

Message Series Title: **'Fulfilled? Experiencing Joy in unexpected places'**

Message Title: **'Where Do We Begin to Experience Fulfillment?'**

Scripture Source: **Philippians 1:1-11**

Date: Sunday, January 11, 2015

Speaker: John Garner

An Honest Assessment

In terms of experiencing personal fulfillment, where would you 'mark' the continuum?

'Running on empty' _____ | _____ growing fulfillment

What is the reason for your assessment? If we were to sit down over a coffee and you spoke freely and honestly, what reasons would you share with me? Now, add to the assessment the question of joy. How acquainted are you with the experience of joy?

Let that word, that yearning, linger and generate thought and reflection within you.

Joy: "the emotion of great delight or happiness caused by something exceptionally good or satisfying...a deep feeling or condition of happiness or contentment; gladness". Anthony Quinn quote: "I have lived a joyous life, but I am not a joyous man."

Can you identify? Way too often, I can.

God yearns for a different reality for you and me. Jesus put it this way in John 10:10: "*The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.*" Jesus makes it clear that we have a spiritual enemy who is out to mislead and deceive us...leading down dead end paths that end in ruin and pain of many varieties. Jesus offers a better way of living that is marked by purpose, fulfillment, and even joy. How do we experience more consistently the kind of life he offers to people like you and me? HOW?

At the Heart of 'How' is a 'Who'

For the next number of weeks we are going to study, think, and reflect upon a letter written in the first century by a church leader named Paul. He writes a 'thank you' letter to a Christian congregation in a Roman city named Philippi. His letter is unmistakably infused with joy and fulfillment. 16 times the verb or noun form of the word 'joy' is used. How did Paul come to experience this quality of life, especially when life was hard and uncertain? How did he pull it off? What can we learn for our everyday lives, with their mix of good, bad, and ugly?

As I read this letter, I ask myself these fundamental questions: 'are these words meant to tease us or are they meant to be experienced? Will I only talk about Philippians or will you and I 'taste' the truth more fully? Let us settle for nothing less than 'tasting' the truth of fulfillment and joy more fully and consistently.

Think on this...'joy is both a choice and consequence; it is not a circumstance.'

And at the heart of the experience is a relationship that 'sets the stage' for everything meaningful and fulfilling in life...a relationship with Jesus of Nazareth.

Who is Paul the Apostle?

Let's get acquainted with the man who wrote the letter, the people he wrote it to, and why.

Before he was known as Paul the Apostle of Christ, he was Saul of Tarsus. And, he was a man of mission.

Persecution: Acts 7:54-8:1 (read) He was supportive of the persecution of Christians. Acts 8:3; 9:1-2. He moved from sideline supportiveness to proactive engagement in the persecution of Christ followers. Anything that threatened his Jewish beliefs and way of living was to be destroyed. And he poured his energies into that pursuit. Until...

Conversion and Mission: Acts 9:3-31 A stunning turn of events! Saul is confronted by the risen Jesus. His life is changed. He becomes a passionate and thoughtful follower of Jesus and begins teaching others about Jesus and starting churches where Jesus is 'front and center.' And that brings us to this letter.

Paul's Friends in Philippi

History: Acts 16: 11-38, a church started in the midst of controversy, persecution, and suffering.

God's Spirit worked in life changing ways in people's experiences. Interesting facts about Philippi:

“named after King Philip 11 of Macedon, father of Alexander the Great...a prosperous Roman Colony...citizens of Philippi were also citizens of Rome...many were retired military men...

A gold producing region...a city of dignity and privilege” (NIV study Bible)

The church was composed of a mix of Jewish and Gentile people.

Current Circumstances

Where was Paul at the time of this writing? Under house arrest, probably in the city of Rome. His movements are limited, his ability to come and go as he pleased is greatly restricted. We will learn more about his circumstances and the effect they have and don't have on Paul. Remember...joy is both a choice and consequence, not a circumstance. Keep that in mind!

The Root of a Fulfilled and Joyous Life: Philippians 1:1-11

- **A Relationship with Jesus is Essential: Vss. 1-3**

Paul is clearly enthralled with Jesus...not as an idea or ideal, not as a belief system...no, he is captivated by Jesus, the person. He sees himself as fully devoted to Jesus and then the mission of Jesus.

Paul never 'got over' who Jesus was and what he had done for him. His passion for Jesus was rooted in his understanding of who Jesus is and why he showed up.

Consider these autobiographical reflections: Galatians 2:20; 1 Timothy 1:12-17. Paul is mindful of the extent of Christ's love and mercy for him. He is gripped by the truth of the forgiving and transforming grace, mercy, and love of Christ. These truths never got old to Paul. The old hymn would have resonated deeply with Paul: “and he walks with me and he talks with me along life's narrow way...”

Folks, at the heart of 'how' to experience a fulfilled life is a 'who' and his name is Jesus, One who longs to be in relationship with you. This is not rocket science, yet it is profoundly humbling. To acknowledge my need of a Saviour and to surrender my life over to the authority and care of Jesus, by a choice of faith and obedience is humbling. And life giving. To follow Jesus in daily life, humbling and life sustaining.

Let me ask you...do you understand some of the core truths about Jesus? Saviour. Son of God.

One who loves deeply and forgives freely. You and I can want fulfillment and joy, yet, the root is a personal relationship with Jesus, the risen Lord. Are you in relationship with Him?

- **Engagement in Jesus' Mission is Crucial: Vss. 3-8** Paul is grateful for their practical and ministry partnership in getting the message of Jesus, 'out there.' They have practically supported him in the past, that's the catalyst for this letter. He feels deeply for them and is profoundly grateful for them. He knows that the work God has begun in them will continue and be completed the day of the return of Jesus.
- **Intelligent Love is Critical: Vss. 9-11** If we would live a life that is marked by maturity, health, and vitality, love must be core to who we are and how we live. But, not a 'blind love'. Message rendering. “So this is my prayer: that your love will flourish and that you will not only love much but well. Learn to love appropriately. You need to use your head and test your feelings so that your love is sincere and intelligent, not sentimental gush.”

How many crazy, hurtful, destructive things are done in the name of love? Things beyond count. Love must be boundaried and directed by God's truth, generating righteousness of behaviour that reveals the character of Jesus.

Reflection and Response

Which of these three statements most resonates within you?

1. 'a relationship with Jesus is essential'
2. 'engagement in Jesus' mission is crucial'
3. 'intelligent love is critical'

Where do you see a need for growth of understanding and personal application? _____

Our library has excellent resources on each of these themes. Do research. Ask questions. Acquire answers.

Would a conversation between Sundays be helpful? Ask us for a conversation.

Think seriously about connecting with a Journey Group where these Scriptures are studied and talked about more interactively.

And remember, the root of a more fulfilling life is found in relationship, first and foremost with Jesus.

Will you choose to make that relationship the most important one in your life? When we do, all other relationships can be enriched and strengthened.