

The Journey to Joy

Series: J.O.Y. Jesus, Others, and You - #8
A Study of the Book of Philipians

Text: Philipians 4:4-9

Introduction: Ten years ago, in April 2013, a fishing vessel was attacked off the coast of South Africa, killing everyone on board. A TV crew documented Marine Biologist, Colin Drake, as he worked to determine the predator responsible. His discovery is presented in shocking footage that points to a monster shark of over 60 feet in length.

That was the description of discovery channel's documentary that kicked off Shark Week in 2013. The documentary was titled **Megalodon, the monster shark lives**. The documentary showed that the prehistoric creature that went extinct ages ago had now returned to the ocean, and they showed video of a whale that had washed ashore that had this huge bite taken out of its side, and they measured the teeth marks and determined that it was the exact size of a Megalodon's jaws.

They had scientists and shark researchers explain why they believe the evidence proved that 60-foot shark was not extinct after all. There was just one problem with the documentary. It was all a hoax. It was all fake. Every one on the team were actors and all the evidence was made up. And despite a brief disclaimer that it was fiction, many people thought the documentary was real.

The big hoax created such a huge negative backlash Discovery Channel has never again produced a fictional documentary for Shark Week.

But there's a much bigger and more devastating hoax that many of us have believed all our lives without ever thinking to question it. It's "**The Happiness Hoax**" and the lie goes something like this: I need to do whatever it takes to be happy. The most important thing in my life is to be happy. God wants me to be happy. Just so you know, God wants us holy.

If your goal in life is to be happy, it's guaranteed that you won't be. It's an illusion that we're always trying to grasp, but it's always just outside our reach.

But like the Megalodon happiness used to exist when God created Adam and Eve and put them the Garden of Eden, where they enjoyed perfect contentment, because they were connected to God's love.

It was a perfect paradise, until they disobeyed God, sin entered the world, and happiness became hard to find in a now broken and imperfect world.

We have this deep longing in our soul for happiness because our hearts were made for Heaven. But here's the amazing thing, God loves us so much that even after the fall, we can find something much more fulfilling than happiness – It's called **JOY**. Once you've tasted joy, you'll never settle for just happiness.

Galatians 5:22-23 says: ***"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control..."***

Joy is a fruit of the Holy Spirit, and it's safe to say that joy is one of the most elusive fruits for us as believers, because joy is often misunderstood.

We tend to equate "happiness" with joy, but they are two totally different ideas because they originate from different sources. One comes from the world around us. The other originates directly from the Spirit of the Living God living in us.

Happiness is conditioned by and often dependent upon what is "happening" to us. Joy, on the other hand, is a divine dimension of living that is not shackled by circumstances. The Hebrew word means, ***"to leap or spin around with pleasure."*** In the New Testament the word refers to ***"gladness, bliss and celebration."***

If **joy** is a pervasive sense of well-being, **worry** is the opposite, a persistent sense that your life is not really doing well.

Some studies suggest that an average adult spends over two hours a day worrying, fretting over questions like, "What if I make the wrong choice? What if I choose the wrong job? What if I marry the wrong person? What if I'm not attractive enough? What if I can't find happiness?"

A writer named James Bryan Smith explains worry in a helpful way. He wrote, "Despite their similarity, worry is not the same as being cautious or careful.

We should be concerned about many things: locking doors, managing our money wisely, and healthy living and fulfilling relationships. This is not the same as worrying.

Worry is what we do after we have planned, prepared, and acted properly. Worry is a disproportionate level of concern based on an inappropriate measure of fear."

A biblical scholar named Thomas S. Kepler wrote about a woman whose fears were running out of control, so she began to keep a worry journal. **She found that:**

40 percent of her concerns were about things that would never happen.

30 percent of her concerns were about things in the past she couldn't change.

12 percent of her concerns were about criticisms from others, which was more about them than her.

10 percent of her concerns were related to her health, which only got worse the more she worried.

In the end, only **8 percent** of her concerns were situations about which she could actually do something, which means 92 percent of what she spent her time worrying about didn't change a thing.

Jesus once asked, "***Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?***" It was a rhetorical question. The answer was and still is no.

Some of you are struggling to listen right now because your mind is occupied with anxious thoughts. Some people will battle with anxiety throughout their lives. A big part of worry is just how your brain is wired. There's a particular genetic trait some people carry that correlates with a predisposition for worry. {Some of you are now worried as to whether you have that genetic trait.}

Real transformation (**this is important**) is not just about trying harder to do better; it's about renewing your mind and confronting what's going on in your head. Listen to what Romans 12:2 says, "***Do not conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is...***"(NIV)

If we're going to experience real joy, if we're going to understand the way worry impacts us, we need to confront not just our circumstances or behavior,

but our thoughts. That brings us to what Paul had to say about **THE JOURNEY TO JOY**. This is our final message in our series from Philippians.

Turn with me to Philippians, chapter 4, starting in verse 4. Paul writes:

“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! 5Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. 6Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

*8Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. 9Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.” (NIV) **PRAY***

At the heart of this text is a very simple instruction: **“Don't worry.”** Paul literally says, **“Don't be anxious about anything.”** In other words, don't worry about your job. Don't worry about your finances. Don't worry about your 401(k). Don't worry about your physical appearance. Don't worry about being single. Don't worry about your health. Don't worry about your kids. Don't worry about anything.

You're thinking, "how is that possible?" Worry is not something you try harder to stop doing. Most people who try to stop worrying end up worrying more about the fact they can't seem to stop. Paul is not saying, "Just try harder."

In fact, in this text he gives 3 very practical ways we can confront worry.

1. Remember that the Lord is near. Paul doesn't begin by saying, "Just don't worry." He begins with a simple yet profound statement about the reality that **The Lord is near**. God is close to you right now. I'm convinced that the quality of your spiritual life can be accurately predicted by how you answer one simple question: **Do you live as if God is close or far away?**

Our God who is near is not anxious about what you're anxious about. He's not anxious about what's going on in your marriage, or with your kids.

He's not anxious about your financial situation. That doesn't mean He doesn't care. He cares very much, and He is near.

When we live more in the awareness of God's presence, we begin to experience peace in our minds and bodies. It's what Paul calls gentleness. He says, "**Let your gentleness be evident to all.**" In the original language, this is a word that means calm in the presence of trouble **or** kindness in the presence of unkind people.

The thing about worry is that so much of it is a preoccupation with ourselves. "How am I doing? What will people think about me? How will my life go?" Paul says when we are more aware of God's presence, we can start to experience joy, gentleness, freedom from worry, gratitude, peace.

2. Talk to God anytime. Paul says, "**Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.**" In other words, ask God for help. It's interesting. When a person is worrying about something, there tends to be a lot of thinking and rehearsing possible scenarios, and very little time talking with the Lord.

In a way, worry is fed by a cycle of self-talk. The way we interrupt that cycle is by talking directly to God. "God, I need help with this situation at work or in this problem in my family." Paul tells us to do this in every situation.

When you're in an argument, ask God for help. When you're trying to help your kids, ask God for help. When you're unsure about how to pay all your bills, ask God for help. When you're trying to get that first date, ask God for help. When you're trying to get out of that first date, ask God for help. In the book of James we read, "**You do not have because you do not ask God.**"

Some people will wonder, "Well, what does he mean by that?" I think he means you do not have because you do not ask God. One of the simplest ways to confront worry is to ask God for help in any and every situation.

So, this week, make a commitment. In those moments when you feel anxiety, when those anxious thoughts are rushing through your mind, don't let it go unchecked. Ask God for help. Be specific. Be honest. Be direct about it.

Paul says when you do this, **do it with thanksgiving**. Gratitude is a powerful antidote for worry because the goal is not to make all your problems go away. The goal is to experience God's peace even when life isn't peaceful.

Paul calls this the "***peace that transcends understanding.***" That's a powerful thought; to know that it's possible to live fully at peace when life is uncertain.

3. Think great thoughts. Paul writes, "***Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.***" What you think about matters. The images you see, what you look at online, the music you listen to. It matters.

Dallas Willard wrote about this. He said the ultimate freedom we have as human beings is the power to select what we will allow our minds to dwell upon. At the end of the day, taking on worry is not a matter of trying harder to not worry. It's mostly about what you're feeding your mind day in and day out because your mind is taking in ideas and images that produce thoughts and feelings that lead to actions and attitudes.

Paul says, "Think about whatever is true." A great question to ask yourself, particularly in a moment of anxiety, "Is this thought true? Is it valid?" Paul says, "Think about whatever is noble or honorable. Think about whatever is right or pure." One of the reasons reading Scripture is so helpful is that our minds get to engage in what is right and pure.

Paul says, "Whatever is lovely," which means attractive or beautiful. Our minds need to dwell on beauty. It could be the view of the ocean or mountains or the face of a person you love or someone who loves you or the performance of a song or work well done. Paul says, "Whatever is admirable, anything excellent or praiseworthy, think on these things."

The fruit of taking seriously what you dwell on is so significant. Your moods will be different. Your attitude will be different. Your patience and level of worry will be different. Why? Because you are what you think. So, let me ask you, how is your mental diet? What are you choosing to think about?

Then Paul closes with what may be the most important thought of all. He says at the end, ***"And the God of peace will be with you."***

Here's what this means. At the end of the day, when darkness comes, when fears try to take hold, when your mind is racing and you can't make it stop, you are not alone. God is with you. He's not just with you; He loves you, and He's for you.

To have the fruit of joy ripen in our lives is to recognize the journey involved in getting there. It takes time, diligence, patience, and hard work to make a grapevine produce grapes. Fruit is not instantaneous because it must overcome weather, bugs, weeds, poor soil, and neglect.

Likewise, in our journey to joy we're faced with waves of apathy, the currents of pessimism, the deluge of doubt and the waterfalls of despair. There is no way we can manufacture this fruit on our own.

If we want to see this fruit ripen in our lives, we desperately need the Holy Spirit to prune away what hinders our joy and then empower us to make some choices that move us closer to a lifestyle of rejoicing. We need to do two things: guard against **Joy Busters** and cultivate **Joy Builders** into our lives.

Joy Busters

Before Paul talked about the Fruit of the Spirit in Galatians, chapter 5, he asked a very penetrating question in Galatians 4:15: ***"What has happened to all your joy..."***

William Barclay has said that "a gloomy Christian is a contradiction in terms, and nothing in all religious history has done Christianity more harm than its connection with black clothes and long faces."

Here are three common JOY BUSTERS to guard against.

1. Unfulfilled expectations. If the truth were to be told, some of us would be discontented with our lives. It could be that your expectations for your marriage have not been met. Or maybe your kids aren't living like they should. Perhaps you don't have everything you want, or you seem to be going in the opposite direction of where you want to go.

I'm convinced that a spirit of discontent can rob many of us of joy. Listen to how Paul discovered the secret of being content with what God had given him in Philippians 4:12: ***"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."***

I find it interesting to note that Paul calls contentment a "secret." He also had to "learn" how to live with unsatisfied expectations. Likewise, we must learn to live with plenty or with little. Contentment doesn't come when we have everything we want, but when we're satisfied with everything we have.

2. Unresolved conflict – is another joy buster. When we allow conflict between ourselves and another person to go on, or when someone's offense against us occupies our mental and emotional attention, we have little left over for the Lord. Anger clouds our judgment, and obscures our view of God, draining away our joy.

Hebrews 12:14-15 challenges us to not allow relational ruptures to fester because bitterness can set in: ***"Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many."***

The bible says, love keeps no record of wrongs. If you're still itemizing people's mess-ups, the fruit of joy will diminish from your life. Paul recognizes the link between joy and unity in Philippians 2:2: ***"Then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose."***

3. Unconfessed sin. This third joy buster is perhaps responsible for chasing more joy out of life than any other. Sin can send joy far away.

David understood this when he attempted to ignore the promptings of the Spirit. Psalm 32:1-5 says, ***"Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the LORD does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit. When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity."***

I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD' -- and you forgave the guilt of my sin."

I love how this Psalm ends. After David owns his sin, VERSE 11 says, his joy returns; ***"Rejoice in the LORD and be glad, you righteous; sing, all you who are upright in heart!"*** Did you catch that? **He was not able to rejoice and experience the joy of the Lord until he confessed his sins!**

That's very similar to what David wrote in Psalm 51:7-8: ***"Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice."***

Before we move on to some positive joy builders, I want to give the Holy Spirit an opportunity right now to do some pruning in your life. Let's take a couple minutes to allow God's Spirit to show you where you need to change.

- Do you have some unsatisfied expectations that have led to a spirit of discontent? If so, confess your discontentment to Him right now.
- Are you involved in some conflict with someone? Make plans to meet with that person so that you can be reconciled and get back on your journey to joy.
- Is God's hand heavy upon you right now because of some sin that you've not confessed and repented of? Don't keep silent any longer. Acknowledge your transgression and ask the Lord to restore the joy of your salvation.

I have some great news this morning. Lost joy can be restored. David's joy was a long-lost memory. And yet, he boldly prays in Psalm 51:12, "Restore to me the joy of your salvation..." God honored his prayer...He will honor yours.

Joy Builders

Billy Sunday once said, "The trouble with many men is that they have got just enough religion to make them miserable. If there is no joy in religion, you've got a leak in your religion."

God not only wants to restore our lost joy, but He also wants us to cultivate those things that will build lasting joy. The Bible gives us at least six ways to positively experience our Journey to Joy.

1. **Recognize God as joyful.**

Listen to how God feels about you from Zephaniah 3:17; ***“The LORD your God is with you, He is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, He will rejoice over you with singing.”*** [Read again]

I love how the Living Bible paraphrases this verse: ***“Is that a joyous choir I hear? No, it is the Lord himself exulting over you in happy song.”***

Isaiah 65:18-19: ***“But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create, for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy. I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in my people...”***

[Dr. Martini asking me about Chosen, person who played Christ was so full of life and joy.] [Hockey teammate once asked if Jesus was a fun person]

When we recognize God as joyful, we will be even more drawn to Him. He is not an aloof judge just waiting for us to mess up so He can unleash His fury. He has created us to be His delight. He finds great joy in you!

That’s exactly what Nehemiah discovered in Nehemiah 8:10: ***“...The joy of the LORD is your strength.”***

2. Reverence God in worship.

God delights in us and finds great joy in His creation – then when we celebrate His attributes in worship, we allow our joy to flow back to Him. The Westminster Confession states it well: **our chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.**

Psalms 66:1-4: ***“Shout with joy to God, all the earth! Sing the glory of his name; make his praise glorious! Say to God, ‘How awesome are your deeds! So great is your power that your enemies cringe before you. All the earth bows down to you; they sing praise to you; they sing praise to your name.’”***

Our collective worship of God on Sundays should be the culmination of our individual and private worship during the week. We make room in our lives for God’s joy through the traditional disciplines of prayer, Bible reading, Scripture memory, meditation, fasting and worship.

As we revere God by celebrating His attributes, the fruit of joy will begin to blossom in our lives.

When David focused on God's character in Psalm 28, he couldn't help but break out into joy. Listen to verse 7: ***"The Lord is my strength and shield; my heart trusts in Him, and I am helped. My heart leaps for joy and I will give thanks to Him in song."***

3. Reaffirm your commitment to the church.

The first two joy builders are vertical and have to do with how we view God and how He views us. If we're serious about joy, we must also make sure that we are doing OK on the horizontally by living in biblical community with others.

Romans 12:15 challenges us to ***"rejoice with those who rejoice..."*** We're not able to do this unless we're connected to others. If you're not in fellowship with believers, your joy will leak out.

When contemplating whether it would be better to die and spend eternity with His Lord, the Apostle Paul concludes that it would benefit the church if he hung around for a while. In Philippians 1:25-26, he said: ***"Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me."***

As I connect with you and you connect with me, our joy will overflow. We need each other. If we're not attending church interacting with others, we could be jeopardizing the joy of other people. When we live in loving relationships with our brothers and sisters in Christ, we'll be more joyful, and we'll be helping others increase their joy.

4. Reignite your passion for the lost. Philemon 6: ***"I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ."***

Luke 15 records for us how much rejoicing takes place when the lost are found. When the lost sheep is recovered, verse 5 says that the owner ***"joyfully puts it on his shoulders"*** and then goes home and calls his friends and neighbors and declares in verse 6, ***"Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep."***

Jesus went on to say, ***"I tell you in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents..."***

4. Release your problems to the Lord.

One of the hallmarks of Christian joy is that it can be experienced during intense sorrow and loss. Often, we define happiness as the absence of something undesirable, such as pain, suffering, or disappointment. **But Christian joy is the proper response to the presence of God Himself.**

In Acts 16, the authorities beat Paul and Silas. After they were severely flogged, they were thrown into prison. To make sure they didn't escape; they were put in the inner cell and had their feet fastened in stocks.

Verse 25 says that Paul and Silas ***“were praying and singing hymns to God...”*** This word for praying is not the word used for making requests but rather the word used for praise, or worship. Instead of asking God to get them out, they turned this tough situation into an opportunity for rejoicing.

This reminds me of what Matthew Henry, a Bible scholar from the 1700's wrote in his diary after some thieves robbed him and took his wallet: **“Let me be thankful first, because I was never robbed before; second, because, although they took my wallet, they did not take my life; third, because, although they took my all, it was not much; and fourth, because, it was I who was robbed, not I who robbed.”**

Because the Lord is in charge we can have joy – no matter what. 2 Corinthians 7:4 says, ***“...in all our troubles my joy knows no bounds.”*** James 1:2 challenges us to ***“consider it pure joy...whenever you face trials of many kinds.”***

6. Remain close to Jesus. To discover joy, we must abandon the search for it and go looking instead for the one who is Himself...JOY. Joy is the flag high over the castle of our hearts announcing that Jesus is in residence there.

If we want the kind of joy that is complete, lacking nothing, then we must remain close to Jesus. Jesus said it clearly in John 15:4: ***“Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.”***

Recognize God as joyful...Reverence God in worship...Reaffirm your commitment to the church...Reignite your passion for the lost...Release your problems to the Lord...Remain close to Jesus. In other words – ABIDE IN CHRIST!

Conclusion

"The Happy Hypocrite," tells the story of a man who proposes marriage to a woman, but she says that she will only marry a man with the face of a saint. Confused, he spends the night wandering the streets, heartbroken. In the morning, he stumbles upon a mask maker shop. He purchases a saint's face mask. As he is leaving, a woman he once knew, sees him leave the shop with his new false face, confronts him, but he pretends not to know her and returns to London. While looking at himself in the reflection of a brook, he sees the woman he loves, leaps across the brook, and proposes marriage. She accepts.

One month after the marriage, as the happy couple is celebrating the occasion, the woman from his past shows up and refuses to leave until she gets one last look at the man's true face. A scuffle between the three people results in the woman tearing off his mask. Although he fears that his true love is lost, it turns out that his face has assumed the contours of the mask. His new love concludes that he was testing her fidelity for a time before revealing his true beautiful face. His face had conformed to the mask.

Becoming like Christ is like this. Go ahead and put on Christ. At first it may feel unnatural or uncomfortable, and you may think, "who am I trying to fool?" But everyday just keep putting on Christ and you will grow to look more like him.

People can see fake fruit. **Are you a fraud or are you a fruit-bearer?** Are you a charlatan or a true Christian? Are you playing charades or praising Christ? The only way to have real joy is to nurture your relationship with Jesus, abide in Christ, and keep in step with the Spirit each day.

Three actions steps to take this week.

- 1. Guard yourself against those JOY BUSTERS that rob you of joy.**
- 2. Identify 1 or 2 JOY BUILDERS that you need to work on.**
- 3. Memorize Romans 14:17 and live it out each day; *"For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit."***