

## Same Mind, Same Love, Same Joy (Part 2)

Philippians 1:1-11

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August 23, 2020

Many of us oscillate between periods of contentment and discontentment. And in these trying times, with the pandemic and wildfires, it's easy to become dissatisfied with life. Philippians speaks directly to us because Paul wrote it when he was imprisoned, isolated, and in despair. But he finds joy and contentment by turning his eyes to God, and teaches us to likewise change our thinking. Paul teaches us how to find true joy, not just fleeting happiness. For happiness is temporal because it comes from focusing on things that are temporal, but a foundational joy comes from focusing on things that are constant, eternal, and spiritual.

In Philippians 1:3-4, Paul says that he constantly prays for all the Philippians with thanksgiving. The word used for prayer here is not the generic word for speaking to a deity (*proseuche*) but rather the particular word *deesis*, which is specifically about requesting to meet a need. Although we don't know what the Philippians were going through exactly, we know that they had some kind of need, which Paul is addressing. And yet in the midst of Paul's imprisonment and the Philippians' need, he counterintuitively can be thankful to God every time he prays. Although it's difficult, your circumstances don't have to prevent you from having a thankful disposition. We are called to thank God in all situations, and to rejoice with those who rejoice, even if what they are thankful for is the very thing that you lack. It's not easy and requires spiritual discernment and maturity. Paul wants to change our thinking in this letter. And he goes further in v. 4 to say that he always prays with joy, in addition to thanksgiving. This joy isn't dependent on physical circumstances. This joy isn't putting on a happy face or being in denial, but rather it's a disposition of joy and thankfulness that serves as our foundation. It comes from focusing on that which is unchanging and eternal rather than on the temporal.

In v. 5 Paul says that his joy comes from fellowship with the Philippians in gospel service. This gospel isn't just Jesus' work on the cross, but His continuing work in us from conversion to glorification. Gospel work is not just the work of proclaiming the gospel, but participating in God's work, in any way. Despite their need, Paul and the Philippians both are focused on serving God. In v. 1 Paul doesn't introduce himself as an apostle, but as a fellow servant of Jesus Christ, the King. All of us who belong to God participate in His work. Though we may serve each other or the community, ultimately we are serving God, who is exalted above

all things. When we keep in mind that we serve the King of the universe, it's harder to become burned out or lose motivation. We can give thanks for this privilege of serving such a great God together. I'm thankful that in the English congregation, contrary to the 80/20 principle, a majority of our brothers and sisters serve in some way.

Furthermore, Paul can have joy because he looks forward to the hope we all have in Jesus (v. 6). This hope is the completion of Jesus' work in us, the resurrection of the body, the final transformation, and an eternity spent with God. Let us long for Jesus' return, keeping our eyes on this hope that unites us. Then we can have joy and fellowship even in times of need.

In v. 7 Paul continues to express his love and thanks for the Philippians, who all fellowship together with him in God's grace. Then in vv. 9-11 we see what Paul is praying for the Philippians to have. He prays for them to grow in love, most likely with an emphasis on loving each other. He prays for this love to be based on spiritual knowledge, wisdom, and discernment. This isn't the same love that other types of groups have for each other. In our basketball group that used to play on Sundays, we find ourselves sharing a lot of interests. It's often the case that members of groups based on one shared interest will share many more interests. But in church, those who have fellowship in Jesus often don't have other interests in common. Our love must transcend our differences, which makes it harder. It's not based on shared interests, but on a shared life in Christ, being like-minded in faith and purpose.

Paul prays for this love to abound more and more in order to approve what is excellent, what is truly valuable (v. 10). The word for excellent is the same word used in Matthew 6:26 to describe what is valuable. We must realize what really matters. Again we must focus our eyes on what is constant and eternal. Many of our interest, like sports, are by nature fleeting, so it's hard for us to experience joy in these. We need to grow in our ability to identify things of value, which truly give joy. Let us humbly come before God and change the way we think. Even in need, let us find joy and thanksgiving that does not depend on our physical circumstances or temporal needs, but rather on all the spiritual blessings and the purpose that we have been given through Jesus and eternal hope we have in Him.