



## JoyFULL

### Part Two: Joy Through Purpose

Text: Philippians 1:12-14; 18b-21

Founding Pastor Ken Werlein

1. Have you ever had an experience like Ken's on his mission trip in Mexico, a time in another culture, perhaps on a mission trip, where the people there were consistently joyful despite having far fewer material possessions and comfort than us here? Describe that experience.
2. Read Colossians 3:4 and Psalm 16:11. Where is lasting joy found? If God is the giver of all good gifts (James 1:17), what is our role in truly living a full life of joy?
3. Read Ecclesiastes 3:1-15.
  - a. What does this passage teach about the inevitability of change in this life?
  - b. What does this mean for us therefore about the danger of tying our joy to our circumstances?
  - c. Why do so many of us dislike and resist change?
  - d. What will outlast the constant change in this life?
  - e. How do we root ourselves, and by extension our joy, in eternal things?
4. Read Romans 8:28.
  - a. This verse carries the amazing truth that God doesn't waste anything. He can work all things for our good. But what must first be true?
  - b. Why is that so? Why is that the foundation of the promise?
  - c. How have you seen this in your life? What is a situation where God used something tragic in your life for his purposes?
  - d. Where in your life are you struggling to trust God and find joy regardless of circumstance? Spend time sharing with your group, encouraging one another with the promises of God, and praying for one another.

Challenge: In this passage, Paul says he was "put here" in prison. Who put him there and why? Why have you been "put" in your workplace, your home, your community, your family? Go beyond the generic, "To share the gospel". Like Paul shared specifically with the Imperial Guard, God has put you into certain people's lives. Who are they? Why does it make sense that you would be the person to share? Are there cases where there is no one else but you to share?

Prayer: Father,

Your Word is my source of encouragement. Today I want to trade in my joyless countenance for a spirit of praise and thanks. I ask You to recycle this old, worn-out me for a new me with a renewed outlook, a God-perspective on my life and circumstances.

Restore the original joy I found when I first laid eyes on Your truth. Make me new again! My spirit needs Your resuscitation. Breathe in my nostrils the breath of life as You did with Adam. Holy Spirit, fill me with the life and breath of my Creator!

Set my feet to rejoice again! Fill me with good food and restore me to great friends who will help me walk this path with joy! Joy is Your will and Your way!

I choose joy today! And I wait expectantly as You fill me with the capacity for joy once again.

In Jesus' Name  
Amen!

## STUDY DEEPER

### Joy Changes Everything

It's often important to assure despondent Christians that Jesus himself sometimes plumbed the emotional depths. But it's equally important to guard against the opposite extreme, as if joy were a luxury we could well do without.

Being a man of sorrows was only one side of Jesus's life. The Spirit dwelt in him without limit (John 3:34), and wherever the Spirit is there is joy (Galatians 5:22). Clearly, too, he found joy in his special relationship with his Father, in whose will he took delight (Psalm 40:8; Hebrews 10:7); and as he approached the end of his ministry, it was the prospect of the joy set before him that strengthened him to endure the cross (Hebrews 12:2). This was not merely the anticipation of joy; it was the joy of anticipation – and it was a key element in the psychology of his obedience.

### The Heart of Joy

Peter speaks of a similar joy when he describes believers as “greatly rejoicing” in anticipation of their final salvation (1 Peter 1:6). Indeed, joy is part of the spiritual profile of every Christian.

It has little to do, however, either with our natural temperament or with our personal circumstances. It is the fruit of the Spirit, and it is worth noting that when Paul uses that phrase, he speaks not of “fruits” in the plural, but of “fruit” in the singular. The fruit is one indivisible organic whole, which means that whenever the Spirit comes to live in a human soul the result is love and joy and peace, and all the other graces which the apostle mentions in Galatians 5:22–23. It is one fruit, with many segments. There cannot, therefore, not be joy in a Christian heart. Even its temporary absence is a symptom of some underlying spiritual malady.

On the other hand, the fruit is not produced mechanically, but grows up like the seed which germinated while the farmer slept (Mark 4:27). It is the result of a living relationship with the Holy Spirit. We bear it only if we keep in step with him.

When we grieve the Spirit, our own joy withers.

### The Focus of Joy

But not only is the Spirit the one who personally produces this fruit in believers. He produces it by focusing our minds on spiritual things: those very things which the natural man cannot receive (1 Corinthians 2:14). Specifically, he fills our hearts with joy by focusing our minds, not on joy itself, but on the majesty of God, the beauty of Christ, and the unsearchable riches which are ours in him. Two or three examples must suffice.

First, the case of the Philippian jailer. Having received the gospel, he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God (Acts 16:34). It’s not clear how narrowly we should take this (presumably in his previous life he had been an idolater, not an atheist), but whatever else is implied in the jailer’s coming to faith, it certainly meant that God had suddenly become utterly real to him – and commonplace though it is, there is no greater joy than the assurance that God is and is for you. To those who have come out of the dark night of atheism, this is the greatest truth of all. “It is a great thing to believe in God,” said the seventeenth-century Scottish theologian Robert Bruce. It makes the whole universe glow.

Secondly, there is the point which Peter makes in 1 Peter 1:8. He himself had had the privilege of seeing Christ; his readers, however, had not, yet they believed in him and they loved him, and the result was that they rejoiced with an inexpressible and glorious joy (1 Peter 1:8). The same is still true, surely, of believers today. The sheer beauty of his immaculate humanity and majestic deity captivates our hearts, and we draw our very identity from the fact that we are loved by God’s own Son.

Thirdly, we rejoice when we think of the future. Christ will return, and when he returns we will receive in full the inheritance already prepared for us in heaven. This is not something to be pushed

to the margins of our Christian lives. It has to be absolutely central, as it was in the life of Christ, who in his closing hours focused his mind on the glory which would follow the completion of his work (John 17:1–5). Indeed, it is so central that when Peter urges us to be ready to witness to Christ at every opportunity, he describes this witness as a defense, not of our faith, but of our hope (1 Peter 3:15). If we bear in mind the close connection between hope and joy, what Peter is really saying is, “Be sure you are always ready to speak up whenever non-Christians ask you to explain the joy that so clearly fills your lives.”

### The Overflow of Joy

But does joy really matter? It certainly mattered to the apostle John, who tells us that what drove him to write was his concern that his readers’ joy should be complete (1 John 1:4). We have already seen the link between joy and obedience in the life of our Lord. The same link holds in our own Christian lives. “Holy joy,” wrote Matthew Henry, “is the oil to the wheels of our obedience.” It was this same principle that Jonathan Edwards highlighted when he wrote that God had made our affections the spring of our actions, adding, “The Scriptures speak of holy joy as a great part of true religion.”

This was clearly exemplified in the life of the apostle Paul, the supreme example of “labors more abundant” (2 Corinthians 11:23). Not only does he constantly urge us to rejoice; he exemplifies it himself. He was “always rejoicing” (2 Corinthians 6:10). But he also presents us with another remarkable example of joy in action. When he urges the Corinthians to contribute liberally to the collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem, he invokes the example of the Macedonian churches, whose “overflowing joy” welled up in rich generosity (2 Corinthians 8:2). This is what joy does. It overflows.

William Wordsworth once defined poetry as “the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings.” However inadequate these words may be as a definition of poetry (Milton’s *Paradise Lost* was certainly not spontaneous), we have every right to introduce Wordsworth’s language into the vocabulary of the Christian life. Our service is the spontaneous overflow of powerful Christian joy, deeply rooted in union with Christ and sharply focused on the beauty of his gospel. Where there is such joy, there can be no lukewarm-ness. It overflows in spontaneous obedience.

### The Strength of Joy

We see the same principle at work in the life of Nehemiah, one of the great action-men of the Old Testament. When the work of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem had been completed, all the people assembled to hear Ezra read the Book of the Law, but as Ezra read, Nehemiah noticed that the people were weeping (Nehemiah 8:9), and he immediately sensed danger. On a day that was sacred to God, it was utterly inappropriate to be mourning and weeping (Nehemiah 8:9). He then gave a remarkable instruction: “Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who

have nothing prepared” – and to that instruction he appended a memorable statement of principle, “Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength” (Nehemiah 8:10).

The terrifying corollary to this is that without joy we are impotent, like Samson shorn of his strength, and this has huge implications for every pastoral and preaching ministry. How can we equip the saints for works of service? We are in grave danger of falling into the patterns of the secular world and its obsession with special courses, training-programs, consultants and even boot-camps; and when all else fails, simply off-loading huge burdens of guilt onto demoralized congregations, whose commitment never seems to match our expectations.

But if Paul is to be believed, the task of motivating and equipping Christians for service is neither more nor less than the ordinary, stated work of pastor-teachers; and if Nehemiah is to be believed, the primary way to achieve that object is by filling their hearts with joy; which in turn means filling their minds with constant reminders of the breadth and depth and length and height of the love of Christ (Ephesians 3:18–19).

Sorrow, especially for our own sin, has its place. But it is not our strength. That lies in the joy of forgiveness.

<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/joy-changes-everything>