

COLLECTIVE

PHILIPPIANS (Lesson 1)

Read: Philippians 1:3-7

What was it about the Philippians that brought Paul so much joy?

First, he had happy memories of the people. *“I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all, in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now” (Philippians 1:3-5)*

His memory of them made him smile. Meaning what?

He had no regrets, he nursed no ill feelings, he struggled through no unresolved conflicts. When he looked back over a full decade and thought of the Philippians, he laughed! I wonder how many members can say that about the former churches they have served in. Could you say that about former friends you have had? Or places you have worked? What are your happy memories?

Unfortunately, the memory of certain people makes us agitated. When we remember them, they bring sad or disappointing memories. Paul knew no such memories from his days in Philippi. Amazingly, he could not remember one whom he would accuse or feel ill toward, not even those who threw him in prison or those who stood in a courtroom and made accusations against him. He entertained only good memories of Philippi. Positive memories make life so much lighter; don't you think?

Another reason he was joyful was because he had firm confidence in God.

*For I am confident of this very thing, that He who **began** a good work in you will **perfect** it 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 defence and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers of grace with me (Philippians 1:6-7)*

Paul's confidence in God was a settled fact. He knew that God was at work and in control. He was confident that God was bringing about whatever was happening for His greater glory. When we possess that kind of confidence, we have a solid platform built within us – a solid platform upon which joy can rest.

Look at the words “began” and “perfect” from the passage. They represent opposite ends of life. The One who started (began) a good work in your life will complete (perfect) it. The work You have begun in me will by Your grace be fully done in me. That's what gives us confidence. That's what helps us laugh again.

Focus on the word perfect. I doubt that we have imagined the true meaning of it. Travel back in your mind to the cross where Christ was crucified. See the Savior lifted up, paying for the sins of the world. Listen to His words. There were seven sayings that Christ uttered from the cross commonly called the seven last words of Christ.

COLLECTIVE

One of them our Lord cried out was a single word “Tetelestai!” – translated means “It is finished!”. Telos is the root Greek term of “Telestai”, the same root of the word translated perfect. Paul was saying, “He who began a good work in you when you were converted ten years ago, Philippians, will bring it to completion. It will be finished! Jesus will see to it. And that gives me joy!”

You want a fresh burst of encouragement? You may have a friend or a loved one who is not walking as close to the Lord as he or she once was. Here is fresh hope. Rest in the confidence that God has neither lost interest in them nor lost control. The Lord has not folded His arms and looked the other way. The One who began a good work will bring it to completion. He will finish the task.

There are three major joy stealers at work in our lives. The first joy stealer is **worry**. The second is **stress**. And the third is **fear**. They may seem alike, but there is a distinct difference.

Worry is an inordinate anxiety about something that may or may not occur. What is being worried about usually does not occur. But worry eats away at joy like slow-working acid while we are waiting for the outcome.

Stress is a little more acute than worry. Stress is intense strain over a situation we cannot change or control – something that is out of our control. And instead of releasing it to God, we agitate over it. It is in that restless agitation stage that our stress is intensified. Usually, the thing that plagues us is not as severe as we make it out to be.

Fear, on the other hand, is different from worry and stress. It is dreadful uneasiness over the presence of danger, evil, or pain. As with the other two, however, fear usually makes things appear worse than they really are.

How do we live with worry, stress and fear? How do we withstand these joy stealers?

Go back to Paul's words:

For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus (Philippians 1:6).

How do we do this practically?

Remind yourself early in the morning, or several times a day, “God, You are at work, and You are in control. And, Lord God, You know this is happening. You were there at the beginning, and You will bring everything that occurs to a conclusion that results in Your greater glory in the end?”

And then you should just relax. From that point on, it really doesn't matter all that much what happens. It is in God's hands.

COLLECTIVE

There is a story of a man who was always anxious about his business. In fact, he had built it from nothing into a rather sizable operation. But with growth and success, however, came ever-increasing demands and ever-increasing pressures. Each new day brought a whole new list of responsibilities.

Weary of the worry, the stress, and the fear, he finally decided to give it all over to God. With a smile of quiet contentment, he prayed, *"God, the business is Yours. All the worry, the stress, and the fears I release to You and Your sovereign will. From this day forward, Lord, You own this business"*. That night he went to bed the earliest he had ever been since he started the business. Finally, he had peace.

In the middle of the night, he was woken up by a call. His factory was on fire. But the man calmly got dressed, got into his car and drove to the factory. With his hands in his pockets, he stood there and watched, smiling slightly.

One of his employees that was by his side asked him, *"Why are you smiling? How can you be so calm? Everything's on fire!"* The man answered, *"Yesterday afternoon I gave this business to God. I told Him it was His. If He wants to burn it up, that's His business."*

Some of you read that and think, "That's insane!". But it's not. Actually, that is one of the greatest pieces of sound theology you can embrace. Firm confidence in God means that it is in His hands. He who started something will bear the pressure of it and will bring the results exactly as He planned for His greater glory. How could a business burned to the ground be of glory to God you may ask. Well, sometimes the loss of something very significant – perhaps something we are a slave to – is the only way God can get our attention and bring us back to full sanity.

The happiest people are the ones who have learned how to hold everything loosely and have given the worrisome, stress-filled, fearful details of their lives into God's keeping. We have seen that Paul remained joyful because he had great memories and because he lived with firm confidence.

Hudson Taylor put it like this:

"It doesn't matter, really, how great the pressure is; it only matters where the pressure lies. See that it never comes between you and the Lord – then, the greater the pressure, the more it presses you to His chest".

The pressure on you may be intense. The things that steal your joy may be waiting outside your door, ready to pounce at the first opportunity. However, nothing can rob you of your hold on grace, your claim to peace, or your confidence in God without your permission. Choose joy. Never release your grip! The single most important choice a follower of Christ can make is his or her choice of attitude. Only you can determine that. Choose wisely. Choose carefully. Choose confidently.

Reflection & discussion:

- 1) What are the things that steal your joy?**
- 2) What can you do daily to prevent the loss of your joy?**