

“Don’t Let Your Joy Factor Slip”

By Pastor Tom Harrison

Philippians 4:1-9

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Paul uses the word “rejoice” eight times in Philippians. The word, “rejoice,” is in all four chapters. He uses “joy” an additional five times. Such frequent use of this word for Paul is unparalleled in his writings. That is why Philippians is “The Epistle of Joy.” Hebrews describes Jesus enduring the cross *“for the joy that was set before Him.”* James begins his wonderful little book by saying, *“Count it all joy, my brothers...”* You would think he would say something like “when everything is going your way” but he completely reverses the narrative. Jesus said in the Beatitudes that we are not blessed because of favorable circumstances, but because we are approved by God. In 4:4, Paul says to rejoice in the Lord. He did not say rejoice in your circumstances, situations, feelings, experiences, or successes, but to rejoice IN THE LORD. The secret of joy for a Christian is to be “in Christ” or to let Christ be in us. We can be joyful because we know that whatever else happens, Jesus wins. Since we are “in Christ,” we will be *“more than conquerors through him who loved us.”* The power of His Resurrection is what gives us confidence that all things will work together for good for those who love Him (Romans 8:28). Paul practiced joy, too. In Acts 16:25-26: *“About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, and suddenly there was a great earthquake...”* I would have been calling for a lawyer, complaining about how unfair and rude the Philippians were, praying for God to get me out—but Paul had a different mindset. Amid suffering, he was singing and praying. Having such mentors and examples is humbling. Few of us look at life this way. Galatians 5:22 transitions from our ways to the way of the Holy Spirit, *“But the fruit of the Spirit is love...”* The first fruit of the Spirit after love is joy. When God’s love is in us, joy follows.

APPLICATION: Memorize verse 4:4 this week: *Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I will say, Rejoice.* Paul repeated this twice. **JOY** is our theme. How would you describe Paul’s practical advice in Philippians 4:1-9 on how to be joyful? What serious problem does he address that so often sucks joy out of life? How is your joy factor? Do you tend to be more conflicted, complaining, combative, or joyously content? What can you do?

This sermon has two halves. First, Paul describes a particular situation in vs 1-3. The second half is one of the most beloved texts in scripture (v 4-7). Turn in your Bibles (pew #1166). **John** reads the first 3 verses. *Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, ²stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved. ²I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. ³Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.*

Paul starts by talking about love. He LOVES the Philippians. However, they were having a problem in the church. We don't know what these two women were disputing or who "the true companion" was, but it upset Paul enough to call them out by name. Women had been so important in the gospel, both for Jesus and for Paul. Lydia had helped Paul establish the Philippian church. But now, these two women are in conflict with each other over some issue. They had some sort of falling out and were not of the same mind. Their dispute was jeopardizing the witness of the gospel for which they had fought. The old poem says it well: *"To dwell above with saints we love – oh, that would be glory. To dwell below with saints we know – well, that's a different story."* Paul asks for a 3rd party to intervene ("*a true companion*").

How would you like for your name in the Bible once for something bad? Music had "one hit wonders" – these are like "Bible one hit blunderers." Cain killed his brother. Korah led a rebellion against Moses. Balaam and Jonah were prophets who went off the road. Ahab & Jezebel were notorious.

Conflicts in church relationships can be interpersonal or about doctrine or practices. Asbury is experiencing two major transitions – #1 is the denominational disaffiliation. We are making progress. I will communicate with you before my last day, July 31st. #2 happens August 1st as Andrew Forrest becomes Asbury's new senior pastor.

SLIDE #1 Managing Transitions, Making the Most of Change. (Screen picture of Book).
Whiteboard.

Ending
Neutral Zone
New Beginning

The Israelites lost track of the bigger picture. They grumbled. They created a community of complainers. They lost their joy. *"Show me your friends – I'll show you your future."* Hang with grumblers and complainers and you'll become just like them. Furthermore, they were short-term thinkers. When I became Asbury's senior pastor in 1993, it was the ending of a 29-year era with Bill Mason as the senior pastor. I became "the new kid in town." It took time for me/us to figure things out. Asbury was far bigger than my previous church in every way. In the fall of '93, our finances were lagging. I wondered how we would pay our Conference apportionments. I asked Bill Taylor, who celebrated his 90th last Tuesday, what would we do if we couldn't pay our apportionments. With a calm, non-anxious presence, Bill said, "We'll just pay it out of reserves." I said, *"Reserves? This church has financial reserves? I've never heard of a church having reserves."* That signaled to me that this church, unlike the Israelite wandering, was not characterized by short-term thinking. As we go through this Neutral Zone, I encourage you to: "Stay Calm. Stay Connected. Stay the Course. And Stay in Christ." And also, Lower your expectations – raise your commitments.

(Please stand as John leads you) **Philippians 4:4-7 Pew Bible #1166**

⁴ Rejoice in the **Lord** always; again, I will say, Rejoice. ⁵ Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The **Lord** is at hand; ⁶ do not be anxious 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**.

How does the church hold together? Paul has 4 simple but direct words of wisdom/advice:

SLIDE #2 How does the church hold together? ⁴**REJOICE** in the Lord **always; again, I say rejoice.**

Paul didn't write this letter from the lap of luxury, but from prison. He never knew when he would be killed. But even in his affliction, when everything was NOT going his way, he made the "Choice to Rejoice." There are no loopholes. "Always" and "again." Until the Lord returns, all of us will have stress, sickness, and struggle. Those we love will pass on. So will we. But in every situation, God consoles us. We CAN rejoice in the Lord always. I learned Psalm 40 years ago: *I waited patiently for the Lord; he inclined to me and heard my cry. He drew me up from the pit of destruction, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure. He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God. Many will see and fear and put their trust in the Lord.* We have so much to rejoice in. Nehemiah reflected this joy, too. Though surrounded by enemies, he persevered and helped rebuild the walls of his beloved Jerusalem (Nehemiah 8:10) *do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.* When one of Asbury's former pastors, Mark McAdow, left our staff to become the senior pastor @ 1st in OKC, he asked me, "What do you think the most important thing in your role?" I told Mark, "Do not let your joy factor slip." To paraphrase "If mama ain't happy, ain't nobody happy," "if the senior pastor's not happy, ain't nobody happy." Crankiness is not helpful.

SLIDE #3 ⁵Let your **REASONABLENESS** be known to everyone. The **LORD** is at hand; NIV uses "gentleness" not "reasonableness." Be tender towards one another. Jesus described himself as being "gentle, and lowly in heart." Be joyful. Be reasonable. Be gentle. Paul puts it back in a spiritual perspective. Why be reasonable/gentle? Because the Lord is at hand. The Lord, through the Holy Spirit, is present with each of us NOW. So, we have someone to love. AND, He is coming again. So, we have something to look forward to.

SLIDE #4 How does the church hold together? ⁶*do not be **ANXIOUS** about anything*

SLIDE #5 How does the church hold together? *but in everything by **PRAYER** and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to **God**.*

SLIDE #6 ⁷*And the **PEACE** of **God**, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in **Christ Jesus**. **Rejoice + be Reasonable + non-anxious + prayerful = peace** If we choose to rejoice, be reasonable, non-anxious, and prayerful, the result will be peace with God, peace with one another, and be at peace with ourselves.*

SLIDE #7 7x in these 7 verses, Paul emphasizes “*the Lord, God, & Christ Jesus.*” He shares 4 things we are to do (Stand firm, agree in the Lord, rejoice in the Lord, let your requests be made known to the Lord) and 3 things the Lord will do (He is at hand, He will give us His peace and will guard our hearts/minds). If implemented, Paul promised, “the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (v. 7).

When we hear a sermon like this we usually conclude, “I must try harder?” But I’m not sure saying, “Don’t be anxious” or “Have more joy” helps. While we all believe this, how do we practice it? I think Paul provides the answer: we are to be rooted in “*the Lord, God, & Christ Jesus.*” We must switch from the kingdom of ME, into God’s kingdom. I need to trust more. I need to stay calm, stay connected, stay the course, and MOST IMPORTANTLY stay in Christ. My joy is dependent upon my relationship with Christ. That means I develop my affections for Him. If we develop our affections for Christ, then joy (and not anxiety) will follow. Jesus is the strong ox who pulls the plow. (*Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*” Matthew 11:28-30) We need to harness ourselves to Him and stay in the yoke of relationship. He will do the work. We are to stay in step with Him.

So, it’s a simple question of application: Are you trusting in Jesus? Not if you did 30 years ago, but NOW. Not for some future event, but right now. To trust in Jesus means we cling to and completely rely upon Him. Trusting Jesus is how we retain our joy.