

The Message

Note: No sermon is quite the same when you read it. You miss the inflections, the understanding that you gain in the hearing. Nevertheless, the words are shared with you here.

Date: August 8, 2010
Scripture: Phil. 4:4-9
Speaker: Ray Hughes

(RE) JOY

Hasn't summer been busy? Summer is my favorite season. Although I am ready for my kids to go back to school, I've enjoyed these busy, summer months. As a child, I have fond memories of summer. Summer was fun.

Today, I would like to talk about some of those wonderful childhood memories that many of us share. Can you remember what it was like in fourth grade when the bell rang and you just couldn't wait to get out that school door? Do you remember hanging out at the pool? The pool in our neighborhood is great, and we love to hang out there with our kids. I remember the excitement of the pool and the ball park.

Do any of you remember the movie The Sandlot? I love that movie because it is reminiscent of my own childhood. It reminds me of the freedom and the adventure that life is. Somehow as adults, we forget that life is an adventure. Do you remember what we didn't have as children? Today's kids have hand-sanitizer. I understand the need to kill germs. We even have hand-sanitizer here in the church. When I was a kid, the only sanitizer I had was my mom's thumb! She would lick her thumb and then smear it around my face—and that was hand-sanitizer. To this day, I can remember my mom licking her finger and using it to wipe my face. She would just ignore my pleas of "Mom, stop it!"

My kids have bottled water all the time. Yet, growing up, we drank out of the water hose. I don't know what was coming out of the hose or what had crawled up in that hose, but that water tasted just fine. As a kid, I don't remember wearing seat belts. Please understand—I know the importance of wearing seat belts. Another thing I don't remember is a child's car seat. But I do remember the vinyl car seats. When you would sit on the car seat in the hot summertime, you would just stick there. In the winter, you would just slip and slide all over the backseat.

It was fun to be a kid. Somehow, as we grow older, we lose that sense of adventure. I wonder why we lose that feeling. I don't think God wants us to lose

it. For some reason, we have all these anxieties and worries and fears that trap us and keep us from living the life God wants us to live.

Do you remember the “Peanuts” cartoon? In one, Lucy and Charley Brown are talking and Lucy asks, “Charley Brown, do you think there has ever been a person who is truly, truly happy?” As they ponder this thought, Snoopy comes bounding into the room. Lucy, then, asks Charley Brown, “Do you think there has ever been a person who is truly happy—and not out of his mind?”

You might ask that question sometime, but you might even ask that question of the Apostle Paul. Look at his life! He has everything and his encounter with Jesus completely re-directs his life. Now, Paul is a criminal in the eyes of the Jewish people. He is stoned, beaten, and imprisoned. In fact, he writes the epistles while in prison. In writing to the churches, his purpose is to encourage them. Can you imagine yourself in his situation?

Yet, at the end of Philippians, we find Paul writing the following: “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!” (Phil. 4:4-5). How could Paul say this? How could he say rejoice in the midst of the circumstances that he faced? For a lot of us, the circumstances that we face rob us of that joy and rob us of that childlike faith. Therefore, we look at our lives and say, “This is not what I dreamt life would be like.” Life is not as fun as I thought it would be. Life is not as adventurous as I thought it would be.

Something within us makes us realize that there is supposed to be something more to life. However, we find ourselves in these circumstances that cause anxiety and cause us to be fearful and “safe.” However, God doesn’t want us to be safe. Paul didn’t live a “safe” life. He engaged God’s vision and mission as the purpose of his life. In fact, Paul said, “To live is Christ and to die is gain.” In other words, he really didn’t care what happened to him because he had found the meaning of life.

Many of us would like to experience what Paul felt. We would like to rejoice in every situation, but we think, if “you just knew my circumstances... If you knew, you would understand how difficult it is for me to live as Paul did.” In spite of everything Paul lost—his position, his wealth, his reputation, etc.—he still said, “Rejoice!”

As we look at this passage this morning, we are going to find three secrets to joyful living. If we could practice these things, we could live the life God wants us to have.

The first secret that Paul shares (and lives) is as follows:

Secret #1 Interact with God.

Lot of us struggle with prayer. Since I’m so ADHD, when I pray for more than five minutes, my mind is on a different planet! Because of our personalities,

prayer is different for each of us, but *prayer* is interacting with God. Prayer is spending time talking and *listening* to God. Note what Paul writes: “Do not be anxious.” (Phil. 4:6). Pay close attention to that word anxious. Many of us live with anxiety.

Paul continues: “Do not be anxious about anything, but *in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving*, present your requests to God” (Phil. 4:6). Hence, to discover that joy, we must tell God what is on our hearts. When you’re worried, talk to God! Then notice what happens: “And the peace of God which transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:7).

How many of us would like some more peace in our lives? The Jewish word for peace is *shalom*, which really means “wholeness.” For us to be “whole,” we must let God put us back together. We want things to be right, and if we would let God do that, we would experience that joy and that childlike sense of adventure. So, when we’re worried, we must pray and turn those worries over to God.

Notice how Eugene Peterson paraphrases that verse in *The Message*:

Don’t fret and worry. Instead of worrying, pray. Let petitions and praises shape your worries into prayers, letting God know your concerns.

What if we could really do that? What if we could let God *shape* our worries into prayers? What if our worries became the conversations that started our life with God? What if we began to tell him, “God, I’m lonely” or “God, I’m afraid of this big decision. “God, I’m confused about marriage” or “God, I’m unsure of how to raise my kids.” What if in the midst of all those worries, we turned them into prayers? What could God do? Before you realize, a sense of God’s wholeness, the peace of God, will come and settle you.

Paul understood that first step—that we must interact with God and pray with him and to him, and listen to God. **Secret #2: Dwell on the positive.**

Do you know the story of Robinson Crusoe? In Daniel Defoe’s novel, Robinson Crusoe is shipwrecked on a deserted island. Utterly alone, he makes a list of the advantages and disadvantages of his current status. In the book, Crusoe begins his list by stating: “I don’t have any clothes” but “it’s warm here and I don’t really need any clothes.” It’s all about perspective, isn’t it? Then, he writes: “All my possessions have been taken away” but “I’m on a beautiful island that has plenty of food and water—my situation could be a lot worse.” You know, it’s hard to remember the good things. The bad things seem to get our attention.

Whatever we put into our mind comes out in our attitude. It comes out in our life and the way we live. Our outlook determines if we can move beyond our circumstances. For instance, I don’t eat a lot of fast food, but for some reason, I had a weakness for a juicy hamburger. Although I’m not going to mention the

name of the establishment, I bought a big cheeseburger, a huge order of French fries, a Dr. Pepper, an apple pie, and—on top of that—a milk shake! This type of eating is not normal for me, but for some reason I gave in to my weakness. Unfortunately, two hours later my body was screaming at me, “What in the world were you thinking?” Everything that I had put into my body was saying, “Get me out!”

What we put into our minds comes out. Garbage in, garbage out! What do you dwell on each day? What do you think about most? What do you listen to? What do you take in? Paul says,

Finally, brothers and sisters, 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. (Phil. 4:8)

If you want to experience peace, get beyond your anxiety, and live the life that God has called you to the fullest, focus your attention on the things of God.

Such a focus doesn't mean that all things are merry and cheery and there are no problems in our lives. Some of us have real problems and struggles, and I certainly am not making light of those troubles. Nevertheless, Paul writes that in the midst of those tribulations, if you can turn them into prayers and focus on the good, you will begin to have peace.

Next, in order to achieve joy, Paul shares **secret #3: practice contentment**.

Oliver Wendell Holmes, a professor at Harvard, was a short man. One time he gave a speech to a group of businessmen who were, surprisingly, all very tall. After Holmes' presentation, one of the businessmen asked him, “How does it feel to be lecturing to a group of people who are so much taller than you?” Quickly, Holmes responded, “I feel like a dime among pennies.”

Joy is really about perspective. In Philippians 4:13-14, Paul writes:

I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

Paul had a different perspective. He knew that everything in this life was temporary. Everything he had came from Christ.

The biggest problem we have when we face these issues in life that affect our joy is that our view of God is much too small. If we understood that the Creator of the Universe, who created billions and billions of stars, is the same God who raised Jesus from the dead. That power is in our lives. When you have that kind of perspective, watch your problems shrink! Folks, we serve a big God. If we could focus on him, then we could be content in every situation. The solution to our problem of lacking joy is this: **Joy doesn't come from a denial of the**

circumstances we face, but from a confidence in God's presence with us.
That's where joy comes from! To do so, we must trust in God.

Abraham Maslow, the psychologist, actually said, "Without exception, every person who was sincerely radiant and alive was living for a purpose beyond himself." What are you focused on?

As we close today, I want to challenge you. I want you to trust God in three ways.

Trust your past to God's mercy. What is it in your past that you think is too grievous or too ugly, that God would never accept you? When you repent of your sins, God accepts you. God is faithful and just to forgive your sins. When you ask Christ into your life, God no longer sees your sins. So, why don't we trust God's mercy over our past? Why don't we trust his grace to forgive our past and bring us into a new life?

Trust your present to God's love. Know that God loves you and wants the best for your life. God has a vision for your life. He wants you to experience joy in this life. No, life is not going to be easy, but if you will trust God today, he will help you live today to the fullest.

Trust your tomorrow to God's provision. When we look to the future and we're not sure what it holds, we must remember that we have a God who does know our future. God wants the best for us.

In closing, I ask that you bow your heads and pray. In this room, I am certain that there are those who are not trusting God in their past, not trusting God in their present, and not trusting God in their future. I ask that you say a simple prayer:

God, I trust you. Take control of my life. I give you my past. I invite you into my present. And I submit my future to you. In Jesus' name, Amen.