

## How God Meets Your Deepest Needs: HE BRINGS JOY!

There's a lot that can steal our joy today! We just need to read the news:

- Some Tsunami relief efforts are having problems
- Disease is spreading in South East Asia
- Soldiers dying in Iraq
- Insurgents kidnap officials
- Train Wreck in South Carolina
- Mother who drowns her children goes free
- child trafficking increases
- Oil-for-food scandals

The world is in desperate need of massive doses of joy.

You need joy in your life. It is not just some casual thing that it would be nice to have. You have a fundamental emotional need for joy in your life. Life without joy is overwhelming. Life without joy is overburdened. Life without joy is oppressive. Studies have actually shown that the more joy we have in our lives, the more productive we are. Corporations are now hiring Joy Consultants to kind of pop up and build up the joy in peoples' lives so that all the employees can be more productive. It is true that you have more energy, more creativity, more productivity the more joy you have in your life.

Last week, we started the series "How God Meets Your Deepest Needs" based on the names of God. One of the names of God from Psalms 43:3 in the Hebrew language is El Simchathgali, which means "I am the God of exceeding joy" – I am the God who knows how to party, I am the God of overflowing, abundant joy.

When you talk about joy, one of the first places you should go to in the Bible is the book of Philippians, a little book in the New Testament – only four chapters long. But 16 times in four chapters, Paul says "Rejoice... Be joyful ... enjoy life." Sixteen times he uses the word "joy" in four chapters. The amazing thing is Paul didn't write this book when he was on vacation in the Caribbean. He was in prison, in a dungeon, in Rome waiting to be executed. In the darkest days of his life he writes the most positive book in the Bible. He gives us his six joy-builders. They are the opposite of the joy-busters in life. They are the antidotes to the killjoys of life.

There are six joy-builders found in Philippians. If you will begin to practice these things in your life, you will find depression lifting, discouragement diffusing and a new sense of joy in your life, which you need.

The first antidote for the things that kill our joy is: Finding out what God wants and then doing it!

## 1. We need to find out what God wants and do it!

A real killjoy in life is having no real purpose at all. If you're just drifting, if you don't know where you came from or where you're going and why you're here, of course you're not going to have any joy in your life. You're just going to cruise on auto-pilot through life, substituting happiness for joy – short-term pleasure for joy. We all need a cause greater than ourselves in which to live for. That is what brings us joy. Living for yourself does not bring joy.

When Paul writes Philippians, he literally had lost everything. He's old. He's in prison. He's in poor health. He's lonely, living in a dungeon in Rome, chained to a Roman Praetorian Guard 24-hours a day. They've taken away everything from this guy. He has no friends, no ministry, no freedom. He even has no privacy, since the guard is chained to him 24-hours a day.

But there is one thing that they could not take away from Paul – his purpose in life. So Paul says in Philippians 1:21 - *For to me, to live is Christ*. Paul says that his purpose in life is to live for Jesus!

2 Timothy 1:3 (Living Bible), Paul says, "*My only purpose in life is to please Him.*"

If you want to have a joy-filled life, if you want to get out of the dumps and into the joy zone, you need to get in line with God's purpose for your life. You need to figure out what God wants for you and then do it. You need to make that statement where you say, "God, I give myself to You and I want You and only You to guide my life." When you begin to live the purpose for which you are made, all of a sudden life makes sense and all of a sudden the joy goes up.

The prophet Isaiah saw God and knew that God was call him. In the book that he wrote, Isaiah tells us that his world was full of darkness and distress. In chapter six, however, he sees God. He knows that God wants someone to send a messenger to God's people, so Isaiah tells God, "send me!" (6:8). 29 chapters later, in Isaiah 35:10, Isaiah proclaims, "*The ransomed of the Lord will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away.*" Joy didn't happen for Isaiah right away when he decided to follow God's purpose for his life. It took years for him to come to grips with joy, but it began when he committed to doing what God wants. Joy might not overtake you right away, but it will come when you say, "God, I will follow you!"

God is looking for who will do what He wants, so He can fill them with joy!

## 2. We need to let go of our pasts.

Philippians 3:13 - *One thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead.*

Paul says if you want to enjoy life, there are some things you've got to throw in the trash and never look at again. There are some things you've got to get rid of. There are some things you've got to throw overboard in your life because they are wearing you down and they are overburdening your journey.

The first thing he says you've got to throw out is the past. We all have regrets. Everybody's got skeletons in the closet because nobody's perfect. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle who wrote the Sherlock Holmes series decided to play a prank on some very important people in England so he sent an anonymous note to eight prominent men in England that said, "All is found out, flee at once." He just wanted to see what would happen. In 24-hours all eight men had left the country.

I'm sure that we could find out certain things about each of us that would cause each of us to want to leave this service right now. We all have regrets. The only problem with regret is, it doesn't work. It cannot change your past so it just makes you miserable. We get stuck in the land of "if only's". If only I could redo my life, if only I could change things, if only I could relive that part, if only I could resolve things differently and make different decisions.

You can't. So it's not going to change by regretting. Regretting is just a waste of time.

John in his short books in the back of our Bible, tells us to get real with our past. He says in:

1 John 1:8 - *If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.*

The VERY next verse, however, John tells us what to do with the sin in our past.

1 John 1:9 - *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.*

The Bible says that when we come to God and say, "God, I'm sorry. I've blown it. I've made a mistake." When we come to Christ and confess our sins to Him, He takes those sins and throws them in the deepest parts of the oceans and puts up a "No fishing" sign. This is an amazing verse. That the God of the universe chooses to forgive your mistakes once they're confessed. If God can forgive your mistakes and your sins, than you can let go of the regret. Then you can get on with life.

Isaiah 43:18-19 - *Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland!*

The starting point of joy is to let go of the past. Jettison all regrets – the grief, the grudges and the guilt.

Another anti-dote for joy stealers is when we realize...

### **3. We need to help others!**

Paul was joyful because he was unselfish. He invested his life in others. If you want to have continuous joy in your life, here is the secret. Give your life away in helping others. Stop focusing on your problems and aches and pains and start focusing on helping others. Become other-centered. The more you give your life away, Jesus said, the more you find it. The more unselfish you become, the more joyful a person you're going to be. The more self-centered you are, the more miserable, and cranky you're going to be.

Paul is in prison and even in prison he's thinking about other people.

*Philippians 4:1 - Therefore, my brothers, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, that is how you should stand firm in the Lord, dear friends!*

Paul's joy were the people he had invested his life in. Paul's joy were the people he cared about, that he'd led to Christ, that he'd helped grow. He says, you're my joy.

Probably the most famous line of all of Shakespeare's plays is the phrase, "To be or not to be," from Hamlet. It's Hamlet's famous soliloquy. Hamlet is talking to himself. The Prince of Denmark is saying, "To be or not to be, that is the question." He's talking about suicide. He was considering taking his life. He's saying, "I don't know whether I'm going to take my life or go on living in pain. Should I live or should I die? To be or not to be?"

Paul said the exact same thing in Philippians 3 for the exact opposite reason of the Prince of Denmark. Hamlet's saying, "I don't know what's worse – living or dying. Which is more painful? For me to go on in my pain or for me to die in pain? I don't know which one's worse."

In Philippians chapter 1, Paul says the exact opposite, "I don't know which is better, to go to heaven or to stay here and serve people in the name of Christ. Which one's better?" It's the same dilemma. It's a different point.

Guess which one had the joy? Paul. Because he was using his life to help others.

*Philippians 1:21-24 - For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not*

*know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body.*

How could death possibly be of benefit to Paul? Because he knew where he was going. He was a friend of God. Paul says, "Either way I win. On earth, my purpose is to live for God. When I die, I get to go be with God." He has a purpose for living and he has a purpose for dying. You can't get a man down who has that. That's his secret of joy – a purpose for living, a purpose for dying.

Do you? Do you have a purpose for living? Do you have a purpose for dying? You're miserable when you don't find your purpose in serving others. Paul says, When I use my life to help others it brings joy in my life. Either way, I win. I win whether I live or I die.

Another anti-dote to the loss of joy letting God take over.

#### **4. We should let God handle our future!**

Just like I said earlier that we need to get rid of our memories of the past, we also need to face the other end of life. If you're going to enjoy the present, you must omit all worries about your future. Worry, hands-down, is the greatest killjoy of them all. You cannot be joyful and worried at the same time. Worry only makes things worse. The more you worry about something, the bigger it gets in your mind. It turns molehills into mountains and it exaggerates and gets bigger and bigger in your mind. Worry is just as useless as regret. You can't change the past. You can't change the future.

Paul's antidote for worry is letting God handle the future.

As I read earlier, Philippians 3:13 - *Forget what is behind AND strain toward what is ahead.*

This verse says something remarkable: when we have let God handle our past, we also need to allow Him to guide us to the future.

He says there are two days you shouldn't worry about – yesterday and tomorrow. "Don't worry about anything, instead pray about everything. Tell God what you need and thank Him for all He has done."

Jesus pretty much said the same thing:

Matthew 6:31-33 - *So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*

Here's Paul's choice for you: you can either worry or you can trust God. If you are worrying it means one thing – you're not praying. If you are praying you don't have to worry. So Paul says if you want to be filled with joy, you've got to forget the past and you've got to forget the future and focus on right now. Don't worry and don't regret because God has a plan for your life.

The old English word for "worry" means "to choke or to strangle". Today the word is "necktie". Worry, like a necktie, can cut off the blood to your carotid artery and you can't think straight and you do really stupid things. Paul says omit all worry about your future. Instead, trust God, pray.

For God to provide joy, Paul reminds in Philippians that God wants us to:

1. Find out what God wants and do it
2. Let go of our pasts
3. Help others
4. Let God handle our future

## **5. We need to focus on what is good!**

Focus on what's good. Once I've yielded myself to God's purpose I need to start looking around the world to what has God been doing. As you know, life is filled with ups and downs. We have mountains and valleys, wins and losses, good times and bad times. We have critics and we have complements. Of course you have a choice, which are you going to focus on. You can walk around looking at all the bad things in your life or you can go around looking at all the good things. It's your choice. Looking at the cup: Is it half full or is it half empty? It is your choice and everyday you're making that choice. What are you choosing to focus on? Even on your worse day, life is good. Even on your worse day, you have it better off than many, many other people in this world. You can choose to focus on what is good.

Paul gives us his fifth joy-builder in Philippians 4:8 - *Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.*

Where do you get a list of things like that? Talk radio? Not likely! Television? Is that where you're going to find things that are true and admirable and pure? No. The newspaper, magazines? No.

But there is one place you can count on – God's word. The more you fill your mind with this book, the more positive and joyful you're going to be. This is true, this is right, this is admirable. This is worthy of value. Fill your mind everyday. Spend some time reading God's word.

Paul says if you want to have joy, the fifth joy builder is to build or focus on what is good.

Paul practiced this himself. Even when he was in prison, he had every reason to be bitter, every reason to complain, every reason to have a pity party. All his friends had left him. He's alone, old, in prison unjustly to be executed. While he was in prison, Christians turned against him and were attacking him incessantly. He was criticized unjustly. If there's anything that takes away our joy more quickly than criticism, I don't know what it is. Just let somebody say something about how you look or about what you said or make a judgment against you, immediately you lose your joy. You want to retaliate, get even, criticize back. You start stewing in your mind. Paul says, "I don't have time for critics. I have yielded myself to God's purpose. I'm focusing on what's good. The last thing I'm going to do is let some critic rob me of my joy." He says, "I'm not even going to allow other people to take my joy from me."

The reason why you may not be full of joy is because you sweat the small stuff. Like that little book says, "DON'T SWEAT THE SMALL STUFF!" Isn't it true that a lot of the conflict in your life, a lot of the killjoys in your life are over inconsequential things that aren't going to matter thirty minutes from now much less for eternity? Most of the arguments Sarah and I get into are over small things. Every time you get upset over an insignificant issue, you are letting the killjoys rob you. Paul says, focus on what is good. That's your choice. Everyday, you're making a choice: Am I going to be joyful or am I going to be stressed out?

Finally, Paul's last advice to build your joy

## **6. We need to learn to be content!**

Philippians 4:11 - *I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances.*

It wasn't natural; he had to learn it. It's easy to be content when you're living on Easy Street. But Paul's life was not easy. It was very difficult.

Turn with me to 2 Corinthians 11:23-28. READ

In spite of all this, no matter what happens, Paul says to rejoice. In all situations rejoice in the Lord. Always rejoice." He says "I've learned to be content."

Bottom line: Joy is a decision. You are as joyful as you choose to be. If you're discouraged today, it's because you're choosing to be discouraged. You can choose to be joyful because there are many things you can be joyful about. God is saying, if you learn to be content and you choose to make the right decision, you can be joyful.

We get caught up in “When and then” thinking. “When ‘this’ happens in my life, then I’ll be happy. When I get married, then I’ll be happy.... When I get a job then I’ll be happy. When I graduate then I’ll be happy. When....” fill in the blank, “then I’ll be happy.”

No you won’t. You are as happy as you choose to be. You’re as joyful as you choose to be. Because joy is a choice.

Some of you are facing some not so happy circumstances right now. You may be going through some very tough times. Some of you are having to swallow a bitter pill right now financially or physically or in a relationship. You think, “There’s nothing in my life worth being joyful about. How can I be joyful when everything is wrong in my life?”

Here is the main reason: **God is in control!**

Paul writes that God is working out the issues in his life.

*Philippians 1:6 - He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.*

You see, God sees it all, God knows it all, God cares about it all, God’s in control of it all, God will use whatever I am worried about for my good, God will give me the power that I need. God is in control and is faithful to complete whatever He started in my life. So what am I worried about? Nothing.

We get so frustrated and discouraged because we don’t know what God’s doing in our lives but God knows. What we need to do is trust Him for the things we can’t see how they’re going to turn out because we know that what God starts, He finishes. God has your best interest at heart. Therefore no matter what happens, you can be joyful. Because what He starts, He finishes.

Tell story of struggle with Depression

I had to realize that in the Scripture in the NIV translation of the Bible, there are over 500 happy words. Five hundred references to happy words like joy, rejoicing and gladness and merriment and mirth and laughing. In contrast there are only 158 references in the whole Bible of sadness and mourning and tears.

What that says to me was that the Bible is primarily a book of joy, reflecting a God whose nature is joyful and reflecting the nature of His Son Jesus Christ, the man of joy. So why don’t more of us think of Him in those terms? Why is our picture of God and Jesus distorted and thinking of Him as just sad and somber and serious? Think about the pictures, paintings, and sculptures that you’ve seen of Jesus Christ or God. They seem to be always somber and serious. You never see a smile on a picture of the

face of God. You never see a smile on a picture of the face of Jesus Christ. All of the art seems to portray Jesus at His most agonizing moments when He was dying for us. If you focus exclusively on His pain you get that incomplete picture.

The Bible portrays Jesus as a happy, joyful person that reflects the nature of God. When you think about Jesus and the way that He dealt with people, in His attitudes, He was joyful. Crowds followed Him everywhere. Crowds don't follow cranky people. Children loved Him. They flocked around Him. They weren't afraid of Him. Children do not do that around people who are grumpy. He got invited to a lot of parties. You don't invite crabby people to your party! We can know that Jesus had something very winsome, very attractive, very joyful about Him!

Jesus was a man of joy. This should give us hope! His life gives us permission to seek a life of joy for ourselves. Based on the truths of scripture, Rick Warren's wife, wrote a definition of joy to live by. She wrote:

Joy is the unshakable assurance that God is in control of all the details of my life, the quiet confidence that ultimately everything will be all right and the determined purpose to praise God in all things.

When we grasp this definition, SUDDENLY, joy is within our reach.

You see, you were made for joy! You were made to know God. You were made to have a relationship with Him. You were made for His purpose and you were made to share the love of Christ with other people. Do that and you will have joy. That is the secret found in Philippians.

God wants us to be filled with joy. God will provide the joy as we follow Him, as we work along side of Him. God wants us to realize what Paul lays out in Philippians:

1. We need to find out what God wants and do it, THEN WE WILL HAVE JOY!
2. We need to let go of our pasts, THEN WE WILL HAVE JOY!
3. We need to help others, THEN WE WILL HAVE JOY!
4. We should let God handle our future, THEN WE WILL HAVE JOY!
5. We need to focus on what is good, THEN WE WILL HAVE JOY!
6. We need to learn to be content, THEN WE WILL HAVE JOY!

It all comes down to a relationship with Christ!

Call for Decision & Pray