

The Joy of All Things
Week 10: Joy in All Things
Phil. 4:10-14
11/2/2014

Welcome/intro: expecting you, hoping you'd come—takes a lot of courage to walk into a new place, thanks for taking that step here today

Today is our last week in our fall kick-off series called “The Joy of All Things”

But don't you worry there's more good stuff coming up—starting next week I'm really excited that we'll be doing a series that will run all the way through Christmas
And we'll be talking about prayer.

Prayer is one of those things that many of us know we should do and almost everyone does it at least occasionally
even non-religious people find themselves praying from time to time

But it's also one of those things that some of us feel guilty about because we never feel like we do it enough

And some of us just don't feel like we're any good at it—I mean you hear some other people pray and you wonder if they went to school for prayer or if they were just born with this prayer gene that you didn't get--they're just so good at it!

Well over the next eight to ten weeks or so we're all going to go to school in prayer

And there are a couple of things that we're going to do starting next week during this series that I wanted to give you a heads up about because you might want to take advantage of these opportunities during the prayer series

[Opportunities Staring Next Week During Prayer Series]

1. Prayer room open all Sunday morning here at Woods Charter.

Just down this hall to the right, we're going to have a quiet room with some really quiet music playing, some comfortable pillows, maybe a few candles

And there will be one or two people who will be glad to either pray with you and for you or just leave you alone and let you pray on your own, whatever you'd like or need

But if you've got something really big going on in your life and you want to get here a few minutes before the service and just spend some quiet time in prayer, that prayer room space will be available for you to come and pray

And if during the service God does something in you and you need some space to go and respond, that room will be open after both services as well

Starting next week all morning long there will be a prayer room just down that hall on Sunday mornings, I'd encourage you to go and get some prayer

2. Passing the basket twice!

Let me tell you what it was like for ME on Sunday mornings before it was my job to be fully present and accounted for

So it's Sunday morning and I'd get up and coming to church but I'm sitting there and SOME MORNINGS I'd have ten thousand other things & distractions racing through my mind:

tasks that were looming on the horizon Monday, relationships that were bothering me, maybe Kelly and I had a fight the day before or that morning situations that needed fixing, stuff around the house I had to get to this afternoon

So I was there physically but mentally I was everywhere else but there and that made it really hard to have ears open to what God might want to communicate to me that morning

Now that probably NEVER happens to ANY of you, I'm sure that each of you is fully tuned in and paying RAPT and RABID attention to each and every word and detail, ESPECIALLY when I'm speaking!

BUT in the off-chance it MIGHT happen to you for the first time in the next eight weeks or so, we're going to do something new

Starting next week there will be a little notecard laying on your seat and at the beginning of the service you can write down whatever it is that you're carrying into that morning that might keep you from hearing what God might want to say to you

And we'll pass the basket right AFTER the announcements and that's just for you to give us your worries, your distractions and whatever it is you need someone else to carry for you for the next few minutes so you can be alert to what God might have for you

And the folks who are serving in the prayer room will pray over it for you and carry it for you for that hour so that you can be free to engage with God

And then we'll pass it a second time after the message is over like we usually do and that's when we invite you to give to the Lord if that's a part of your worship

So we're passing the baskets twice, but the first time it's not about giving money, it's about giving over your worries and distractions and letting someone else carry them to the Lord for you

3. Opportunities to get prayer at the end of each service

Each week during this series at the end of my message we'll have prayer ministers here in this room in the back who will be glad to pray for you and with you about anything that you need prayer for

4. If you have a prayer journal of any sort, encourage you to bring it starting next week because some of what we'll do might be worth jotting down or working into your prayer journal

And if you've never tried keeping a prayer journal of some sort, maybe this week you can pick one up or order one on-line and bring it with you next week and try it out during this series

That's all starting next week, there's more coming along with all of that but that's enough to get you a little taste of what we're excited about for this series

For today, we're closing out the Joy of All Things series, finishing up the short little book in the Bible called Philippians

The title of this series is "The Joy of All Things"

because the book of Philippians talks about joy and rejoicing more than any other book of the Bible

This series has been really great for me, really challenging to me because it's shown me how many ways I go wrong in my quest for joy

And to begin with we differentiated between *happiness* as a temporary experience based on circumstances

and *joy* as a permanent disposition of our hearts that remains in the midst of any circumstances

Paul, the guy who's writing this is in a JAIL CELL in the 1st century and jail-cells in the first century weren't exactly famous for their sparkling hospitality!

But while Paul's in jail, and he's raving on and on about joy—that has nothing to do with his circumstances and everything to do with something that's BIGGER than his circumstances

Sometime recently I was in what is unfortunately not an uncommon bind: too much to do and not enough time to do it

Any of you ever experience that or is that just my unique neurosis as well?

I'm so familiar with this situation that I've realized that there are levels of too much to do and not enough time to do it

There's low-level too much to do and not enough time to do it, which means that it'll all get done it just won't be very convenient

Then there's mid-level too much to do and not enough time to do it, which is a little more serious

And then there's

“No really, there's no way on God's green earth that I can get all of this done in the time allotted

unless I cut out everything else in my life including eating, sleeping, and going to the bathroom and even then it might be not get done!”

I was approaching that state sometime ago, I forget all the details but it wasn't just work stuff but the home schedule and kids and soccer and all of that and that week was crazy

And in the midst of it someone offered to take some of that stuff OFF of my plate so that I could do some of those extracurricular things like eat and go to the bathroom

And it was a funny thing: I needed the help, there was no doubt about it. But I hesitated to accept it.

Any of you ever experience that? It felt awkward or weird to have this person willingly take on something that was legitimately my responsibility to handle

I think that there's a spectrum here:

some of us ask for help too much and are always looking for other people to get us out of our responsibilities, always looking for the rescue from someone else rather than stepping up to own what's ours to own, that's just not that healthy

but on the other end of the spectrum is the person who refuses to ever ask for or accept help when it's offered—and that's not that healthy either

As we close out our time and come to the end of Philippians today

we find that the occasion for Paul writing to the Philippians is that this is a thank you note for a gift that the Philippians gave to Paul to support him in his travels and his ministry

And as Paul thanks the Philippians he's going to show us what it means to walk this line and this tension between two things:

On the one hand, there's this beautiful biblical picture of inter-dependence that challenges and corrects those of us who are resistant to receiving help from others

And on the other end, he's going to talk about this power available to us that is the secret to being content in all things

And that has nothing to do with other people and everything to do with our own individual connection with God

Turn to Philippians 4:10, just that one verse for now Paul writes this:

10 I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it.

For those of you who are new, when I first started serving here a little over two years ago I had never served in a church before

I had only worked with college students doing campus ministry but never in a church context

So I was a little a little stressed out that I wasn't going to know what to do with old people like Mark Stith who was up here leading worship a few minutes ago!

Those first few weeks were a lot of transition and a lot of internal stress and anxiety

And one morning, completely out of the blue I got an email from an old pastor, not the pastor from the church I had just come from or even the church before that

This was my pastor from when we lived in Richmond, Virginia about eight years prior who I hadn't been in regular contact with since we had moved!

And he emailed me to tell me that he and the whole church staff had been praying for me that morning because they knew about my transition here to Chatham Community Church

And in the midst of all the stressed out voices in my head,

This email was like the voice of the Lord telling me that he was with me and for me

and it cut through all the static and noise like Drano and brought a tremendous sense of comfort and encouragement

for at least a few minutes there was this invitation to breath, to rest, and to remember that God was active and at work, including by calling people to be praying for me

Paul here celebrates that his old friends the Philippians had renewed their concern for him by delivering to him a financial gift

and it had blessed him and encouraged him while he was in jail, just like that email from my former pastor blessed and encouraged and renewed me during a stressful time

Notices, that Paul rejoices *in the Lord*

And he rejoices in the Lord because he knew just like I knew that it's the Lord who is the one who puts people on our hearts and calls us to help meet their needs

The Lord is the one who spurred the Philippians to give their gift and so Paul rejoices and gives thanks to the Lord,

Who had moved the Philippians to renew their concern for Paul by meeting a practical, specific need he had

Let me talk for a minute with my friends who cannot accept help from others.

Sometimes, not always but sometimes, the Lord is prompting other people to offer to help you.

And we had a great conversation about this in my small group that if and when we decline that help, there are a number of ways this does damage:

1. It is a blessing to others to serve. When you refuse to let them serve you, you are cutting them off from the joy of serving, refusing to allow them to experience that joy
2. Sometimes you need it!
3. If the Lord has prompted them to offer you that help, you are not simply declining them, you are saying NO to the Lord who has moved them to offer to serve you.

If Paul had sent the money back to the Philippians and said "NO THANKS, don't want your money" it would not have only been rude the Philippians who gave the gift

It would have been dishonoring and disobeying the Lord who had prompted the Philippians to give the gift in the first place

he wouldn't have just been saying "NO" to the Philippians but the God who stirred them up to give the help to Paul

My friends who do not like to ask for or receive help, there are many words that might describe you:

resourceful, proficient, smart, achieving, GIFTED, maybe proud and stubborn

But the rejoicing and the joy that Paul experiences and describes here is reserved for those who know the blessedness of being able to receive ALL of God's gifts, however they might come at us, in whatever form they might take—including through other people

Starting next week, there are going to be all kinds of offers to you each Sunday for prayer. Some of you won't need it.

But MANY and I mean MANY of you over the next 8 or so weeks WILL need some time to pray or be prayed for at some point

And my hope and my plea with you is to not miss out on the rejoicing that comes on the other side of receiving a gift that someone wants to give you in prayer!

From this place of gratitude to the Philippians, Paul goes on to call those of us who are perhaps over-eager for help

to embrace a core secret to the joy that we've been talking about these past couple of months

11 I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. 12 I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.

Americans love secrets, don't we?

How many of you know anyone who's a conspiracy theorist type person? How many of you know someone who just loves to gossip?

As a culture we're obsessed with secrets and secret knowledge:

cop shows and all the various CSI's are not only the #1 shows because of the great acting although LL Cool J is quite talented

and it's not only because as a culture we love violence, which we do but it's also because we love secrets and figuring out secrets!

Paul says he's learned a secret to something that we all want but almost none of us know how to get

He's learned the secret to ***contentedness***.

There's three key words here: learned, secret, and contentedness

Contentedness is the goal here, it's the subject and object of what Paul's talking about

And before he gives that to us this morning we've got to ask ourselves a fundamental question: do I want it?

Do I want contentedness? Is that a value for me?

Or have I grown so accustomed and so used to being discontent that I'm kind of content with my discontent

I'm kind of happy with that gnawing feeling of discontent, that kind of keeps me energized and motivated to go after the next thing?

It's tricky because discontent is a very powerful motivator, isn't it? It can get us up in the morning and keep us moving!

One person in my small group said that his life was basically moving from one degree of discontentedness to another!

And we kind of floundered around trying to get a good definition of what contentedness was and what it wasn't

And what we found as a small group was that it was much easier to say what contentedness ISN'T than what it is

it's not apathy, it's not ambivalence, not a zen-like dis-engagement or detachment from life

Paul was a passionate, fully engaged man who rode the roller coaster of loving and serving and being invested and caring deeply about the people who he invested in

One of my mentors along the way introduced me to a phrase that was very helpful for me in this: he said he was content but not satisfied

He was leading our campus ministry and we were talking about kind of the state of where things were

and he said he was content, there was plenty of evidence of the Lord at work and lives being changed by Jesus

but he was not satisfied, wasn't going to just sit back and coast, there was a whole lot more to be done and a whole campus to be reached

And so he was content but not satisfied. Another way of talking about this that's been helpful for me in this journey has been to identify "holy discontent."

There are things that God has a holy discontent about and he invites me to share in his holy discontent—over the state of the world, the situations where people are being exploited, injustice, exploitation, stuff that's just NOT right

These are the things that God is discontent with and he invites us to share in his holy discontent

So there's holy discontent and holy dis-satisfaction and those are good things

But if I were to be honest about what's going on in my head and my heart and what's driving most of my decisions about what I buy, how I relate to people, what I try to accomplish

it's not a whole lot about holy discontent, it's mostly just discontent—
sometimes moderately selfish and sometimes grotesquely selfish
sometimes just going with the flow of the culture or what the world tells me I should be discontent about

And here's the thing about discontent that's not holy: it kills joy. Discontent will always displace joy in our hearts whenever it's not a holy discontent

If we want this permanent, lasting joy, we have to weed out of our hearts the discontent that gets planted there in so many subtle ways each and every day

And so together we've gotta' ask the question: do I really want to know the secret to Paul's contentedness and apply it to my own life or not?

Another key word here is "learned"

as we kicked this around in my small group this past week I asked "How do you think Paul *learned* contentedness" and someone immediately said, "Practice"

Contentedness is learned as we practice it, as we cultivate it; we learn contentedness as we practice it

And it struck me as we were talking about it that it's not just contentedness that requires practice

BOTH contentedness AND discontentedness require practice
both are practiced and become habits, habituated behaviors that we move toward without even thinking about it

It just so happens that I'm very gifted when it comes to practicing discontentedness in my life!

I've spent years and years practicing, I've got it down to an art form!

And that inner dialogue, that inner conversation, the habituated thoughts in my heart and mind that I've been working on to perfection over the past 40 years of my life

has very often and most often propelled me in the direction of discontent

And the next morning after small group I just had to confess to the Lord that I've practiced discontent my whole life and I needed new patterns of thought, I needed him to forgive me and help me practice contentedness

How about you? What have you been practicing in your heart and mind this past week? This past month? This past year? This past 10 years? This past 40 years?

Paul has learned the secret to being content

he's achieved this state of contentedness, and we've got to ask ourselves if we even WANT contentedness

and he's gotten to this place by learning it, by practicing, and we've got to ask IF we want contentedness, are we willing to practice it, to learn it

Because there's a secret involved in this practicing and learning, and here's Paul's secret, re-reading what we just read and finishing his thought:

11 I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. 12 I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. 13 I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

We said at the outset of the series that every few verses in the book of Philippians we get a phrase or sentence that's been crotche'd or knitted or quilted or made into a cutesy hallmark card with dandelions and kittens and sunsets and bunnies

This is our last one and perhaps the most quoted and quilted of them all!

Paul's secret to contentment, his secret to having contentment and ultimately JOY in ALL THINGS and in the midst of all situations and circumstances

Has come as he's brought Jesus in WITH HIM into those situations.

Every single situation is evaluated and looked at and considered and experienced NOT ONLY through an earthly perspective

Whether Paul's in jail or being chased down by authorities or teaching or tent-making or building a church or barely surviving ship-wrecks

What he sees is never the last word on his experience.

All of this is run through the lens of Jesus

he is content and has joy in all things as he embraces the presence of Jesus in the midst of those things and as he looks at all his experiences through the lens of Jesus

Discontent is the outcome or product of how you're measuring your life, by what standard are you measuring your life's experiences

Discontent is all about expectations and expectations are not made out of thin air, they come along with our understanding of how the world is supposed to work and how we're supposed to relate to it

As Paul experiences the crazy ups and downs of his life, the primary grid, the primary tool of evaluation
his expectations about what his life is all about and what he deserves or expects

All comes from Jesus who is his primary reference point and his primary guide through his life to help him make sense of his life

My friends, all of us have some grid, some paradigm, some way of evaluating our lives and the people and situations around us

In order to make sense out of all of it—we want meaning, we want purpose, we crave a sense that life can make sense somehow

When our experiences don't match our expectations or what we think we're entitled to or what we're hoping for or think we want in life

Then we experience discontentment

But what Paul is doing here is saying that the voice he's listening to, and the grid he's using to evaluate his life, and what he's expecting out of his life

Are all being sourced in and all come from Jesus

who is the one who gives him strength and wisdom and understanding and joy in the midst of all things, all of his life

even the stuff that on the surface should generate nothing but discontent and confusion and anger and frustration

Last week my family and I went to Arizona, spent one day at the Grand Canyon, it was awesome.

And over the course of an afternoon we stopped at three or four different viewing areas to try to take in the enormity of it

And it struck me as we were there for just one day that in order to really comprehend the vastness and beauty of this thing

You probably needed to not just hit a couple of roadside observation viewing areas

To REALLY understand and grasp the enormity of the Grand Canyon

you needed a guide who can take you all the way down to the bottom and hike or raft down at the bottom for several days

and who can point out all the different rock formations and tell you all about the history of how this thing formed, tell you the full story of it

And then you probably needed to get in a helicopter with the guide and see it from way up on high

You need a guide who can tell you the full story and give you multiple perspectives to really understand the vastness and beauty of this thing
My friends, to understand the vastness and beauty and wonder of this world, including and especially of YOU, you need a guide who knows more than you do

And Jesus offers to be your guide through life, walking with you every moment of every day to help you to understand, to see, to hear, to know what is true, right, good.

The past ten weeks or so we've been talking about the joy of all things as we're reading through Philippians
and my own true confession is that digging into this has showed me how much I struggle in my own life to know joy

My friends, for those of you who like me battle discontentment and as a consequence have a hard time hanging onto joy

Paul's secret is that he's practiced letting Jesus be his guide through all his difficulties, all his challenges, over and over again

He's let Jesus be his strength, let Jesus be the one to tell him not just the story of what's going around him in his circumstances

Paul has let Jesus be the one to tell him his OWN story, explain his OWN life—Jesus has been the guide, the voice, the strength, the resource, the presence who is with him at every point, at every turn

And in Jesus, through Jesus, by Jesus, Paul has learned the joy of all things

As we close out this series, I want to finish where we started week one as this great little book gives us three questions to wrestle with when we feel our joy-meter is running low:

1. What's my primary story?

Another way we might ask this question or an addendum is "and who's telling me my primary story?"

Am I getting my primary story from the culture that I need to achieve a certain thing, be a certain way, fit into a mold or pattern?

And that mold or pattern could even be a counter-cultural mold or pattern—it's funny how you can be with a group of people who all pride themselves on being non-conformists

And they all look exactly the same—all dress the same, talk the same, have the same ways of expressing their crazy rebellion

One person once commented that there was an awful lot of conformity in their group's non-conformity!

What's my primary story? Are we willing to let Jesus be our guide who tells us our story and the story of our lives

Or are we basically telling our own story through the lens of discontent that gets generated and created by our own impulses and the world around us?

What's your story and who are you listening to, what voices are you allowing to interpret and explain and generate your expectations?

2. Who are you walking with?

Here again in this passage, Paul takes joy because of his relationships, his community is a source of joy for Paul as it has been throughout this book

Now this will look different for different people, we've all got different personalities and temperaments and different styles of relating

But at some level, at some point, we've got to have people in our lives whom we can live out this beautiful picture we get in the Scripture

That is NEITHER co-dependent and irresponsible NOR is it independent and stubbornly refusing to get help

It is gloriously and healthily inter-dependent

the primary image we get in the Scriptures are of a body—each one of us as a hand or ear or foot or nose and each of us unique and stand-alone

but each of us in different ways in different seasons of our lives relying in a healthy and appropriate way on one another

And finally:

3. Where is your confidence?

Because there's no such thing as permanent joy without confidence

Joy can only flourish in difficult and hard times when we're confident about something or someone that's bigger than our hard times

who has the power to work good purposes in the midst of our hard times.

Paul here declares that Jesus is his strength, he's confident in the strength and power of Jesus to carry him through difficult times

And Paul's practiced, practiced, practiced trusting Jesus, being confident in him even in the midst of disappointments, and even when he's prayed for stuff and God's said no

In the midst of all of his circumstances and all the extraordinary challenges that Paul faced

And even in the midst of his disappointments, Paul has rock-solid, unshakeable confidence that Jesus Christ who reigns and rules over all the cosmos has the power to redeem him, sustain him, and help him

Each of us will end up having to fight for joy, learn how to experience and hold onto joy

If we can begin to practice Jesus-type answers to these three questions, just like this Scripture we've looked at over the past 10 weeks has invited us to

Then with Jesus as our guide, we, too, can know the joy of all things.

PRAY