

Live A Life of Joy!  
Pt 3: The Foundation of Joy  
Philippians 3:1

Let me describe a situation that I want you to try to imagine yourself to be in. I want you to think about the emotions you would feel in this situation. What would your attitude be? What would your thoughts be? What would you be feeling?

Imagine you are in a foreign country and you are arrested, even though you have not broken any law. You are then physically beaten by the authorities. After being beaten, you are taken to jail. It is a dark, filthy, dirt floor jail cell that they throw you into. But that isn't enough. They then take old fashioned shackles and lock them onto your ankles. Night falls, and there you are.

Think of the emotions you would feel. What thoughts are going through your mind? What words would describe your overall attitude?

Is there any joy in your life at that moment? Would you feel like singing?

The Apostle Paul was in a similar situation. But I think his attitude was radically different than what most of us would experience given the same circumstances.

Look with me at Paul's experience:

Acts 16:22-24

22 The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten.

23 After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully.

24 Upon receiving such orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

If you are the Apostle Paul, what are your thoughts, what are your emotions, what is your attitude?

Look at the very next verse:

Acts 16:25 About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them.

They are not crying. They are not complaining. They are not angry. They are singing! Others could beat them up, they could lock them up, they could chain them up, but they could not burn up the joy in their heart.

Paul would later write:

2 Corinthians 7:4 "...in all our troubles my joy knows no bounds."

In spite of some pretty desperate situations, Paul never lost his joy. How can that happen?

Introduction: What is the key to living a life of joy?

How is it possible to have joy in even the worst of circumstances?  
What is the ultimate foundation for joy?

The secret is found in Paul's opening comments in chapter three of the book of Philippians:  
Philippians 3:1 "Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord!"

I want you to look at the last three words of that sentence: "...in the Lord!"  
Paul's joy was in the Lord. Ironically, it was in Philippi that Paul was thrown into prison. Years later, in a letter to these same Philipinas, he tells them to rejoice in the Lord.

The Lord Jesus Christ is the foundation upon which a joy filled life is based.

I believe that if you want to live a joy filled life, your joy must be founded upon the Lord.

Satan will try to deceive you with cheap substitutes of joy, which more often than not will ultimately bring misery to your life.

Make no mistake about it, a Christ based joy is extremely different from anything you will find anywhere else. And, not only different, but infinitely better.

So, let me explain how joy in the Lord is radically different than any artificial joy that you will find in the world.

#### 1. Internal not external

A Christ centered joy comes from inside of you because of Christ's indwelling presence through His Holy Spirit.

Conversely, the world believes that joy comes from external things. For example, most people think that joy comes from the accumulation of material possessions. They think that fancy cars or huge luxurious homes or a bunch of expensive toys or enormous sums of money, or powerful or famous positions, or celebrity status or other such things are necessary to experience joy.

However, consider the writings of Solomon. He was considered the wisest man of his time and one of the wisest men who ever lived. He wrote, Ecclesiastes 2:3-11

- 3 I tried cheering myself with wine, and embracing folly-my mind still guiding me with wisdom....
- 4 I undertook great projects: I built houses for myself and planted vineyards.
- 5 I made gardens and parks and planted all kinds of fruit trees in them.
- 6 I made reservoirs to water groves of flourishing trees.
- 7 I bought male and female slaves and had other slaves who were born in my house. I also owned more herds and flocks than anyone in Jerusalem before me.
- 8 I amassed silver and gold for myself, and the treasure of kings and provinces. I acquired men and women singers, and a harem as well-the delights of the heart of man.
- 9 I became greater by far than anyone in Jerusalem before me. In all this my wisdom stayed with me.
- 10 I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure. My heart took delight in all my work, and this was the reward for all my labor.
- 11 Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun.

Solomon didn't have joy. He had everything a man could want, but he didn't have joy.

Solomon learned that true joy is not found in pleasure, material possessions, wealth, popularity, self gratification, a successful career, worldly accomplishments or good health.

Joy comes from some place other than these. Joy is an inward thing, it comes from within.

To understand this, to fully comprehend this, you must realize that there is a difference between happiness and joy.

Happiness is always temporary. Happiness is dependant upon external happenings.

External things can be taken away from you.

For example: In Spring Valley, Illinois a man had his wife's diamonds and rubies mounted in a ring for her birthday. He decided on one final romantic touch. He tied the birthday card and a balloon to the ring and put the whole thing in his car. Arriving at his house, he opened the car door to take out the present. But while reaching for his briefcase, the Helium balloon and birthday ring headed for the clouds, never to be seen again.

The ring, the diamonds, the rubies....all lost!  
The happiness that things provide can be taken away.

You never know when the economy is going to go bad.  
You never know when you are going to get a bad report from the doctor.  
You never know when you or a loved one might get in a tragic accident.  
You just never know when your life can be radically changed in an instant.

Joy from within is not dependant on external situations.  
It is a result of the indwelling presence of Christ's Holy Spirit.

That's why the Bible mentions "Joy" or "Rejoicing" 330 times and "happiness" only 26 times.  
Joy is a whole lot different than happiness.  
Joy comes from within.

Your joy comes from within when you have Jesus within.

Happiness depends upon what happens to you or what happens around you.  
Joy is not dependant upon external circumstances or situations.  
Joy comes through the indwelling presence of Christ's Holy Spirit.

Jesus Himself was filled with Joy because of his Spirit.  
Luke 10:21 "At that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit..."

Furthermore, Jesus' desire is to fill us with His joy.  
John 15:11 (Jesus said) "These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full."

The Apostle Paul explained it this way:  
Romans 14:17 "For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit."

Billy Sunday said, "If you have no joy in your religion, there must be a leak in your Christianity."

We have joy because of Christ's presence in our lives.

The second way that joy in the Lord is radically different is that it is other centered rather than self-centered.

## 2. Others not self

Joy comes when we focus on serving others rather than self.

If you are looking for joy, watch joyful people. You will discover that most joyful people are those who invest their time and energy in others. They've grown beyond themselves! The unhappiest people are those who are waiting around, wondering how someone is going to make them happy.

A great psychiatrist was once asked how a lonely and unhappy person should deal with unhappiness and depression. He said, "Lock the door behind you and go across the street, find someone who is hurting, and help him or her."

If you have been allowing problems in your life to rob you of your joy, then take your eyes off your problems, take your eyes off yourself and focus on serving someone else. There is joy in serving others!

Philippians 2:2-4

2 Make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.

- 3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.
- 4 Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Joy is completed when you put others before yourself.

A fascinating study was conducted by Bernard Rimland, director of the Institute for Child Behavior Research. Rimland found that "The happiest people are those who help others."

The conclusion of the study stated, "After a series of surveys and analysis ... it was found that all of the people labeled happy were also labeled unselfish. Those whose activities are devoted to bringing themselves happiness...are far less likely to be happy than those whose efforts are devoted to making others happy."

Therefore, if you want to be joyful, call up someone who's lonely and visit them for awhile. Go to a nursing home and spend some time with some folks there. Mow somebody's grass who can't do it for themselves. Give some money away. Take someone else out to lunch. Go with our group to the Paz de Cristo food line later this month.

Become less focused on yourself, more focused on others.

Perhaps that helps to clarify Jesus' words when he stated, Matthew 16:25 "For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it."

This is contrary to what the world teaches, this is counter-cultural, but the more you serve others the more you allow Christ's joy in your heart to dominate your life.

The third way that joy in the Lord is radically different is that it is focused on the eternal and not the temporary.

### 3. Eternal not temporal.

The classic example of inner joy in spite of external hardship, is of course our Lord Jesus Christ.

The night before His crucifixion, Jesus was in the upper room with His apostles. Soon He will be arrested and tried and convicted of crimes He did not commit. Soon they will be laughing at Him. They will put a crown of thorns on His head, they will mock Him. They'll slap Him and spit upon Him and whip Him. A gang of soldiers will physically beat Him up. Soon His body will be nailed to a cross and He will die. And He knows that all of this is going to happen.

Shortly before He is arrested Jesus was talking to His disciples about obeying God's love and being disciples. Then he makes the following statement:

John 15:11 "I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete."

On the last night of His life, facing the torture which lie ahead of him, Jesus talks about love and joy. And the next day He goes to the cross and dies for us.

How could he talk about joy at such a time?

The writer of Hebrews looks back at that and writes these words in Hebrews 12:2; "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross and scorned its shame."

How could Jesus do that? He looked at the joy of eternity and overlooked the suffering of the temporary.

He wasn't consumed with the temporary. He had an eternal focus.

The Apostle Paul had that same focus.  
2 Corinthians 4:16-18

16 Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.

17 For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.

18 So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

He had a similar message for the church in Rome,

Romans 8:18 "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us."

An eternal focus is the result of a strong faith.

Where's your focus?

The story is told of an elderly lady who came in to visit with her pastor. She wanted to discuss her funeral arrangements. During the discussion, she mentioned that she wanted to be buried with a fork in her hand. She further explained that prior to the service, she wanted an open casket, and she wanted the fork in her hand at that time.

She then explained why. She said that she loved all the church potlucks she had attended over the years. She said that her favorite part of the potluck was when the servers were collecting the plates after the meal and they would say to each individual, "keep your fork." She said that could only mean one thing, dessert was coming. In her opinion, dessert was the very best part of the meal. When she was told to keep her fork, she knew that the best was yet to come!

She said that likewise, when she considers life and death, she knows that the best is yet to come. That was the message she wanted to convey to those who came to pay their last respects at her funeral. "Don't worry, the best is yet to come!"

The Apostle Paul explained it this way:

Colossians 3:1-2

1 Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.

2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.

Let's end where we started, back in Philippians chapter 3:

Philippians 3:20 But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Have you received Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior?