

CHOOSING TO BE JOYFUL

PHILIPPIANS 4:2-9

*BEING HAPPY IN LIFE IS A CHOICE WE CAN ALL CHOOSE.
WE FIND JOY THROUGH BEING AT PEACE WITH OURSELVES, WITH
OTHERS, AND WITH GOD.*

Outline

I. **LIVING IN PEACE** (VS 2-3)

We Bring Glory To God And Credibility To His Gospel Message By Living In Peace.

- A. **BEING AT PEACE** (2)
 - B. **FACILITATING PEACE** (3)
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II. **GOD'S DESIRE TO GIVE US PEACE** (VS 4-7)

God Provides Us With Peace. He Has Promised To Provide For All Our Needs And He Has Promised To Never Leave Us Nor Forsake Us.

- A. **REASON FOR JOY** (4-5)
 - B. **REMEDY FOR WORRY** (6)
 - C. **REASON FOR PEACE** (7)
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III. **OUR RESPONSIBILITY TO PURSUE PEACE** (VS 8-9)

God Provides Peace But We Are Responsible To Pursue It And Take Hold Of It.

- A. **RIGHT THINKING** (VS 8)
 - B. **RIGHT BEHAVIOR** (9a)
 - C. **RIGHT FEELINGS** (9b)
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CHOOSING TO BE JOYFUL

PHILIPPIANS 4:2-9

I am really beginning to get a new understanding of the book of Philippians. It seems to me to be a book about church life. In other words, if one of the major themes in this letter is about being joyful, then this joy is meant to be connected to the body of Christ. Remember, Paul said that the purposes of our individual lives as they are connected to the church are to bring glory to God and credibility to the gospel message. That means that the way we conduct ourselves as believers will either attract people to God or repel people from God. How we conduct ourselves towards other believers and unbelievers in some sense demonstrates the truths of God's message of salvation, or casts doubt on the reality of God and the salvation message.

Joy is one of the characteristics that should permeate our lives. In the context of this letter, it seems to me that Paul says that joy comes from peace. In other words, as we learn to live at peace with God through faith and obedience, as we learn to live at peace with other believers through sacrificial love and service, as we learn to live at peace with unbelievers through grace and mercy, and as we learn to live at peace with ourselves through humility ... it is then ~~that~~ we discover the joy that God has for us.

But it seems to me that we miss joy because we think that worldly things can bring us joy. Let me give you an example.

We spent a week with some friends on vacation. The women had gotten up early to go eat breakfast and the men got up a little later. We were seated on the other side of a partition so the ladies didn't know we were there.

One of the ladies asked, "What would it take to make you completely happy?" Now keep in mind there was a partition so I'm not sure if this was my wife's answer, but I think it sounded like her voice. She said, "Here's what it would take to make me happy. I'd like to be sitting here having a cup of gourmet coffee, looking at a *Wheaties* box with my son's picture on it. My daughter would be on the cover of *Business Week*, and my boyfriend would be on the cover of *Playgirl Magazine*. ... And my husband's picture would be on the back of the milk carton."

Like I said, I'm not sure if that was Luings' voice or not. But I do know this. If we are looking for things in this world to bring us joy, we'll never find it.

I'd really like us to see how the themes in this letter dovetail with one another. Paul has told us that our purpose is to bring glory to God and credibility to the message of the gospel. We do that by being unified. We are to stand together against any threat from the outside. We help one another take a stand against the temptations and sins in this world. We hold one another up when we are weak. We can stand against persecution, ridicule, and temptation.

We are also to be unified from within. We are to love one another, serve one another, and sacrifice for one another in all humility. In humility we learn to depend on God for everything. In humility we come to accept the fact that we are always in need of God's grace and mercy. In humility we can accept that all of us are always in need of God's grace and mercy. This attitude will allow us to enjoy the journey of life as we learn to receive and extend grace and mercy.

And then this portion of the letter starts out with two church leaders who are in conflict with one another. They are not only losing out on joy in their personal lives; their dispute is threatening to suck the joy out of the whole church. I want all of us this morning to hear the main idea loud and clear. **BEING HAPPY IN LIFE IS A CHOICE WE CAN ALL CHOOSE. WE FIND JOY THROUGH BEING AT PEACE WITH OURSELVES, WITH OTHERS, AND WITH GOD.** Joy is a choice. However the catch is that learning to be at peace is where we find lasting joy.

I. LIVING IN PEACE (VS 2-3)

*We Bring Glory To God And Credibility
To His Gospel Message By Living In Peace.*

Let's start with *living in peace* as described in verses 2-3. Here is that theme emerging again in Paul's letter. **WE BRING GLORY TO GOD AND CREDIBILITY TO HIS GOSPEL MESSAGE BY LIVING IN PEACE.** Jesus said that the world would recognize that we belonged to Him by the love we have for one another. Paul has told the Philippians in several different ways that we need to be unified and humble in order to stand against threats from outside the church and division within the church. And now, we are presented with two very important and prominent leaders in the

church who are at odds with one another. Let me make just a quick aside concerning the role of women, both in the church and in society in the city of Philippi . Unlike many other parts of the ancient world, Macedonian women in the city of Philippi played a very important role in civil and religious endeavors. Women were considered as complete equals with men. It seems from the book of Acts and from this passage that women held very powerful positions in the church in Philippi .

Let's just try and put ourselves in these two women's shoes. In our congregation, they may be very influential board members, perhaps one is even the board chairperson. They are up on the platform with the other leaders while perhaps Epaphroditus reads this letter out loud to the congregation. In the beginning of the letter, Paul singles out the overseers and deacons for a special greeting. The letter goes on about the need for unity, humility, sacrificial love and service. The letter talks about setting aside personal agendas in order to consider others better than ourselves. Then all of sudden, out of nowhere, Epaphroditus reads this sentence from Paul, "I am begging you Euodia and Syntyche to get together and be of one mind, one heart, and one Spirit. Set aside your differences. I know the Lord Jesus wants this and you can only accomplish this through the Lord Jesus." Can we even begin to imagine how embarrassing that would be to be singled out like that in front of the whole congregation? What could these two women say or do?

We do not know what these two women were arguing about. However, whatever it was, it may have been causing people to choose sides. It usually does. Leaders must be very concerned about the health of the church. If leaders are so caught up in their own issues, or their own hurts, or their own problems or agendas, then perhaps they need to step down for a time until they find themselves emotionally healthy again.

These women were great and notable women. What kind of example were they setting in the church? Think about it. They were dividing the church and non-Christians outside the church would find it easy to mock and criticize Christianity. Who would ever want to follow Jesus if angry or petty people were leaders?

I think these verses are addressed primarily to leaders because we are the ones who are to set the tone and example to the church. But if all believers want to find joy, they must first pursue peace.

A. BEING AT PEACE (2)

This whole passage is peppered with phrases like "in the Lord," "in Christ Jesus," "The Lord," "to God," "of God," etc.

Look at this phrase in verse 2. I think the phrase "in the Lord," is meant to be applied in three different ways. Paul says, "I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche." That word *plead* is a very emotive and powerful word. It is the same root word that is used as another Name for the Holy Spirit. It means to beg, to plead, to comfort, and to exhort. It often carries the idea of the authority of God. So Paul could be begging these ladies in the Name and Authority of Jesus.

Secondly, he wants them to agree with each other in the Lord. That word *agree* means to be one in heart, mind, and purpose. They are to be of one mind, heart, and purpose in the Lord Jesus Christ. Their goal is to serve Jesus as leaders in the church. That is to be their goal. Arguing threatens to prevent the church from reaching that goal.

Thirdly, they can only be humble and be reconciled through the power and love of Jesus. They can only lay down their hurt, their pride, and their agendas as they fellowship with Jesus in His suffering and death. They can only be restored as they experience the power of His resurrection in actively loving one another.

The reputation and the survival of this church are at stake. Leaders must be mature, humble, loving, and sacrificial. Unity among the leaders is to be an example of what unity in the church should look like.

B. FACILITATING PEACE (3)

Verse 3 reminds us that Jesus commanded us to be peacemakers, and as such, we are to be facilitating peace. Please don't miss out on what's at stake here. Note how influential these two women are. Paul said that they have contended side by side with him. We don't know who Clement was but he must have been famous in the Philippian church. Paul, Clement, Euodia and Syntyche stood back to back and fought side by side in order to preach the gospel. They took their lumps right alongside the men. These women's names are written in the book of life. They are genuine believers. They are godly women. They are strong and powerful. That's why their disagreement is so devastating.

Paul now enlists the help of another prominent leader to intercede. Again, we don't know who this was, but the Philippians certainly knew who Paul was appealing to. Paul refers to him as a genuine coworker in the Philippian church. Paul is acknowledging publicly that Euodia and Syntyche's argument is life-threatening to the church. This public appeal is meant to demonstrate how critical this is, and by asking another prominent leader to intercede, would demonstrate to the congregation how important

unity is.

We always have to be careful if we have dynamic and powerful personalities. Those same qualities that enable us to excel in our missions for Christ, if used for personal agendas, can destroy people and the church.

Joy is a result of peace. We must be committed to bringing everyone along. The attitude of leaders should be the same as Moses. When Moses left Egypt, he didn't leave any Hebrew behind. All the Israelites, the strong, the weak, the old, the young, the healthy, and the sick. Everyone made it safely out of Egypt. That is the attitude the leaders of the church are to have.

A good example of how we find joy through peace is the way business is conducted on the board. On almost every issue over the past 15 years that I have been here, we have worked to a complete consensus among the board members. I can honestly say that working together with your board members and leaders has energized me over the years. They have saved me many times from making bad decisions. I'd like to publicly thank all of you who have served over the years and continue to serve. You have made this job a real joy for me. Thank you. That working together in harmony brings joy. As leaders of the church, and as church members, we must remember that it really does matter how we live in peace with one another. Because **WE BRING GLORY TO GOD AND CREDIBILITY TO HIS GOSPEL MESSAGE BY LIVING IN PEACE.**

By the way, these principles also work at home. Where a husband and wife are living in peace, where there is a spirit of unity, living with one heart, mind and purpose, there will be a house filled with joy.

II. GOD'S DESIRE TO GIVE US PEACE (VS 4-7)

God Provides Us With Peace. He Has Promised To Provide For All Our Needs And He Has Promised To Never Leave Us Nor Forsake Us.

This concept is reinforced in a different way in verses 4-7; God's desire is to give us peace. **GOD PROVIDES US WITH PEACE. HE HAS PROMISED TO PROVIDE FOR ALL OUR NEEDS AND HE HAS PROMISED TO NEVER LEAVE US NOR FORSAKE US.** God knows that we can only find joy in life when we find peace. And since God continually provides us with all our needs, He will certainly provide us with peace. If you quickly look through these four verses, you can

easily see that God intends for us to experience peace and joy as a result of His power and presence in our lives. Each verse contains a phrase that refers to God. Let's examine them.

A. REASON FOR JOY (4-5)

In verses 4-5 God's presence is given as a reason for joy. Paul starts off this section by saying, "Rejoice in the Lord always." Then it's almost as if he hears what he is saying and he pauses to think. He is in a Roman prison, perhaps shortly to be executed. His favorite church is threatened by false teachers and they face persecution from a very Roman nationalistic spirit in this city. The church may be threatened from within by two quarreling leaders. Paul thinks about it a little more, points at his secretary who is taking down the letter, waves at him to keep writing and says, "I will say it again, Rejoice!" Huh? If I were sitting in the congregation, I would really be confused at this point. Paul has painted a pretty bleak picture. He is in jail, my church is being threatened from without and within, and I am now supposed to rejoice? There is no mistake. Paul said that I am to always rejoice. Look at the important phrase in verse 4. He says to rejoice "in the Lord." I am not to rejoice in my circumstances. Did you catch that? We tend to be happy if things are going our way. If we are not experiencing any difficulties, if we are not sick, and if everyone around us is behaving, then we are filled with joy. However, when loved ones get sick or die, when we get sick, when people betray us, or we lose money, or if in general we run into a streak of bad luck, ... then we lose our joy. The problem is that we have learned to look for happiness in our circumstances. So when things go well, we are happy. When things go poorly, we are sad.

But Paul tells us to rejoice always. You see, the love, power, and presence of God are constant. He is always with us and He passionately loves us.

And Paul emphasizes that point in verse 5. He says, "The Lord is near." God is always spatially near. In other words, God is near to us because He is omnipresent. But more than that, He lives in you if you are a believer. In his letter to the Romans Paul said that there is nothing in this world, not trouble, hardship, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger, or even the sword can separate us from God's love in Jesus. And nothing in the spiritual world, not life, death, angels or demons, not the present, future or any power can separate us from God's love in Jesus. To sum it up Paul says that nothing in all creation can ever separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Jesus is near to those who have received Him.

Jesus is near in space, but He is also near in time. Before Jesus died and rose from the dead, He promised to physically return, claim us and set all the wrongs right. Today,

we are almost 2,000 years closer to the time Jesus will return and fulfill those promises. Every day that passes brings us one day closer to Christ's return.

And so if we truly believe that Jesus is returning soon, and if we believe He lives in us and promised to never leave us nor forsake us, that is a real reason for joy. The word translated *gentleness* in verse 5 is difficult to translate with one word in English. For all the Italian and Spanish speakers here, a better word would be *simpatico*. Be gentle, kind, charming, well-mannered, patient, generous, and gracious. As we come to realize that God is always near to us in every way, we can start to be *simpatico*. As we come to feel God's presence we start to feel joy. As our lives start to reflect that *simpatico* spirit, we become a source of joy to others around us, and that also brings more joy to us.

B. REMEDY FOR WORRY (6)

Knowing that God is near is a real reason to be filled with joy. But there are even more reasons for joy. Verse 6 informs us that God's love is the remedy for worry. Paul tells us not to be anxious. The words we use today are worry, anxiety, stress, or obsessed. I know there are several of you out there that think worry is your Spiritual gift. ... It's not a gift. How does trusting God help us with worry and anxiety? Here is what we have to come to accept about the nature of life. Life is ambiguous. Life is very uncertain. We have to understand that we are not in control of life. Most of us want to learn nice little tricks or techniques to control life. That causes anxiety and stress. Because life is ambiguous, uncertain, and for the most part out of control, we often feel threatened. The more we feel these things, the more stressed, worried, and anxious we become. The more stressed, worried, and anxious we become the more we try to control life, people, and circumstances. And the more we do this, the more out of hand life becomes, ... and the cycle starts all over again, only with more intensity each time around.

The only way we can learn to live with the uncertainties and ambiguities of life is to learn to accept them and live with them. We can do this only as we learn to place our lives, futures, and destinies in God's hands alone.

We do that through prayer. We pray, first of all, by worshiping God for Who He is. In other words, we focus on how big and powerful and loving God is. As we do this we come to realize two things. First of all, we are brought back to the place where we realize God loves us and is near to us in every way. Secondly we come to realize that our worry is sin because we are in essence saying that we don't trust God. Next we come to a loving Father through the blood of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Paul told us to rejoice always. Here he tells us to bring everything to God in prayer. We can be filled with joy when we come to realize that God wants us to always come to Him in pray with everything that concerns us. We lose our sense of peace and our joy when we continue to worry and don't trust God. We find peace as we are able to release all our concerns to God. When we experience that peace, joy is right behind.

C. REASON FOR PEACE (7)

And verse 7 follows this up by telling us that God's power is the reason for peace. Here we are back to a military term - only this time it is used to describe God. As we learn to accept the fact that God's love is the reason for our joy, His love is the remedy for our worry, and His power is the reason for our peace, we can start to relax because the verse says that God will stand guard over our hearts in Christ Jesus. That word guard describes an army standing guard over a city. The army stands guard and keeps watch so no enemy can enter the city and catch the people by surprise. It is not the lock on your door, or the alarms on your window, or a loaded gun that will protect you. God stands guard over us. If we learn to rest in that knowledge, then we can experience the peace that God has for us. Here is the upshot of this. **GOD PROVIDES US WITH PEACE. HE HAS PROMISED TO PROVIDE FOR ALL OUR NEEDS AND HE HAS PROMISED TO NEVER LEAVE US NOR FORSAKE US.**

III. OUR RESPONSIBILITY TO PURSUE PEACE (VS 8-9)

God Provides Peace But We Are Responsible To Pursue It And Take Hold Of It.

But there is yet one more step to experiencing peace. God commands us to live in peace. God's presence, power, and love provide us with opportunities to experience His peace. But as verses 8-9 point out, it is our responsibility to pursue peace. We must be the ones to take hold of it. In other words **GOD PROVIDES PEACE BUT WE ARE RESPONSIBLE TO PURSUE IT AND TAKE HOLD OF IT.**

Paul says, "Finally brothers and sisters." In other words he is reemphasizing that God commands us to live in peace and God provides opportunities for us to experience that peace and joy. However, we must pursue it. Finding peace that leads to joy is found in a pretty simple formula. Right thinking + Right Behavior = Right feelings. If we are willing to marry up godly thinking with godly behavior, we will experience the peace and joy God desires to give us. The last phrase in verse 8 says, "think about these things."

The last phrase in the first sentence of verse 9 says, "put into practice." The last sentence says, "And the God of peace will be with you."

A. RIGHT THINKING (VS 8)

Let's look at right thinking in verse 8. Let me just summarize this for us. Good things happen in life every day and bad things happen in life every day. We have the choice on which things to focus our attention. There are dirty, sleazy things available for us to look at and think about and there are good and noble and pure things to focus our minds on. We have to choose. Paul tells us to focus our minds and our thought lives on those things that true. Many people have all sorts of things they think are the source of truth. People depend on science, experience, school, philosophy, friends, television and all sorts of other things. But for me, I'll stick with the Bible, the Word of God. If we want to experience the peace and joy God has for us, we must measure everything against the truth of the Bible. Spend time in reading and studying the Bible with this method. Don't try to evaluate and judge the Bible with our experience and knowledge. Let the Bible evaluate our thoughts, actions, and behaviors.

We need to focus our attention on the things in life that are noble and right. In other words, we should focus our mind on things that are honorable and on people who are honest. We must concern ourselves with being fair and just.

Also, we must choose to keep our minds away from the filth of this world by concentrating on things that are morally pure and lovely. God designed relationships to be pure, uplifting and winsome.

Things that are admirable and excellent are worth our spending time focusing on them and thinking about them. Things that are virtuous and commendable and good should occupy our thought lives.

In other words, those things that are praiseworthy are those things that God calls good and worthwhile in the Bible. They are things that are worth our time thinking about. To sum it up, our thinking should be shaped by the truths of Scripture. Our thinking should not be dominated by television, magazines, radio, culture, and the world. We need to accept God's Bible as truth and allow God to make us into the people He wants us to be through the renewing of our minds. If we let the world influence our thinking, it will squeeze us into its mold. If we conform our thinking to God's thinking, our lives will be transformed and we will find peace and joy.

B. RIGHT BEHAVIOR (9a)

But thinking is not enough. We must follow it up with right behavior as the first half of verse 9 demonstrates. Paul is saying to the Philippian church, "Look, I have spent a lot of time with you. I have spoken authoritatively to you the traditions and teachings of Jesus Christ. You have heard me teach. You have read my letters, and you have seen how I have lived out these truths before you. Now that you know the truth, put it into practice (my paraphrase)." In other words, it is easy to turn Christianity into an intellectual or philosophical pursuit. The philosophers used to call these kinds of guys Sophists. Look, we can preach and teach and even debate what it means for a husband to love his wife like Christ loves the church. But it is pure sophistry unless we as husbands go home, clean the house, cook dinner, wash the dishes, watch the children, and take out the garbage. Talking about what the Bible means is useless unless it translates into godly action.

Here is the point. We must study the Bible with a humble attitude that says, God change my mind so that it agrees with yours. Then we must immediately put into practice what we have learned. Spiritual growth is two-sided. First we must grow in our thinking. Then we must grow in our behavior. Lately, when people ask me how they can pray for me, I say, "The intellectual side of my spiritual life has really been growing. I need you to pray that my behavior changes and catches up to that intellectual growth."

C. RIGHT FEELINGS (9b)

Look at the last sentence of verse 9. As this last sentence indicates, right feelings come as we learn to marry up right behavior with right thinking. Paul puts it this way, "And the God of peace will be with you." Did you catch that? He didn't say, "the peace of God will be with you," he said the God of peace will be with you. God does not send us peace. God comes to us and brings His peace with Him. We are filled with God and all His peace. When we reach out and take hold of God through right thinking and right living, we will experience the peace and joy He has for us. The bottom line is this. **GOD PROVIDES PEACE BUT WE ARE RESPONSIBLE TO PURSUE IT AND TAKE HOLD OF IT.**

Peace, joy, and happiness are readily available to all of us. But the sad thing is that not many of us will ever experience it because we are not willing to look for it where God says to look for it and we are not willing to pursue it the way He says to pursue it. God commands us to live in peace. He provides peace for us. But we are required to pursue it and take hold of it. We must do it God's way. We all want to find joy, but we can only experience joy as we learn to live at peace with God, with others, and with

ourselves. **BEING HAPPY IN LIFE IS A CHOICE WE CAN ALL CHOOSE. WE FIND JOY THROUGH BEING AT PEACE WITH OURSELVES, WITH OTHERS, AND WITH GOD.**

IV. EPILOGUE

I don't know who wrote this story, but I think it demonstrates why we don't often find peace. The story goes like this.

"Many years ago, a little boy was given a priceless possession; his deceased grandfather's gold pocket watch. How he treasured it! But one day, while playing at his father's ice plant, he lost the watch amid all the ice and sawdust.

He searched and scratched, becoming frantic, but no watch. Then he suddenly realized what to do. He stopped scurrying around and became very still. In the silence, he heard the watch ticking.

God has given each of us a priceless gift of joy in Jesus. How easy it is to lose our joy in the scurrying around of life. Yet it is always there to find, if we will but pause and listen to the beautiful presence of Jesus in our hearts."

Joy can only come as we experience peace with God, peace with one another, and peace with ourselves. Joy will always avoid us if we don't first experience peace.

I am going to pray 3 prayers. You can say "amen" if you want these prayers to apply to you.

1. Salvation prayer.
2. Prayer for forgiveness

Prayer for accepting circumstances