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Philippians 2:12-18

Discipleship 101: Joyful Disciples

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Jesus and the **12 disciples** walk into a restaurant and Jesus says to the **hostess**, “Table for **26** please.” So she says to him, “But there’s only **13** of you?” Jesus says, “Yes, but we all want to sit on **one side**.” Is it okay to tell **jokes** in church? Is it okay to laugh? I think so. But what if I were to tell you that the Bible actually encourages us to be **joyful** and **happy** as a **church**.

In his letter to the Philippians Paul not only says in 2:14, “Do everything without grumbling or arguing” he says the **opposite, positive command** in verse 18, “So you too should be glad and rejoice with me.” Paul doesn’t just not want churches full of complainers. He wants churches full of happy, joyful, laughing people.

In fact, I believe one of the ways we **obey** God is by being joyful. In Philippians 1:27 Paul says, “Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner **worthy** of the gospel of Christ.” The last two weeks we’ve learned two ways we, the church, can live worthy of the *life-transforming world changing good news of Jesus Christ*.

I. Live worthy of the gospel through **unity**. (1:27-30)

II. Live worthy of the gospel through **humility**. (2:1-11)

This week we’re finishing Paul’s explanation of how to live worthy of the gospel, and how do we?

III. Live worthy of the gospel through **joy**. (2:12-18)

Today we are returning to this big theme of what it means to live lives worthy of the gospel.

Live worthy of the gospel. (2:12-13)

How do we know when Paul is speaking of not grumbling and being joyful that it ties all the way back into chapter one verse 27? Philippians 1:27-2:18 is full of **connecting** words like “**therefore**” that string together his message, it’s full of **imperatives** (or commands) telling the church to act a certain way, and it shares a **common theme**, Christ—living in light of Christ, with the mindset of Christ, and the day of Christ.

In today’s verses we also notice a **pattern similar** to the text from last week. **Before** Paul told the Philippians to be humble (2:3-11), he reminded them of what they already have in Jesus (2:1-2). He offered **grace** before obedience. Now before Paul tells us to stop grumbling, he reminds us of God’s **grace** in our lives. In verses 12-13 Paul **calls** us to obey, but he also gives us a **confidence** that we will obey.

“12 Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always **obeyed**—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, 13 for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.” So first we hear a...

Call — Work out our salvation. (v. 12)

Paul begins his final urge to live worthy of the gospel by calling them to work out their salvation. By “salvation” Paul **doesn’t** mean their **individual** salvation. He means **corporate** salvation (ya’ll’s salvation—you plural—**our salvation**). In other words, the church **together**, is supposed to figure out **day by day** what it means to be saved by Jesus and to be his **followers**. How does the message of Jesus impact our personal

lives, but also us as a church? And when Paul says, “not only in my **presence**, but now much more in my **absence**”—he’s saying, “I’m not always going to be there. Keep striving at your faith.

Since my **parents** are here tonight I thought I’d tell about how my brothers and I would act differently when my parents weren’t at home. Sometimes we would **sneak** television when my mom ran errands. We would sit on the top corner of our couch so we could see through the window for when our green van pulled into our driveway. And as soon as it did, it was like a code red lockdown with sirens. Everyone ran for their books and tried to look like we weren’t just watching **Judge Judy**. Paul is saying to the Philippians, “Don’t be like the Romig boys! Act like you’re saved whether I’m home or not.”

Paul knows there is someone more important than him who is always present, so he adds, “work out your salvation with **fear** and **trembling**.” Does he want the Philippians to be afraid of him? No! He wants them to **fear God**. The Greek word for fear is “**phobos**” like our word for “phobia.” Does Paul want them to have an **irrational** fear? No. The fear Paul is talking about is “the fear of the Lord” or the “fear of God” (Acts 9:31; Rom 3:18). It’s a healthy, respectful fear, that knows how powerful and holy God is.

I bought **outlet covers** this week since my family is visiting with some little nieces and nephews. I have a healthy fear of what might happen if my nephew or one of my nieces puts their fingers in a socket. They will get **zapped** and my **brother will kill me**. I don’t want either of those things to happen. I have a healthy fear of electricity and of my brother.

We also should have a **healthy fear** of God as we grow in our understanding of what it means for him to save us. We should always act like God is present anytime we’re behind **closed doors** in **team meetings** or out in public getting coffee, tea, or a meal. Whether we’re **alone** serving the church or representing the church as a believer on our **frontline**, we’re called to continue working out what it **means** to be saved by Jesus, and to be one of his followers. But is our only motivation fear? No. We also have...

Confidence — Because God is working in us. (v. 13)

Here’s the **grace** part—“for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.” We’re supposed to work our salvation “**out**,” but the good news is God is working our salvation “**in**.” So what’s God’s purpose? Most modern English **translations** translate “purpose” as “**pleasure**.” In other words, God is doing whatever he **desires**. God always desires what’s best for us (James 1:17).

Romans 8:28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. (NIV®)

This tells us that God is using everything for our good—births and deaths, new jobs and job losses, health and sickness, ministry successes, and ministry failures. But what exactly is the **good** God is doing? What’s his **plan**? God is using everything to make us more like Christ.

Romans 8:29-30 For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. (NIV®)

So the good thing God is doing in this life is making us more **like Christ**. And when we die, he’ll glorify us, which means we’ll become perfectly like Christ. *So we obey Jesus, living humbly, united, and joyfully, because God is working in us to make us like more Christ and one day he’ll finish the job in glory.*

Think of an activity you like but have never been good at. For some of us it’s **sports**. You really like baseball or track or CrossFit but you’re not that good at it. For some of us it’s **academics**. You want to be smarter and have a better memory, but it’s hard. For some of us it’s **cooking, arts, or music**. You can barely draw a stick

figure. For some of us like me, you're bad at all three. What if I were to tell you that you are **guaranteed** to be the best in the world at your chosen activity? God will make you **flawless** and perfect. But to receive this, you have to **try**. So God will make you **great**, but you have to practice. That's what Paul is saying. God will make us glorious, but we need to work it out what it means to be obedient disciples.

We're called to work out our salvation but we're confident because God is working in us. This is why we can be joyful. This is why we can live worthy of the gospel. Paul is saying...

Live worthy of the gospel through joy. (2:14-18)

Paul already said to "obey" in verse 12. Now he's explaining **how** we obey— "Do everything without grumbling or arguing." We all inherently know what grumbling is. It's complaining. It's whispering under your breath how you disagree or are upset (Acts 6:1; 1 Peter 4:9). It's sighing and dragging your feet. It's telling others when you don't get your way. It's having a **bad attitude**.

Paul is addressing our **heart attitudes**, because **outwardly** we can be the most obedient go-getter church people, but if on the inside we're constantly complaining and **resentful** that doesn't honor God. When Monica and I were over at the **Iles** for dinner one evening they were teaching **Emma** to "**obey with a happy heart**." This call isn't just for children. We're called to obey Jesus with happy hearts too.

We live worthy of the gospel through joy. But joy can be hard to find. Here are **three steps** to developing joy.

1. Remember the result of grumbling. (v. 14-15)

"Do everything without grumbling or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, 'children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.' Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky."

At **Philippi** we know **two women** are arguing, Euodia and Syntyche (Phil 4:2). We also know that either in Rome or in Philippi believers are preaching Christ out of **envy** and **rivalry** (Phil 1:15). Clearly, some in the church are grumbling and arguing. So Paul reminds them of **another people** who also grumbled and complained, and what happened to them. The line "warped and crooked generation" points us to the OT.

Deuteronomy 32:5

They are corrupt and not his children;
to their shame they are a warped and crooked generation. (NIV®)

This is a line from a **song** Moses wrote about Israel. They were a people who **loved** to grumble. When Moses first led Israel out of **400 years** of slavery in Egypt to the promised land, he sent **spies** into the land (**Canaan**), but all but two of the spies reported that the local inhabitants were too strong and powerful to overcome. Then it says the people grumbled.

Numbers 14:2 All the Israelites grumbled against Moses and Aaron, and the whole assembly said to them, "If only we had died in Egypt! Or in this wilderness! (NIV®)

When the Israelites grumbled, they were saying, "We don't **trust** you God." When we grumble, especially as a church, we're showing we **don't have faith** in God. We're showing we don't trust him. The **consequence** for Israel was God sentencing them to wander in the wilderness for **40 years** and everyone dying above the **age of 20**, except the two faithful spies (Num 14:29, 34). Grumbling leads to death.

As a new church, we're forming our **culture**. What do we want our culture to be like? If we're joyful, people are going to be **drawn** to our joy, *just like the Philippians, we will shine like stars in this world*. Building this culture begins behind **closed doors** when we have the opportunity to foster joy instead of grumbling. One

TED talk I listened to called complaining “viral misery.” One person gives their grumbles to another, and then it spreads to another and another, and pretty soon we’re all grumbling and complaining. In those moments when we’re tempted to complain about each other, our leadership, or even other ministries, let’s **tell jokes**, laugh, and rejoice that we can serve Christ even when it’s hard.

Some of you have not met him, but one of the reasons I miss serving with **Anthony** on our **leadership team** is because when he would get tired, he wouldn’t complain, but he would start telling jokes. He controlled what was **projected** on the screen during our meetings, and the later it got the weirder things he started writing. When being a church is tough, or when your life is hard, remember that grumbling never leads any place good. *1) Remember the result of grumbling (or not grumbling). Second...*

2. Hold fast the word of life. (v. 16)

“as you hold firmly to the word of life. And then I will be able to boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor in vain.” In our verse, Paul **emphasizes** holding fast the **word of life**, the Bible. Is the Bible an **emphasis** in your life? Do you read God’s word? Do you study it? Do you memorize the **foundation verse** in our sermon series? We do these things as a church because we want God’s words to give us **life**.

Kathy Keller, Timothy Keller’s wife, once asked him, “If you had to take a **pill** every single day or you would die, would you ever miss a day taking that pill?” I know that if I had a pill I had to take every single day to live, taking that pill would be the first thing on my mind every morning. God’s word is the pill we need every single day to truly live. Let’s spend time with God through his **word** and **prayer**.

Paul says that if the Philippians hold onto God’s word, he will not have **run the race** in vain. We learned that word for “vain” last week. It’s the Greek word **Kenos**, which means “empty handed.” Just remember the Massachusetts **lottery keno**. If you play it, you’ll walk away **empty-handed**. Paul doesn’t want to end this life empty-handed when it comes to the Philippians. They will endure is if they hold onto God’s word.

This word for “**hold-firmly**” also means to “**hold-out**.” *Part of keeping God’s word is not keeping it to ourselves.* We’re supposed to hold the word of life “in,” but we’re also supposed to hold it “out.” *As we focus on hiding God’s word in our hearts and sharing God’s word with the world, we’ll be too busy to grumble.* It’s when we take our eyes off of **Jesus** and his **mission** that we begin to argue and complain.

When a child is crying or whining, what’s one of the **tools** their parents use. **Redirection!** You redirect your child’s attention from his or her problem onto a choice, or new activity, or new idea with the hope that your child will forget what made them upset and move onto this new thing. God does that with us. When we’re tempted to despair, and grumble, he gives us his **word** to redirect our thoughts and actions. When we see how great Christ is, it takes our minds of our circumstances and places them on Christ.

So what are the **three steps** to developing joy? 1) Remember the result of grumbling (and not grumbling). 2) Hold fast the word of life (the Bible). And 3)...

3. Find your joy in Jesus. (v. 17-18)

Somehow Paul manages to find joy despite his circumstances. “17 But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you. 18 So you too should be glad and rejoice with me.”

What does it mean Paul is being poured out like a **drink offering**? The Israelite priests sacrificed a **lamb** in both the **morning** and **evening** as a burnt offering. When they did this, they also offered a drink offering, which was a mixture of **flour**, **olive oil**, and **wine** (Ex 29:38-41). They also offered drink offerings at other special times, like festivals, or with other offerings (Lev 23:37; Num 15:4).

Paul is being poured out by **suffering** under **house arrest** for the gospel. Just like the Old Testament offerings, his offering is a **pleasing aroma** to the Lord (Lev 23:18). But the amazing thing is Paul says, “This sacrifice makes me happy and it should make you happy too.” **What** could possibly make Paul willing to pour himself out as a drink offering? He’s willing to do it for their **faith**. What faith are we talking about? The faith that ultimately **centers** on **Jesus**. Did you know Jesus was poured out as a drink offering first?

Luke 22:20 In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you. (NIV®)

Jesus’s **body** and **blood** became the **bread** (flour) and **wine** of our drink offering. He poured himself out so that we can have life, and laughter, and joy. **Why** would Jesus do this? Because **saving his people** is his joy.

Hebrews 12:1b-2 And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (NIV®)

Who is Jesus’ joy? Anyone who puts their faith in him. At the cross, Jesus **loaded up** all the sin and grumbling and complaining of any who trust him **upon himself**, and then he died. But that means our sin and grumbling and complaining are put to death too. And when he **rose** from the grave, he left it behind, banishing it forever. Now Jesus **offers** us joy where we once only knew grumbling. If you **confess** your sins and put your **faith** in Jesus, your **grumbles** go on Jesus and his **joy** falls on you. Although we **still** complain, if you know Christ, you don’t have to **pay** for that sin and one day in **glory** you’ll never complain again.

Find your joy in Jesus. When we understand Jesus offers us his eternal joy, we realize Jesus is worth our joy.

Jesus is worth your joy.

In Christ, we can have a **joyful life** right here and now, even if we’re being poured out through **hardship**. Why? Because Jesus was **poured out** for us. *Jesus is worth your joy.*

A little boy was standing in the lobby of his church. He was starting up at a big plaque on the wall that had the names of men and women on it. The Pastor came over and said that these were the men and women in the church who died in the service. The little boy’s eyes got big and he said, “Well how long did the pastor preach for?” So with that, remember this—*Jesus is worth your joy.*

Pastor Jonathan Romig wrote and preached this message for the people of Cornerstone Congregational Church. [Click here to listen to more sermons](#) or [click here to read our story](#).