

How To Be A Joyful Community

Attitudes That Bring Joy To Your Home (Church)

The Ups & Downs of Joy

MAKING THE DREAM WORK TAKES TEAMWORK

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When Paul first arrived in the city of Philippi, he was hounded, we are told in Acts 16, by a slave girl who told fortunes via a spirit. Literally, that spirit is described as the *pneuma pythona*, the spirit of a python.

In Greek mythology Apollo descends from Olympus to select a site for his shrine and oracle. He picks Delphi, a city in Greece, which was guarded by a serpent. He slays it and it rots. (In Delphi there are sulfur pits and this smell is in the air. Chemists call it sulfur and the mythologists called it, “dead, stinky serpent.”) The prophetess at Delphi was one of the wonders of the ancient world. Her name was Pythia. She would descend into a sulfur pit cave and having eaten Laurel wood bark, which was hallucinogenic, would come out with a prophecy. (By the way laurel is also what was used for the champions in the Pythian Games, similar to the Olympic Games. In the Olympic Games olive wreaths were used for the crowns but in the Pythian Games it was a laurel wreath.) The girl who was hounding Paul was basically, most likely, a drug addict pimped out for fortune telling.

We’re studying Philippians and have noted that Paul, the author, is filled with joy. It shows up in everything from the vocabulary of the letter to his ease around the topic of his own death.

Are there clues to what makes for joy? That’s what we’re looking for because we would like to have it and the world needs it.

We’ve noted several sources of joy arising out of Jesus Christ. And while there are sources of joy, it should be noted

that there are killers of joy. Joy stokers. Joy stiflers. There is that which you do not want snaking in and stinking up your life or church and there is that which you want to shine forth like bright stars.

Let's pray.

Here's how I would distill what Paul has said gives rise to joy. Joy comes from being Christ's and having a good role in his great universe. That role is being servants who add value to people.

Joy comes from trusting Christ's choreography of life and resurrection truth. Prison has turned out for Paul not to be a setback but very strategic. If death showed up for him, it is not a problem because he is not going to truly die.

Joy comes from cooperative, friendly, meaningful work. United, team-like, family-like partnership. The advance of the gospel. Harmony around the person of Christ and work of Christ.

I think I could summarize a lot of what Paul is thinking as joy comes from enjoying the love of Christ, enjoying the love of the people of Christ, and enjoying the loving of people for Christ. I think it is nice to be loved by Christ and by you. A good Christ, a good church, on a good mission.

The goodness has very much to do with help and cooperation. These don't just happen. No, to make the dream work takes teamwork.

Let's read.

In a Peanuts cartoon Lucy demanded that Linus change TV channels, threatening him with her fist if he didn't. "What makes you think you can walk right in here and take over?" asks Linus. "These five fingers," says Lucy. "Individually they're nothing but when I curl them together like this into a single unit, they form a weapon that is terrible to behold."

“Which channel do you want?” asks Linus. Turning away, he looks at his fingers and says, “Why can’t you guys get organized like that?”

Paul is telling us that one aspect of joy is a church that comes together in a good way ... not to punch anybody’s lights out (except the devil I suppose). Paul doesn’t stop with this. He shares with us *how* a church comes together in a good way.

There’s a big idea in this sermon and a key point. Here’s the big idea.

To make unity there is effort mixed in with the Holy Spirit. To make the dream work takes teamwork. It isn’t, “To make the dream work takes team.” It is *teamwork*. He has said to conduct ourselves together as a colony, to stand firm together as a unit, to strive athletically together as a team ... v. 1:27 and following. Those all involve effort. Now he did say that he was confident that the one who began a good work in you would carry it on. So we are not on our own. *We can do nothing without God but if we do nothing, that also will be without God.* He has made us as creative and with a will and a body so we can *do* ... with him. But there is a do. There is a ‘work out’ or ‘work at’ the spiritual well-being of y’all. (2:12 where salvation means well-being and fear plus trembling means yielded to God.)

For cooperation in our homes and churches we need to cooperate with the Holy Spirit. That means our effort and his effort. In so much of life we want the fruit but not the sow, to lose weight without effort, to gain skill without effort, to love well without effort. But life is about effort ... not by ourselves, that’s a recipe for arrogance or exhaustion, but with the Spirit.

A jungle just happens. A garden took work.¹

What is the work? That, then, is the question. Paul isn’t doing just a high flyover. He’s getting very plain and very

¹ Adam and Eve were put in a garden and told to “work it.”

practical. The work -- It's a two-fold work. It's what we do *and* what we don't do. From the Sermon on the Mount, with Jesus speaking of a foolish and wise builder, to Paul in other letters saying 'set your mind here but not here' or 'put on this behavior but take off this behavior.'" There is that which we do and that which we don't do. Or, there is that which we start doing and that which we stop doing.

So let's get right to it – do this: serve, be humble, commend. Don't do this: be selfish, be conceited, complain. Don't be conceited, be humble. Don't be selfish, serve. Don't complain, commend.

Don't be selfish, serve. Verse 3-4ff, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition, but look to the interests of others ... having Christ's example of taking the form of a servant."

Don't be conceited, be humble. Verse 3-4ff, "Do nothing out of vain conceit, but humbly look ... and have Christ's attitude of humbling himself even to death on a cross."

Don't complain, commend. Verse 14ff, "Do some things (no, everything) without complaining or arguing ... and follow Paul's lead as we see him commend Timothy and Epaphroditus."

There is so much that needs to be said and there's not nearly enough time. Let me be direct and practical, I hope.

Here's the big idea of the sermon. We, I believe, will all hear what I have just said as, "**I** need to do these things and that's the absolute truth." I do. You do. But here's a message right here in this passage that will help me and you do these things and it is this. If we posted a sign on all the doors that had a circle around a cigarette with a line through the cigarette, what would that mean? That I shouldn't smoke here. And that's the rule *for everyone* in this building. If I light up, someone should look at me and direct my attention to the sign and I should put it out. Everyone could say, "This affects our health, our insurance rates." No smoking zone. It's not just what I do or you do, it's what *we* do.



No being selfish zone, no being conceited zone, no complaining zone. That's the circle sign with the mark through it as a corporate standard for the church of Jesus Christ.

I loved Denzel Washington in *Remember the Titans*, a story about a football team dealing with integration. They struggled. There was strife. The coach made speeches about pulling together. But there were individuals who did what they were going to do, who were sticking with their old ways. So the team struggled until a few of the players who wanted winning more than division confronted their fellow players and friends. "Knock that off or get off the team. We do not undermine any member of the team. We support them." Saying that took courage. It took discipline. A church is a team where individuals actually say to other individuals that as Christians, we have a prescribed, constructive way of living. We see selfishness, conceit, and complaining sinfully handled as cancers.²

When I lived in Houston, I lived beyond Beltway 8 on the west side. There were a lot of toll roads there and they had the EZ Pass system. Right under the highway flyover at Beltway 8 and I-10 was one of the offices handling the passes. It had a city government look ... which unconsciously for me made me think, "Slow, bored, dull ... this will take forever and the clerks will be like zombies." I was startlingly shocked. The staff was, "Yes, sir." "I can help you here, sir." "Sylvie, you look nice today and would you get this nice gentleman that sheet regarding EZ Pass charges?" I wanted to know where this happy and helpful atmosphere came from. Someone had set a tone. They had come together and agreed on attitude standards. It had to be. The church is to be like that – no on selfishness, conceit, and complaint and yes on service, humility, and commendations.

² John Blaga had a bee removal service in this week. Bees had invaded the corner of the building. If unchecked, they would have harmed the building and us.

See, you and I may have slippage on our behaviors and attitudes. But if this is a community effort, we help each other out. Team – together everyone accomplishes more.

Negatively put is Proverbs 17:4 says, “Troublemakers like talking to troublemakers.” One gives to the other quarter, sanction, approval. If you find someone constantly doing the selfish, conceit, complaint thing with you, what’s your role in that continuing on? Have you said to that troubled person, “We don’t handle it that way”? Constructive people love talking to constructive people, but troublemakers don’t.³

Organizations have policy manuals. This passage in the Bible is a policy manual for Christians. We hold these values and practices together for all of our good.

Ok. That’s the big point. Now to three specific attitudes that bring joy to our homes or our home churches. Or the ups and downs of joy.

They are attitudes and we can choose our attitudes. I have told people I have thought about hiring, “I expect a good attitude. I can get a bad attitude for free. I’m not going to pay for one.”

Selfishness down and service up ... leads to cooperation and joy.

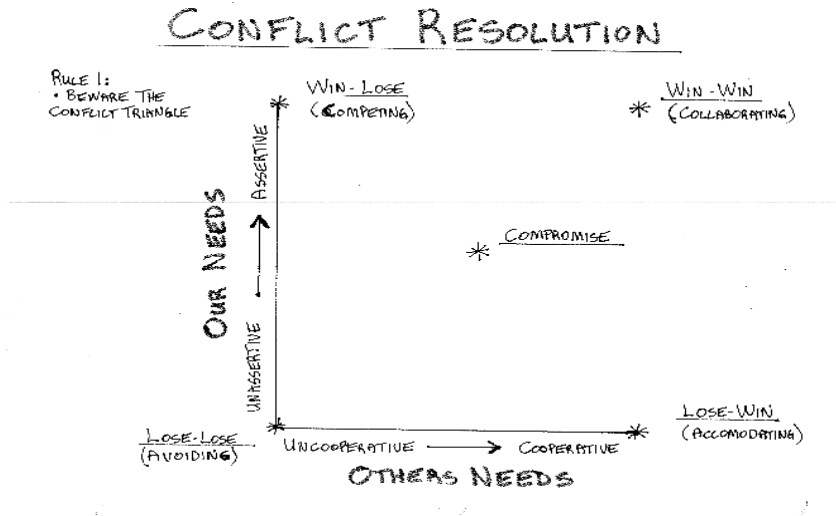
Superstar tenors (The Three Tenors) Jose Carreras, Placido Domingo, and Luciano Pavarotti were performing together in Los Angeles and a reporter tried to press the issue of competitiveness between the three men... who’s the best, who gets the bragging rights of first place. “You have to put all of your concentration into opening your heart to the music,” Domingo said. “You can’t be rivals (*or selfish*) when you’re

³ When we have Discover First get-togethers, I say to everyone, “If you have something you love about our church, tell everyone everywhere. But if you have the opposite, speak directly and quickly *to the person responsible or who can do something about it.*” If then, we’re critical, and sometimes we need to be, and we’re talking to someone about it, we ask, “Is this person responsible or someone who can do something about it?” If not, stop.

together making music.” It’s ‘how can we help the music, *how can we help each other help the music.*’ That’s the deal.

Here’s a practical idea that may help us put selfishness down and service up.

Diagram. I win/you lose (that’s selfishness). I lose/you win (that’s not sustainable). I win/you win (sustainable service). In geometry and graphing ...



Next for cooperation and its joy, conceit down and humility up. Humble yourself in the sight of the Lord and he will lift you up. (James 4:10; I Peter 5:6) So humbling is something one can do.

Let’s just say if we raise up humility, like on a teeter totter, conceit will go do. How can we raise up humility.

P, P, P. Don’t pretend, push, or presume. Tell the truth always and be who you really are. Ask and do some work but don’t force. Let God work. Presume not. When you go to a party, like the Pharisees did, they moved to the head of the table. Don’t do that.

Complaining down and commending up. Paul follows his own advice. Is he complaining about prison? No. Is he griping about people who are preaching out of rivalry? No. But he does commend not only the Philippians, but Timothy and then Epaphroditus.

This week on one of the news radio stations there aired a story about how dogs' brains are being studied in the communication process with people. For this study, Fido needed to undergo an MRI. Lying still in that massive, gonging contraption is quite a trick. The scientist explained that they trained the dogs to like being still. They praised stillness. And they praised stillness. Recognize what you value. Praise what you value.

The church is to be a place that praises, yes, God, but also people who are transformed by Jesus Christ and are transforming for Jesus Christ.

I'm glad that I don't have to preach this sermon in reaction to a problem (something Paul might have been doing with his letter!). Rather, this sermon is just explaining the Bible as we read through it.

"Amen" means "we agree and might it be so." Will you agree and make it so? Amen? Amen.

If you would like to talk with someone about this message or your spiritual life, or to have someone pray with you, the pastors and elders of the church would welcome your call.

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