

JOURNEY INTO A JOY-FILLED LIFE

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Journey Into A Joy-filled Life

A Study on Philippians

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INTRODUCTION

Many of you have watched television's A&E's Biography program over the years. It interests us to learn about the events of a person's life and how those events shaped an individual's personality and journey through life. I don't know if you have ever thought much about it, but all of us have a little running biography in our heads of our life's story. Some years ago, in one of my ministry courses I was assigned to write a personal ministry biography. The biography had to do with the events leading up to me becoming a Christian and my ministerial experience. In my biography, I talk about growing up in a non-Christian home, my becoming a certified dental technician, and the transition of becoming a Christian and later a gospel preacher.

I included in my ministry biography a few of the foolish things I did in those early years that consequently landed me in some pretty embarrassing situations. We can find ourselves in an embarrassing situation even when we are trying to do the right thing. For example, I had just started my full-time ministry with a church when I learned that an elderly lady was in the hospital and needed a visit. I remember standing outside her hospital room knocking on the door. I decided to make it my practice to knock before entering a room because I have heard about occasions where a minister comes in the door only to find that the patient's covers, were not covering very much.

I knocked on the door of the hospital room to see if it is OK to come in, and this sweet elderly woman, whom I had never met, boldly said, "come on in preacher." I walked in and she

said “Glad to see you do you want to see my scar?” Before I could respond, she in one fling of her arm, tubes and all threw back the sheet, and she wasn’t wearing much more than a bandage that covered the scar. Now this is my first official hospital visit at on the other side of ministry school. I thought to myself, I really wanted to do well in this thing called hospital visitation and this was not a good start! All the way back to the church office I was wondering what in the world I was going to say when someone asked me about my visit with this lady. I decided in advance if someone asked me if I saw her? I would stay to my script and say, “Yes, I saw her.” That story did not make my biography.

Every life tells a story, which story will yours tell? Someday they are going to take me out and dig a hole in the ground and my wife and children are going to watch this tent be swallowed up by the earth. What will my story, my journey, tell them on that day? I hope they will be able to say along with others, “Thank God, God’s story, God’s journey, became His story and His journey. Thank God for his Christian influence in my life.”

The Apostle Paul in the Book of Philippians connects the dots that will teach you how to live a joy-filled life. You will notice throughout Paul’s writings he lays claim to another person’s story as the defining story of his life. Paul’s mission in life was about trying to get others to travel with him on the Christian adventure. His journey with Jesus was fueled by Jesus, death, burial and glorious resurrection. Paul submitted to the death and resurrection story of Jesus and it changed his life.

If you were left to author your story, and were brutally honest not leaving out any detail, the stories of sin, shame,

and failure would overwhelm all other perspectives. God knows this and that is why God edited Paul's story with Jesus' cleansing blood and He wants to edit yours as well. The thoughts and concepts I have written in this book has evolved from my years of studying and preaching through Philippians. My purpose was not to write a commentary, but to share ideas that can help make application from what the apostle records for our learning and study.

If you will continue to journey with Jesus, or begin the journey, or take the journey afresh, the journey will ultimately take you to the place of a joy-filled heart. The Apostle said in Romans 15:13 – "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." Jesus said in John 16:33 – "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." Will you allow your life's story to be written in light of the victory of those who journey with Jesus into a joy-filled life?

The Apostle Paul, in Philippians Chapter Three, calls us to follow his example in following Jesus. Paul's example illustrates for followers of Jesus the value of perseverance. When I did my mother's memorial service there was one word that came to my mind that I thought best summed up her life. The word was "perseverance." Perseverance could have been my mother's middle name. She persevered in trying to help others. She was a caretaker to many and cared about those who were lonely, weak, and unable to take care of themselves. My mother loved me the best she knew how and I am thankful for she did her best.

The word perseverance is the one word I used over and

over during her memorial celebration. She displayed an attitude of perseverance in a number of areas through the years. I learned a good measure of perseverance from her life. I remember her mixing concrete in wheelbarrows until I was old enough to do it myself. We built rock planters together all around the outside of our home. I remember my mother taking me on summer trips she would call "rock hunting," but it was not what most people might think. We did travel to the nearby desert looking for rocks, but we were not looking for little rocks we could put in a small rock collection. These were not pretty little rocks you might carry around in your pocket. They were big rocks and it would take two hands for me to carry them.

Together we would pick up these good size rocks from closest dry desert river beds. One rock or two at a time and we would lug them to the trunk of the car. She called it rock hunting, looking back, I would call it "child labor," because it was a lot of work. We made a number of trips like that and from my memory it was always summer and the rocks were hot to touch by midday. After a few loads of carrying rocks back to the car, I had all the fun I wanted picking up rocks. My mother persevered on those outings and she made me persevere.

There were times mother knew I needed to rest and she would let me rest, but she never stopped loading the rocks. She would often finish the job of loading the trunk herself. There were other times she knew I didn't really need to rest and she made me persevere. I wanted to quit after a few loads, not my persevering mother. It did not take all that many rocks in the trunk to weigh down our car. After a morning of "rock hunting," back home we would travel. When we got home the work was not done. We had to unload those rocks

and begin mixing cement. We would mix up mortar to pour over the rocks after they were placed in the forms she had previously made from two-by-fours.

I have reflected on those rock hunting trips and now I realize those trips were more than just about rocks. They were about a relationship between mother and son. As we walked together we talked together and what we were doing in during these construction zone projects was sharing life together. My mother could be pretty tough at times, but it made me stronger and able to reach out and take hold of life in ways I may never have done without her example of perseverance.

It was not till after I graduated from high school and left home did I start reading the Bible. There was a period in my life when I did not know where real life was to be found, but I came to realize that real life was not found apart from Jesus. Life as God designed it is only possible through a relationship with Jesus. Jesus sinless sacrifice on the cross makes the joy-filled life possible for those who will follow Jesus. I learned Jesus persevered in a way that truly humbled me. His life's story summed up in His birth, death, burial, and resurrection from the grave demanded a response from my heart and with my feet.

Jesus gave up His life on the cross so He could have a walking, talking relationship with His creation. We can listen to what He says to us in the Bible and we can talk to Him through prayer. While my mother did plant seeds of perseverance in me, I saw the value of perseverance from a different perspective in reading the Bible. The scriptures started to teach me the value of perseverance in following Jesus and having a relationship with Him.

I am still learning the depth of what it means to persevere in my journey with Jesus. Fortunately, like Paul the writer of Philippians did, I figured out a long time ago quitting is not an option. You are not a failure until you quit following Jesus. Quitters will never receive the prize God has in store for His people. Paul's journey with Jesus, reflected in his words in the bible letter called Philippians is a reminder that it is not just important how you start the Christian race, it is also important how you finish. The original word translated in the New Testament "perseverance" or "patience" found in the New Testament conveys more than the idea of just waiting for something to happen. Perseverance conveys the idea of "endurance, firmness, and steadfastness."

Years ago, our son was doing an excessive amount of traveling one summer recruiting for a basketball team. He asked me if we could house his border collie a few weeks that summer. At the time we had a very lush lawn of grass that I had worked hard to maintain. I was concerned about his dog digging holes in my yard. My son said, "No dad he does not dig holes." I said, "OK great." My son was right, his dog did not dig at all in the yard, what he failed to tell me was what his dog might chew up in my backyard.

When I came home after work the first day to check on our new yard guest I checked out the yard and he had refrained from digging anywhere. I then went to the hose bib to turn on my sprinkler because it takes a good deal of water to keep the yard thick and green. I turned on the water on but the sprinkler did not work. Upon investigating I could see and hear water rushing out near the sprinkler head. I walked over to the area and noticed that the hose looked like it had been cut in half. It looked like it had been cut, but not with a knife. The dog who did not dig in the yard had chewed through the hose

very methodically only a few inches from the end of my seventy-five-foot hose.

The dog chewed a small section off the end of the hose. So I made a trip to the hardware store to purchase the parts I needed to repair the hose. That was the first day he destroyed my hose, but a couple of days later it happened again. This dog who did not dig certainly found it entertaining to chew through my hose. The dog detached my hose a third time, and a fourth time, and many more times. The dog was having a good old time systematically chewing through my reinforced, tough, lifetime guarantee hose. Meanwhile my hose was getting shorter and shorter. It got to the point where his dog was chewing through my hose every day.

I recall struggling to have patience with my yard guest and perhaps you know the challenge of being patient at times in your own life. We tend to confine the idea of patience as simply a matter of inconvenience or to have to wait for something to happen. Patience or perseverance at times does imply a willingness to wait, but it also means the desire to keep pressing on in your journey with Jesus regardless of the situation. The quality of perseverance is something that was on display in Paul's journey into a joy-filled life in the letter of Philippians.

The important Christian characteristic of perseverance is seen quite vividly in the Apostle Paul's journey. Paul never quit following Jesus despite difficult circumstances or difficult people. In fact, dealing with difficult circumstances and difficult people likely helped Paul develop an even stronger faith in God. Following Jesus requires a spirit of perseverance coupled with a desire to follow Jesus all the way to heaven regardless of this world's troubles or trials. What is absolutely incredible

to me is that when we follow Jesus with a spirit of perseverance we will experience an inexpressible joy that only comes from above. There is joy in following Jesus that you cannot find anywhere else. The joy-filled life begins with having a relationship Jesus.

At the end of each chapter you will find some helpful discussion questions that can be used in various types of class settings. The questions are designed to promote thought in an effort to help teach, train, and transform our lives to the glory of God. Learning to develop the mind or attitude of Christ, as Paul directs us to do in Philippians 2:5, involves learning to discipline ourselves in both the attitude and actions of Christ. Our thoughts impact our actions. The development of Christ-likeness as seen in attitudes like humility and patience, or in actions like service and obedience, requires a great deal of honesty, effort, determination, and prayer.

Chapter 1

JOY IN RELATIONSHIPS

(Philippians 1:1-11)

What is the secret to having a joy-filled heart that is content? This is just one of the many questions we will pursue the answer to on this journey with Jesus into a joy filled-life. This journey will take you through the book of Philippians, which could be identified as the happiest book in the Bible. Depending on your Bible translation words like “joy,” “rejoice,” or “happy”, are used in various forms, multiple times in the four little chapters. Everyone longs to have joy in their life, only most people are searching for joy in all the wrong places.

The joy-filled life only comes from the Lord and one’s relationship with Him. The short book of Philippians was written to the church in Philippi which the Apostle Paul helped to establish. What is amazing to think about, is the happiest book in the Bible was written by a man who was currently in prison in the city of Rome for preaching Christ. It is even more surprising when you understand this was not his first time to be incarcerated for sharing the good news of Jesus. In fact, soon after Paul and his missionary helpers arrived in the city of Philippi to initially establish the church he and Silas encountered serious opposition. Once a few individuals heard the good news and accepted God’s message things became difficult for the mission team and the church.

Paul and Silas were dragged before the authorities while doing mission work in the city of Philippi and were stripped, beaten, and thrown into prison. Paul and Silas chose to not only pray in this problematic situation, but together they lifted their voices in praise to God. The prison guards, along with their fellow prisoners were probably not use to hearing praise of any kind ringing out from walls of the inner cell. Which

should tell us the joy that Paul and Silas experienced in the Lord was not based on their circumstances. The joy of the Lord as described in the Philippian letter for all followers of Jesus goes beyond any situation or circumstance.

While, now being confined to prison in Rome for being a Christian and preaching, Paul makes contact, by way of letter, with his spiritual brothers and sisters back in Philippi. Paul has these believers in his heart (Philippians 1:7). What a blessing it is to receive mail from a loved one. The young man and young woman in love, hunger to hear news from each other. The soldier who receives news from his or her family delights in hearing from them. The family of a soldier may celebrate after hearing that their loved one is safe. People look forward to receiving calls and letters from their family and friends.

The book of Philippians is Paul's love letter to his spiritual friends who have started their own journey with Jesus. As we journey into a joy-filled life with Jesus, we too must let Paul, through the Holy Spirit, share some specific things that can fill our hearts with joy. I have an early word of warning as you make this journey into a joy-filled life. If you make joy, the major goal of your life you are going to live a very self-centered life, and that is going to end up making you miserable. Making joy your primary goal in life will guarantee you will never find the type of joy Paul talks about in Philippians.

Joy, as I see it in Paul's letter is the result, or a byproduct of making Jesus, the Lord of your life. You will discover in this journey into a joy-filled life that the fruit of the spirit called joy, is actually the result of three things: right thinking, right living, and right acting. As you begin this journey through Philippians notice the emphasis on the joy that comes from certain relationships. Joy begins with a relationship with Jesus.

Philippians 1:1-11 – 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, ⁶ being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. ⁷ It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart; for whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, 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. ⁹ And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, ¹⁰ so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, ¹¹ filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ--to the glory and praise of God."

We can learn in these early verses that joy begins and flows from a particular relationship. Paul's opening words of his letter begins by pointing to the relationship he has with the Lord Jesus. He says he and Timothy are "servants of Christ Jesus." Now it would be easy to skip past this phrase and just move on, but this idea of service will be one of the points of emphasis. We will be exploring three main focal points as we move through Philippians. They are: love, prayer, and service. All three of these ideas are found in the first eleven verses.

These three points, love, prayer, and service, will surface multiple times in the four chapters. All three of these ideas are part of the recipe for living a joy-filled life. Love will help you to follow in Jesus' steps. Prayer will help release God's power into your daily life. Service will allow you to use your talents and gifts for God's glory. In light of Paul's usage of the word "servants" in the very first verse, it is important we do not skip over this servant concept. We should rather stop and absorb what is being said here when he describes himself as a servant of Jesus.

I would go so far as to say, that if we do not understand his perspective of what it means to be a servant pleasing to Christ, you have no hope of experiencing the joy of the Lord. There are several Greek words translated “servant” in our New Testament. Sometimes the word “servant” describes a house servant, a hired servant, or a personal attendant. The original word Paul used for “servants,” in Philippians 1:1, literally means “bond-servants,” and is translated such in the New American Standard Bible. The idea behind the term identifies Paul and Timothy as slaves of Christ.

Paul deliberately, and frankly, quite proudly, referred to himself and Timothy as bond-servants of Jesus. In the first century, the people were familiar with slavery. They understood that the slave or bond-servant was subject to the master. Whatever the master wanted, that is what the slave did. What was important to the master needed to be important to the slave. When Paul says he is a slave of Jesus Christ he understands Jesus is in charge. Whatever Jesus wanted him to do, that is what Paul happily did.

The joy of the bond-servant was to please the master. By using the particular word, Paul did for servant, he was communicating he was bound, or inseparably connected to Jesus. His whole identity as a Christian was structured from the one to whom he belonged. Paul was saying that his passion and desire was to please his master. God’s passions and desires became Paul’s passions and desires. Paul’s identification as a person was forever linked to his Master.

When Paul uses the word servant, he was professing his total obedience, and commitment to the Lord. He understood he owed absolute obedience to Christ. When Paul started His journey with Jesus he knew he was a man living under the authority of his Master’s will. Paul’s life was now guided, directed, and regulated by the authority of the Lord’s will. In Matthew’s Gospel a Roman centurion, an army officer, told Jesus in Matthew 8:9 – “For I myself am a man under author-

ity, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and that one, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it." This centurion officer was a man with authority over his forces and he understood what it was to be under authority. Paul shared the sentiment of the Roman officer's understanding of authority as Paul applied it to his relationship with Jesus.

Paul voluntarily surrendered himself as a slave to Christ and lived his life completely under His authority. The terms bond-servant or slave, understood correctly, paints a beautiful picture of one's relationship to Christ. It is one's relationship with the Lord Jesus that equips him or her to develop healthy relationships with others. Paul was willing to suffer anything and go anywhere for the Lord, in the hope that others might come to experience the salvation that leads to a joy-filled life. Paul and Timothy were servants of Jesus and they found great joy in their relationship with Jesus.

It is no little thing Paul referred to himself as a "servant." He unashamedly wore the sign "servant" for the Master. There was no hint of regret in Paul's labor for the Lord. There was no hesitation to serve Jesus, once Paul started his journey into a joy-filled life. Paul felt no shame in being imprisoned for following Jesus, in spite of difficult situations. As a recipient of God's grace, it was full steam ahead for Paul to wholeheartedly serve Jesus. What did serving Jesus look like for Paul? In the most practical terms, serving Jesus, meant serving others.

Jesus ministry was all about people and relationships. Jesus was in the people business, Jesus was a servant and if we journey with Jesus we will be servants of people. Red flags should be waving, and red lights should be flashing anytime God's people become more interested in programs, than the people for which the programs were initially designed to help. Paul's ministry was all about people and relationships. Paul's relationship to love and serve others naturally flowed out of

his relationship with Jesus.

The fourth chapter of Philippians unveils a story in the church family that will illustrate we cannot have a vibrant healthy relationship with Jesus that will result in joy-filled living, if we are not doing our part to have healthy relationships. This principle of cultivation, caring, serving, and loving relationships with each other in God's family, has far reaching value beyond the Christian circle. John 13:34-35 - ³⁴ "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. ³⁵ By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." Paul and Timothy, graciously accepted the role of a servant and were willing to serve Jesus, and the church, because they loved Jesus.

Paul and Timothy, were like first responders for the cause of Jesus in the first century. When someone needs help, or medical attention, first responders stand ready to serve the needs of people. True servants care about the interests of others and find the most pleasure and fulfillment in life from serving others. That is just what genuine servants do, they help, they comfort, they encourage, and in essence they do whatever needs to be done.

The world's definition of success is much different than the Lord's definition. Our world has described various periods of success. For example, when you are sixteen-years old success is being able to get your driver's license. When you are ninety-five years old success is being able to keep your driver's license. This may help put life in perspective. What is it that really defines a successful life? Success in the eyes of the Lord is whether or not we are willing to be used by God? The key to the most successful, most forceful, most impactful life that has ever been lived is summed by the word servant. Being a servant of Christ means your life will have force and an impact in this world.

Being a servant of Christ means your life will be significant

and you will leave a mark for all of eternity. Follow Jesus into servanthood and you will find a level of joy, strength, energy, power, and intensity that extends beyond yourself. Few people deny that Christ's life was the most important in all of human history in terms of shaping people's thoughts and actions. What made his life so profound? Do you remember what was said in Matthew 20:25-28 - ²⁵ "Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. ²⁶ Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, ²⁷ and whoever wants to be first must be your slave-- ²⁸ just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

There are certain words that we might not naturally put together, but according to Jesus they belong together. Words such as servant and joy. If you lack joy in your life, who are you serving? Are you serving self or are you serving Jesus as Lord? This world does not teach us to serve. In fact, we try to get out of serving most of the time because we want to be served. We are not born to serve, and we remain on that course until we begin the life-changing adventure of following Jesus. There is a definite connection between serving the Lord and knowing the joy of the Lord.

Time and time again Paul urged the Philippians to be people of joy. Have you noticed that our world lacks joy? Have you ever noticed that weather forecasters always say things like, "Today it will be partly cloudy with a ten-percent chance of rain?" During my years of living in Phoenix, Arizona, I never heard a weather forecaster say, "Today it is going to be mostly clear with a 99 percent chance of sunshine." Which by the way should have been an easy thing to do in the Valley of the Sun. We are prone to be a joyless people, and that is unfortunate because that strikes against God's plan for His creation.

I can understand why people in the world lack joy, but how

is it possible for believers to have a joy deficiency? Could it be that there are individuals who have equated acknowledging there is a God, to following Him? There is a difference between admiring Jesus and following Him. Many people admired Jesus, but only a few devoted themselves to Him. While many in the crowds admired Jesus' teaching there was something happening in the hearts of the minority that went way beyond admiration. Their hearts started pounding and their minds started racing. Something inside them said, "This is it! This is what I have been longing for my whole life, inexpressible joy, and peace, and mercy." Some folks said, "I do not care what others do, I am following Jesus, I am following Him all the way.

There were people in the city of Philippi who heard the good news summed up in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. They heard how Jesus could save them from their sins and they chose to follow Jesus. They were humbled in learning that the Creator and Redeemer wanted to have a relationship with them. In the first chapter of Philippians we read of their spirit of appreciation for Jesus' sacrifice and service to make possible fellowship. The result of the missionary efforts in their city was that some individuals by their actions chose to go the way of Jesus.

As I read Paul's love letter to the Philippian Christians it is not hard to catch their resolve to follow the Lord. They must have said things like, we will be Jesus' partner in the gospel and we will partner with Paul, because they did (v.5). These believers adopted the attitude, we will do whatever Jesus wants us to do. We will go wherever Jesus wants us to go, and we will send and support others to share the good news we have been blessed to hear. They were willing to give whatever they could in their service to the Lord and others. That should be the attitude behind the open invitation Jesus gave to everyone when He said, "Follow me." The people in the church in Philippi had made their decision, and left the

mocking crowds to follow Jesus.

There is no greater need today, than for a person to have a relationship with Jesus and be committed to serving the Lord. Paul came into Philippi sharing the refreshing news of Jesus and encouraging others to follow Jesus. Paul did this because he himself, had earlier made such a decision in his own life and it was the best decision he ever made. Paul chose Jesus and out of his relationship with the Lord, he tried to inspire others to join him in the journey into a joy-filled life.

Paul's journey with Jesus had brought some painful experiences, but he never wavered in his service to the Master. His positive Christian attitude is woven through the four chapters of Philippians. If ever there was someone who had the right to have a sour outlook on life, it would have been Paul. I say that only because he was sitting in prison for his faith, awaiting trial before Caesar where he could be condemned to death. If anyone had reason not to be joyful or optimistic it was Paul. Rather than wallowing in self-pity, or calling on his friends to help him attempt an escape, or even help him make bail if it became an option, Paul wrote a joy-filled letter.

Being optimistic is a good thing. I have heard that a key ingredient in the longevity of aging people is optimism. I am not sure about any research on this, but I have noticed optimistic people are happier people. Pessimistic folks are not happy, and what is worse, they seem to have a gift to make the people around them unhappy as well. If I have a choice, I would always prefer being around optimistic people. I like the optimism in the ninety-five-year-old lady who admitted, "I have sure grown old. I have had multiple heart surgeries. I have had joints replaced in my arms and legs. I cannot see very well and cannot hear anything quieter than a jet engine. I take forty different medications and sometimes get dizzy so I am subject to blackout. I have circulation problems throughout my body. But I am optimistic about the future, because I still have

my driver's license!" We may like her optimism about the future, but we would not want to be a passenger in her car.

Paul's optimism about the future had foundation in the grace of God. The grace of God that the believers in Philippi shared with him (Philippians 1:7). How could Paul have joy while wearing chains for defending the gospel? When the list of bad things kept piling up against Paul, his optimism was based on the fact he had received grace and peace from Jesus. His experience in Philippi was not all good. Acts Chapter 16, tells us how he was severely beaten for preaching Christ and thrown into jail to be restrained by chains. How could he have any measure of joy since he had so many bad things that happen to him while he was in Philippi? It was because Paul had a choice what he put in his memory bank, and one thing he put in his memory vault was the relationship he had with these Christians. This was, of course, not the only thing he had etched into his memory. He could experience joy based on his relationship with God and particularly how the Christian family shared in God's grace with him.

Understand that when he wrote this letter to the Philippians, it was not a letter of self-pity. He did not complain that things had turned out as they did. This is why I am so drawn to the letter of Philippians as it reflects both his relationship and commitment to the Lord. You can choose to focus on the negative or the positive, but do not think you will ever discover the joy-filled life by dwelling on negative things. A joyful attitude toward life has everything to do with your relationship with Jesus. Paul had joy by focusing on his relationship with Jesus and the positive relationships he had with his brothers and sisters in Christ.

What else besides from being a servant of Jesus was Paul's secret to a joy-filled life? How could he be joyful in the midst of so many difficulties? Paul made a conscience decision to be joyful by focusing on the positive relationships God had brought his way. Joy is an act of the will. It is an attitude of

heart that we embrace in Jesus, not a feeling that comes and goes like surface happiness or sadness. When Paul chose joy, he focused on the positive and that meant he focused on people and his relationships with them.

Prayer is another spiritual discipline that is woven within Philippians. Notice Philippians 1:3 - "I thank my God every time I remember you." Paul puts an emphasis on prayer, along with love and service. Paul looked at the past with thanksgiving to God which led him to pray with all joy. He says in Philippians 1:4-5 - 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." Paul prays with joy in his heart for these people because they are in his heart. If you are going to experience relational joy you need not only be grateful for the people in your life, you need to pray with joy for them.

Paul was not only thinking about the Philippians, he was praying for them. Paul said when he did that, there was a joy that filled his heart. Why? Because of their "partnership in the gospel." The word translated "partnership," or "participation," is from the Greek word "koinonia." The original word is usually translated "fellowship." It expresses a sense of community, closeness, and cooperation. They shared fellowship with the gospel and as a result they labored together in the Lord to advance the good news.

Develop the discipline of prayer and unselfish living through service to God and others, and you will experience God's kind of joy. Paul says this partnership in servanthood for the gospel has been there "from the first day until now." They did not just serve for a short time, their partnership continued because of their love for Jesus and their deliverance from sin's condemnation. It brings me joy in my heart, Paul says, to have servants like you as partners for Christ. You have to be prayerful, patient, and persistent in your love with people if you are going to be a servant who loves and serves in the likeness of Jesus. These three words that begin with the letter

“P” will strengthen your resolve to love them God’s way.

Philippians 1:8 reads, “God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.” Paul loved and cared for these people with the love and care of Jesus. When you look at your present trial with confidence in God you will understand that positive praying is more effective than positive thinking. Positive thinking is helpful, but it cannot compare to positive praying. The quickest way to change a bad attitude and bad relationship to a good one is to pray.

You may not be able to change your circumstances, but you can change yourself, and pray with a confidence God can produce a change in the people around you. Often times we want the people around us to change, but we do not want to change ourselves. We think if she would do this, or if he would do that, I would be joyful. You have figured out by now, you cannot change anyone, but positive praying with a joyful heart, can change you.

Someone might naturally ask at this point, for what do I pray? Why not pray what he did in Philippians 1:9-11 – ⁹ “And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, ¹⁰ so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, ¹¹ filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.” Paul looked at his present situation and the circumstance of his Christian family in Philippi with a confidence in God’s provision.

Philippians 1:6, “being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.” Paul prayed for their love to grow. He makes positive statements that are backed up with productive prayer. We can know this request for them to grow in their understanding of Christ, was also God’s will for them. Productive prayer will always line up with God’s will for our lives. Paul is voicing in this prayer not only what he desires for

his friends, but what God desires for His people everywhere.

How can their love abound and grow? Love can grow in us by God's design when we connect God's kind of love through the knowledge of Christ. The Greek word Paul used for "knowledge" in verse nine, does not simply mean knowledge, but experiential knowledge. The word meant a fuller knowledge, knowledge upon knowledge, as if a person has taken the information and has put that knowledge into practice. The result of such knowledge is the ability to make healthy decisions, and determine what is best. Paul understands the more we love God's way and grow more and more in knowledge of Christ, the better choices we will make. Philippians 1:10, "so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ."

God's love and knowing Christ, helps you understand what is of eternal value. God's love, coupled with the insight you can get from reading God's Word that illustrates God's love, will help you to make choices on which direction to go that will bring glory and praise to God. The servant's heart will be filled with compassion for people. The servant's relationship with people will honor and glorify God. The servant who serves the Lord, will experience joy. Real joy begins with a relationship with Jesus.

Our society seeks celebrity status from the school-aged children to adults, and it is often sought at the expense of conviction and character. This push towards being a superstar instead of being a servant, often times trickles down into the Christian faith in subtle ways. Only when the "what can I do for you," replaces "what is in it for me," can we begin to grow up in Christ and understand the joy of being a servant of Jesus.

Jesus served out of love by His own free choice, as did Paul and Timothy. God the Father did not manipulate or coerce Jesus to serve. He served out of relationship with His Heavenly Father. He served with love in His heart and faithfulness in His walk. Jesus wants you to serve Him and love Him the same

way, with all your heart. Take a personal audit of your practice of serving others, praying for others, and persistently loving others, and you will have good pulse on how your journey is going with Jesus.

CHAPTER 1 – QUESTIONS
TO HELP TEACH, TRAIN, AND TRANSFORM LIVES

1. How would you describe Paul's desire to follow Jesus even though he found himself confined to prison in Rome for preaching Christ? How does this reflect the value of Paul's understanding of his relationship with Jesus?
2. Paul had endured jail time for the sake of the gospel prior to his Roman imprisonment. Explain the circumstances surrounding his experience in the city of Philippi and his attitude as expressed by his actions at that particular time? (see Acts 16:12-40)
3. If you want more joy in your life, should you be searching for joy or is there a better approach to finding the joy lived out in Philippians?
4. What term did Paul use in referring to himself and Timothy as he started his letter? What was the heart's desire of the person defined by this term? How did Paul equate that to his life?
5. How does the world's view of success differ from the God's view? What did serving Jesus look like for Paul and how can that help us?
6. It is understandable why unbelievers lack joy, but how is it possible for believers to have a joy deficiency? Explain the difference between admiring Jesus to really following Him?
7. How can your love for Christ grow and abound?