9

****Devotional:****

Paul's urgent warning to "rejoice in the Lord" establishes where true joy originates—not in circumstances, achievements, or religious performance, but in Christ alone. Like the Philippians who faced false teachers adding requirements to salvation, we too encounter voices suggesting Jesus isn't enough. Grace protects our joy by anchoring us to an unchanging truth: we are accepted not because of what we do, but because of what Jesus has done. Today, reflect on areas where you've been striving to earn God's approval. Confess any performance-based thinking and rest in the completed work of Christ. Let grace guard your heart against the exhausting pursuit of approval. Your acceptance is already secured in Him.

Day 2: The Danger of Misplaced Joy

****Reading:**** Philippians 3:4-6; Luke 18:9-14

****Devotional:****

Paul possessed an impressive spiritual resume—perfect pedigree, flawless religious observance, zealous devotion. Yet he recognized these accomplishments, when trusted for salvation, became obstacles rather than assets. We easily fall into this trap, measuring our worth by church attendance, ministry involvement, or moral performance. Like the Pharisee in Jesus' parable, we can stand before God listing our credentials while missing the heart of the gospel. What accomplishments are you tempted to present to God as proof of your worthiness? Career success? Family stability? Religious activity? These aren't inherently wrong, but they become dangerous when they replace simple faith in Jesus. Today, surrender your resume to Christ and embrace the humble posture of the tax collector: "God, have mercy on me, a sinner."

Day 3: Counting Everything as Loss

****Reading:**** Philippians 3:7-8; Matthew 13:44-46

****Devotional:****

Paul uses shocking language—calling his impressive achievements "garbage" or literally, refuse—to illustrate the radical reorientation that occurs when we truly encounter Christ. Like the merchant who sold everything for the pearl of great price, Paul recognized that knowing Jesus surpasses all earthly gain. This isn't about despising good works or accomplishments, but about proper perspective. When we grasp the surpassing worth of Christ, everything else dims in comparison. What are you holding onto that competes with Jesus for first place in your heart? Success? Reputation? Comfort? Security? The invitation today is not to abandon good things, but to loosen your grip on them, recognizing they cannot save you, fulfill you, or give you lasting joy. Only Jesus can do that.

Day 4: The Righteousness That Comes from God

****Reading:**** Philippians 3:9; Romans 3:21-26; Isaiah 64:6

****Devotional:****

Paul makes a crucial distinction: righteousness that comes from law-keeping versus righteousness that comes through faith in Christ. Our best efforts at moral perfection are like filthy rags before a holy God—not because good works are bad, but because they can never bridge the gap between us and God. The gospel offers something radically different: Christ's perfect righteousness credited to us through faith. We don't climb up to God through performance; God comes down to us through Jesus. This is the great exchange—our sin for His righteousness, our guilt for His innocence, our death for His life. Stop trying to clean yourself up before approaching God. Come as you are, receive His righteousness as a gift, and let that transform how you live.

Day 5: Knowing Christ and His Power

****Reading:**** Philippians 3:10-11; John 17:3; 2 Corinthians 4:7-12

****Devotional:****

Paul's ultimate desire wasn't just forgiveness—it was intimate knowledge of Christ. He wanted to experience resurrection power in daily life and fellowship with Jesus even in suffering. This is mature faith: not joy despite hardship, but joy rooted so deeply in Christ that circumstances cannot shake it. Knowing Jesus means more than knowing about Him; it means walking with Him through valleys and mountaintops, experiencing His presence in weakness, and holding firm to resurrection hope when death surrounds us. Today, ask yourself: Do I truly know Jesus, or do I just know about Him? Pursue deeper relationship through prayer, Scripture, worship, and obedience. Let knowing Christ become your greatest treasure, your highest pursuit, your deepest joy. When you really know Him, joy isn't something you chase—it's something you live.

****Reflection Questions for the Week:****

- Where have I been seeking approval instead of resting in God's grace?
- What accomplishments am I tempted to trust in for my salvation?
- How can I practically "count everything as loss" compared to knowing Christ?
- Am I pursuing religious performance or genuine relationship with Jesus?
- What would change in my life if I truly believed Jesus alone is enough?