

THE SECRET TO JOYFUL LIVING

The story is told of a young man who came to a renowned doctor in Paris complaining of depression. He asked what he could do to get well. The doctor thought of a well-known young man named Grimaldi, who visited many parties and danced the nights away in the Paris nightlife. The doctor told the young man, "Introduce yourself to Grimaldi. Let him show you how to enjoy yourself and you will get well." The downcast young patient looked up with a frustrated smile and said, "I am Grimaldi."

Most people don't enjoy life; they just endure it. They long for happiness but they seldom experience it. Most people believe if they could just change the situations in their life then they would be happy. They think if they could just remove their problems all would be well. However, there is no such thing as a problem free life.

The word HAPPINESS comes from the word HAPPENSTANCE from which we get the word CIRCUMSTANCE. In other words, happiness depends on circumstances, the happenings that are around you. It depends on what is going on in your life. If you go to Disney World, you are happy. As soon as you leave you lose your happiness.

There is a big difference between happiness and joy. Joy is learning to be joyful in all situations, even in the problems of life. Happiness is external (around you) but joy is internal (within you). It is constant. It is an attitude. So how do you live a life of joy?

The background of the book of Philippians is that Paul had spent the last four years in prison. There were two years in prison in Caesarea for a trumped-up charge. Then he was put on a ship to go to Rome to appear before Nero who was not known for being kind to Christians. On the way he's shipwrecked, stranded on an island, bitten by a poisonous snake, waits the winter there, continues on to Rome, spends another two years in prison awaiting trial to be executed. During this two-year period in Rome, he is chained to a guard for 24 hours a day. He has absolutely no privacy. Every four hours he gets a new guard. In spite of all of these situations, Paul is joyful.

Phil 1:12 Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. 13 As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. 14 Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly. 15 It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. 16 The latter do so in love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. 17 The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. 18 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, 19 for I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance. 20 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. 21 For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. 22 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! 23 I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; 24 but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. 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, 26 so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me.

Happiness is caused by things that happen around me, and circumstances will mar it; but joy flows right on through trouble; joy flows on through the dark; joy flows in the night as well as in the day; joy flows all through persecution and opposition. It is an unceasing fountain bubbling up in the heart; a secret spring the world can't see and doesn't know anything about. The Lord gives his people perpetual joy when they walk in obedience to him. -- Dwight Lyman Moody

Paul gives us here four secrets to joyful living:

1. I need a PERSPECTIVE to live from

Everyone has problems. The problems you face are not as important as how you see those problems. You need to see things through God's perspective and not your own.

Even though Paul was in prison his focus he was still positive. He understands the benefits that had come from his condition. The gospel was being advanced through his trials. How?

First, Paul had always wanted to go to Rome. Instead of having to pay for the trip himself, God had given him free passage. Also, because he was in prison Paul had lots of time on his hands so he could sit down and write a big chunk of the New Testament.

Second, Paul is chained to the palace guard. These were called the Praetorium Guard. They were the elite troops of the Roman Empire, personally chosen by Caesar to be his body guards. They were the highest paid people of the empire. When they retired after 12 years of service, they were made leaders across the Roman empire.

There was not a more strategic group that Paul could have witnessed to if he was going to reach the Roman Empire. God puts Paul in Rome; Nero pays the bill and chains a future leader of Rome to him every four hours. These guards had an inside route to the emperor and as a result even some of Nero's family became believers. History tells us that Nero had his wife, mother and children killed because they became believers. That is how great this impact was. Paul had a captive audience.

Third, others who saw Paul's boldness were being encouraged to proclaim the gospel with the same boldness. Attitude is essential. Your attitude towards problems can encourage other people. Courage is contagious. It spreads like wildfire. Other believers became bold because of Paul was bold.

What seemed like a problem was really a blessing. Story of the person stuck on the island. The hut burned but it brought the rescue. When you get this perspective, you are on the way to joyful living. Paul says that God has a purpose behind all my problems therefore I have a perspective to live from.

2. I need a PRIORITY to live by

When things get tough you need to know what is really important in order to distinguish the trivial things in your life from the significant. You can focus on your problems or focus on your priorities. You either decide what's important in your life or you'll let other people decide what's important for you. You have to determine what has the most value in your life.

While Paul was in prison, he heard that there were others who had gone to some of the churches that he had planted and were saying very bad things about him. Paul had been successful. Others wanted to take credit for the work that Paul had started and turn others away from him and towards themselves.

Phil 1:17 The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. 18 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.

I know of a pastor that planted a church. The church grew and was very successful. After a while it became apparent that the gifts that had helped this pastor plant the church were now standing in the way of it moving forward and it was time that the pastor moved on. The elders went to the pastor and tried to explain that. The pastor's pride was hurt and instead of graciously stepping back he fought against it and began rallying people to his side. The church was split. Eventually that church that the pastor had worked so hard to plant was destroyed by his own pride. I wish I could say that as an isolated event but I have seen that repeated so often.

Maxwell Perkins, once wrote, "One of my deepest convictions is that the terrible harms that are done in this world are not done by deliberately evil people... They are done by the good people -- by those who are so sure that God is with them. Nothing can stop them; for they are certain that they are right."

Contrast that to the revival in Scotland in the late 1830s. Robert McCheyne was pastor of a church and went on a long trip to investigate a missionary work on behalf of the Church of Scotland. William Burns came in as the interim preacher and it was under his ministry that the Holy Spirit started a new work. As you might expect, some in McCheyne's church wanted Burns to be the new pastor. When McCheyne heard the news, he agreed, he wanted William Burns to replace him as the pastor since his preaching had been so powerfully blessed by God. But Burns would have none of that. He was determined to put pastor and people back together again.

"Today no one remembers those who complained and called for McCheyne's removal. History remembers too great men – men who refused to be drawn into petty rivalry, men who loved Christ more than their own praise, men who were spiritually great. Burns and McCheyne, as the old writers used to say, *gloried in the ruins of their own righteousness*, and, as a result Christ was honored, and they rejoiced to see envy and rivalry die. Like Paul, they ministered from goodwill."

Paul understood that it was the Gospel that was important and not his own pride or ego. He does not care if his name is dragged through the mud so long as the gospel is moving forward. Even in the face of many problems Paul could rejoice because what was really important (the Gospel) was going out. Even if it may not have been the way it could or should have, lives were still being changed.

Joy is one of those things you achieve by not seeking it directly.

An old dog saw a puppy chasing its tail and asked, "Why are you chasing your tail so?" The puppy said, "I have mastered philosophy; I have solved the problems of the universe which no dog before me has rightly solved; I have learned that the best thing for a dog is happiness, and that happiness is my tail. Therefore, I am chasing it; and when I catch it, I shall have happiness." The old dog shook his head and said, "My son, I, too, have paid attention to the problems of the universe and I have formed some opinions. I, too, have judged that happiness is a fine thing for a dog, and that happiness is in my tail. But I have noticed that when I chase after it, it keeps running away from me, but when I go about my business, it comes after me."

Paul said he wasn't going to let anybody steal his joy. Not circumstances nor critics. He said their motives may be wrong, their style may be wrong, but if the message is getting out, so what?

It is a question of priority. In Greek the term “what does it matter” literally means "so what". What does it matter? Paul said he had to set his priorities, his values, not let little things steal his joy.

How many arguments in your marriage are over little things that really don't matter? Is it worth losing your joy over? No! Have a perspective to live from and a priority to live by. Know what is important.

3. I need a POWER to live on

I need strength to make it through life and to keep on going when things get tough. Life can wear you out and drain you completely. You lose your energy. Sometimes you feel like you are ready to throw in the towel. You say, "I've done the best I could, but it's not good enough and I'm sick and tired." You need a fresh power supply.

Phil 1:19 for I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance.

Paul says, I have two things that give me strength and kept me going in spite of four years of imprisonment. One, the prayers of other people. And two, the help of God's Spirit. You can't live without hope. You've got to have hope to cope.

On a cruise from Mexico to Hawaii in 1979, Los Angeles lawyer John Peckham and his wife, Dottie, put a note in a bottle and tossed it into the Pacific. Three years and nine thousand miles away, Vietnamese refugee Nguyen Van Hoa leaned down from a tiny, crowded boat and plucked the bottle from the South China Sea -- amazed to find a name and address and a dollar for postage and the promise of a reward. "It gave me hope," said Hoa, who had escaped from a prison camp in Vietnam. Safe in a UN refugee camp in Thailand, he wrote the surprised Peckhams. For two years they corresponded; Latter the Peckhams agreed to sponsor the emigration of Hoa and his family. They arrived for an emotional meeting with the Peckhams -- and a new life from an old bottle.

Where do you get your hope to keep on keeping on? God's answer to personal energy crisis is this:

Phil 4:13 I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

If I am going to make it in life, I need a perspective to live from. I need something so I can see the way things really are not the way I feel they are, the way they appear to be. I need a priority to live by so that I do first things first and I'm not taken away by non-essentials. And I need a power to live on that gives me the strength to keep going and keep on keeping on.

4. I need a PURPOSE to live for

Phil 1:23 I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; 24 but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. 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

An English newspaper asked this question: "Who are the happiest people on earth?" These were the four prize-winning answers: A craftsman or artist whistling over a job well done. A little child building a sand castle. A mother, after a busy day, bathing her baby. A doctor who has finished a difficult and dangerous operation, and saved a human life.

No millionaires among them. No kings or emperors. Riches and rank, no matter how the world strives for them, do not make happy lives. In each case it was a person with purpose.

Paul is old and tired and had been in prison for four years. He has done what he has been given to do by God and is ready to go on to heaven. They had taken every single thing from Paul – his friends, his ministry, his freedom and his privacy. They've taken everything from him except the one thing that cannot be taken from you and that is a purpose to live for.

When Paul says "to live is Christ and to die is gain" he is not saying he is suicidal. He was just anticipating death. He was not afraid of dying. Death is just on to better things, out of the prison. Paul had a purpose to live for. How would you fill in the blank? For me to live is ...

The problem with possessions, pleasure and power is that they don't last. Not a lifetime, much less an eternity. There isn't ultimate fulfillment. If it were true then the people who had the most pleasure would be the happiest. The people who could afford to have the most experiences would be the most joyful. And it isn't true.

If power meant happiness, then Joseph Stalin should have been content. Instead, the Russian premier was afraid to go to bed at night. He had seven different bedrooms, all locked and he slept in a different one each night to prevent assassination. He employed a servant whose sole task was to guard and protect his tea bags.

If possessions meant happiness, then billionaire Howard Hughes should have been content. His distrust of people and fear of germs lead him to live a life of lonely exile. He died in a motel room a hermit with a belly length beard and corkscrew fingernails.

If popularity meant happiness, then John Lennon should have been content. His name was a household but his popularity brought misery. His biographers describe him as a frightened man unwilling to sleep with the lights off and afraid to touch anything because of its filth.

Why does God leave you on earth after you become a Christian? Once you are His child why does he leave us here? For the benefit of other people. To tell those who don't know the Lord the good news and encourage each other. Paul says those are two things I've seen in my own life.

The secret of joy is simply this -- Jesus first, others second, yourself third (JOY). If you reverse that order – Yourself first, others second, God third – you get YOG and you will be miserable. After all, what is a miser? It comes from the Latin and means wretched. A person who hordes things to himself.

The best use of your life is to invest it in something that will outlast it. I am convinced that the reason there is so much unhappiness in our culture, so many discouraged and depressed people is because in our society there is a total preoccupation with self. When you learn to have a greater purpose in your life than just yourself, you will have joy more than you can handle. God has a purpose that is bigger than my problems.

If you want to find true happiness, give yourself to others. If you find your Christian life is stale, start serving. Find a place to use your gifts to bless others. When you use your gifts to help others, you are doing what you were created to do. You find meaning and purpose. We all need a perspective to live from, a priority to live by, a power to live on and a purpose to live for.

Fritz Kreisler, the world-famous violinist, earned a fortune with his concerts and compositions, but he generously gave most of it away. So, when he discovered an exquisite violin on one of his trips, he wasn't able to buy it. Later, having raised enough money to meet the asking price, he returned to the seller, hoping to purchase that beautiful instrument. To his great dismay it had been sold to a collector. Kreisler made his way to the new owner's home and offered to buy the violin. The collector said it had become his prized possession and he would not sell it. Keenly disappointed, Kreisler was about to leave when he had an idea. "Could I play the instrument once more before it is consigned to silence?" he asked. Permission was granted, and the great virtuoso filled the room with such heart-moving music that the collector's emotions were deeply stirred. "I have no right to keep that to myself," he exclaimed. "It's yours, Mr. Kreisler. Take it into the world, let people hear it."