

Exponential Joy
Philippians 1:1-11
Part 1—Choose Joy

Pastor Chuck Swindoll relates a true story that illustrates the innocence of childhood. One evening a grandmother was spending time with a very precocious granddaughter. The little girl looked up and asked, *“How old are you Grandma?”* The woman was startled and she responded, *“Well, honey, when you’re my age you don’t share your age with anybody.”* The little girl said, *“Aw, come on, Grandma, you can trust me.”* *“No, dear, I never tell anyone my age.”*

Then the grandmother got busy fixing dinner. Before she knew it, she realized her granddaughter had been absent for about twenty minutes—much too long! She checked upstairs and the child had dumped her grandmother’s purse on top of the bed and was sitting in the midst of the mess, holding her grandmother’s driver’s license.

When their eyes met, the child announced, *“Grandma, you’re seventy-six.”* *“Why, yes, I am. How did you know that?”* *“I found the date of your birthday here on your driver’s license and subtracted that year from this year...so you’re seventy-six.”*

“That’s right, sweetheart. Your grandmother is seventy-six.” The girl continued staring at the driver’s license and then she added, *“Grandma, you also made an F in sex.”*

There’s an innocence about children that gets squeezed out of us as we wrestle with issues like war, politics, a pandemic and mortgages. Studies show that children laugh about four times more than adults. And unfortunately, some of the most serious people around tend to be those who profess faith. Think about it. Does the stereotypic Bible believing Christian ever have a smile on his or her face?

Well, in this new series, I hope God will turn that stereotypic frown into a Spirit-filled smile. Over the next nine weeks we’ll explore one of the most infectious books in the New Testament: the book of Philippians. Philippians is only 104 verses long. But over and over again joy splashes out like a rubber ball popping up after being submerged under water.

Twelve times we find the Greek word for joy or joyful in the four short chapters of Philippians. The message in this letter is fairly simple. But it has revolutionary potential to transform our outlook on life. Today we’ll consider the first eleven verses of this remarkable document. We begin with chapter 1 verse 1.

“Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all God’s holy people in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons:” (Philippians 1:1)

The authors of Philippians are Paul & Timothy. Notice that even though Paul wrote thirteen of the New Testament documents he still refers to himself first as a servant. The

Greek word for servant in verse one is *doulos*. You might circle the word in your message notes. A *doulos* is a bondservant. A *doulos* is someone who voluntarily submits themselves—someone who chooses—to be a slave to God.

Exodus 21:5-6 describes a slave who refuses the opportunity for freedom and re-submits himself to his master for life. The scripture says, *“If the slave plainly says, ‘I love my master, my wife and my children; I will not go out as a free man,’ then his master shall bring him to God, then he shall bring him to the door or the doorpost. And his master shall pierce his ear with an awl; and he shall serve him permanently.”*

That’s a picture of what *doulos* means. A *doulos* is a bond-servant who freely gives up his or her personal rights to serve God. It’s when we allow God’s grace to crucify our selfishness with a cross-shaped awl.

Paul’s ministry partner in Philippi was his protégé Timothy. Whenever we read about Paul’s ministry he’s surrounded by other people. One reason Paul was so fruitful was because he never ministered alone.

Verse one indicates the letter was first sent to the *“saints in Christ Jesus in Philippi.”* The Bible refers to every Christ-follower as a saint. The word saint in Scripture is not used for a select group of faith-heroes. Saint describes all of us who have been declared righteous by God on the basis of his grace through our faith in Christ. So why don’t you turn to the person next to you and say *“You’re a saint!”*

In addition to the Christ-followers in Philippi, the letter is also addressed to *“the overseers and deacons.”* These were the leaders in the local church. Overseer is a term that’s used interchangeably with elder in the New Testament. ECF has eight council members who oversee our ministry. The term deacon refers to a second tier of church leaders. At ECF deacons correspond to the leaders of our ministries and our small group leaders.

“Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” (Phil 1:2)

This is a greeting Paul often uses in his letters. The focus is on God’s grace—the unmerited favor he so freely bestows—and the supernatural peace that follows; all of which comes from God through faith in Jesus Christ.

“I thank my God every time I remember you.” (Philippians 1:3)

For us to appreciate what Paul is saying, we need to understand what happened when he was in Philippi. We read about this Acts 16. The chapter opens with Paul ministering in what’s now the country of Turkey on his second missionary journey. Paul and Silas were re-visiting the churches Paul established on his first missionary journey. Along the way, according to Acts 16:3, Paul added Timothy to their ministry team. Remember that Paul lists Timothy as his co-author of Philippians.

Up to this point the Gospel still had not crossed into Europe. But that was about to change. In Acts 16:9 God moved in a powerful way that altered history. This event is known as the Macedonian Call. This was God's call to the Apostle Paul to cross over the Aegean Sea from Asia into Europe. This is when the Gospel first arrived in Europe. Verse 10 also includes an important detail. In verse 10 Luke, the author of Acts, begins to use "we" for the first time. From this point on Luke is an eyewitness to most of the events recorded in the rest of the book.

According to Acts 16, the missionary team's first stop in Europe was Philippi. Philippi is located in what we now call northern Greece. Two significant conversions happened in Philippi: a wealthy cloth merchant named Lydia and the town jailer.

Lydia's conversion is recorded first. Apparently, there wasn't a synagogue in Philippi because there were too few Jews. As a result, the Jews met for prayer on the Sabbath by the river. One day Paul showed up sharing the Gospel message. Lydia, along, with other members of her household, heard the Gospel; they accepted Christ and were baptized. After that Lydia invited the missionary team to stay in her home. Her home then became the base of operations for the first church in Europe.

A second important conversion was the Philippian jailer. A demon possessed slave girl was being used by her owners to make money by telling fortunes. After the girl harassed Paul for several days, he finally cast the demon out. The slave owners then caused an uproar because their source of income had been eliminated. Paul and Silas were flogged and thrown into prison. They were locked in the inner cell and, just to be safe, they also had their feet fastened in the stocks.

All this will be important to keep in mind when we get back to the Philippian letter. Paul had only been in Philippi for at most a couple of weeks. In other words, he was just getting to know Lydia and the others who had come to faith. The church was just getting launched when, wham, everything fell apart and Paul was flogged and tossed in jail. In ancient times when people were flogged it often left them half dead. Their backs were flayed open by the cat-a-nine-tails. This is what Paul experienced in Philippi.

About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everyone's chains came loose. The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!"

The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household." Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then

immediately he and all his household were baptized. The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole household.

Doesn't that rock your world? Think about it, Paul and Silas are sitting in a smelly jail cell with their backs ripped open because they were just flogged. And what are they doing? They're praying and singing hymns to God! Isn't that extraordinary?

It seems to me too often we make mountains out of molehills. To us our stuff seems so significant, our pain seems so terrible, our circumstances seem so unfair; so, we belly ache and we complain. But look at Paul and Silas. They're sitting in jail with their feet locked in the stocks and what are they doing? They're praying and singing songs! Talk about raising the bar regarding our attitude!

While they were praying and singing, God sends a powerful earthquake that shakes open the cell doors and loosens their chains. Paul and Silas are free! The jailer thinks everyone has escaped so he's about to kill himself to spare the Roman authorities the trouble. Paul says, *"Wait! Hold on! We're all here!"*

The jailer rushes in overwhelmed by all that's happened. He asks the most important question we can ever ask: *"What must I do to be saved?"* Paul and Silas answer in unison with one of the shortest Gospel messages on record: *"Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved..."* The jailer responded, along with the rest of his family, and that night they were all baptized.

So that was Paul's experience in Philippi! He was stripped and beaten. He was thrown in jail. Now, as we turn back to Philippians 1:3 let me share one more thing that makes Paul's joy in this letter extraordinary. Not only did Paul experience painful things while he was in Philippi, but he writes this letter while he's once again in chains because of his faith. This time he's in Rome awaiting execution. We read about this in Acts 28.

Thus, not only did Paul look back on a grocery list of negative things that happened while he was in Philippi, but as he writes the letter he's also going through some pretty tough stuff. But none of these challenges rob his joy. How is it that Paul is able to experience a joy that so powerfully transcends his circumstances? What is his secret? If we can learn this secret, friend, we will experience truly exponential joy! Let's read verses 3-11 to find out.

I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart and, whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me. God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.

And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God. (Philippians 1:3-11)

Five principles that move us toward exponential joy. The first one is in verse 3.

1. Focus on the positives in your past.

Instead of rehearsing the negative things that happened in Philippi, Paul let the negatives go. He made a choice to move beyond the negatives. Instead, he focused on the positive things. *“I thank my God every time I remember you.”*

Instead of thinking about the flogging, I imagine Paul thought about Lydia and her family coming to faith. I imagine Paul thought about how cool it was to experience the earthquake and to see the jailer and his family come to Christ. I imagine Paul thought about how faithful the church had been to support his ministry in the years since he planted the church. There were so many good things to focus on that after a while maybe Paul didn't have time to recall the negative!

Do you know what? You can make the same choice. You can look over your shoulder and focus on everything you didn't have, all the things you missed out on, all the rotten things that were done to you...but if you do that, you'll become a very critical and negative person.

Or you can choose to focus on the positive and dwell on the blessings you experienced. That's what Paul does and it helps him to experience exponential joy. And if there are no positives at all in your past—then you can still not dwell in the negative. You can focus on the positive things right now in your life.

For the next nine weeks we're going to work together to memorize one of the most transformational verses in the Bible. It's Philippians 4:8. Every week we'll repeat it out loud. I hope you will allow its truth to shape how you think about your past, your present and your future. Would you repeat it with me? *“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.”*

This verse summarizes the first step to exponential joy: focus on the positives in your life. Let the negatives go!

A second step toward exponential joy is...

2. Pray with thanksgiving.

Look at verse 4. *“In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now...”*

Later in this letter we learn that the Philippian church was the only church that helped Paul financially. The Philippians are also applauded in 2 Corinthians 8 for their

generosity in a collection for needy believers. In other words, the Philippians had been major partners with Paul to extend the message of Christ. As a result, Paul prayed for them with joy. You might underline the phrase *“I always pray with joy...”*

Praying with joy and thanksgiving is directly connected to Philippians 4:8 thinking. Once we begin thinking about the things God wants us to think about—things that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely and admirable—then we’ll begin to pray more positively. This is one reason I always begin my personal prayer time with praise. No matter how crummy I may feel I can always find something to praise God for.

A good example of praying with thanksgiving is a woman I read about who didn’t get married until she was 31 years old and then she had 12 children. She spoke at Christian conferences when she was still single telling people that she didn’t worry about getting married. She left the future in God’s hands. But she said every night she hung a pair of men’s pants on her bed and knelt down to pray this prayer:

Father in heaven, hear my prayer
And grant it if you can
I’ve hung a pair of trousers here
Please fill them with a man.

One Sunday Pastor Chuck Swindoll shared that prayer with his congregation. A couple of weeks later he received a note from a mother in his church. The note read: *“Dear Chuck, I am wondering if I should be worried about something. It has to do with our son. For the last two weeks I’ve noticed that before our son turns out the lights and goes to sleep at night, he hangs a woman’s bikini over the foot of his bed...Should I be concerned about this?”*

Chuck assured her there was nothing to worry about! Paul says in verse 4 he always prayed for the Philippians with joy! Thus, a second step toward exponential joy is to pray with thanksgiving.

A third step is to...

3. Rest confidently in God.

Look again at verse 6. *“...being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”* It’s amazing how much difference it makes when we recognize who’s in control. Awhile back I saw a poster that said, *“Good morning, this is God. I will be handling all your problems today. I will not need your help. So have a good day.”*

This is more or less what Paul says in verse 6. Paul knew that God was the one who began the work in the lives of the Philippians. Since God had begun the work, God was also responsible to complete it! Because he was resting confidently in God, Paul experienced an amazing level of joy even though his circumstances were far from ideal.

In my better moments this is also true for me. When I remember that God is in charge it always makes a huge difference. The only time worry begins to overwhelm me is when I try to carry on my shoulders what God wants to carry on his. When I start doing that it robs my joy. Why? Because every time I pretend to be God, I discover it doesn't work!

In Matthew 11:30, Jesus says, *"For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."* This means if we're living in the stream of God's power, if we're trusting him for each breath, if we're resting in him for each step, then life doesn't have to be hard. Jesus says his yoke is easy and his burden is light. Why? Because, if we allow him to do it then he will carry the yoke for us!

A few years ago, I completed in an 11.5-mile relay race across Lake Tahoe. Along with five other swimmers, we swam from one side of the lake to the other. The first leg was a 30-minute swim for each person. I was the last swimmer to get in the water. By that time, our team was a couple of miles offshore in the deepest part of the lake.

When I jumped in the water it was cold. I started swimming. The lake is about 1,000 feet deep at that point and I began thinking how in less than 5 seconds I could cramp up and sink out of sight. It could happen so fast they might never find my body. Those thoughts flashed through my mind and I started to mentally wig out.

But then I caught myself and re-focused. I took captive my thoughts. I muscled my mind to begin thinking about God's goodness, his faithfulness, his watch-care over my life. I began resting in him; letting God carry the burden for my safety. Once I re-focused, it settled me down and I enjoyed the rest of the swim. Thus, a third step toward exponential joy is to rest—really rest—confidently in God.

A fourth step is to...

4. Cultivate healthy relationships.

Look at verses 7&8. *"It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart and, whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me. God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus."* (Philippians 1:7-8)

Don't miss the warmth and sincerity of Paul's feelings for the Philippians. The word he uses in verse 8 for affection is the Greek word for *"bowels."* In the first century it was believed the intestines held the most tender parts of human emotions. In effect, Paul is saying he had the deepest possible love for the Philippians.

Healthy relationships with other people open a huge doorway to joyful living. Think about how meaningful it is to enjoy a sunset with someone else. Think about how fun it is to laugh watching a funny movie with someone else. Think about how significant it is to share with someone a new insight you've just learned from Scripture. These are the kinds of things that happen in our Rooted Groups. That's why I keep encouraging you to get into a group! People who have learned how to cultivate healthy relationships are people who experience exponential joy.

I want to point out one more step toward exponential joy...

5. Prioritize stuff that matters.

Look at verses 9&10. "And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ." (Philippians 1:9-10)

Don't miss what Paul is praying for:

- He prays that their love will increase with more and more knowledge insight.
- He prays that they would discern what's best
- He prays that they would be pure and blameless.
- He prays that they would be filled with the fruit of righteousness.

Does that sound like the stuff that you have as priorities in your life? Does that sound like the kinds of things you pray for? One reason some of us don't experience much joy is because we get spooled up about all the wrong things. But when we focus on the things that really matter—things like love, discernment and purity—it always enhances the joy we experience.

Conclusion

With that in mind, I'd like to wrap up today asking you to bow your heads. I'm going to read verses 9&10 three times slowly. I want you to let the Holy Spirit use this Scripture to speak into your life about any changes God may be calling you to make.

And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ,