

How To Live A Joy- filled Life

1 John 1:1-4

“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life - ² the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us - ³ that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship *is* with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. ⁴ And these things we write to you that your joy may be full.”

Sometime ago I read this article where “The Edelman Financial Services” of Fairfax, Virginia completed a national study of the worth of the mother based on the average U.S. salary. They compiled a list of the typical functions of a mother such as cook, financial manager, psychologist, bus driver – 17 different occupations that a mother has. The study reports that since mothers wear many hats and since a mother is on duty 24-hours a day the typical mother deserves a full time salary for 17 key occupational positions. **Based on this conclusion and on U.S. average salaries, American mothers should be paid \$508,700 a year.** The editor of *Working Mother* magazine called the half million figure a little low saying that many mothers often take on far more jobs than were covered in the Edelman study.

Mothers are often under-appreciated, under-paid and overworked. It is no wonder then that they fight daily *fatigue* and *depression*. Even though the economy is booming, the wear and tear of daily responsibility kills the joy for many mothers.

Would you agree that there are many *killjoys* in life? In a world where we have a shooting attack targeting Republican Lawmakers

at a ball part in Alexandria, Virginia, or the bombing of the Boston Marathon in Boston, Mass, the world is in desperate need of massive doses of joy.

Each of us needs joy in our life. It is not just some casual thing that it would be nice to have. Each of us has a fundamental emotional need for joy in our life. **Life without joy is overwhelming.** Life without joy is **overburdened.** Life without joy is **oppressive.** **Studies have actually shown that the more joy we have in our lives, the more productive we are.** I read an article in *US News and World Report* saying that corporations are now hiring Joy Consultants to kind of pop up and build up the joy in peoples' lives so that all the employees can be more productive. It is true that you have more energy, more creativity, more productivity the more joy you have in your life.

For several weeks we have been in this series on “How God Meets Your Deepest Needs.” That includes your need for joy. In fact, one of the names for God in Psalms 43:4 in the Hebrew, the Bible says is *El Simchathgali* (El Shum-chath-geelee) which means, “I am the God of exceeding joy” – “I am the God of overflowing, abundant joy.” Jesus said this in John 15:11, “These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.” The Greek reads like this, “I have told you this so that you will be filled with my joy, and your joy will overflow.” In 1 Peter 1:8 he refers to the Christian life as “joy unspeakable and full of glory.” The Greek reads, “happy with a glorious, inexpressible joy.” There can be not doubt that God intended for us to *enjoy living life!*

When you talk about joy, you have to go to the book of Philippians, a little, short book in the New Testament – only four chapters long. But 16 times in four chapters, Paul says, “Rejoice... Be joyful ... enjoy life.” Sixteen times he uses the word “joy” in four chapters. **The amazing thing is Paul did not write this book when he was on vacation in the Caribbean.** He was in prison, in a dungeon, in

Rome waiting to be executed. In the darkest days of his life he writes the most positive book in the Bible. **He gives us his six joy-builders.** They are the opposite of the **joy-busters** in life. They are the antidotes to the **killjoys** of life.

To help you remember them I have put them in an acrostic JOYFUL. Six joy-builders. If you will begin to practice these things in your life, you will find depression lifting, discouragement diffusing and a new sense of joy in your life, which you need.

J – Jettison all regrets about my past. The word “jettison” means “to throw overboard.” Whether it is an airplane that is trying to lighten its load by throwing out cargo so it can stay aloft or a boat trying to stay afloat so they throw the cargo overboard. **Jettison means,** “to abandon as worthless, to discard, to eliminate, to get rid of.” **Paul says if you want to enjoy life, there are some things you have got to get rid of.** There are some things you have to throw overboard in your life because they are wearing you down and they are overburdening your life.

The first thing he says you have to do is jettison the regrets about the past. We all have regrets. Everybody has skeletons in the closet because nobody’s perfect. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle who wrote the **Sherlock Holmes** series decided to play a prank on some very important people in England so he sent an anonymous note to eight prominent men in England that said, “All is found out, flee at once.” **He just wanted to see what would happen.** In 24-hours all eight men had left the country.

I am sure that we could find out certain things about you that would cause you to want to leave this service right now. We all have regrets. The only problem with regret is, it does not work. **It cannot change your past so it just makes you miserable.** We get stuck in the land of “if only’s.” **If only I could redo my life, if only I could change**

things, if only I could relive that part, if only I could resolve things differently and make different decisions.

But you can't. So it is not going to change anything by regretting it. **Regretting is just a waste of time.** What do I do?

The Bible says release it. Once you release it, then you can get on with your life. **How can you do that? You can release your past because God does.** The Bible says that when we come to God and say, "God, I am sorry. I have blown it. I have made a mistake." When we come to Christ and confess our sins to Him, He takes those sins and throws them in the deepest parts of the oceans and puts up a "No Fishing" sign. **The Bible says, "Their sins will I remember no more."** **That is an amazing verse.** That the God of the universe **chooses to forget your mistakes once they are confessed.** ***If God can release you from your past mistakes and your past sins, so can you.*** **Then you can get on with life.** Isaiah 43:18-19 says, "Forget what happened in the past and don't dwell on events from long ago because I'm going to do something new." **The starting point of joy is to let go of the past.** **Jettison all regrets – the grief, the grudges and the guilt.**

O – Omit all worries about my future. Now we have to face the other end of life. **If you are going to enjoy the present, you must omit all worries about your future.** **Worry, hands-down, is the greatest killjoy of them all.** You cannot be *joyful* and *worried* at the same time. **Worry only makes things worse.** **The more you worry about something, the bigger it gets in your mind.** It turns molehills into mountains and it exaggerates and gets bigger and bigger in your mind. **Worry is just as useless as regret.**

Paul's antidote is found in Philippians 3:13, "One thing I do is forget what is behind me and do my best to reach what is ahead." He says there are two days you should not worry about – yesterday and tomorrow.

Here are Paul's alternatives: you can either worry or you can pray. If you are worrying it means one thing – you are not praying. If you are praying you do not have to worry. **So Paul says if you want to be filled with joy, you have to release the past and you have got to focus on right now.** Don't worry and don't regret because God has a plan for your life.

The old English word for "worry" means "to choke or to strangle." Today the word is "necktie." **Worry, like a necktie, can cut off the blood to your carotid artery and you cannot think straight and you do really stupid things.** Paul says omit all worry about your future. Instead, pray.

Y – Yield myself to God's purpose. A third killjoy in life is having no real purpose at all. If you are just drifting, if you do not know where you came from or where you are going and why you are here, of course you are not going to have any joy in your life. **You are just going to cruise on autopilot through life, substituting happiness for joy – short-term pleasure for joy.** We all need a cause greater than ourselves in which to live for. That is what brings us joy. Living for yourself does not bring joy.

When Paul is writing this letter, he has literally lost everything. He is old. He is in prison. He is in poor health. **He is lonely, living in a dungeon in Rome, chained to a Roman Praetorian Guard 24-hours a day.** They have taken away everything from this guy. He has no friends, no ministry, and no freedom. He even has no privacy, since the guard is chained to him 24-hours a day.

But there is one thing that they could not take away from Paul – his purpose in life. So Paul says in Philippians 1:21, "For me to live is Christ." In 2 Timothy, another book he wrote at this same time, he says, "My only purpose in life is to please Him." Paul says, "My whole purpose in life is to exalt Christ."

If you want to have a joy-filled life, if you want to get out of the dumps and into the joy zone, you need to get in line with God's purpose for your life. You need to make that statement where you say, "God, I give myself to You and I want You to put Your purpose in my life." When you begin to live the purpose for which you are made, all of a sudden life makes sense and all of a sudden the joy goes up.

Romans 6:13 says, "Give yourselves completely to God – every part of you – to be tools in the hand of God to be used for His good purpose." I dare you to pray the most dangerous prayer: "Use me." **That is the most dangerous prayer you can ever pray.** He will wear you out. God is looking for people who will yield themselves to His purpose.

F – Focus on what is good. Once I have yielded myself to God's purpose I need to start looking around and see what has God been doing. As you know, life is filled with ups and downs. **We have mountains and valleys, wins and losses, good times and bad times.** We have critics and we have complements. Of course you have a choice, which are you going to focus on. **You can walk around looking at all the bad things in your life or you can go around looking at all the good things.** It is your choice. Looking at the cup: Is it half full or is it half empty? **It is your choice and everyday you are making that choice.** What are you choosing to focus on? **Even on your worse day, life is good.** **Even on your worse day, you have it better off than many, many other people in this world.** You can choose to focus on what is good.

Paul gives us his fourth joy-builder in Philippians 4:8, "Fix your thoughts [focus] on what is true and honorable and right. Think about things that are pure and lovely and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise." **Where do you get a list of things like that?** Talk radio? Not likely! **Television?** Is that where you are going to find things that are true and admirable and pure? No. **The newspaper, magazines?** No.

But there is one place you can count on – God’s word. The more you fill your mind with *biblical truth*, the more *positive* and *joyful* you are going to be. The Bible is *true*, it is *right*, it is *admirable*. **The Bible is worthy of value.** Fill your mind with it everyday. Spend some time reading God’s word.

In your mind there is a scale of the negative thoughts you get everyday - the negative input – and the positive input. You don’t have to go looking for negative thoughts. They are everywhere around us. **People are more than happy to give them to you on a regular basis.** As you go through life, you get a lot of pebbles put on the *negative side* of your brain. If you don’t counter-balance that intentionally with God’s truth, God’s word, positive thoughts and beautiful ideas, you are going to get out of balance. **And the negative is going to outweigh the positive in your life and it is no wonder you are depressed.** It is no wonder you are down all the time. It is no wonder you are discouraged and you do not want to get out of bed in the morning. **Why?** Because you don’t have any food, any soul food, that is going to equalize the negative in your life. Therefore, Paul says if you want to have joy, *the fourth joy builder is to build or focus on what is good.*

Paul practiced this himself. Even when he was in prison, he had every reason to be bitter, every reason to complain, every reason to have a pity party. All his friends had left him. **He is alone, old, in prison unjustly to be executed.** While he was in prison, Christians turned against him and were attacking him without mercy. He was criticized unjustly. **If there is anything that takes away our joy more quickly than criticism, I don't know what it is.** Just let somebody say something about how you look or about what you said or make a judgment against you, and immediately you lose your joy. You want to *retaliate*, *get even*, and *criticize back*. **You start stewing in your mind.** Paul says, “I do not have time for critics. I have yielded myself to God’s purpose. I am focusing on what is good. The last thing I am

going to do is let some stupid critic rob me of my joy.” He says, “I am not going to allow other people to take my joy from me.”

Now, listen carefully right here, the reason you are so unhappy a lot of the time is because you get too concerned about trivial issues.

The reason you lose your joy so rapidly is that you do not focus on the things that really matter and you allow unimportant things to upset you. How many arguments in your family are really over major issues? **Isn't it true that a lot of the conflict in your life, a lot of the killjoys in your life, are over inconsequential things that are not going to matter thirty days from now much less for eternity?** Every time you get upset over an insignificant issue, you are letting the killjoys rob you of joy for a dumb reason. Paul says, “Focus on what is good.” That is your choice. Everyday you are making a choice: “Am I going to be joyful or am I going to be stressed out?”

U – Use my life to help others. Paul was joyful because he was unselfish. He invested his life in others. **If you want to have continuous joy in your life, here is the secret.** Give your life away in helping others. Stop focusing on your puny problems and aches and pains and start focusing on helping others. **Become other-centered.** The more you give your life away, Jesus said, the more you find it. The more unselfish you become, the more joyful a person you are going to be. The more self-centered you are, the more miserable, cranky, self-piteous type person you are going to be.

Paul is in prison, and even in prison he is thinking about other people. In Philippians 4:1 he says, “Dear brothers and sisters, I love you and I long to see you for you are my joy and the reward for my work.” **Paul's joy was the people he had invested his life in.** Paul's joy were the people he cared about, that he had led to Christ, that he had helped grow. He says, “You are my joy.”

Probably the most famous line of all of Shakespeare's plays is the phrase, “To be or not to be,” from *Hamlet*. **It is Hamlet's famous**

soliloquy. Hamlet is talking to himself. The Prince of Denmark is saying, “To be or not to be, that is the question.” **He is talking about suicide**. He was considering taking his life. He is saying, “I do not know whether I am going to take my life or go on living in pain. Should I live or should I die? To be or not to be?”

Paul said the exact same thing in Philippians 3 for the exact opposite reason of the Prince of Denmark. Hamlet is saying, “I do not know what is worse – living or dying. Which is more painful? For me to go on in my pain or for me to die in pain? I do not know which one is worse.”

In Philippians 3, Paul says the exact opposite, “I do not know which is better, to go to heaven or to stay here and serve people in the name of Christ. Which one is better?” It is the same dilemma, but it is an entirely different point.

Guess which one had the joy. Paul. Because he was using his life to help others.

Philippians 3:21-24 says, “For me, living means opportunity for Christ and dying, well, that’s better yet. But if living will give me more opportunities to win people to Christ, then I really don’t know which is better, to live or to die. Sometimes I want to live and at other times I don’t, for I long to go and be with Christ. But the fact is, I can be of more help to you by staying.”

How could death possibly be of benefit to Paul? Because he knew where he was going. He was a friend of God. Paul says, “Either way I win. On earth, my purpose is to live for God. When I die, I get to go be with God.” **He has a purpose for living and he has a purpose for dying**. You can’t get a man down who has that. That is his secret of joy – a *purpose for living*, a *purpose for dying*.

Do you? Do you have a purpose for living? Do you have a purpose for dying? **If you don't it is no wonder you do not have any joy in your life.** You have not yielded yourself to God's purpose and you have not gotten to know His Son. You are not ready to live and you are not ready to die. **You are miserable.** Paul says, "When I use my life to help others it brings joy in my life. Either way I win whether I live or whether I die."

Finally, Paul's last joy-builder...

L – Learn to be content. Philippians 4:11 says, "I have learned [notice the word "learned"] to be content whatever the circumstances." **Listen, contentment is not natural; he had to learn it.** It is easy to be content when you are living on Easy Street. But Paul's life was not easy. It was very difficult. 2 Corinthians 11 Paul tells us a little of his biography, "I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received forty lashes minus one (in other words, he was whipped 39 times in five different experiences. Add that up and you can figure out how many scars were on the back of Paul.) Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked. I spent a night and a day in the open sea. I have been in constant danger. I have labored and toiled. I have often gone without sleep. I have known hunger and thirst. I have often gone without food. I have even been cold and gone without clothing. Besides everything else, I have faced the daily pressures of my concern for all the churches. In spite of all this, no matter what happens, rejoice. In all situations rejoice in the Lord. Always rejoice." He says, "I have learned to be content."

This is the bottom line - Joy is a decision. You are as joyful as you choose to be. If you are discouraged today, it is because you are choosing to be discouraged. **You can choose to be joyful because there are many things you can be joyful about.** God is saying, "If you learn to be content and you choose to make the right decision, you can be joyful."

We get caught up in “When and then” thinking. “When ‘this’ happens in my life, then I will be happy. When I get married, then I will be happy....When I get a job then I will be happy. When I graduate then I will be happy. When....” (fill in the blank), “then I will be happy.”

No you won’t. You are as happy as you choose to be. You are as joyful as you choose to be. **Because happiness is a choice.**

Some of you are facing some not so happy circumstances right now. You may be going through some very tough times and, and some of you are dealing with some very hurtful memories. Some of you are having to swallow a bitter pill right now financially or physically or in a relationship. **You think,** “There is nothing in my life worth being joyful about. How can I be joyful when everything is wrong in my life?” **There are at least two reasons:**

I can always be joyful no matter what happens because I know God is in control. **Paul says,** “I’m going to keep on being glad (remember he is in prison awaiting execution) for I know that as you pray for me and as the Holy Spirit helps me, this is all going to turn out for my good.” **He says,** “I have a couple of encouragements here: you are praying for me and the Holy Spirit is helping me. But here is the real issue: God sees it all, God knows it all, God cares about it all, God is in control of it all, God will use it for my good, God will give me the power that I need. So what am I worried about? Nothing.”

Granted, this is not the way that Paul had planned it. Paul wanted to go to Rome, rent the coliseum and have a Billy Graham crusade with him being Billy Graham. **He wanted to share God’s love with all the Roman Empire.** **Instead he goes with his hands and feet shackled, put in a dungeon for two years with a 24-hour guard.** **I am sure he shared Jesus Christ with every one of those guards.** They changed every four hours – that is a couple thousand guards over a two-year period. **Who was the real prisoner?** Paul had a captive audience.

The Bible tells us that some of these praetorian guards took the Good news back and even members of Nero's own family became believers. That is what you call a chain reaction!

Not only that, he did something else while he was in prison. He wrote most of the New Testament. Aren't you glad Paul set still in prison? We wouldn't have the New Testament. If he had gone out, Mr. Evangelist, and been traveling all over he would have never slowed down long enough to write what we now know are the inspired New Testament books. Paul had a plan but God had a better plan. Paul said, "I trust God's plan better than my own. Therefore I am full of joy because I know God has a better plan. I also know that God's going to write the final chapter." So he drew this conclusion in Philippians 1:6, "I am sure that God who began the good work within you will continue His work until it is finally finished on that day when Jesus Christ comes back again." We get so frustrated and discouraged because we do not know what God is doing in our lives but God knows. What we need to do is trust Him for the things we cannot see how they are going to turn out, because we know that what God starts, He finishes. God has your best interest at heart. Therefore no matter what happens, you can be joyful. Because what He starts, He finishes.

You may think that joy is some kind of characteristic for naturally upbeat cheerful kind of people. And your personality type is not the joyful type. But you are wrong.

Here is the question: Is anybody going to be in heaven because of you? Who is going to be there because you took the time to share the fact that God loves people, that He has a plan, that He died for their sins, and that He wants them to be in heaven. Is anybody going to be in heaven because of you?

Each of us were put here to get to know God, to fulfill His purpose, to share the love of God with other people, and to help each

other. If you are not doing that, you are wasting your life. Therefore, you have some tough choices to make.

You have a chance to determine your destiny. But you must choose what the values are in your life. If you will get to know God's Son, begin to yield yourself to God's purpose, use your life to help other people, you will have more joy than you could possibly ever imagine. **Paul was joyful regardless of his circumstances, because he had a purpose for living and a purpose for dying.** Do you? Paul said, "For me to live is Christ." **If I asked you to summarize your life purpose in a sentence, what would you say?** How would you fill in the blank, "For me to live is _____" Some of you might say, "For me to live is money." I am going to make as much as I can and then I am going to spend it all on me. Or, "For me to live is possessions." **The desire to acquire is everything and at the end of this life the one with the most toys wins.** We have so many people who have much to live on and nothing to live for. Some of you might say, "For me to live is pleasure." **When we live our entire lives for our weekends and vacations and hobbies, those are all fine and good things but they are not the purpose of life.** Some of you may say, "For me to live is position and prestige and power and fame, and I am going to make it and I am going to achieve and I am going to be looked up to." So we dress for success and drive to impress and then wonder why our lives feel empty.

Deep inside you are thinking, "There has got to be more than this." **You are absolutely right!** You were made to know God. You were made to have a relationship with Him. **You were made for His purpose and you were made to share the love of Christ with other people.** Do that and you will have joy. That is the secret.