

Series: Side by Side
Message Title: ***Finding Joy Begins with Denying Self***
Date: Sunday, April 22, 2018
Scripture: Philippians 2:17-30
Speaker: David H. McKinley
Location: Warren Baptist Church, Augusta, GA

Introduction

What brings you joy in life—deep, abiding, abundant joy?... coffee?... children or grandkids?... mate?... job?... home?

One of the most radical claims of Jesus Christ is the fact that fulfillment doesn't come through focus on self, but through sacrifice of self.

"Then Jesus told His disciples, 'If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it'" (Matthew 16:24-25 ESV).

I have a book in my library dating back some 30+ years written by Gary Smalley, *Joy That Lasts: How to Have an Overflowing Life*. He is best known for his work in marriage and family relationships.

Smalley begins the book with the thesis that many of us have to “hit bottom” (that is, come to the end) in order to understand why we lack joy and have a great tendency to live with frustration and complaint.

“Do all things without grumbling or disputing, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain. Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all” (Philippians 2:14-17 ESV).

Smalley’s starting point: “Trials can be our greatest experience, for they can lead to the source of lasting joy.”

In this book Smalley used a dispenser and a cup to demonstrate where and how many seek joy in life. What are the sources from which you seek joy?

- For many, joy is found in **people**—friends and family. We love people in our lives and expect this love will be reciprocated in a way that will bring fulfillment and joy. Yet as time goes on, we find we are not made happier, more secure, or fulfilled, but often frustrated. Why? The problem with people is that we can't control them! Instead of filling our cup, they drill holes in it!
- For others, joy is found in **places**—if I can just go to.... We all carry pictures of places in our minds and experiences we have shared or one day hope to share. We think there is a certain neighborhood, a mountain home or beach house with a certain number of bathrooms or views that will really bring serenity and satisfaction. But as beautiful and desirable as they may be, when it comes to places, we get bored with them.
- For some, joy is found in **possessions**—when I get this, then... (house, car, boat, RV, phone). Money does not bring lasting fulfillment nor is it the key to the door marked, "Overflowing life." When it comes to possessions, we never get enough.

- For others, joy is found in **position**— look at who I am! All of us want to feel our lives matter, and invariably, our self-worth gets tied up in our accomplishments and achievements. I want people to see me as important. The problem with seeking joy in our position is that we can never climb high enough and, I might add, we can fall quickly!

I'm speaking to you today? Do who have your cup under one of the spigots listed above and struggling when it comes to joy and satisfaction in your life?

“Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me” (Philippians 2:17-18 ESV).

Paul, like Smalley, gives us insight and instruction regarding what he has learned about joy. There was much trial and error in the life of Paul. He begins by taking us somewhere we really don't want to go and confronting us with something we don't want to believe. Finding joy begins with denying self. It is self-denial (not the pursuit of self-fulfillment) that brings joy.

That's upside down in a world where we think and receive messaging about our need to care for ourselves, coddle ourselves and comfort ourselves.

What is Paul saying here in this text? Paul is relating the joy of his life to the ministry of his life—living for God and for others, and not for self. Philippians 3 talks about a compulsive, self-driven life.



Joy Comes Through Sacrifice, Not Indulgence

Paul spoke of the joy of being poured out. He used the term, “drink offering.” In the Old Testament, a sacrifice was made, but the last part involved the pouring of wine on the sacrifice to increase the smell and savor.

You and I will never know joy and strength in ministry until we come to the altar.

“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God,

which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Romans 12:1-2 ESV).

Anytime. Anywhere. Any cost.

When I see my ministry as an offering rather than an obligation, it changes me and everything I do.

You can approach a stranger and request help. They may do it out of obligation, but if a friend knows you are in need, he/she will step up and do more than you asked.

This is the greatest reward of parenting—not the returns you get for your service, but the fulfillment that comes from your sacrifice.

What about your relationship with God? Do you do the minimum required or do you find you want to do all you can?

“The measure of a life, after all, is not its duration, but its donation.” —Corrie Ten Boom

Joy Comes When I Engage in Ministry as a Partner and Not as a Lone Ranger

The New Testament is all about membership and partnership in ministry together.

Listen to Paul's description of Timothy:

"I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be cheered by news of you. For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But you know Timothy's proven worth, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel. I hope therefore to send him just as soon as I see how it will go with me, and I trust in the Lord that shortly I myself will come also (Philippians 2:19-24 ESV).

While we may be called upon to minister as individuals, we never minister alone. God uses others and He has many faithful servants.

It is easy in our individualistic culture to feel isolated and alone. God want us to

remember the importance of valuing others and sharing in partnership with them.

Joy Comes When I Focus on Serving Rather Than Being Served

“For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But you know Timothy’s proven worth, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel” (Philippians 2:21-22 ESV).

I like good service and I’m guessing you do too, but the church is not a place we come to be served; it is a place we come to engage in service together.

Throughout the book of Philippians, Paul provides an overview of God’s plan and purpose for every believer:

Membership
in the Body

Maturity
in the Faith

Mobilization
in Ministry

Mission
in the World

I believe our greatest need as a church in these days is mobilization in ministry. Many

people are connected and committed to our ministry. Many are growing in knowledge and truth, but there is a need for us to have a breakthrough in mobilization—choosing to serve, rather than being served.

Paul is describing the incredible heart of Timothy, but also his own commitment in ministry:

“So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others” (Philippians 2:1-4 ESV).

This is the mindset of joy in life and it is the example of Jesus.

“Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality

with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:5-8 ESV).

A key fact of life is this: All of us live by either Philippians 1:21 or Philippians 2:21:

"For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21 ESV).

"For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 2:21 ESV).

The question is not "Where are ya'll?" but "Where are you?"

Joy Comes When I Receive the Ministry of Others and Show Respect Toward God and Give Thanks For Them

Paul goes on to identify another partner in ministry:

"I have thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus my brother and fellow worker

and fellow soldier, and your messenger and minister to my need, for he has been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill. Indeed he was ill, near to death. But God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. I am the more eager to send him, therefore, that you may rejoice at seeing him again, and that I may be less anxious. So receive him in the Lord with all joy, and honor such men, for he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me” (Philippians 2:25-30 ESV).

This entire letter is about the ministry and work of Epaphroditus.

“Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble. And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only. Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again. Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit. I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied,

having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:14-19 ESV).

In each case with Timothy and Epaphroditus, the men were selfless and servant-hearted. They worked together for the gospel. It is easy to celebrate the celebrity, but God calls us to celebrate sacrifice and service for His kingdom.

Joy Comes When We Press On While Others are Giving Up or Giving In

"...for he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me" (Philippians 2:30 ESV).

Joy comes through endurance. There are quitters in our world who quit at the slightest sight or sign of resistance. Endurance is always the result of denial of self.

People want to quit in maturity when God disappoints them, in ministry when they get discouraged, and in marriage when they get injured.

“It is not my ability, but my response to God’s ability that counts.” —Corrie Ten Boom

I’m NOT saying any of these are easy or trivial. They are at times catastrophic, but in the end, endurance matters.

“Jesus said to her, ‘Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life’”(John 4:13-14 ESV).

So many seek joy through the indulgence of self, but God’s Word is clear; it is in the denial of self that joy is found and is full.