

Ever Expanding Joy
Philippians 1:12-30
Part 2—Choose Joy

Introduction

There was once a farmer who began to look at his farm through critical eyes. Every place he looked on his farm he saw something wrong. So, he decided to sell and move somewhere else. He contracted a realtor who came out to look things over.

Then the realtor called to get the farmer's approval for an ad for the newspaper. The ad spoke of a good location, a well-maintained house, sturdy barns, lush pasture, a beautiful pond, fertile soil and a great view. The farmer listened carefully then he asked the realtor to read it again. Finally, the farmer responded, "*Don't put the ad in the newspaper. I've always wanted a place like that. I think I'll stay right where I am.*"

Our attitude makes a huge difference in terms of what we experience in life. Some of us know Karen Garrette. She has faced a long battle with various types of cancer. Even now she is dealing with another challenge. But Karen has faced these difficulties with resilience and peace. It's been really quite remarkable.

This was also true for the Apostle Paul. This is our second message from Philippians. We're calling this series: Choose Joy. We pick up the text in 1:12 with Paul commenting about his imprisonment because of his faith. Outwardly his circumstances were difficult. But as we're going to see, Paul had this amazing ability to live above his circumstances. He chooses joy.

Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel. As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. And because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear. (Philippians 1:12-14)

The reference to "*palace guard*" is literally "*praetorian guard*." These were ten thousand handpicked soldiers first commissioned by Caesar Augustus. They were strategically dispersed around Rome to keep the peace and to protect the emperor. Paul's reference to the praetorian guard indicates he wrote Philippians while he was guarded by them while he was in Rome.

The chains Paul refers to in verse 14 were about eighteen inches long. One end was attached to the prisoner's wrist and the other to the guard. The chain was not removed from the prisoner as long as he was in custody. This made both escape and privacy impossible. According to Acts 28:30, Paul lived under house arrest for two years in Rome. The entire time he was chained to a series of soldiers.

Now here's the remarkable part: instead of seeing the soldiers as an inconvenience, Paul looked at them as a captive audience. What a great example of turning lemons into lemonade! For two years one soldier after another was chained to Paul giving him a chance to share the gospel. Those soldiers would then take the message back to their barracks and repeat it to their comrades.

In the end, the whole palace guard heard about Christ! Not only that...but, according to verse 14, the way God used Paul while he was in chains also encouraged the rest of the believers to become bolder about their faith.

“Romans 8:28 Thinking” Expands Joy.

Paul demonstrates for us here what I call Romans 8:28 thinking. This thinking allowed Paul to trust God even when his circumstances were less than ideal.

Do you remember Romans 8:28? Let's repeat it out loud together. *“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”* This means if we love God and if we're called according to his purpose, God will weave everything we experience into our good.

Thus, being in chains for two years wasn't a horrible loss of Paul's time and freedom. God was bigger than those circumstances. God worked the negatives into good. As we've just seen, because of Paul's chains, the palace guard heard about Christ and the rest of the believers were encouraged. God also used the imprisonment to give Paul time to write four NT letters: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon.

Romans 8:28 thinking requires having eyes of faith to see beyond our circumstances. Typically, we only look at things from one perspective. We only see the obvious. But the Bible assures us there is always more that's going on than we can see with our eyes.

I love the story in 2 Kings 6 about Elisha and the Assyrian army. During the night, the Assyrians surrounded the city in order to capture Elisha. Early in the morning, Elisha's servant went out of the house and panicked when he saw the enemy surrounding the city. But Elisha said, *“Don't be afraid, those who are with us are more than those who are with them.”* And he prayed, *“O Lord, open his eyes so he may see.”*

Then God opened the servant's eyes and he saw the hills above the enemy were full of angels and chariots of fire. The angelic forces greatly outnumbered the Assyrian army.

Romans 8:28 thinking allows us to see with eyes of faith. We begin seeing our challenges from God's perspective. *“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”* In other words, there's more going on than what we can see with our physical eyes. God is working mysteriously behind every circumstance. He weaves everything that happens to us (the good, the bad and the ugly) into the tapestry of his perfect plan for our lives. Thus, Romans 8:28 thinking allows us to remain joyful even when things appear to be falling apart.

Kenneth Dodge tells about an 8-year-old boy named Frank. Frank had a date with his father to go fishing one Saturday. On Friday night Frank laid everything out and was ready to go. But on Saturday morning he awoke to discover it was raining and they couldn't go fishing. So, 8-year-old Frank grumbled and griped and complained all morning. He kicked the furniture, the dog and the cat. Nothing was right. His father tried to explain that the farmers needed the rain. But that didn't satisfy Frank. Over and over again he complained, *"Why does it have to rain today?"*

About noon the clouds broke and the sun came out. His dad said, *"We can't go fishing all day, but at least we can fish this afternoon. Let's go!"* So, they jumped into the truck and went to the lake. They stayed all afternoon and caught more fish than ever before. They had the time of their lives!

When they came home, they cooked some of the fish for supper. As they were sitting down to eat, Frank's dad asked him to say the blessing. 8-year-old Frank prayed this prayer. *"God, if I sounded a little grumpy earlier today, it was because I couldn't see far enough ahead."*

That's the problem, isn't it? Most of the time, we just can't see far enough ahead. That's where Romans 8:28 thinking helps. It helps us to see our challenges from God's perspective. *"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."*

Now, let's consider verses 15-18. *It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. The latter do so out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached.* (Philippians 1:15-18a)

Have you ever noticed critical and judgmental attitudes among Christians? For as long as I've been a Christ-follower I've listened to believers bash one group after another. The root of this criticism is often pride. One group thinks they have a corner on the spiritual market; their way to do church is the only way. Everyone else who's different is not just different, but they're wrong. Different approaches to ministry, then, become issues of right and wrong instead of being what they are: simply different ways to pursue our faith.

As the years have gone by, I've listened to chorus after chorus of this criticism. When I was first saved in the 1970's, Christians were criticizing the new forms of worship being pioneered by Maranatha Music. Then the seeker movement appeared and people lobbed scathing criticisms on Bill Hybels and Willow Creek. Then the purpose driven movement arrived and some folks all but crucified Rick Warren. When Rick's book *The Purpose Driven Life* became a best-seller touching millions with the Gospel, the only thing those shrill critics could say is that Rick never mentions hell in the book.

Frankly, friends, it's the easiest thing in the world to be a critic of other Christians. And it's also the farthest thing from God's heart. Look at what Paul says. He says, sure some folks are preaching Christ for goofy reasons. In fact, some were even trying to hurt Paul by their preaching.

But in verse 18 he says, *“What does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice.”* Paul takes the high road regarding Christians who oppose him. He rejoices. He doesn't criticize. I want you to look carefully at the passage. Make sure I've not twisted it in any way. Take a moment and look at it.

Now, the next time you hear someone on radio or TV or in person bashing another Christian leader or another Bible believing church for doing things differently than they do, I want you to remember this passage. Paul's example teaches us to be gracious toward other believers, even though we may not agree with how they do things. So what if they do things differently than us! That's between them and God. It's not our business. Paul says, *“What does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached.”*

Here's the point. You might fill in the blank: **A Gracious Attitude Expands Joy.**

Pat Riley is regarded as one of the best leaders in the NBA. He used to coach the Los Angeles Lakers when Magic Johnson played. Riley says that when Magic was in junior high, his basketball talent was already obvious. He was so much better than all the other players that he would score 50 points while the rest of the team would score 5. And they won every game.

But the other players were unhappy because they didn't get a chance to shoot very often. So, Magic decided to change his role on the team. He would become the enabler, passing the ball to others making them look good. Magic played only two years in college before becoming a professional with the Lakers. The team had a bunch of superstars. They were all great players but they weren't winning because they were all playing for themselves.

Pat Riley says that Magic Johnson became the catalyst and he decided to make the other players look good. He went to Byron Scott and said, *“I'm going to make you the #1 scorer on this team. I'm going to pass the ball to you and you're going to score.”* And Byron Scott did. He went to James Worthy and asked, *“Why have you never made the All-Star team? I'm going to make you an All-Star.”* Magic started passing the ball to Worthy and next thing you know he was on the All-Star team.

Kareem Abdul Jabbar scored the most points in the history of the NBA. Before he broke the record, Magic Johnson said to him, *“I want to be the guy who passes you the ball when you make that record-breaking basket.”* Riley said, *“On that night, when it was about time for Jabbar to score the record-breaking basket, Magic got off the bench, put*

himself into the game, dribbled down the floor, passed the ball to Jabbar, the ball went through the hoop and the record was shattered.”

Riley says, *“If you look at the video of that event, you’ll see Magic Johnson leaping into the arms of Jabbar. And if you look closely, you’ll see tears streaming down his cheeks.”* Riley said, *“Magic was the most unselfish basketball player I’ve ever seen.”*

Now my question is this: If that works for basketball, won’t it also work in the church? When the Gospel was preached by anyone, even with poor motives, Paul rejoiced. I think the overarching principle might be stated like this: A critical attitude shrinks joy, but a gracious attitude expands joy.

Paul wasn’t soured by those who preached Christ out of selfish ambition. He had a gracious spirit that focused on the bright side—at least Christ was being preached!

At some point being joyful comes back to thinking in a positive way; not being critical; being gracious. I’d like us to repeat our theme verse for this series. I think it underscores the importance of a gracious attitude. *“Finally, brothers and sisters, 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.”* (Philippians 4:8)

Finally, in verses 18-26 we see one more mindset that will help to expand our joy.

But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice.

Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and God’s provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance. I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. 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. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, so that through my being with you again your boasting in Christ Jesus will abound on account of me. (Philippians 1:18-26)

God-Confidence Expands Joy

The overriding theme in this text is God-confidence. Paul expresses his supreme confidence that God is in control. Whether he lives or dies is okay because either way God is in control. And this confidence leads to an amazing supernatural level of joy.

Notice four reasons for Paul's God-confidence:

- In verse 19 prayer is mentioned. Paul is confident because he knows the Philippians are praying for him and he knows that God listens to prayer.
- Also, in verse 19 Paul expresses confidence in the Holy Spirit's ability to help. What happened to him—in other words imprisonment—will ultimately turn into something positive because of *“the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ.”*
- In verse 20 Paul expresses confidence in God's empowerment. The same God who sustained him when he was flogged five times by the Jews and the same God who helped him survive three shipwrecks would continue to give him courage and strength. The term *“eagerly expect”* in verse 20 is a compound word that means to stretch the neck. It was used figuratively of an eager expectation. Like a chick stretching its neck eagerly awaiting nourishment from its mother, Paul was confident in God's ability to provide courage and power to endure.
- Finally, in verses 21-26, Paul writes about his confidence in God's plan for his life. If Paul lives, he knows it means God has more for him to do on earth. If he dies, he knows it means being personally with Christ. It's the ultimate win-win situation. Paul would rather die and be with Christ. For him that would be far better. But he knows there's still more work to do. So, he writes in verse 25, *“Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith...”*

God-confidence has an amazing way of expanding joy. In this entire passage there's not one hint of discouragement; not a hint of negativity. Even though he's chained to a Roman soldier and even though he possibly was about to be executed for his faith, Paul is completely confident because he knows that God is ultimately in control. The level of our confidence in God has a dramatic impact on how we go through the trials of life.

Adoniram Judson was the first overseas missionary sent out from the United States. In the early 1800's Judson and his first wife went to Burma where he labored for nearly forty years. After 14 years of hard work the only things he had to show for it were a handful of converts and a Burmese grammar. During those 14 years he suffered a horrible imprisonment for 1 ½ years and he lost his wife and children to disease.

In the face of these obstacles, Judson prayed that God would allow him to live long enough to translate the entire Bible into Burmese and to establish a church with at least 100 believers. God granted that request over the ensuing 20+ years. And at the end of his life, Judson wrote, *“If I had not felt certain that every trial was ordered by infinite love and mercy, I could not have survived my accumulated sufferings.”* In other words, if he wasn't supremely confident that God was in total control—sovereign over even terribly painful things—Judson would not have prevailed.

This God-confidence is captured well in verse 21. “For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.” You might underline verse 21 in your notes. It’s key. Let’s repeat it out loud. (Repeat)

This verse basically declares that our primary focus in life is a settled issue. Jesus Christ is the hub and all the other spokes of my life revolve around him. Whether I live or die Jesus is the center of everything I am and do. It reminds me of a statement written by a young African pastor who was martyred for his faith in Zimbabwe.

I’m part of the fellowship of the unashamed. The die has been cast. I have stepped over the line. The decision has been made. I’m a disciple of his and I won’t look back, let up, slow down, back away or be still.

My past is redeemed. My present makes sense. My future is secure. I’m finished with low living, sight walking, small planning, smooth knees, colorless dreams, tamed visions, mundane talking, cheap living, and dwarfed goals.

I no longer need preeminence, prosperity, position, promotions, plaudits, or popularity. I don’t have to be right, or first, or tops, or recognized, or praised, or rewarded. I live by faith, lean on his presence, walk by patience, lift by prayer, and labor by Holy Spirit power.

I won’t give up, shut up, or let up until I have stayed up, stored up, prayed up, paid up and preached up for the cause of Christ. I am a disciple of Jesus. I must give until I drop, preach until all know, and work until he comes. And when he does come for his own, he’ll have no problems recognizing me. My colors will be clear!

Thus, in Philippians 1:12-26 we see three principles that will help us experience ever expanding joy:

(1) Maintain Romans 8:28 thinking. “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”

(2) Have a gracious attitude...especially with those who view things differently than us.

(3) Keep our God-confidence strong. “For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.” Nothing can ever happen to us that’s not first filtered through his loving hands. Whether we live or whether we die...let’s choose to keep Christ at the center of our lives.

Up to this point Paul has been talking mostly about himself. But in verse 27 Paul shifts the focus to the Philippians. Because of Paul’s example...this is how the Philippians are expected to live.

Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in the one Spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to

them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved—and that by God. For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him, since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have. (Philippians 1:27-30)

I'd like you to underline three statements in your notes:

1. Verse 27: “...conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel...”

2. Also in verse 27: “Stand firm in one spirit...”

3. In verse 29: “For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him....”

Live worthy. Stand firm. Suffer for Christ. I'd like to wrap up today by having us bow our head and focus on those three exhortations. With your eyes closed, I'd like to read those three statements slowly three times. Think about them. Let the Holy Spirit bring to mind the ways he may want to apply them to your life.