

“The Pursuit of Joy”
Philippians 4:8

9/5-6/09

6 pm; 9 & 10:45 am

Series, “*Destination: Joy*”

PREAMBLE

1. Announcement: I’m happy to report that the amended Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws were overwhelmingly approved last weekend. Thank you for your careful consideration and trust in the leadership of the church.

2. Mike Moran has been called to be the senior pastor at Grace Community Church in Auburn, Washington. Next week we’ll pray for Mike and Nancy and send them off.

3. And, the weekend after that, we’ll say goodbye to Matt and Kelsey Moore. They are returning to the church they came from with expanded responsibilities and to fill a much-needed gap in the staffing there.

We are actively pursuing new pastoral staff members, so please be praying for that as well.

OPEN to Philippians 4:8 (**PAGE** 1830)

INTRODUCTION

If you’ve been here for the last few weeks, you understand that a life characterized by *joy* doesn’t “just happen,” just like healthy lawns don’t “just happen.”

Here’s how one man made this discovery for himself:

“In some parts of my lawn, the grass is thick and green. In other areas, it’s sparse and dry. There are even a few places where the grass is missing entirely.

When I mow the lawn, I notice that where the grass is healthy, there are no weeds. Where the lawn is sparse, there are a few. Where there’s no grass, the weeds flourish.

When I stop and pull the weeds, within a few weeks they’re back — and I’m pulling them again. One day it hit me: I don’t have to pull weeds where the grass is thick. Instead of spending all my time pulling weeds, maybe I [need] to invest time making the grass as healthy as possible. The more grass I have, the fewer weeds I’ll have to pull.”

(Mike Bechtle, in an article for Discipleship journal; quoted in the October 21, 2008, entry of Men of Integrity (September/October 2008))

The same applies to joy.

Joy thrives as we pull the weeds of discouragement, pain, apathy, anger, depression, negative thinking ...

... and replace them with the lush lawn of ...

- a growing relationship with Jesus Christ,
- connecting with life-giving people,
- making Christ-likeness the supreme goal of our lives ... and ...

... today we add one more principle to the list ...

KEY IDEA: *Joy* results from *engaging* in the mental *pursuit* of godly thinking

I could have stated this more simply ... “Joy results from godly thinking” ... and it would still be true. I added “engaging and “pursuit” so that we realize that godly thinking doesn’t usually happen on it’s own ... we must *engage*, we must *pursue*.

READ Philippians 4:8

Philippians 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.”

NOTE: This verse is written in the context of solutions to anxiety. I have found that it also applies to other issues that can overpower us emotionally ... issues like anger, depression and discouragement.

To pursue joy ...

I. Engage in Godly Thinking about God

At the end of v. 8 we see the words, “**think about:**” *think (about), consider, ponder, let one’s mind dwell on.* (**BAG**) (*present, middle, imperative*)

Here’s a dramatic example of how Abraham engaged in godly thinking about God when it appeared that God was not keeping His word:

TURN to Hebrews 11:17 (keep your spot here in Philippians because we’re coming back to it)

Here's the background to this story ... When Abraham was in his 99th year, God visited him and promised him a son. Sarah had never been pregnant before, so that was a pretty big deal. Also, Sarah was about 80. When Abraham was 100, a son was born to them and they named him Isaac.

God told Abraham that Isaac was the son through whom He would fulfill His promise to make Abraham into a great nation.

So far so good. But, 10-15 years after Isaac was born, God tells Abraham to sacrifice Isaac as a burnt offering.

Now, this put Abraham to some serious thinking ...

READ Hebrews 11:17-19 “By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, 18 even though God had said to him, ‘It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.’ 19 Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death.”

And in v. 19 we see how godly thinking worked:

“Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead ...”

“**reasoned**” in v. 19 is the same word in Philippians 4:8 that’s translated “**think about**,” translated differently to fit the context.

Abraham reasoned that since ...

- 1) God said Isaac was the son through whom His promise would be fulfilled, and
- 2) since God told him to sacrifice Isaac,
- 3) then it must be that God was going to bring him back to life after Abraham sacrificed him ...

that was the only way Isaac could fulfill God’s promise to make Abraham into a great nation!

That is godly thinking about God ... God keeps His word, so when there appears to be a conflict, God is still going to keep His word ... *somehow!*

Now, back to Philippians 4:8 ...

Think thoughts about God that are:

true	<i>not</i>	false
noble or honorable	<i>not</i> <i>not</i>	shameful dishonorable
right	<i>not</i>	wrong
lovely	<i>not</i>	repulsive
admirable	<i>not</i>	undeserving/contemptible
excellent	<i>not</i>	poor or mediocre
praiseworthy	<i>not</i>	criticism worthy

Another example:

Habakkuk 3:17-19 “**Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls,**

18 yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior.

Why? How? Here is godly thinking about God and what He will do in this devastating situation of famine:

19 **The Sovereign LORD is my strength;**

He makes my feet like the feet of a deer,

He enables me to go on the heights.”

1. God will give me **strength** in any and every situation. 2. God will **equip me** for His solution, and, 3. God will **empower me** to rise above the challenges of life and experience **joy**.

So, when something happens when it seems God isn't coming through as He promises in His Word, and our joy heads south, we are to engage in the mental pursuit of thinking godly thoughts about God ... true, noble, right, lovely, admirable, excellent, praiseworthy ... thoughts about God.

To pursue joy ...

II. Engage in Godly Thinking About Yourself

A. Exchange *negative* self-talk with *godly* self-talk

This is one of the things Philippians 4:8 is saying!

Changing the way you communicate with yourself changes your attitude from discouragement to joy.

Proverbs 18:21 says that ***both life and death are in the power of the tongue***. The words you mutter to yourself have the power to encourage or discourage, to motivate or deflate, to generate joy or repel it.

Don't cling to the past by accusing or condemning yourself regarding past failures. Cut out all self-condemning thoughts and words.

TO DO THIS, don't focus on fighting negative thoughts. Those thoughts will continue to consume your focus. You will always feel what you dwell on.

Focus on replacing negative thoughts with positive, godly thoughts. The next two points give a few ideas for this:

B. Focus on your God-given identity and strengths

Dallas Cowboys coach Jimmy Johnson was asked what he told his players before leading them onto the field for the 1993 Super Bowl.

"I told them that if I laid a two-by-four across the floor, everybody there would walk across it and not fall, because our focus would be on walking the length of that board.

"But if I put that same board 10 stories high between two buildings, only a few would make it, because the focus would be on falling."

Johnson told his players not to focus on the crowd, the media, or the possibility of falling, but to focus on each play of the game as if it were a good practice session. The Cowboys won the game 52-7. What we focus on makes a difference.

(Steve Chandler in 100 Ways to Motivate Yourself)

So, focus on your God-given identity and strengths:

1. You are a child of God. Therefore, you are accepted by God, He approves of you. You are secure in Christ, you are significant / important for God's plans on Earth.

2. You are forgiven. God is not holding any kind of grudge or bad feelings or thoughts towards you.

And, since you are forgiven, you are a saint. You are not “a sinner saved by grace.” You were a sinner, who is now saved. You are now a saint who sometimes sins. Thinking true thoughts, godly thoughts about yourself helps you see yourself as God sees you.

3. You have a spirit of power, love, and discipline (a sound mind). 2 Tim. 1:7

You already have this kind of spirit. You may not know how to tap in to it, but you have it. You may need to learn how to use it.

4. You have spiritual gifts that, when employed, will make a significant positive impact in others’ lives.

There is a place for working on weaknesses, but don’t allow your weaknesses to be your focus.

I read a great statement this week: “*Acknowledge that the sun exists when only clouds are visible.*” (The 4:8 Principle, p. 74, Tommy Newberry)

Acknowledge that you are a child of God even when your emotions or thinking are like clouds, blocking your view. Acknowledge the truth that your past is forgiven, even if clouds of accusation or guilt obscure your vision from that truth.

C. Forgive yourself

Philippians 3:13b-15a “**Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead,**

14 **I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.**

15 **All of us who are mature should take such a view of things.**” (*should think this way*)

Stop dwelling on past failures, past sins, past regrets, the things you wished you had done differently, the things you would go back and change if you could ...

There is a place for making amends ... when it won’t hurt anyone else... but, don’t dwell on or live in the past ... you will never move ahead into the joy and future God has for you.

To pursue joy ...

III. Engage Now! Take Action Now!

Joy results from:

1. A growing, connected relationship with Jesus Christ
2. Actively connecting with life-giving people in biblical community
3. Making becoming like Jesus the supreme goal of your life
4. Engaging in the mental pursuit of godly thinking

All four of these are necessary to walk consistently in joy.

A. Which one is the strongest in your life?

Does it need a fair amount of development or is it in pretty good shape?

If it needs a fair amount of development, stick with it and see the suggested assignments for developing it at the end of the message on that topic (see the church web site under “Resources,” then “Messages.”)

If it’s in pretty good shape ...

B. Which one would you say you should focus on right now?

See the suggested assignments for developing it at the end of the message on that topic. Make that your starting point.

As you gain consistency, add one until your life is characterized by all four principles.

You’ll have times when you stumble, when the old patterns try to return but as long as you are cultivating the lawn of joy, the weeds won’t be able to take over again!

“Father God, thank You for helping me to see what is true about You and about myself. Help me also to see the truth about others. Thank You for showing me the path to joy and how to live in it. In Jesus’ name, Amen.”