

A Recipe for Joy

To The Citizens of Heaven, Part 5

Philippians 1:3-7

In an issue of the journal, Psychology Today, the results of an extensive survey were reported. They had asked their subscribers – more than 50,000 households – to respond to the simple question, How Can Someone Find Happiness?

Responses came in from all around the country as people sent in their viewpoint on how to discover happiness.

People who were in a poorer income bracket typically included “winning the lottery” as the sure way to find their happiness. People with more money were similar in that they simply wanted more things – things they didn’t yet have.

Many of the respondents were obviously confused. They didn’t know what they wanted . . . they had no idea how to define what genuine happiness was or how to get it. They asked for all kinds of advice too.

In fact, one man wrote, “I have listed below the reasons I think I am happy . . . please confirm.”

I think it’s telling to consider the fact that the English word “happiness” has the Middle-English root, “hap”, which is also found in happen, or happening.

In a very real sense, happiness to most people depends on what happens to them.

No wonder most of the respondents to this survey – and nearly everyone you meet on the street – will define their happiness in terms of:

- what *happens* to them –
- what *happens* to their family and friends –
- what *happens* to their investments –
- what *happens* to their health –
- what *happens* to their job –
- what *happens* to their dreams and their plans.

In other words, happiness is tied to the horizontal circumstances of life.

And that is exactly why it can’t be guaranteed – or kept for very long, right?

It becomes that elusive element of life that all of mankind has been chasing throughout all of human history.

Benjamin Franklin made this tongue in cheek observation from the language of our newly crafted constitution which guarantees everyone life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness – he said, Robert J. Morgan records, This constitution gives a people the right to *pursue* happiness, but each individual must catch it for themselves.”ⁱ

Most people, if honest, will admit they haven’t quite caught it yet . . . but they’re still chasing it down.

I found this out in my rambling research . . . there are 1.7 million dogs living in New York City . . . nearly 8 million cats living there . . . which tells you something about New York City.

I’m not going to tell you what those things are . . . you do your own research.

Part of the challenge is the fact that when your cat dies in New York City, you can’t just go out in the park and bury it. And most people don’t have a back yard – and even if they did, they can’t, legally. The city charges a \$50 fee to come and take it away.

One enterprising woman came up with the clever idea to take care of the problem for half the amount. She placed an ad in the newspaper that read, “When your cat dies, I’ll remove it for \$25.00” Half-price. Calls began coming in.

What she would do was go to the local Salvation Army Store or Goodwill Store and purchase an old suitcase for 2 or 3 dollars. When she got a call, she would go to their apartment or home and carefully place the cat in the suitcase. Then she would take a ride on the subway in the early evening – a perfect time for pickpockets and thieves; and she’d sit near a

set of doors and put her suitcase down and then act like she wasn't watching. Sooner or later, a thief would work his way over and then, when the doors opened, grab the suitcase and run. She'd say, rather quietly, "Stop thief."

What a surprise . . . and what a catch.

The average person on the street is grabbing suitcases they think contain the contents of lasting happiness . . . but it never quite delivers.

It is impossible to read Paul's letter to the Philippians without picking up on his contagious spirit of true happiness.

A better word would be "joy". Paul will use that word often in this letter.

But you need to know, joy is deeper and different than happiness.

Happiness depends on horizontal happenings; joy depends on the commitments of the heart.

Paul had every reason to be anything but joyful . . . he's under house arrest, and Roman guards alternate in shifts throughout the day and night, literally handcuffed to this aging Apostle.

Paul is not writing from some country estate where he puts on an easy, happy smile; these are dangerous and difficult times.

Throughout this letter he will model and mandate what it takes to rise above your horizontal circumstances and become a genuinely joyful believer. Listen, if Paul can be joyful and the believers living in this Roman city can catch joy, then we can too.

If you have your Bibles open at Philippians chapter 1, Paul is about to provide nothing less than a recipe for joy.

This recipe might surprise you.

I want to point out at least 4 ingredients to genuine joy, as we work our way through this paragraph.

1. And the first ingredient is what I want to call, Grateful Recollection.

Grateful recollection.

Philippians chapter 1 and verse 3 – just the first phrase – I thank my God in all my remembrance of you.

Ultimately this thank you letter was first and foremost the giving of thanks to God.

And don't miss this intimate, possessive pronoun: I thank my God.

You see, Paul's vertical relationship with God colored – shaped – influenced – and even defined his horizontal perspective in relation to his circumstances.

You start there – with that ingredient – *I thank my God* – and you are on your way to mixing up a fresh serving of joy.

Notice what he's choosing to thank God for . . . *in all my remembrance of you.*

Paul is writing in the present tense – in other words, I am *always* thanking *my God for you.*

Now it's easy to read this last part of *verse 3* and reach the conclusion that Paul has nothing to recall concerning the Philippian church other than pleasant memories.

It *is* true that this church had brought him great joy – as we'll discover;

- it is true that he has little to rebuke them for or warn them;
- it is true that the churches in **Rome and Galatia** were struggling over multiple issues – including a desire by some to return back to obeying Jewish laws and traditions;
- it is true that the church in **Corinth** was divisive and tolerant of immorality and selfishly pursuing public gifts;
- it is true that the church in **Ephesus** was plagued by false teacher;
- the church in **Colosse** was turning away to a heresy all their own;
- the church in **Thessalonica** was riddled with false rumors about Paul, lazy members and false teaching about the resurrection.ⁱⁱ

Yes, it's true that the **Philippian** letter is mostly pleasant; but don't make the mistake of thinking this church was without problems.

Paul in fact will do something very rare in this particular letter by effectively rebuking two women, *by name*, who were causing strife in the church.

He's going to challenge this church on several issues.

Listen, when Paul says, "***I thank my God in all my remembrance of you***", he doesn't mean there aren't unpleasant things he's not grateful about when he thinks of them.

What he does mean is that he's choosing not to dwell on them – or evidently recall them.

You want a recipe for joy? Begin with this ingredient.

Begin practicing the art of selective memory – we already do it anyway, don't we? Let's practice *grateful recollection* – where we choose to remember only those things about people which make us grateful.

Listen, for those of us with a poor memory – we're halfway there.

One author convicted me and reminded me here in this text where Paul is obviously exercising mental and memory restraint; he writes that having a genuine desire to remember and focus on the goodness, kindness, and successes of others does not involve denying their weaknesses and shortcomings but choosing to look past them. Paul will remind the Corinthians to erase the list of wrongs against them in I Corinthians 13; the person who focuses on the faults, shortcomings and slights of others is a person given to the flesh where resentment and a critical spirit will rule.ⁱⁱⁱ

A key ingredient to a joyful spirit is limiting your recollection to that which produces gratitude unto God.

A second ingredient to genuine joy is:

2. Faithful Intercession

Notice verse 4. Always in every prayer of mine for you all, making my prayer with joy.

Have you ever thought about the fact that Paul rarely prayed for things . . . but he was always praying for people?

And notice the comprehensive scope of his prayer life. You could circle the same Greek word used 4 times in **verses 3 and 4** – it's translated *all* or *every*. ***I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all...***

Let me paraphrase it to give you the idea of his repetition for emphasis – *I thank my God in all my remembrance of you; at all times and in all my prayers for all of you.*

He obviously doesn't want to leave anybody out, does he?

He's effectively saying, "Listen, I'm praying *all* the time for *all* of you."

This isn't some pious platitude where we might say to somebody without really thinking – "Yeah, I'll pray for you."^{iv}

And then never do.

Paul meant it.

Can you imagine this once proud Pharisee now so consumed by the grace of God that with joy he prays for a Gentile businesswoman from Asia; a Roman jailer who once had beaten him; a demon possessed girl who once plagued him.

Now converted to Christ (***Acts 16***) – and now every one of them are on his prayer list.

Can you imagine being on Paul's prayer list?

Have you ever had anybody tell you, with absolute sincerity, that they were praying for you . . . do you remember what that did for you?

It brought you joy.

Well, it also brings joy to those who do the praying.

And that's because those who pray for somebody else are winning the battle against I-me-and-mine – and in so doing they are hurdling the greatest obstacle to joy in the entire world, which happens to be themselves.

You can't be selfish and at the same time experience joy. And intercessors are winning that battle.

One of the highlights of my Sunday morning is knowing that there are a half-dozen individuals, who meet in the prayer room and pray during the 8:00am service for all the events that will take place here today.

And when I arrive backstage around 7:45am, unless I get behind a slow driver who drives like it's Sunday morning . . . I get in here and go backstage where the sound tech laces me up with this microphone; then after a sound check, right around 7:55am, I walk backstage and over to this little room next to the baptistery entrance where a handful of men and women are waiting.

They call themselves the Aaron and Hur prayer partners – in honor of those two men who held up Moses's hands while he prayed during a critical battle (Exodus 17) – and that's what they do . . . they hold me up – they hold everything in this ministry up to God in prayer. They'd love for you to join them, by the way. And I would too.

I can tell you they have a different perspective on this morning than many others – they have an entirely different perspective on Sunday School . . . and this service – and this sermon – and this shepherd.

You see, you intercede for somebody and it changes, first and foremost, the intercessor.

Can you imagine this rented apartment where some Roman soldier is chained to the Apostle Paul while under house arrest – and Paul says, "Listen, it's time I went through my prayer list." And that guard sat through Paul's joyful, passionate, intense, personal prayer time over these believers in Rome.

And don't overlook the fact that Paul's prayer life didn't change his circumstances . . . when he said "Amen" he was still chained to that Roman guard . . . but his prayer life changed his spirit.

We know that because he is still chained, and yet he's praying *with joy*.

You want to mix up a recipe of joy, be limited – in your remembering, but generous – in your praying.

The ingredients of joy are not only grateful recollection and faithful intercession, but thirdly;

3. Reliable Participation

Notice verse 5; [I'm praying with joy] because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.

For the first time, Paul introduces one of his favorite words. The word partnership comes from *koinonia* (κοινωνία). Depending on its appearance as a verb or an adjective or a noun, the word can be translated, fellowship, communion, partnership, participating, being ready to share (*Romans 12:13; 15:26; Hebrews 13:16; I Corinthians 1:9*).

Paul will use the word again in his letter to Philippians to refer to fellowshiping with the sufferings of Christ (*chapter 3:10*); earlier in chapter 2 he refers to the fellowship we have in the Holy Spirit.

So this isn't some trite word to refer to – Paul isn't saying that these Philippians had a curious interest in getting his prayer letter.

He actually means here that they are deeply involved in partnering with him in the gospel through prayer, financial sacrifice, distributing his letter to others, hosting him in his trips; carrying on the work in the gospel outreach of the church there in Philippi.

Listen, what we've got to do if we want to experience joy personally and corporately as a church is to elevate our understanding of Biblical *koinonia*.

One pastor/author provoked my thinking when he wrote in his commentary on Philippians wrote that many Christians are going from church to church seeking good fellowship and in so doing they are seeking an illusion. What do I mean (he writes)? [What I mean is this]; Biblical fellowship is more than a cup of coffee after a church service or enjoying other Christians at a gathering; or the pleasure of a meal with another believing parent while your children play nearby. Don't get me wrong, these are wonderful pleasures. But fellowship – the kind Paul is talking about here – goes much deeper. It is shared responsibility; it is serving together in women's Bible studies; volunteering to serve in children's ministries; joining a team and serving on a short-term missions trip; joining some team to do mercy work to alleviate suffering after some devastation; taking the gospel to poor people; joining a band of brothers or sisters to pray for the world.^v

That's koinonia.

That's biblical fellowship.

William Carey and a few other people understood Paul's idea here with the believers in Philippi. Carey would become the Father of Modern Missions, spending 40 years in India. But he knew he couldn't do it alone and so before he left, he wrote to a small group of believers – and I quote – “There is a gold mine in India, but it is as deep as the center of the earth. I will venture to go down into that mine, but you must hold the ropes.”^{vi}

Everybody along that rope of support and prayer and interest and involvement experienced genuine koinonia.

Because genuine fellowship comes from partnering, not spectating.

The church has become all the more like a Sunday afternoon NFL football game, one of my professors used to say; where 50,000 people in desperate need of exercise watch 22 men in desperate need of rest.

I was recently reading the thoughts of one veteran pastor and author of 50 years who wrote that the church today has produced a host of ecclesiastical hitchhikers. The hitchhiker's thumb says, “You buy the car, you pay for repairs, upkeep and insurance; you buy the gas – and I'll ride with you. But if you have an accident, you're on your own. So it is with so many in today's church; their creed is, “You go to the meetings and you serve on the committees and volunteer teams; you grapple with logistics and needs and issues of the church and you take care of the bills and the mortgage while you're at it – I'm just along for the ride. And if things don't suit me, I'll probably complain and criticize and maybe even bail out – you see, my thumb is always out for a better ride.”^{vii}

Man, you get to the end of that paragraph and the word that comes to mind is – ouch.

Kent Hughes wrote that primarily to challenge men, in his book, *Disciplines of a Godly Man*, written more than 30 years ago . . . I wonder what he would write today.

Ecclesiastical hitchhikers . . . stands filled with fans.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the church doesn't need better fans . . . it needs better fellowship – people who will climb aboard and hold the ropes.

And would you notice his confidence and encouragement – verse 6. ***And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.***

The day of Jesus Christ is a prophetic phrase that only shows up in the New Testament only 6 times – 3 of those times are in this letter to the Philippians (1:6, 10 and 2:16).

This phrase emphasizes that future day when Jesus Christ returns and raptures away His church.

In contrast, you will find the phrase, ***the day of the Lord*** used in the New Testament; the day of the Lord refers to a day of judgment and tribulation, described by Paul in ***1 Thessalonians 5***.^{viii}

Paul isn't referring to the day of the Lord, but the day of Jesus Christ – a day the church even now is anticipating; a day when the church is brought to completion in Christ.

In other words, Paul is saying that what God began – God will finish.

Jesus Christ announced to His disciples in ***Matthew 16:18 – I will build my church and the gates of Hell will not prevail against it.***

I will – in the future – build my church! And it began on the Day of Pentecost in Acts chapter 2.

And Paul effectively announces here to the Philippians, “One day, Jesus is going to announce – I have ***finished*** building my church.”

In other words, Jesus Christ the Master builder is going to carry on His construction project until the church is completed.^{ix}

And we believe that completion date will be marked by the sound of a trumpet and the calling away of all who make up the church – the Bride of Jesus Christ.

Paul delivers this ingredient of anticipation and joy to the Philippians – “Listen, what God began in you – this good work of the gospel that you partner with me even now – will one day be finished.

That doesn't mean God will be finished working, saving, delivering – certainly throughout the

Tribulation there will be millions saved and Israel reconstituted as a nation (*Revelation 19, 20*);

But Paul *does* mean that the church will be completed . . . the Bride will be completely called and redeemed . . . then called upward . . . glorified . . . rewarded . . . wedded to Christ and soon to be joined in co-reigning with Him in His future kingdom.

In other words, Jesus Christ will have no unfinished work.

It's not finished yet – but as Paul says here in *verse 6. I am sure of this* . . . that's another way of saying, "It's as good as done!"

The ingredients of joy include

- Grateful recollection
- Faithful intercession
- Reliable participation

One more:

4. Loyal Devotion

Notice verse 7. It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart.

He effectively told them in *verse 3* that they were on his mind – and now here in *verse 7* he concludes the thought by telling them that they are *on his heart*.

We find it easy to tell other Christians, "You're on my nerves." Paul writes, "You all are on my heart."^x

Why?

He writes further, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel.

In the defense – that word is apologia (απολογία) which gives us our word apologetics – the defense of the gospel to those outside the church.

Paul adds here, *and in the confirmation of the gospel* – the word confirmation is a word that refers to the building up of the body.

These believers are partnering with Paul in defending the faith to those outside the church and building up the faith to those inside the church.^{xi}

In other words, they were more concerned about the gospel and the church and the lost than they were about themselves.

No wonder they were near and dear to the heart of Paul . . . a man writing with chains dangling from his wrists and ankles.

They shared his passion . . . they shared his joy – they understood his loyal devotion to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Do you want joy in your life? Do you really? I mean, after this, you might know now why you really don't want it.

But if you do, let's review the recipe:

- **Joy is found in grateful recollection** – we called it, selective remembering; let me put it this way: joy is choosing to remember when people do you right, instead of when they've done you wrong;
- **Secondly, joy is found in faithful intercession** – in other words, joy is choosing to pray for people instead of things we want for ourselves;
- **Thirdly, joy is found in reliable participation** – in other words, joy is choosing to participate in the church instead of hitchhiking as we travel toward our final destination;
- **And fourthly, joy is found in loyal devotion** – let me put it this way; joy is choosing to defend the gospel more than we care to defend ourselves.

These are the ingredients in a recipe that will:

- sanctify your memory
- flavor your relationships
- perfume your perspective
- prioritize your priorities
- and energize your loyalties
- and fuel the engine of your anticipation with grace and wisdom and joy.

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- i Robert J. Morgan, Thomas Nelson's Complete Book of Stories (Thomas Nelson, 2000), p. 406
- ii Adapted from Life Application Bible, Philippians, Colossians & Philemon (Tyndale, 1995), p. 21.
- iii Adapted from John MacArthur, Philippians (Moody Publishers, 2001), p. 20
- iv Adapted from Dennis E. Johnson, Philippians (P & R Publishing, 2013), p. 25
- v Adapted from R. Kent Hughes, Philippians: The Fellowship of the Gospel (Crossway Books, 2007), p. 27
- vi Adapted from Charles R. Swindoll, Clearing the High Hurdles (Insight for Living Study Guide, 1995), p. 54
- vii R. Kent Hughes, Disciplines of a Godly Man (Crossway, 1991), p. 151
- viii Application Bible, p. 26 & MacArthur, p. 28
- ix Johnston, p. 31
- x Warren W. Wiersbe, Philippians: Be Joyful (Victor Books, 1978), p. 23
- xi William Barclay, The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians (Westminster Press, 1975), p. 17