

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth One Verse at a Time*

Elements of Joy, Part 1

Scripture: Philippians 1:3-5

Code: 50-2

This morning it's our privilege again to return to a new study for us, the study of Paul's epistle to the Philippians. Open your Bible, if you will, to Philippians chapter 1. We're going to be examining the next section in Philippians, chapter 1 verses 3 through 8. Let me read these verses as the setting for our thoughts this morning. Philippians 1:3, "I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all; in view from your participation in the gospel from the first day until now; for I'm confident of this very thing that He who began a good work in you will perfect until the day of Christ Jesus, for it is only right for me to feel this way about you all because I have you in my heart since both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel you all are partakers of grace with me, for God is my witness, how I long for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus."

The last couple of weeks, in fact the last number of months have been somewhat difficult times in my life, personally. I am a very positive person, a very content happy person, a very enthusiastic person. But over the last number of months the Lord has put me through some very interesting tests. The Lord has given me a lot of responsibility, a wide wide range of responsibility, responsibility at the church, responsibility for radio, for books, commentaries, publications, tapes, video tapes, the college, the seminary...many many things. But my...my spiritual heart, the real throb of my life is the church. Everything else could go by the wayside but not the church. It is the love of my life, it is the call of God upon my life. And as a result of that, no matter how well everything else goes, when the church is in difficulty, I struggle. And I've been through that for a number of months, a number of weeks and then in the last week or so it came to a point where there was great difficulty in my own heart dealing with things.

And then the Lord brought me right in to Philippians as if to say, "Now we're going to work on your joy, MacArthur, since you've been poured through these trials." And I decided that I could do a little bit of inventory on my joy since I was starting Philippians so I found a book that had a psychological test in it to determine if I was depressed. So last week I took the test, it's called "The Carroll(?) Rating Scale for Depression." It was introduced by the fact that most people experience a certain amount of depression so don't be shocked when you take the test. There were 52 questions, questions like: do you hate to get up in the morning? Is life boring? Do you ever think about killing yourself? Are you unhappy? Do you have trouble eating? All kinds of questions. And they were designed to determine whether a person was depressed. A score of 10 or higher indicated you were depressed. The higher the score the greater the depression.

I took the test as objectively as I could, my score was zero. Now if you could quantify joy, I must have it. Zero, I am totally not depressed. Now I may be unhappy, but remember happiness is a response to circumstance, joy is a confidence built on relationship. Now that test can never be objective for a Spirit-filled Christian because a Spirit-filled Christian possesses joy. And do you remember what I told you joy was? Joy is a gift from God to those who believe the gospel of Christ being produced in them by the Holy Spirit because they receive and obey the Word of God while experiencing trials and keeping their hope fixed on the glory which is to come.

Paul, no doubt, would have had a zero, too, on the test and his situation was far worse than mine. In fact, Paul's irrepressible and constant joy even in the throws of anguish suffering is the heartbeat of this wonderful letter. And the joy that Paul or any other Christian experiences is not some transient emotional feeling that lifts you up one moment and drops you the next, depending on circumstances. True joy is an unwavering constant in a Spirit-filled life. It is not produced by a bed of roses experience, of tranquility and peace and comfort and safety. It is produced by the presence of God and His Holy Spirit, even if you're sitting in the prison waiting for possible news about your execution, as Paul was. He had joy. He had joy, the result of his eternal relationship with a living God through Jesus Christ and the ministry of the Holy Spirit within him. And because he was so near to God he was full of joy. Circumstances aren't a factor. It's your nearness to God that determines the level of your joy. And so Paul knew that inexpressible and irrepressible joy which is an abiding feeling of peace and calm and tranquility and contentment and delight and satisfaction that flows out of deep within because of the presence of God being imprinted on the soul and the conscience being void of offense toward God.

Paul was filled with joy in spite of his situation. And I understand what that means. I understand how you can be unhappy with your circumstances and totally not depressed because your heart is filled with joy in your relationship to God, because you know He's there, He loves you, He's infused you with His joy and you have no guilt in your conscience before Him.

Now Paul filled with joy writes this letter to the beloved Philippians. And as he thinks about them his joy overflows. And that's why in verse 4 he says that every remembrance of them produces joy. The joy that he had in his heart because of his relationship to the living God spilled over when he thought about the Philippians. It was a special congregation. There were really no major problems among the Philippians. He says, verse 3, "I thank my God in all my remembrance of you." I don't have any memories of you that are negative. "Always offering prayer with joy, all my prayers are filled with joy, my every prayer for you all..." all my memories, all my prayers, all of you bring me joy. He doesn't seem to identify any major problems. Verse 8, "I long for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus." A remarkable group. Verse 25, "I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith." Everything about the Philippians gave him joy.

It doesn't mean they didn't have needs, they had needs. In verse 27 he says, "Conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ." In chapter 2 he says, "Make my joy complete," verse 2, "by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose, do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit but with humility of mind," and so forth. They had some needs. Chapter 4 he talks about a couple of women who had needs, "I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche," verse 2, "to live in harmony in the Lord and somebody help those ladies to get their act together." They had needs. Paul was not blind to their needs but rejoiced in the level of their spiritual commitment. They loved the Lord. They loved Paul. They cared for Paul with an unusual zeal, more than any other church, they continually sent him gifts of money to meet his need, to support him. They were generous in their gifts. Even though they were not particularly wealthy, they gave abundantly to Paul's need on several occasions. In fact, he tells them in this letter, "You gave me more than I could possibly use," but that was the way they loved and cared for him. Believe me, they were a congregation to make a pastor's heart rejoice. And every time he thought about them he rejoiced. They were magnanimous, they were generous. Everything they did demonstrated their love.

And as he writes he is a prisoner in Rome. He's in chains. And they heard about that and because of their love for him they want to send to him a gift of love, money. The bearer of that gift is one of their congregation named Epaphroditus. They send Epaphroditus with instruction, "Give Paul this money to meet his needs and stay with him as long as he needs you to minister to him." And so they send one of their choice men to be Paul's personal servant to bring the gift of love and to be the living illustration of their love to him.

Well, when Paul received that gift from the Philippians, when Paul received Epaphroditus, the receipt of their love and care and generosity to him opened the flood gates of joy in his heart and he writes this letter back to say, "I have so much joy, don't worry about me though I am a prisoner, that does not touch my joy, not at all." He is filled with joy.

And that's a marvelous lesson to learn. Trials don't touch joy if it's the joy of the Spirit in a Spirit-filled life. Trials, in fact, may become occasions of deeper joy because they cast the believer totally off his circumstances and on to his God. And it's in that relationship, its depth, that real joy is found. William Kelley(?) wrote, "Think of him in prison for years, chained between two soldiers, debarred from the work he loved and others taking advantage of his absence to grieve him, preaching the very gospel out of contention and strife and yet his heart was so running over with joy that he was filling others up with it," end quote.

Now as we come to verses 3 through 8 his joy spills out. And as it spills out we see the elements of his joy. There were pieces of that joy that we can identify, characteristics, elements. There was the joy of recollection, the joy of intercession, the joy of participation, the joy of anticipation, and the joy of

affection. And we're going to consider those this Lord's day and no doubt next as well.

Let me just label these the elements of a Spirit-produced joy...the elements of a Spirit-produced joy that relates to others...that relates to others. Now before we look at these I need to say this. No one, now mark this, no one and absolutely nothing can produce this kind of joy but the Holy Spirit, okay? Only the Holy Spirit can produce this joy. Let me give you an illustration. Wednesday I found on my desk a book. Publishers send me books, not only Christian publishers send them to me to review but secular publishers as well. Random House Publishers sent me this book entitled, "The Way Up from Down...The Way Up from Down," written by Slaygal(?) M.D. Let me tell you about the book.

The book is on how to overcome depression. That's the way up from down. And it recommends that the way to overcome depression, according to this doctor, 70 to 80 percent effective, is through the use of amino acids and vitamin mineral supplements. I found myself drawn into the book so I read it. The author's theory is this, depression is basically marked by deficiency in certain chemicals, the blood, spinal fluid, urine. A person in depression can be tested in these ways by the examination of their fluid and the depression shows up in a chemical deficiency. These are identified as chemical markers for depression. Depleted chemicals cause a distorted function. In the brain, she goes on to point out, there are neuro transmitters. Neuro transmitters are what pass impulses from one cell to the next, that's a chemical. If the chemical is depleted, then what is in one cell can't be passed to the next cell. That creates depression, somehow. These neuro transmitters are the chemicals released at the nerve endings in the brain when one cell is close to another and they are essential for the brain to pass its messages and data around.

The two ones that we know are zerrotinin(?) and norapanephrin(?). Now when those are depleted that goes along with depression. So, says Dr. Slaygal, depression can be relieved then by replacing zerrotinin and norapanephrin through amino acids and vitamin supplement, mineral supplement.

So, I read those two chapters that explained all that and then came the hundred pages on the program...extensive bio- chemical program. You have to take vitamin B1, B2, B3, B4, B5, B6, B12, all of those and you have to take...and it listed one thing after another and you've got to have all of that and you get into this kind of program and you go through all of this chapter after chapter after chapter of how to get all this stuff together. Then came the last chapter. Dr. Slaygal said, quote: "However, if you continue habitual negative thought patterns you will severely undermine the whole treatment." If you continue habitual negative thought patterns you will severely undermine the whole treatment. Now that caught my attention. The next paragraph said, and I quote. "Persistent negative attitudes can lead to constriction and bondage whereas consistent positive thoughts and expectations create expansion and freedom. Someone has said we suffer because we don't see things the way they are but as we are," end quote. "We can only learn to see differently by wanting to see differently," she says, end quote.

Now, friends, that's very amazing. What she's saying is, all that treatment does is help people who aren't depressed. Did you get that? All that treatment does is help people who aren't thinking negatively. Friend, if you're not thinking negatively, you don't need that treatment. That cancelled the whole book.

Well, she had painted herself into a corner so the book closed with another chapter, "How to reprogram your conscious mind to get rid of negative thinking." Here are the suggestions. Suggestion number one, every time you have a negative thought, shout loudly, "Cancel." That was principle number one. So if you happen in the next number of months to find people at your office going around, "Cancel," you'll know they've read this book. Secondly, develop the art of creative visualization, which is to visualize yourself as Alice in Wonderland. Do sleep programming. Get a tape recording with a lot of positive talk and play it all night while you're sleeping. Listen to a lot of positive vibe music. Get exercise. Stop being focused on the future. Read this book, Be Here Now by Babba Ramidos(?) and this book Be Here Now by Babba Ramidos will teach you how to focus on the moment and you must learn to ignore the future. Release all your anger, that's another one.

And then this, cultivate a meaningful spiritual philosophy, find a belief system that works for you, anyone will do if it works. Avoid those that talk of sin and guilt. (Laughter) And the last point was, find the light in yourself. And the doctor summed it up with a free verse poem, "And remember, we are not here to experience mental and existential bondage, we are here to rejoice, to give and receive joy, to see and experience the true essence, not superficial appearances; to perceive beauty, order and harmony, not ugliness, chaos and discord; to see color, to vibrate and flow with the rhythm of time; to germinate, come to fruition and ultimately fade, to be swallowed, then spewn into the next river of life, new energy, new form beyond our current level of reckoning, with unwavering gradual beckoning to cross the horizon of time, exchanging dimensions, expanding, uniting, bon voyage."

That is a depressing book. I got a better idea, follow Jesus Christ and He'll give you His Holy Spirit and you can be full of joy and save \$15.95. (Laughter) The world at its best can't produce it. What a convoluted attempt to produce joy, can't be done...can't be done.

Paul had that joy. All we have to do is go to the Word of God. Why did we ever believe the world had anything to say anyway? He had that joy. And as he writes to these beloved people, he indicates the elements of his joy. Let's look at them, at least a couple of them. First, there's the joy of recollection, verse 3, "I thank my God in all my remembrance of you." The very thought of the Philippians brought him jubilant memories. Paul Reese(?) wrote, "His whole soul is a carillon and the first bell to be struck is that of thanksgiving," end quote.

You see, Paul had this inventory of memories. And by virtue of the power of the Holy Spirit within him, he focused on the positive ones. He says, "I thank my God in all my remembrance of you."

Everything he could think about the Philippians gave him joy. They were a cause for gratitude. His heart was filled with joyous thanks to God for the sweet memories of these believers. He says, "I thank," using that verb eucharisteo, we get it in English, the eucharist, a service of thanksgiving, "My God," I love the fact that he says "My God" celebrating the intimacy, the personal relationship, the strong sense of personal intimate communion he enjoyed with the almighty Himself. And he uses that phrase repeatedly in his letters, 1 Corinthians 1:4, Colossians 1:3, 1 Thessalonians 1:2, 2 Timothy 1:3, Philemon verse 4. He loves to speak of God as my God, my God...nothing wrong with that. We should do the same. "I thank my God in all my remembrance of you."

Now no one is perfect. The Philippians weren't perfect. The church wasn't perfect. The church wasn't without its problems. There must have been some disunity there or he wouldn't have made such a major issue in chapter 1 verse 27, "You need to have one spirit, one mind, striving together." Chapter 2 verses 1 to 4, "You want to be of the same mind, having the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose." And chapter 4, those two women who were not in harmony. There must have been some discord there. But that church still brought him joy. All churches fall short. All churches disappoint their pastors and their leaders. People do that, we're human. Yet these people loved the Lord and they loved the Apostle and they had effectively erased the tape of negative memories and he was left only with thoughts of joy. Every memory was a cause for delight.

What blessed memories they were. Do you remember them? He must have remembered that sabbath day when he went to the riverside to find some Jewish women because there was no synagogue there, not enough men to have one. And he met a few Jewish women who were there by the riverside near Philippi worshiping the true God in the tradition of their forefathers, the Jews. And there the Lord opened the heart of a lady named Lydia and she was saved and her entire household. The first converts in Europe, that gracious women, was God's gift to His Son, the beginning of evangelism in a new continent. A wonderful beginning, a sweet memory. She became a very dear saint of God in whose house the church met, a woman who showed her personal hospitality to Paul and Silas after their imprisonment.

And then there was the memory of that demon-possessed girl whom Paul by the power of the Spirit of God cleansed of her demons...and perhaps was born again and too entered the church. We'll find out in heaven.

And then there was the memory of jail, the sweet memory of being in stocks after your backs have been stripped and laid bare and your flesh is nothing but pulp. And you're in the darkness of an inner dungeon in the stocks singing and praising God. And God brings in the darkness of the morning an earthquake and breaks the jail open and breaks the stocks and all the chains are loosed. And out of it all the jailer is converted to Christ and his whole household. And they show their tender love to Paul and Silas by caring for their wounds. And there's a baptismal service. And then they are released and the church meets at Lydia's house, sweet memories...sweet memories.

And then there's the memory of those times when the Philippians sent money to him, money to help him. Those times when as part of the saints in Macedonia mentioned in 2 Corinthians chapter 8 they sent generously out of the deep poverty. They were a generous loving people. They were gifts given from loving hearts, gifts that went beyond even Paul's need. And he says to them in chapter 4, "Look, I don't need this much but I'm so glad you gave it because you gave it as a gift to the Lord and it tells me where your heart is and God will reward you and bless you. And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in Christ Jesus."

And then there was the latest gift, the gift from Epaphroditus along with Epaphroditus to fill in the lovely memories of Philippian Christians. Though his present condition was difficult, though his present condition was painful physically, unjust legally, unexplained spiritually in one sense, his heart was unaffected, he was full of sweet memories.

May I suggest to you that that's a key to joy in the Christian life? A real key...to be able to recall the goodness of people, to be able to recall the best in someone, to be able to look past some of the glitches in life and capture the sweet memories...the heart where the joy of the Holy Spirit dominates like it did in Paul is a heart that touches the sweet things of life, not the bitter things. It savors thoughts of other's goodness and other's kindness and other's love and other's

compassion and other's gentleness and other's sacrifice and other's care. And it forgets the rest. It really does. It forgets the rest.

I can...I can easily discern, if given enough time, a heart where the Spirit of God is not in control...because there's no joy. And the tendency is always to focus on everyone's unkindness, ingratitude, faults, wounds that they've inflicted on us. It's a dead giveaway. What isn't right about everybody, what isn't the way people want it to be...learn to walk in the Spirit. Learn to yield to the Spirit. And the Spirit of God has a way of erasing the tape of negative things. I thank God for that. I thank God that I do not remember unkindnesses, for the most part. I ask the Spirit of God to erase those things, to produce in me a joy that focuses on joyful memories. That's the work of the Spirit in the heart of the believer. Bitterness, unforgiveness, always remembering evil, that is the work of the flesh, holding grudges. As Thomas Hardy said, "Some people can find the manure pile in any meadow." You want to live like that? You want to stomp around in that stuff all your life? Not me.

Paul's joy was expressed in pleasant memories. That is a basic element of joy. That's the joy of recollection. Let's look at a second joy, I wish we could say more about that...second joy, the joy of intercession. This is another element of joy. Verse 4, "Always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all." Now here's an element of joy that you never want to miss, the delight of praying for others. When the Spirit of God is in control of a life and you're living in obedience to God's Word and under the control of the Spirit, you will delight in praying for others. Paul says, "On my every

occasion of praying for you I am filled with joy." Now that's tied to his recollection, that's tied to the joy of his memories. And this is the joy of having the privilege to petition. The word here for prayer has to do with petition, deesis, used two times in the verse. It's the idea of asking God for something for someone else. And that is the expression of joy. Joy of the Holy Spirit tends not to be bound up with what I have, but in the privilege of praying that God would pour out His blessing on others. True joy is expressed in the fact that I can see God at work in someone else's life, much more preoccupied with them than with me.

Here is Paul, prisoner, in a negative circumstance not only physically but in terms of his ministry. You're going to find out later in the chapter people were really really criticizing him without mercy and without kindness. And he was not worthy of that at all. So he was undergoing all of that bitterness from rival preachers and people who had animosity toward him. But his particular circumstance did not affect his joy. And the evidence that it was a Spirit-produced joy is the fact that he was all wrapped up in the delight of praying for other people's needs when he himself had needs far greater than theirs in some ways. Making requests to God for others is an element of joy.

You can tell if you're experiencing Holy Spirit joy. Do you find delight in interceding on someone's behalf? When you pray is it your joy to pray for the spiritual benefit, blessing, progress of someone else? Or are you forever and always praying only about yourself?

Now it is true that sometimes our prayers for others involve pain. Sure. Even in chapter 3, would you notice verse 18? Paul says, verse 17, "Brethren, join in following my example and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us, for many walk of whom I have told you and now tell you even weeping that they are enemies of the cross of Christ." Hey, there were some people he prayed about with tears, those who were the enemies of Christ. But with regard to the Philippians, his prayers were painless and filled with pleasure and delight. He loved them. They loved him. He was filled with joy over them. And that joy expressed itself in a delight to prayer on their behalf. You see, love is concerned for others. Joy is found in that love being fulfilled in that others are having their needs met. Joy delights in petitioning God for someone else's needs. It doesn't concern itself with itself, even in the midst of pain, even in the midst of difficult circumstances, it joyfully asks for others to be blessed. It is concerned more about the pain of others than about itself, and that's what chapter 2 says..."Look not on your own things or let each of you regard one another as more important than himself."

And I think it's especially joyous in this case when Paul knew that the spiritual state of those for whom he prayed was good. He found a special joy in that. Even the two women in chapter 4 who were a problem couldn't steal his joy. They couldn't steal his joy. After talking about them in verse 10, "I rejoiced in the Lord greatly." He even says, "Rejoice always and again I say rejoice."

I guess I have to confess to you that I...that I fear that there are very few Christians who know the true joy that the Holy Spirit gives to a fully obedient Christian. And it shows up in these two ways, their negative thoughts toward others and the lack of concern, delight and joy in praying for others. They're self-centered. They're selfish. And so when somebody else offends them, they hold a grudge. That's ego, that's pride. They find little delight in praying for others. They're not nearly so concerned with them as they are with themselves. That's evidence of no joy in the Spirit, that's evidence of a carnal fleshly conduct. Love really finds its expression in the delight of the well-being of others. That's an element of joy.

There's a man named George Raindrop, an interesting name. Wrote a book called "No Common Task." It's got one beautiful incident in it that I want to relate it to you. In the book he tells about a nurse and how this nurse taught a man to pray and literally changed the man's entire life. The story says he was a dull disgruntled dissipated man who became a man of joy. This is what the writer says, "Much of the nurse's work was done with her hands. And she used her hand as, as it were, a scheme of prayer. Each of her fingers stood for someone. Her thumb was nearest to her and it reminded her to pray for those who were nearest and closest and dearest to her. The second finger was used for pointing, those who teach us point to us with it when they would ask us a question. Therefore her second finger stood for all her teachers, she prayed for them. The third finger is the tallest and it stood for the VIPs, the leaders in every sphere of life. The fourth finger is the weakest, as every pianist knows, and it stood for those who were weak and in trouble and in pain. And the little finger is the smallest and the most unimportant and to the nurse it stood for herself."

That's a lovely scheme of prayer. And there will always be a deep sense of joy in the heart of one who learns to pray by that little scheme. Starting with others and ending up with the most insignificant of all, yourself. That's the joy of intercession, the joy of petition.

One other thought, the joy of participation...the joy of participation. Another element of joy, one comes from the idea that we are able so wonderfully to remember the good things, another, that we have the privilege of interceding on behalf of those we love...both are elements of spiritual joy. A third one is the joy of participation. Verse 5 says, "In view of your participation...the word is koinonia, your fellowship in the gospel...from the first day until now." Paul rejoiced over their partnership, is what that word means...their communion, fellowship, participation. He was thankful because of their participation in the gospel. That's their salvation. Grateful because they were believers. And then he adds, "From the first day of your conversion until now." He's thankful for their fellowship in salvation but since salvation through all the years that have passed, they have been partners, sharers, fellowshippers.

Now it is true that the word koinonia, partnership, fellowship, communion, is used in the New Testament sometimes to refer to monetary contribution, giving money. It has that very explicit meaning in several New Testament passages. In fact, it says in Romans 12:13, contributing to the

necessity of the saints, and there uses the word koinonia, partnership. It is a contribution very often. It is an expression of commonness, of partnership, of love when you give money to support. In Romans 15:26 the contribution to the poor saints in Jerusalem is the word partnership. In 2 Corinthians chapter 8 verse 4, chapter 9 verse 13, 1 Timothy 6:18, Hebrews 13:16, the word koinonia is used of a monetary contribution. That's a kind of partnership.

So he is saying maybe in the broadest sense, "I rejoice that you're saved, that you're a partner with me in the gospel, further that you're a partner with me in the spread of the gospel by your gifts, your giving. Further, that you're a partner with me in the spread of the gospel by your spreading the gospel." He just rejoiced in the fellowship of saints. They had given much to him, verse 15 and 16 of chapter 4, "You yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the gospel after I departed from Macedonia no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone, for even in Thessalonica you sent a gift more than once for my needs." They had definitely participated in the financial area.

But there's much more than that here. He says it's your participation not in the money but in the gospel. Not just their participation in the sense of salvation, although that certainly would be part of it, but in the cooperation with the development, the growth, the support of the spread of the gospel. The phrase in the Greek, ais tu angelion(??) indicates the whole scheme of the gospel development. He's simply saying, "I'm just so thankful that you've participated from the very beginning until now in the spread of the gospel, you've come alongside me as partners."

Now, you know, that's another element of joy. The person in whom the Spirit of God is free to produce joy will rejoice in the fellowship of the believers. He'll love to be with Christians. He'll love to have a heart that reaches out and says, "I bless you for your participation." I certainly feel that in my heart. For nearly 20 years you have participated with me in the gospel. You have supported my family. You have provided for my children, my wife. You have provided my home and my clothes and education for my children. You have done what could never be measured in terms of participation in the gospel by enabling me to carry on a ministry...further than the monetary commitment you've made to me, you have participated, you have come alongside, you have energized and supported and worked and been team members in this ministry here. You have participated and I delight in that and I am in debt to you. And my joy spills out when I think about your participation in the gospel. Not just that you're saved, I rejoice in that. But I rejoice that from the first day of your salvation on you have participated, you have had fellowship, you've made the ministry happen. That's such a tremendous enrichment. And what a fellowship we have...what a fellowship.

William Hendrickson has an exceptional section on this thought in his commentary on Philippians. I have in my mind distilled what he said and added a bit to it. But when I think about the fellowship that we enjoy, the partnership, have you ever really defined what our partnership is? It is a...it is a fellowship of grace, first of all, of grace...it's not a natural partnership, it's not a platonic partnership,

it's not a man-made partnership. We're not a club or a society like the Elks or the Rotary or the Royal Order of Goats or anybody else. We're not a man-made organization. This is a divine fellowship effected by God in Christ through the Spirit by grace. It's a fellowship by grace. Apart from the trinity it's non-existent. Impossible to form on a human level it transcends time and space and it's forever. It's also a fellowship of life. We all share the same common eternal life made ours in Christ. He gives us all life. We're all one with Him, one with the Father, one with the Spirit, one with each other. It's a fellowship of life. What a cause of joy.

It's a fellowship of faith. Just as Christ draws near to the sinner himself, the sinner draws near to God in living faith. It's a fellowship of faith, we all believe. We all believe in the same God. We all believe the same truth of God's Word. It's a fellowship of prayer. It's a fellowship where we come commonly before God on behalf of one another. It's a fellowship of praise, a fellowship of thanksgiving, it's a fellowship of love. We enshrine other Christians in our hearts and yearn for them out of love. It's a fellowship of service, commonly we shoulder the load and do the ministry. It's a fellowship of contributing to other's needs. It's a fellowship of promoting the gospel through preaching, teaching and witnessing. It's a fellowship of separation from the world and attachment to Christ. We are detached from the world. It's a fellowship of warfare, or conflict. We wage war side by side, don't we, against a common enemy. Fellowship. And one who is filled with Holy Spirit joy is going to be rejoicing over the fellowship. Is there anything in the world as wonderful as this?

I'll tell you, some people go around picking at all kinds of little things, nit-picking every little deal that isn't the way they like it. All that does is demonstrate the absence of Holy Spirit joy. You don't know how good you have it. Look at the partnership you have. Look at the people you have praying for you, coming alongside to enable you to serve Christ. Look at the people you have who care about you, who want to meet your needs, who want to work with your children, your family, nurture you, who are available for you to minister to and to use your spiritual gifts. Look at the folks who serve you. If you can't rejoice in that, the problem's not outside, it's inside.

True joy produced by the Spirit recollects the good sweet memories, loves to intercede on behalf of the needs, doesn't look at them negatively, counts it a delight to pray for others and rejoices in the fellowship. Never a perfect fellowship, but a supernatural fellowship, a God-authored divinely designed fellowship. And Paul says from the first day until now, from Lydia on, he says, from day one by the river, no moment have I not had joy over you. And by the way, ten years or so had passed...ten years. Their participation in the spread of the gospel was so unique no other church had given so generously. They were sacrificial. They came alongside. They faithfully proclaimed the gospel. They served each other in that church. Their hearts were bound up with Paul. Their hearts were bound up in the cause of Christ. Their hearts were bound up with each other. In fact, when Epaphroditus came to see Paul, they were so sad that he wasn't there cause they loved him so much and he was so sad that he wasn't there because he loved them so much that Paul sent him back. They had a fellowship. They had profound joy...profound joy.

When Saul in the Old Testament was made king, it says there went with him, 1 Samuel 26, a band of men whose heart God touched. I love that. Then it says in the next chapter, the news, you remember, of Nahash injuring the people of God came, the Holy Spirit came mightily on Saul and it says the Spirit of God came mightily on Saul and his men so that they came out as one man. Their hearts God touched and when the enemy showed himself, they came out as one man.

Well the Philippians and Paul were like that. God had touched all their hearts from the first day and through all these ten years or so they had become one man in heart. And therein lies the joy of Paul. That Philippian church, the sweet memories, the privilege of delightful prayer on their behalf and the joy of their constant participation.

How's your joy? How's the joy in your heart today? You say, "Well, where do you begin?" I'll tell you where you begin, it's all produced by whom? The Holy Spirit. You begin with dealing with the sin in your life, confessing it to the Lord, yielding to the Spirit of God and letting the Spirit produce joy. Let me tell you something. The fact that you are chosen by God to salvation before the foundation of the world, the fact that you have been given such glorious life in Christ, the fact that you have been placed in this church alongside these people, the fact that you have been given the privilege of intercessory prayer and access to God at any time, the fact that God has filled your life with so much blessedness should cause you to be constantly filled with...what?...with joy. And if it isn't there, don't blame your circumstances, okay? Take the issue where the issue really belongs. It belongs inside. Let's bow together in prayer.

Together with our hearts in tune with the Lord in the moment of silence as we close our service, let's ask the Spirit of God to produce that joy in us, to put the floodlight on sin to reveal it, to cleanse it. Beloved, this church should be the most joyful church in the world. We are so rich...so rich. Ask the Spirit of God to cultivate the joy of recollection to see people and remember the good things, the sweet memories. Why make life a burden when you don't have to? Why not enjoy it? Why not love it? Ask the Spirit of God to produce in us the joy of intercession, to be delighted just to pray for the needs of others rather than to point them out as negative. Ask the Spirit of God to make us joyful over the participation that we've all shared. This whole church is the result of so many people participating. The new building, because you have participated will be used to train children and young people to live for Christ, to preach and teach His Word. We've all participated. And therein is the joy. Ask the Spirit of God to renew that joy in your heart.

Father, we ask that You would cause us to be grateful and joyful. Fill us with Your Spirit in Jesus' name. Amen.

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