



Greater Joy

Part 1 – Sharing Together in God’s Grace

Pastor Ted Cunningham

Today, we’re starting a brand-new series called *Greater Joy*. We’re going to be going by the Book of Philippians, verse by verse, all the way through the end of the year. So, the question I have for you is how many of you woke up with joy this morning? How many of you, not so much? You can be really honest. This is going to be a reset for joy.

I am married to a joyful woman. She is an early joyful woman; she gets up early in the morning. She gets up before I do. Let me tell you, she is ready to go when I wake up. Usually there is a lot of great life change that’s going to happen around 6:00 am at our house. I woke up a couple of weeks ago... I’m not kidding, she’s usually rocking in her chair. She was so excited for me to be up and to share God’s plans for our lives at around 6:00 am.

A couple of weeks ago, she got passionate about health again. She goes, “We’re going to get healthy in how we eat.” Let’s be really honest, when she says *we*, she means *me*. I just had this brief moment where she was talking about everything we’re going to change and how we’re going to eat and what we’re going to do. I looked at her and said, “I think the next thing out of your mouth is going to be something about our coffee in the morning. Are you threatening our coffee with this whole thing?” She goes, “Well, I do want to...” Folks, for two weeks, I’ve been half-caf, which means half the joy. Let’s just be really honest.

I saw this online, and I texted it to her. It was just the... God sent it to me. “By replacing your morning coffee with green tea, you can lose up to 87% of what little joy you still have left in your life.” If you’re new to our church, I want you to hear this. We will never do that to you. We will never switch the coffee at Woodland Hills to have half-caf. You’re getting full strength. I’m going to start, you finish it if you grew up in church. It’s going to scare some people who didn’t that are sitting next to you. But give it to me with full strength. “I’ve got the joy, joy, joy, joy down in my heart, down in my heart, down in my heart.”

Stop because there are people going, “This is a cult! I don’t want to be here!”

One pastor said it this week and I thought it was perfect. “Many of you have the joy so deep down in your heart that your face hasn’t found it yet.” So, we’re going for joy in this series.

This is just a little diagram to explain how it works. I want joy deep down in my heart, but we’re going to know clearly from this series... Over 19 times the word joy, rejoice, or delight is going to be mentioned.

And our joy is found in Christ Jesus. He's the source of life, he's the source of joy. Many of us are robbed of our joy from what we call joy killers and that would be people, places, or things.

Let me tell you... Gary Smalley said it all the time. Jesus is your source of life. If you look for people, places, or things to be your source, you will be disappointed and crushed. Let it be the overflow. So, when joy is deep down in your heart, the overflow is gratefulness. And in this series, an especially today, as Paul writes this letter to the church at Philippi, he is expressing gratefulness toward believers in Christ Jesus. When he prays, his first thought... And in the morning, I hope this is true of all of us. Before we get out of bed, our prayers begin with just prayers of thanksgiving. Sometimes our prayers can descend into just requests and supplication, but that we would be grateful for those in our life, grateful for those who serve alongside us, grateful for those who partner with us in the gospel. Paul shares that, the gospel and the sharing of it.

When I have the joy of Jesus in my heart, it makes me want to share the good news with others. It's an overflow or like Jeremiah would say, "It's a fire withing my bones." I can't help it. You've been around joyful people. It comes out. They can't hold it in when they have the joy of the Lord. It's going to affect our praise and our worship and our confidence.

Now, here's why this circle is coming back in. We know who our source is. We should be practicing this more. If this is the overflow, it also becomes a spiritual discipline. You remember when Jesus shared with the church at Ephesus. They were doing great things. They were persevering, they were standing up to false teachers. But what does it say in Revelation 2: 4-5? **4 Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first.** You've drifted in your faith, you've drifted from your first love. But the Lord always gives us a way back.

If you're in here today, you've drifted from your faith and you know it's just something marginal in your life right now, there is always a way back. What does Jesus say? **5 Consider how far you have fallen!** If your joy is absent right now and you do not have the joy of the Lord in your life, consider that today. Think back to when you did. Think back to when you were first saved, when you first placed faith in Jesus, and that joy, that gratefulness, the prayer, the gospel you were sharing with other people that was flowing out of you. Consider those days and then what does it say? **Repent...** It's never a word we need to be scared of or afraid of. We need to repent and confess our sins before our Father in heaven. And then I love this: **...and do the things you did at first.** Go back to that.

So, today, we're going to jump in and look at some of these hallmarks, a mark of a Christian who has joy. You can see that this letter is a... You know Paul wrote a lot of letters to churches. I'm going to give you a few of them. In Romans, he wrote that strong, logical, gospel explanation. In 1 Corinthians it was a long book, long letter. He was confronting sin, carnal behavior. In 2 Corinthians, there was more of a forgiveness and a tone of forgiveness and reconciliation. In Galatians, he's fixing doctrinal error. They were adding things to the gospel. He said remember if you do that, that person may be cursed. You don't add to or take anything away from the gospel; you let the gospel be. In Ephesians, it's a doctrinal book. When we get to Philippians, it is a book of joy and gratefulness. It's almost like a missionary thank you letter, thanking the church at Philippi for joining with him.

We're going to jump right into this. Philippians 1: 1-2. **Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus...** This is written from Rome. He is under house arrest. He founded the church at Philippi about ten years prior, so the church is about ten years old when they get this letter. He's in chains for the gospel and he's writing this letter. You're going to see him talk to the church. **To all God's holy people...** The congregation. **...in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons...**

If you are going to be a church, you have to have leaders. So, he's addressing a congregation and the leaders. Yes, we can do ministry outside of the church, but I encourage everyone who desires to do ministry to be plugged in to a local church, and to submit to the authority of the local church because we celebrate and find joy in life in Christ. **2 Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. The church is a body of believers who know that Jesus is their source of joy.** Remind one another of that often and share in the lost and dying world.

I heard a pastor this week in Nashville say... I know I have friends watching right now from Arizona and around the country and we're grateful for this ministry but let me tell you that Woodland Hills, right now, is a supplement to your faith and to your life. You need to be in a local church. I heard this pastor say it and I love it. His name is Scott Sauls. He hears from people all the time. From Seattle, Miami, and other places that say, "You are our church," To which, Pastor Sauls says, "No we are not. And the reason we are not is when you have an emergency in your life, we can't be there for you. When you're part of a local church, we're there for each other. When we gather together, we are the body of believers. We know Jesus is our source, we remind one another of that when we gather, and then we share that with those who are far from God."

Dr. Chuck Swindoll, I love how he thinks. He was talking about this letter, comparing it to all the other letters that Paul wrote. *"Paul didn't write Philippians to answer any profound theological question, to solve some naughty practical problem, or deal with a specific sin. Instead, he wrote to express and encourage joy."* And because Jesus is our source, greater joy is possible in any season or stage of life. There are some of you right now that are tying your joy and happiness and delight and your gladness, your rejoicing to what you're going through. And the reason you have no joy is because you're in a difficult season.

We are coming – I'm praying to my Father in heaven – to the end of a difficult season called a pandemic. We couldn't do anything to get out of a pandemic. We went through that together, but I will tell you, and we are going to see in the text today, I believe as a church we are stronger as a result of it. And you can find joy in the midst of difficult seasons. If you came in here today and you dropped off a three-, five-, and seven-year-old, we're going to need you to pick up that three-, five-, and seven-year-old on your way out. I can't get you through the stage. I can't get you out of the stage of life that you're in. We don't tie our joy to season and stages. We have joy through seasons and stages.

We're coming to Christmas. Some people tie their joy to things and you're looking forward to it. It's going to be a different Christmas because all of your gifts are going to be somewhere out in the Pacific Ocean on ships. It's going to be a fun Christmas. You're going to give everybody a card with a picture of what you were hoping to get them. "This is what I had in mind; you should be grateful. Maybe some other time this will come your way."

We know it's short lived if you tie your joy to things. It's not in people, place, or things. It's in Christ, and it's found in the local church that's led well and cared for. I need you to hold onto that leader part because when we're going end the message today, for those of you who have been hurt by the church, for those of you who have been hurt by leaders and that's caused you to question your faith or be shaky in your faith or maybe to begin to drift in your faith. We can have joy in any season or stage of life, no matter how difficult it is.

3 I thank my God every time I remember you. Do you have relationships in your life that every time you think of the person, this is sound you hear: someone sucking the life right out of you? You know Paul had those relationship, people that drained him. But he's writing with great joy about this group, about this church, because when he thinks about this church, it fills hm with joy. **4 In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy...** I'm always so grateful for what Christ is doing in and through you in his church. **5 because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now...**

Yes, this is a fellowship and I pray that every missionary of our church feels that we are a good partner. I hope when missionaries from Haiti, Tanzania, Indonesia, all across the globe... When missionaries think of Woodland Hills Family Church, my prayer is that they are filled with joy, that they think that is a church that doesn't just send them money, doesn't just send them support every month and pray for them every month and every day. It's not just that. I hope the think we are a people that are constantly looking for ways to bless them. May that always be said of our church. May we be seen as partners in the gospel, here in our local church, in our local community, in the nation, and to the ends of the earth.

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. Until He returns. **7 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.** We're together in this for the sake of Jesus. **8 God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.**

Greater joy requires that we spend time with people who have the joy of the Lord. A lot of you have relationships that drain you. But you need relationships that fill you. Again, people are not the source of life, but the overflow of their heart coming into gratefulness, prayer, thanksgiving, praise, sharing the gospel, coming back. And they become spiritual disciplines that we just keep feeding off of one another, finding joy and joy in the Lord. Do you have those people in your life? If you don't, I'm going to encourage you to find them. If you do and you don't spend a lot of time with them, those are people you need to turn way up. You need to take the other voices, the other people in your life and begin to turn them down and mute them.

We tend to weigh ourselves down with relationships marked by ill feelings, regrets, rejection, and abandonment, and they can consume us. Yes, Paul had those relationships. He was rejected, he was abandoned, he had churches that he had to go to and defend himself and defend his authority as an apostle and defend the gospel. He had a lot of difficult, challenging relationships. The book we are in, the letter written to Philippi, is a book of joy and I'm so thankful for you. But greater joy is found in lifelong partners in Christ Jesus.

9 And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, 10 so that you may be able to discern what is best... If you are in your Bible right now, underline this or highlight it on the app that you're using. Paul here is not speaking about a sentimental love. Most people... And when you hear the world talk about love, you're getting a sentimental love. That is not what Paul is talking about. He's talking about a love that is rooted in knowledge and discernment. **...and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, 11 filled with the fruit of righteousness...** What he is doing in and through you and what it's producing. **...that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.**

We shared a lot about this in the *Armor* series and we are going to see a little bit of it in Philippians. We said that one of the schemes of Satan... He's brilliant because he's made it unloving and unkind to go against him. So, what Christians do is they back away and we're told we're not loving and we're not kind when we stand on truth and when we speak truth. And we said this, and I'm going to say it a different way, but it's similar and you're going to remember it from *Armor*, if you were a part of that series. Joining others in their drift from truth and discernment does not make you a more loving and kinder person. You do not need to join people as they abandon God's Word in order to prove to them that you love them. When you stand for truth, when you stand with Jesus as your source of life and joy, you can speak the truth with courage and boldness and confidence and, like we saw last week, clarity. You can do all of that in love.

Chuck Swindoll has a great illustration with all of this. I just want you to know that all the graphics today, I created on PowerPoint. That's why they all look very kind of emoji-like. I get really excited about it and then people tell me we should have gotten a graphic designer involved in that. So, just go with it for now.

Chuck Swindoll puts it this way. "Love is a free-flowing river." But that's where our culture wants us to stop. Just love, love, and however anybody wants to be loved, cared for, just love. And if you stop loving someone... It gets really confusing. He says, "The banks of this river..." Yes, let love flow through your life. The banks of this river are knowledge and discernment. You go online and love is all people talk about. Do you know what social media is missing? Knowledge and discernment. And lots of it. And when you bring in knowledge and discernment, what are you told? You're not loving. No, these are the banks of this river. I want to be rooted in knowledge and discernment. That's why greater joy establishes boundaries in relationships. It does. And that's exactly what he's saying.

Can I just share this with all of us? And this is every generation. You're like, *these young people need to hear this*. I don't know... you seniors on Facebook, you need to hear this too. Stop pouring your heart out online, expecting everyone to love you. Stop pouring your heart out online, expecting everyone to validate you. Stop pouring your heart out online, expecting affection from the world. Why are believers looking for affection and love from the world? Paul is clearly saying here that we find it in Christ. We find it in our lifelong partnerships within the church. Let me tell you. I don't need it from the world. Jesus is clear. If you stand for me, the world is going to hate you. Too many believers... We are called to love a lost and dying world, but we're not called to spin our wheels all day long and throw discernment to the side and throw knowledge to the side so that the world will love us. That's not at all how this works. Be rooted and grounded in Christ Jesus.

What is he saying to the church at Philippi? We want you to become more loving. We want you to abound in love and joy. How do you do that as a church? With knowledge and discernment. We are spending too much time seeking it from the world when we already have it in Christ. We're spending too much time seeking it from a lost and dying world when it's already been given to us in Jesus.

This has just been hitting me because I know I have many friends who are constantly seek affection online. When you seek affection on social media, remember that many will never see your post. And you're looking for that serotonin hit, or dopamine hit, or whatever, and you post something where you pour your heart out online and you know your friends online and you're like, *oh no why aren't they liking this?* Maybe they didn't even see it, and you're waiting for it. Don't let an algorithm determine your relationships with people. You heard Facebook is changing their name, right? It's no longer going to be Facebook.com; it's going to be Facebook.gov. Oh, stop it. That was a joke. I tried it at the first service, and it didn't work either. I was like, *I'm double down in the second service*, and it didn't work there either. So, we're going to dump it at 11:30... or maybe 11:30 has a better sense of humor than the first two services and they may take it better than y'all did.

You have many real relationships with people in the church but you're online as well. They care; they just don't have the capacity right now to show it. They have a lot going on. They're raising a three and a five and a seven year old. Many of them care but they don't know how to help. You're looking for something that you're not getting. I just want you to know you already have it. You have it in Christ. You have it in this church. Plug into relationships that will pour back into you the joy of the Lord. Let's be honest, many of your "friends" don't care.

12 Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters... We're constantly going back to the church. **...that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel.** The people coming against me in Rome; it's serving the gospel. Being chained to a Roman soldier under house arrest; it's serving the gospel. **13 As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard...**

When I read that this week, I was just intrigued to think about it. Can you imagine being the Roman soldier chained to the apostle Paul? Just get in his world for a little bit. Sometimes we don't get into all the other characters when we read scripture. And the comedian in me comes out. I developed a 30-minute bit off of this. I can just imagine the soldier going home to his family at night. "How was your day at work, dad?" "Oh, you have no idea." "What did you do?" "I was chained to this guy named Paul." "What did he do?" "I don't know but he writes letters out loud all day long. He talks about Jesus all the time. He never stops talking about Jesus. I've asked my superiors if we can chain him to a wall and not to me. Let me stand outside of his rented house. Don't make me go in here."

...and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. "What did you do to get in here, man?" "Well let me tell you. I've written a couple of letters about it. Let me tell you about Jesus." Do you think any of these Roman soldiers came to faith? Whatever season or stage of life you're in right now, don't waist it. Stop wasting it. See it as an opportunity to share the gospel of Jesus in whatever season or stage of life you're in. We want to wait for joy in the next season or stage of life. That's called destination addiction. We're not waiting for joy in the next season or stage, we've got it in this because we have it in Christ and we're going to share.

He's chained to these soldiers and guess what? It's gotten out to the whole palace guard. "What dude did you get today?" "I'm back with Paul." "If you ain't saved yet, you probably will be by the end of the shift."

14 And because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord. My chains have served a great purpose. The season of life that I'm in, great purpose. ...**and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear.**

I'm wondering if he's thinking through Joseph as he writes this. Remember when Joseph, at the end of Genesis, is reassuring his brothers. All that they put him through. All the pain they brought him. Do you think Joseph went through some difficult seasons? Yeah, from a very young age. And what do we read in Genesis 50: 20? **You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.**

If I can end to those of you right now... And I hear it. I want to end with those who are questioning their faith because of bad church leaders or church hurt. I spoke with a counselor a month or so ago and said, "I make my entire living healing three wounds: the father wound, the mother wound, and the church wound." I know some of you have been hurt by the church. I've been hurt by the church. I've caused hurt in the church. I'm not a perfect leader, I get that. I get I've caused many wounds over the years. I have tried to make amends for the those.

It's becoming popular now. There is a podcast right now on the rise and fall of the large mega church. I just caution us as a church that we don't turn the church into an episode of dateline. I know Jim Gaffigan does a whole bit on it. But about 20 years ago went all in on murder. He says we're all addicted to it; we just loved these shows on murder. And if you watch it, almost every episode is about spousal murder. If you didn't know any better, you'd think most marriages end in murder.

I heard one pastor call our addiction to failure in the church... In all these podcasts and blogs, he's calling it failure porn. He says we just love and can't get enough of it when people fail. But we know it causes hurt and deep wounds.

I serves in a church in Phoenix years ago. Many people. The church grew. God did amazing things in that church. The pastor was having multiple affairs. The pastor was a dear friend of mine. He still is a dear friend of mine. He was an alcoholic and a sex addict. I remember talking to people who came to faith in Jesus in that church. They were disciplined in that church, their marriage was saved in that church. After my friend fell, they started to ask me questions like, "Is all of it fake?" "Is all of it for naught?" "Is it insincere?" "Does it even matter." "Is everything I've poured my life into..." I was able to tell them "Absolutely not! My friend spoke truth. He gave the gospel." Maybe you've never seen this before in scripture, but here's what we read as we close out our text today.

15 It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. He's going to go straight to the motives of preachers. **16 The latter do so out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel.** So, there were people coming against him. Some commentaries say that they saw a gap, with Paul imprisoned and under house arrest, that this was their opportunity to get out and

make something of themselves. **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.** Now look at this question. I had to really sit in this for a while this week because when people... We went through a terrible church split 14 years ago and I wanted the person who left to just be like, *done with you, and I hope nothing you do succeeds.* That's not what Paul is saying here. **18 But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached.** Have you ever seen that before in the scripture? **...And because of this I rejoice.**

Chuck Swindoll said it this way, "A heretic..." meaning someone who teaches a false gospel, which is why Paul wrote to the Galatians. "... with sincere motives is still preaching a gospel that has no power to save anyone." So, it doesn't matter. If he's a heretic, it doesn't matter what his motives are; his gospel is not the gospel of Jesus and won't save anyone. "But if the presentation of the truth, even by those who aren't living in accordance with it..." Can I repeat that? "...a presentation of the truth, even by those who aren't living in accordance with it. "...still has the power to bring a person to faith. Never forget it is the work of the Holy Spirit, not his empowered preachers that save people."

So, if you've given up on the church because someone hurt you in the church, let me just encourage you. When leaders fail you, Jesus remains your source of joy... period. Keep your eyes on him. Stay focused on him.

Father, we look forward to working through this book, the book of joy. I pray that it stirs up joy in this congregation. I pray that those who knew it was deep down in their heart at one point and it's still somewhere in there, but they are just stirred up during this season. I pray that we share it with each other more. When we're praying tomorrow morning, tonight and someone comes to mind that brings great joy to us that we would pick up the phone, we would text, we would call, we would encourage. And that we as a church, our love for people, our love for each other would abound more and more. That this love and this joy would grow in knowledge and in discernment.

I am one pastor grateful for a congregation that has joy. And I just pray for the one who has never placed faith in Jesus that today would be the day of their salvation, that they would confess their sins, they would repent, and cry out to Jesus to be the source of their life, that he is Lord and has been raised from the dead. That if they call on his name, they would be saved.

We pray all of this in the good and mighty name of Jesus. Amen.