

Happy Father's Day!

We have been going through the Paul's letter to the Philippians in this series. And if you didn't know already or haven't caught on by now, Paul's theme throughout is one of joy.

You know, there's actually a lot one can find on this subject these days. There is a plethora of articles, research, self-help books, and life hacks out there intending to point us down the journey of finding joy.

But I don't think we need bloggers or neuroscientists to concede that we need joy. We know we need joy because we feel the lack of it. I know I need joy like I know I need water when I'm thirsty. And I don't need my thirst confirmed by a high school biology class.

We know we need joy because I thirst for it. It surfaces when times get difficult, when we experience loss, when relationships are broken, or when we search for meaning and purpose.

Failure and frustration in school, life, dating, parenting, or work all remind me that these things alone cannot fill me with joy. And sometimes it leaves you cynical and deflated,

searching for the next big thing to artificially fill you with joy.

Maybe you're like Mitch Robbins, the main character played by Billy Crystal in the movie City Slickers. At the beginning of the movie his son reluctantly invites him to speak at his class's career day. When he finally gets up, his son is embarrassed, and he starts having this moment of clarity like- "Oh no, my life really stinks and is boring." And when he finally starts talking he shares this awkwardly cynical narrative that he has drawn out based on his joyless, purposeless existence.

"Value this time in your life kids, because this is the time in your life when you still have your choices, and it goes by so fast. When you're a teenager you think you can do anything, and you do. Your twenties are a blur. Your thirties, you raise your family, you make a little money and you think to yourself, "What happened to my twenties?" Your forties, you grow a little pot belly you grow another chin. The music starts to get too loud and one of your old girlfriends from high school becomes a grandmother. Your fifties you have a minor surgery. You'll call it a procedure, but it's a surgery. Your sixties you have a major surgery, the music is still loud but it doesn't matter because you can't hear it anyway. Seventies, you and the wife retire to Fort Lauderdale, you start eating dinner at two in the

afternoon, lunch around ten, breakfast the night before. And you spend most of your time wandering around malls looking for the ultimate in soft yogurt and muttering, “How come the kids don’t call?”, “How come the kids don’t call?” By the eighties, you’ve had a major stroke, and you end up babbling to some nurse who your wife can’t stand but who you call mama. Any questions?”

You know they say that jokes are only funny if there’s truth in them. This monologue is funny and awkward because we can all see a little truth in it.

Not long after Mitch’s hopeless confession he and his NYC friends sign up for a real life cattle drive. Their hope is that this epic adventure would provide a spark of life back to their miserable lives.

Maybe you haven’t signed up for a cattle drive, but my guess is that your google, amazon, and pinterest history is filled with searches for how to fill your life with joy and purpose.

TITLE:

Life Hacks and Cattle Drives: How to Find Joy

So today let’s allow God to speak to us in our search for joy. We know we need it. But let’s honestly consider what

God has to say today from Philippians 4. My hope is that you realize that the joy you're really searching for is the joy that only is found in the Lord.

Philippians 4

So then, my dearly loved and longed for brothers and sisters, my joy and crown, in this manner stand firm in the Lord, dear friends.

² I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to agree in the Lord. ³ Yes, I also ask you, true partner, to help these women who have contended for the gospel at my side, along with Clement and the rest of my coworkers whose names are in the book of life. ⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! ⁵ Let your graciousness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. ⁶ Don't worry about anything, but in everything, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

⁸ Finally brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable—if there is any moral excellence and if there is anything praiseworthy—dwell on these things. ⁹ Do what you

have learned and received and heard from me, and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

This is God's word.

This morning I want us to focus on 3 things about joy that Paul shares with us here. Saddle up, let's go:

1. Joy Leaks.

Here, Paul starts laying out his final thoughts in this letter. First he again notes the special relationship he has with this group of people. He calls them his joy and his crown here. Remember in his introduction all the joy he recalls in his prayers for this church because of their partnership in the gospel.

But then Paul names some names. Seems to be some conflict going on between these two ladies Euodia and Syntyche. The details of the conflict are not shared. But whatever it was it seems to be big enough that Paul feels the need to push them toward reconciliation in this very public letter. Eeek.

On a side note, how would you feel if you were called out by name as needing to reconcile a conflict in a letter that would be read FOR THE NEXT TWO THOUSAND YEARS. Does that reframe conflict and how petty it can be sometimes?

Though we don't know details we do know that these ladies along with Clement and others have been some who have labored and toiled at Paul's side. But somehow they've gone from contending for the gospel to conflict with one another.

And Paul seems to be reminding these ladies of their identity and true source of their joy. You see, joy is always linked to community in Christ. Let's look back:

Phil. 3:20

Our citizenship is in heaven, and we eagerly wait for a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul is saying you guys are common citizens. Though your joy has diminished because of this conflict, you should work it out. But earlier in the letter he said:

Phil. 1:27

Just one thing: As citizens of heaven, live your life worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or am absent, I will hear about you that you are standing firm in one spirit, in one accord, contending together for the faith of the gospel,

Paul uses the same word translated contending in 1:27 that he uses to describe these ladies and others who have labored at Paul's side. These ladies have gone from fighting for the gospel side by side to fighting with each other.

This is Paul reminding us once again of what kind of people we are deep down. Joyful people know where to find their identity, even if its temporarily forgotten. We're citizens of the same kingdom, awaiting Jesus return.

Joy leaks. Guys even among the best, most Christ-exalting community, the potential for conflict is not only possible, but inevitable.

Paul says elsewhere that we are like jars of clay in Christ. We're supposed to be containers of God's presence and joy. But we're still broken on this side of eternity. Conflict, circumstances, and sin have a way of creating holes that deplete and distract us from our joy in Christ. Whether it's the size of a pinhole or pothole, it is going to happen even in the best environments and among the best people.

Not to mention we are sinful and in our flesh we are tempted to find and cultivate our joy in areas apart from God.

Jeremiah 2:13

For my people have committed a double evil: They have abandoned me, the fountain of living water, and dug cisterns for themselves— cracked cisterns that cannot hold water.

Sometimes we're so foolish to hold on to a grudge or find joy in things that God knows, and we know, will never last!

Seeking eternal joy in temporary pleasures, no matter what they are, will always be a broken, cracked cistern. And eventually it will show up in our relationships with other people. Like we talked about a few weeks ago, we'll turn into a black hole, turning in on ourselves causing destruction for us and those around us.

Perhaps this morning you need to ask God to expose the leaks to your joy. Do I have a consistent, gnawing feeling of emptiness in my life? Do my relationships lack joy? How might I need to contend for the gospel again in my relationships and restore joy?

And Paul sees this as an opportunity to plug the leak before it gets worse.

2. Joy Overflows.

“I thought you just said joy leaks? Now it overflows too?”

Yeah, it's a weird paradox. Joy can leak but it can also overflow at the same time. It just depends on your source of joy.

Paul gives a clear command:

Phil 4:4

⁴Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!

This is very telling. We're to rejoice IN THE LORD. We'll never find deep satisfying joy that is big enough to overflow to others unless it's found in him. That's crucial.

Yes, you can find some measure of temporary joy in serving others, in simple pleasures and creature comforts. I'm not saying the life hack blogs are completely wrong—gratitude, mindfulness, having meaningful conversations, and limiting screen time are all very helpful reminders. But we need something more than getting makeovers, going on trips, or having a day to “Treat Yo Self!”

You can experience the emotions of joy for a little while by carrying out life hacks or going on a cattle drive. But what Paul makes clear is that we are to rejoice IN THE LORD. Our joy when disconnected from God's grace and purpose will always leave us lacking.

We must locate our joy in the Lord first. We must attach all other joys to him and bring our joys in alignment with his. When? Always. How often? Again and again.

How will that look? It will definitely take the form of meditating on scripture and praying. But what if rejoicing looked more like Sierra Schmitt dancing at the starting block before her swim events. Have you seen this? You need to watch it!

She walks out wearing wireless headphones and in front of a huge crowd she's just dancing like she's front row at a k-pop concert. I may not look it, but this is how I feel when I walk down the ice cream aisle at Kroger.

But I think we need this reminder. Our worship both public and private should look and sound more like Preds games and stadium concerts. I think Paul's command for us to rejoice includes the full spectrum of experience- quiet and loud, kneeling and dancing.

And when we rejoice in the Lord, it starts to overflow into other areas of our life.

Phil 4:5-7

⁵ Let your graciousness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. ⁶ Don't worry about anything, but in everything, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the

peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

When our joy is constant and in Christ it overflows into every area of our lives. As Paul shares here it should affect the quality of our life- one marked by increased gentleness and decreased worry. Bathed in prayer and gratitude. All with a tangible experience of the presence of God's nearness and peace.

Want your joy to overflow greater than your anxiety? One theologian has said:

“The way to be anxious about nothing is to be prayerful about everything.” D.A. Carson

God cares about your worries but only his shoulders are big enough to carry them. Jesus said my yoke is easy and my burden is light. Cast your cares upon him because he cares for you. Lift your eyes from your circumstances and locate you joy and prayers in Christ.

That's how I felt for a long time. Years of teaching at Keller Central. Frustrated. Hated my job. Graciousness was not something I was known for by my students. And the peace of God did not often describe me. Consumed by feeling forgotten and like a failure. I was looking for joy and purpose in my job. And for the next several years God

changed my perspective. My job wasn't the problem. I was. I felt entitled that God would change my circumstances. I had missed locating my joy in the Lord instead of in my career.

When I started finding joy in God and thanking him for his provision things began to change. I stopped hating my job and taking myself so seriously. I began experiencing the presence of God in my classroom. I had peace. I didn't have to prove myself to anyone any longer.

Paul is showing us that joy, when placed in the Lord, overflows into all of these other areas.

Joy in the Lord changes us from the inside out. Our attitudes, our prayers, and our experience of God's presence all begin to confirm around our joy in his nearness. You'll become grounded. Stable. And able to hear even bad news without freaking out.

And isn't that the kind of person you want to be? Aren't these the kind of people we want to be as a church?

Of course.

Joy has a Focus.

In the movie City Slickers, Mitch and his friends travel to New Mexico to begin their cattle drive adventure. When they arrive they meet their trail boss named Curly. He is this grizzled old cowboy with the gruff voice and eyes that can pierce a man's soul. Mitch and his friends are all terrified of him at first.

Later though, Mitch is able to break through a bit to Curly. And they're able to have a pretty long conversation where Curly asks Mitch, "Do you know what the secret of life is?" Mitch says, "No." And Curly holds up his index finger. Mitch says, "You're finger?" Curly says, "No. One thing." But of course it is up to Mitch to figure out what that one thing is. Very pluralistic and post-modern of him for a cowboy, I must say. Oh yeah, and then Curly dies.

Well, here at the end of this passage Paul starts getting down to the brass tacks. To rejoice in the Lord in such a way as to overflow we need to focus.

Phil. 4:8-9

⁸ Finally brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable—if there is any moral excellence and if there is anything praiseworthy—dwell on these things. ⁹ Do what you

have learned and received and heard from me, and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

There are lots of distractions and shiny objects to garner our attention these days. Paul is telling us how to rejoice. It requires effort and focus to dwell on all of these things and to imitate what they've already learned about the gospel.

In one of the life hacks articles I read it said that if you would just place yourself at the center of your own story/life then you'll have more joy. Really? If other people have the potential of letting me down, won't I let myself down too? That's why this joy isn't just about raising dopamine levels in our brain or smiling more. Lasting joy isn't found in techniques and life hacks. Our joy is found in a person... and it's not us. It's Jesus.

These qualities all point to him- true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable. All these point to the person of Jesus Christ. Sure I can look at a sunset, listen to a beautiful piece of music, or eat delicious food. But nothing will calm the storms in my soul like dwelling on the person of Jesus Christ.

Do you know how Saint Augustine would have answered Curly's questions about the secret of life and pursuit of joy and peace?

St. Augustine once said:

“Only love of the immutable can bring tranquility.”

What does this mean? Immutable means something that will never change. God is the only thing that will never change. Loving my wife, my family, my job, ice cream, my bank account, my physical health, my comfort, or anything else, if any of these can be taken away then I can't truly find my peace in them. They could all change.

Joy is found in a person not through techniques or circumstances. God alone is the peace that cannot be disrupted. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. He promises his peace to you only through locating your joy and salvation in him. But to have the peace of God you can't just have a piece of God. You have to focus on one thing: Jesus.

Only in Christ can you dwell on all of these qualities here at one time. Christ's beauty and power embody all of them. And he is strong enough to save, to carry your burdens and anxieties. He's tender enough to be concerned with your finite life. And he's sovereign so that

you can trust him even when things don't make sense or go your way.

No cattle drives needed. Life hacks need not apply.

Jesus tells us in John 15:11 that he wants his joy to be our joy and for it to be complete. Wow! Do you want Christ's joy? Do you want your joy completed?

Then you need to bring your focus on Jesus. Joy and peace are available. He is true, he is honorable, he is just, he is pure, he is lovely, he is commendable—Jesus is excellent and praiseworthy!

In Jesus Christ, our greatest problem, our separation from God because of our sin, has been solved. Jesus paid the penalty of our sin. And he rose from the grave to give us eternal life. This is where the peace of God starts. But it continues here over and over and never gets old.

Is Jesus where you find your joy? I hope he is.

Phil 4:4

⁴Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!

Lord's supper.