

# The Joy of Gospel Partnership

Joy by Example Part 01

Philippians 1:1-5

1-10-2016

Summary: Message of the book: The solution to disunity caused by suffering is joy from gospel partnership (when you suffer, fight disunity with the joy of gospel partnership). Message of this passage: Paul sets the example for them by describing how he always prays with joyful thanksgiving for them because of their gospel partnership.

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**Philippians 1:1 Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons: 2 Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 3 I thank my God every time I remember you. 4 In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy 5 because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now**

## Introduction: Loneliness

I did some reading this week on what one author referred to as the “epidemic” of loneliness in our culture. One study showed that in 2010, 35% of people 45 and over reported being chronically lonely. A decade earlier, it was only 20%. Our culture is becoming more and more individualistic and isolated, and it is creating a major problem with loneliness. How about you? Do you struggle with feeling like you don’t have anyone to talk to, no one really understands you, you find yourself fairly often waiting for someone to call you or email, or you feel unable to reach out to others in a meaningful way, you feel starved for company, it’s hard to make friends, or you feel excluded – on the outside looking in with the people who matter to you? More and more people are finding themselves feeling that way, and that’s a concern for researchers because loneliness is linked to all kinds of health problems. Lonely people almost always have poor health. Those feelings cause stress hormones which, if you have them for an extended period, cause things like diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, neurodegenerative diseases, Alzheimer’s, obesity, and even cancer, as tumors metastasize faster in lonely people. The military is spending millions of dollars trying to address the problem of loneliness because lonely soldiers don’t function well in battle. One famous researcher had amazing results helping mentally ill people just by addressing their loneliness. And she postulated that “loneliness lay at the heart of nearly all mental illness ..., and no patient was too sick to be healed through trust and intimacy.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cited in <https://newrepublic.com/article/113176/science-loneliness-how-isolation-can-kill-you>

Of all the problems we have, you would think loneliness would be the easiest one to solve. How hard could it be to cure loneliness in a world of seven billion people? But the mere presence of people doesn't cure it – even in the church. Churches are constantly coming up with new programs and groups to help people get connected – singles groups, men's ministries, women's ministries, youth groups, fellowship groups, community groups, retreats, picnics, game nights – everything imaginable to help people develop friendships. The problem is, lonely people don't come to those things. One of the most interesting things I read in the research was the fact that the more loneliness a person feels, the more he will tend to respond by withdrawing from people. When you're not feeling lonely, you will go out and be with people, but when feelings of loneliness come, it actually makes you more reluctant to be with people. And the reason for that is loneliness or non-loneliness is not simply a function of whether or not you are around people. According to the researchers, it has more to do with worrying about what people think of you. Lonely people tend to make a lot of assumptions about how others perceive them. They interpret every little thing as a sign that people don't like them or look down on them. And when you think people are looking down on you or don't like you, you don't want to be around them.

So some of the leading experts in the field are trying to address the problem by teaching classes on how to read body language. They figure if we can teach lonely people how to correctly interpret facial expressions and body language, then they won't keep assuming people don't like them. The problem with that is, even if you could read people perfectly (which you never can, but even if you could), you would see that some people really don't like you. Here is the reality: As long as you are focused on what people think of you, you are always going to feel unloved, neglected, look down on, or even rejected.

So what's the solution? I believe the solution is found in the book of Philippians. One of the most striking things about the book of Philippians is the depth of intimacy and profoundness of the friendships that you read about in that book. Philippians is commonly known as the book of joy, but I think it would be equally accurate to call it the book of love, or the book of friendship. It is the book of joy, but it was joy that came specifically from the intimacy of the friendships that existed in the church. So whether you are lonely, or you just lack joy in your life for some other reason, this book is going to be a great help to you.

When we finished James, I was going to go next to Titus. But then a few weeks ago Andrew suggested Philippians, and I realize that makes such good sense for us for where we are right now as a church. If we are really serious about developing this culture of encouragement that we have been talking about, why not go to what is arguably the most encouraging book in the whole Bible? All the various components that are part of that culture of encouragement emphasis are here in Philippians –...

- welcoming family warmth,
- peacemaking and reconciled relationships,
- unity and oneness,
- assuming good motives,
- becoming a grumble free zone in a world of complainers, and
- speaking to each other in uplifting, edifying ways instead of tearing each other down.

It's all here. And so today we begin a brand-new study through this delightful book.

## **Book of Sound Bites**

You are going to love this book. I think Philippians probably has more sound bites and popular quotations per chapter than any other book in the Bible.

**Phil. 1:6 ... he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion**

**1:21 For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.**

Chapter 2 has that great section on the humility of Christ who emptied himself and took on the form of a servant and became obedient to death.

**2:9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow ... 11 and every tongue confess...**

**2:12 work out your salvation with fear and trembling, 13 for it is God who works in you to will and to act**

**3:13 ... one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal to win the prize**

**3:20 our citizenship is in heaven.**

**4:6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds**

**4:8 Finally, brothers, 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.**

**4:12 ...I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation**

**4:19 And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.**

All of that in four little chapters. So we are really in for a treat in the coming months.

## **The Problem: Disunity**

So let me start by just letting the cat out of the bag right up front in telling you the overall message of the book. The church in Philippi had a unity problem. Paul brings up the issue of unity in every chapter.<sup>2</sup> And he brings it up in connection with their suffering. They were really a lot like the churches James wrote to. They were suffering, and instead of standing firm, they responded to that suffering in ways that fractured the unity of the church. So I believe Paul wrote this book to encourage the Philippians to guard their unity in the face of suffering. The passage that sums up the message of the whole book the best is probably the closing paragraph of chapter 1.

**Phil. 1:27 ... conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then ... I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel 28 without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. ... 29 For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ ...to suffer for him, 30 since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.**

Paul is saying, “I need to know that even in the midst of your suffering and being persecuted that your unity will stay intact. And here is what is really fascinating - the solution that Paul offers for their disunity problem is something you would never guess - and yet it makes perfect sense. The solution to their unity problem was joy.

## **The Solution: Joy**

This is what naturally happens to a church when suffering comes: First, we interpret suffering the wrong way – that is how it starts. Then, that wrong interpretation of suffering destroys our joy. And when joy goes out of a church, the next domino to fall is always unity. The reason people start picking at each other and not getting along in church is because joy levels are too low. The congregation’s joy level gets low and they start grumbling against the leadership. The leadership’s joy level gets low and they start having a bad attitude towards the congregation or toward each other. People working together in ministry - their joy levels get low and they start picking at each other and getting on each other’s nerves. And the

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<sup>2</sup> 1:27-30, 2:1-4, 14, 3And in: 15-18, 4:2-3.

unity of the church that is so precious to the Holy Spirit and to the Father and to the Lord Jesus Christ is shattered. What's the solution to that? James gave us the solution from the negative side - showing us the root problems of selfishness and pride and worldliness. But in Philippians we get the positive side of the solution - more joy. If you want more unity in your church, it is not going to happen until joy levels increase. Paul heard about the unity problems in this church that he loved so dearly, and he decided to take the approach of sending them a letter of pure encouragement. No rebuke at all – just lots of encouragement and instruction about how to increase their joy.

When Paul says, “I want you to have more joy,” that is not just a throw-away little greeting card comment. It is right at the core of everything Paul wants to accomplish in life. The success or failure of the church is riding on whether joy levels stay high enough. It doesn't take an expert Bible interpreter to read the book of Philippians and see that it was really, really important to Paul that they increase their joy.

## Emphasis on Joy

Later in chapter 1 Paul gets to talking about the possibility that he might die, which would be great for him because he would be with Christ. But then he gets to thinking about how if he lives, he still has a shot at helping increase the Philippians' joy. So he says:

**Philippians 1:25** **Convinced of this, I know that (instead of dying and going to be with Christ) I will remain (in the body), and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith**

That is what made Paul want to stay alive. And it is a summary of his job description – work for their progress and joy.

**2:18** **So you too should be glad and rejoice with me.**

**2:28** **I am all the more eager to send him, so that when you see him again you may be glad ... 29**  
**Welcome him in the Lord with great joy**

**3:1** **Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord!**

And in case they haven't picked up on it by chapter 4 -

**4:4** **Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!**

Paul uses the words **joy** or **rejoice** 16 times in this tiny little book – far more often than any other book in the Bible. Half of those are Paul telling them how to have joy, the other half<sup>3</sup> are references to Paul's joy, so he can teach them by example. In the whole first chapter he is showing them by example how to have joy in the midst of suffering. That's why I've titled this section, “Joy by Example.” Working for their joy was always Paul's job description as a spiritual leader in the church. You see it in 2 Corinthians as well.

**2 Cor. 1:24** **Not that we lord it over your faith, but we are workers with you for your joy, because it is by faith you stand firm.**

People need to have faith and stand firm, but they will not be able to do that unless they have enough joy in the Lord. Without that, they will not stand firm, and church unity will be destroyed.

## The Source of Joy: Loving Others

So joy is crucial - especially the joy that comes from love relationships. It is great to have the joy that comes from your private times alone with God, but that kind of joy, by itself, is not enough. You also need the joy that comes from loving people.

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

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<sup>3</sup> 1:4, 18, 2:2, 17, 4:1, 10.

How does that sound to you? How does that happen? Next verse:

## **12 My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.**

The greatest joy does NOT come from being loved by others. It comes from loving others. So Paul wants the Philippians to have that really deep joy that comes from love relationships.

And not just any love relationships. A lot of times love relationships can cause you way more sorrow than joy. But Paul is going to show us how to develop the right kind – the kind of friendships that will not only solve the problem of loneliness, but that will fill your heart up with profound joy. And he is going to do the same thing I did – let the cat out of the bag right up front. In the very first paragraph of the book, he gives us the key to developing these kinds of friendships using his love for them as an example. He starts with a warm greeting.

## **Paul's Love**

### **Greeting**

**1 Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons: 2 Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.**

You can tell from the rest of the book that Timothy is not a co-author,<sup>4</sup> but Paul mentions him at the beginning - probably because this book is all about warmth and friendship and Timothy no doubt had a close bond of friendship with the Philippians as well. He was there with Paul when the church was founded. So instead of his typical, “Paul, an Apostle of Christ Jesus,” he says:

### **1 Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus**

He doesn't have to pull his apostle card, because no one in Philippi is resisting his authority. Instead he wants to emphasize his humble submissiveness to Christ.<sup>5</sup>

### **1 ... To all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi**

If you are from a Catholic background that might sound a little weird to you, because the Catholics believe that only certain, special people qualify as saints. But in the Bible, anyone who is a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ is a saint. The word *saint* means *holy one* – someone who is set apart from the world. That's us. We are saints, not because we are anything special in ourselves. He says we are **saints in Christ Jesus**. The thing that makes us special and holy is not anything about us; it is only because of our association with the Lord Jesus Christ. If you want to encourage someone, remind them of who they are in Christ. And then here is something really interesting:

### **1 ... together with the overseers and deacons**

**Overseers** is another word for elders or pastors. This is the only book of the Bible where the book is explicitly addressed to both the congregation and the leadership. Obviously, all the letters were intended for the entire church – congregation and leadership, but this is the only place where the leaders are specifically mentioned in the opening greeting. It's hard to say why that is for sure because he never mentions them again in the book. One possibility is that their disunity problems might be conflicts between the congregation and the leadership. That's pretty common when a church has unity problems.

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<sup>4</sup> Timothy was not a co-author of this book like he was in the book of Colossians. Colossians starts out “Paul an Apostle and Timothy our brother ... to the saints in Colossae ... We thank God for you. But here in Philippians, it starts out Paul and Timothy, but then he immediately goes to the first person – I thank God for you. It's all “I” and “me” and later on in the letter he mentions Timothy in the third person – “I'm going to send Timothy to you.”

<sup>5</sup> There is, still, an implication of authority however, as throughout the Old Testament “servant of God” is used for key leaders, such as Moses.

And we know that Paul really wants to go out of his way to include everyone in his expressions of love in this letter. You can tell that just by looking at how many times he keeps saying the word **all**.

**1 Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi...**

**4 In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy ...**

**7 It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since ... all of you share in God's grace with me.**

**8 God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.**

**... 25 I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith**

Paul wasn't taking any sides – he loves all of them. Euodia and Syntyche were going at it. Word about their conflict made it all the way to Paul in a Roman prison. No doubt there was a contingent of people in the church who were getting behind Euodia, and some other folks who were on Syntyche's side. Maybe certain people were being excluded from certain groups or whatever. Paul goes way out of his way, when he is expressing his love and affection for this church, to include every single person.

So that may be one reason why the leadership is specifically mentioned. We cannot say for sure that that's the reason, but I think we can say for sure at least this much – that Paul especially wanted the overseers and deacons to pay attention to the letter. So if you are an elder or deacon, make sure you pay careful attention to this study.

Then Paul's typical greeting:

**2 Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.**

If you want to wish someone well, the best thing you could possibly wish for them is for them to receive **grace and peace** from God. Nothing is more important in life. Nothing is more valuable. And if you want to teach your kids how to have success in life, the most important thing you can possibly teach them is how to get grace from God.

So Paul begins with a warm, loving greeting. Then he starts in expressing his love. Listen to how much love he had for them:

**3 I thank my God every time I remember you. 4 In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy ...7 It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart... 8 God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.**

Someone sitting there in Philippi listening to that might say, "You probably say that to all the churches." But he didn't. No other book has comparable expressions of Paul's love for the people. This letter is unique. His letters to other churches are much more formal and structured, where the first half is doctrine and the second half is application. You don't see that in Philippians. It reads a lot more like an informal, personal letter of encouragement.

**Paul says "I," "me," or "my" in this book 179 times.**

**Compare that to 37 times in Colossians, or 50 in Ephesians (much longer book).**

It is warm, it is personal, and his expressions of love are effusive.

**4:1 Therefore, my brothers, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, that is how you should stand firm in the Lord, dear friends!**

A lot of people will tell you that the book of Philippians is their favorite book. If that's you, then you may have something in common with the apostle Paul, because I think the church in Philippi was his favorite church. He had so much love for them.

## The Joy of Gospel Partnership

Why? Paul stayed in Corinth a year and a half. He stayed in Ephesus three years. So you can see how he got attached to those people. But listen to the account of when Paul first went to Philippi:

**Acts 16:12 From there we traveled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia. And we stayed there several days.**

Paul was only there a matter of days. In those days Lydia was converted, the jailer got saved, a handful of others, then Paul left. Years later Paul did pass through there again in Acts 20, and possibly a couple other visits that aren't recorded in Scripture. But there is no record of any long-term stay in Philippi. So how did Paul develop so much love for them and a friendship with them that brought him so much joy?

What's the secret to having joy-producing friendships? Lots of quality time together? Not in this case. In this case it happened through the mail, in a long-distance relationship. But it wasn't just letters that they sent him – it was financial support. What is it specifically in verse 5 that Paul says brought him all that joy? Their **partnership in the gospel**. What kind of partnership?

**Phil. 4:15 Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; 16 for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid again and again when I was in need.**

They kept sending him financial support so he could focus on ministry. All those churches Paul risked his life to bring the gospel to – they all loved him, but not enough to actually send money. Only this one church sent money. Why? Was it because they were wealthy?

**2 Corinthians 8:2 Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. 3 For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability.**

They were in extreme poverty, yet they sent money. And not just money, but people. In chapter 4 he is talking about Euodia and Syntyche and he says:

**4:4 ...help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.**

Euodia, Syntyche, Clement, and some others all labored with Paul in the cause of the gospel. We don't know if they just helped him locally there in Macedonia – maybe in the city of Thessalonica and around that area, or if they traveled all the way to Corinth or what. But Paul had help in his work, both money and labor, from this little church in Philippi. And that had been going on the whole time this church had existed.

**1:4 ... I always pray with joy 5 because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now**

Paul started this church in 49 AD, and he wrote this letter probably in about 61 AD, so it has been 12 years they have been partnering with him. Just like two guys who co-own a business, Paul and the Philippians were business partners. And their side of the partnership involved financial support, so they sent that continually for 12 years – except for one period of time when they couldn't. In 4:10 Paul says they didn't send money for a while because they lacked the opportunity. We don't know why – probably because they didn't know where Paul was for a while. There was a period there after Paul was arrested in Jerusalem, where he got shuffled around from one jurisdiction to another, and his case stalled out for two years, then he gets sent to Rome on a ship that sinks and they end up stranded on an island. During that time the Philippian church wouldn't have had any contact. Finally he makes it to Rome, and he is in a house arrest situation, so he can receive guests and write letters. News about that gets around, and all the

other churches say, “Ah, Paul has reemerged. Praise God.” And his friends in Philippi say, “Ah, Paul has reemerged. Let’s send him a gift!” So they gather up a bunch of money, put it in the hands of one of their best guys (a guy by the name of Epaphroditus), and they send him off to Rome to go help Paul.

That meant the world to Paul. Paul didn’t even ask for financial support from the Corinthian church, because they were too immature to handle it. The Corinthians were so spiritually immature that if he accepted their money, there would be all kinds of problems – suspicion about his motives, etc. And so those people in Philippi had to support Paul financially so that he could devote his full time to ministering to the Corinthians. That’s what Paul was talking about in 2 Corinthians 11:8.

### **2 Cor. 11:8 I robbed other churches by receiving support from them so as to serve you.**

All that is to show you the kind of interest the Philippians took in Paul’s gospel ministry. That is what so endeared them to Paul’s heart. And it endeared them, not because Paul was interested in money, but because it showed that they were as passionate for the work of the gospel as he was.

## **Partnership in a Shared Passion**

Nothing will knit your heart closer to someone than partnership in a shared passion. What is the key to close friendships? Do you have to find that special person that you just really hit it off with – same personality type, and they make you laugh? No. Does it come from spending lots of quality time together and opening up and sharing your heart? Sometimes, but not always. Sometimes you share your heart and they share their heart and all you do is find out your hearts are really different. Intimacy isn’t caused by spending time together, or sharing your feelings, or time spent talking – intimacy and deep friendship come from shared interest in a common passion.

There is a little project I have been working on for the past 25 years called “raising children.” It’s a major passion in my life. And in that project, if something goes wrong, or if there’s some major victory, there is one person on this planet who fully understands my sadness or joy. Some of you have raised kids so you can understand in general, but there’s only one person who has been there from the beginning, knows all the ups and downs of what’s gone on the past 25 years with my kids, who has wrestled alongside me over decisions, and poured out almost her entire adult life in working at my side in this project, and who cares just as much as I do about whether it succeeds or fails. That person is my wife, and having that common interest and passion knits our souls together in ways that I can never be knit with anyone else. Partnership in a shared passion.

Raising kids has been a big part of my life, but that project, as important as it is to me, isn’t the most important project I’m involved in. It is just a little sliver of the most important project. The most important project is the work of the gospel in the world. And few people if any have ever had that as clearly in focus as Paul did. Which is why it meant so much to him to have partners in that work who cared about it like he cared about it. That is what gave Paul so much joy and so much love for the Philippians.

### **4 ... I always pray with joy 5 because of your partnership in the gospel**

## **The Gospel**

That’s the first of nine times he mentions the gospel in this little book.

### **1:5 ...your partnership in the gospel**

**1:7 ... whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me.**

**1:12 ... what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel.**

**1:16 ...I am put here for the defense of the gospel.**



**1:27 ... conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then ... I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel**

**2:22 ... Timothy has proved himself, because ... he has served with me in the work of the gospel.**

**4:3 ... help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel**

The work of the gospel was the singular, driving passion of Paul's life. When his life was threatened, his only question was, "Which would be better for the cause of the gospel – for me to live or for me to die?" If he could somehow advance the gospel by enduring suffering – whippings, beatings, floggings, imprisonment – he was more than happy to do it. When he said, "I'm going down to Jerusalem to preach the gospel," and they said, "But if you do that, you'll be captured and put in chains and you might be killed," Paul's response was, "So what's your point? I'm going down there to preach the gospel. If I get beaten and imprisoned and killed, how is that relevant to the discussion at hand?" If anything didn't contribute to the cause of the gospel, he had zero interest. If it did, it was the most important thing in the world to him.

And if you are wondering what the gospel is, let me just give you a quick definition. The word "gospel" literally means good news. And if you look up all the places where that word is used in the New Testament, here's what you'll find: The gospel is the good news of the kingdom of God, which Jesus preached.<sup>6</sup> It is a message of grace<sup>7</sup> that says that in order to avoid the coming judgment,<sup>8</sup> all men must worship, fear, and honor the true God<sup>9</sup> through faith in Jesus Christ, who died for our sin and rose again according to the Scriptures, guaranteeing the resurrection of believers.<sup>10</sup> The gospel demands a response of faith, which involves repenting,<sup>11</sup> taking a posture of obedience,<sup>12</sup> and bowing to Christ as Lord,<sup>13</sup> resulting in justification and a pattern of living by faith.<sup>14</sup> That is the gospel. And the work of the gospel is the work of proclaiming that news to unbelievers and persuading them to believe. And once they believe, teaching them how to live by faith, which is a life-long task. And making progress in that task was the only thing that mattered to Paul. So when someone else came along who also had that passion, that was Paul's best friend – no matter what personality type they had.

## What Is Your Passion?

If you want to increase your joy, you must be partners with the saints in a common passion. And that common passion must be the progress of the work of gospel. If your passion is movies or sports or some hobby, you may or may not find another person who shares that passion. And even if you do, it's not a great enough cause to bring the kind of joy you are going to need. It has to be a partnership in a huge, grand, important passion. If seeing other people sold out for the work of the gospel doesn't bring you great joy, that means the work of the gospel isn't a high enough value in your heart. And you may have to do some very serious soul-searching about the priorities of your life. Jesus never allowed any room for someone to be a Christian but have other interests outside of Him that are greater. If there is anything in your life more important to you than the Lord Jesus Christ, you are not a Christian. And that includes even your own life.

**Luke 14:33 In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.**

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<sup>6</sup> Mt.4:23, 9:35, 24:14.

<sup>7</sup> Acts 20:24.

<sup>8</sup> Ro.2:16, 1 Pe.4:17, Rev.14:6-7.

<sup>9</sup> Rev.14:6-7.

<sup>10</sup> 1 Cor.15:3-4.

<sup>11</sup> Mk.1:15.

<sup>12</sup> 2 Thes.1:8, 2 Cor.9:13.

<sup>13</sup> 2 Cor.4:3-5.

<sup>14</sup> Gal.1:1-18.

Many times the reason we get lonely, or we lack joy, is because we can't find anyone who really cares about what we really care about. But that should never happen to a Christian, because there are millions of other Christians - people who care so much about the gospel that they would die for it. And if that doesn't give me joy, I need to find what pile of trivia has captivated my affections and put that on the junk heap where it belongs, so that I start caring about what really matters.

## **Source of Joy: Gratitude for Gospel Partners**

Our time is gone, which is sad because there is one huge piece of this puzzle that I haven't gotten to yet, and it is absolutely essential for joy. If you want to increase your joy with joy-producing love relationships, it is not enough to just be partners in a common passion. There must also be gratitude to God for those partners.

**3 I thank my God every time I remember you. 4 In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy 5 because of your partnership in the gospel**

His joy was connected to his thankfulness. Just like we saw in our study of Psalm 42 – an essential ingredient for joy is gratitude. If you want to get a lot of joy from your friendships, stop worrying about how they are treating you or how they feel about you or how much they like you, and turn your attention to gratitude for them.

It is amazing the impact that has. If you would have asked me prior to this week if I was thankful for all of you, I would have said *yes*. And I often start my prayers for you, "Thank you for that person God..." But this last week I have been much more intentional about it. When I pray for you, instead of just saying, "Thanks for so and so" and then getting on with asking God to bless you, I slowed down and cultivated an actual attitude of thankfulness. So I go through the prayer cards, and I think, "What is wonderful about this person? What graces exist in his life because of God's kindness? How does the work of the church benefit from that person's existence? What spiritual gifts does she have?" And as I did that, real, emotional gratitude to God started to well up in my heart for all of you, and I could just feel an immediate surge in my level of joy.

Just think of what you have seated around you right now! We live in a world that hates God, and treats the Lord Jesus Christ like just another man, and is in total rebellion against His Word and His will. And in a world like that, where almost everyone is an enemy of Christ, let me ask you this: How many of you love the Lord Jesus Christ? Look at that! Just look at it! Let your heart fill up with joy and gratitude for that! Another question: How many of you are willing to die for Christ? How many of you have devoted your life to serving the Lord Jesus Christ?

If you want to chase loneliness out of your life and replace it with joy-producing relationships, spend time thinking about what God has done in the hearts of the people around you in this church and strive for a thankful attitude about it. And as that thankfulness increases, so will your joy.

**Benediction: Colossians 3:15 Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. 16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. 17 And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him**

### **Application Questions (James 1:25)**

- 1) How would you describe your level of loneliness?
- 2) How would you describe your level of joy?

- 3) What would you say is the biggest obstacle in your life right now to having the kind of joy-producing relationships that Paul describes in Philippians? Lack of passion for the work of the gospel? Lack of gratitude for the saints? Or something else?
- 4) Spend some time giving thanks to God for what he has done in the saints in the group around you right now.