

Shine Brightly
Joy: A Study of Philippians
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Introduction

Joy.

It's sitting in left field at Nats Park for the first time since 2019 and watching Gomes hit the winning run in the 9th inning.

It's floating down the Shenandoah River on a lazy Saturday.

It's getting to the end of a school year...am I right parents? We made it. You did it.

It's your kid playing with sparklers for the first time, getting her ready for some Fourth of July festivities.

Until something goes badly wrong and a wayward spark burns a hole in her BB-8 pajamas. And then it's very sad.

As an enneagram 7, I love the life in life.

But I've also discovered surprising joy in some very difficult moments.

When I'm walking through what feels like year million of infertility and the note arrives in the mail "still praying."

When I'm waiting at the metaphorical window praying for the prodigal to come home, deciding it's just too hard and not worth it to keep showing up in prayer and begin to give up, and then hearing God whisper... "it's worth it to keep showing up because you will find my presence there... I am waiting for them, too."

I love the joys of baseball and the river and sparklers and the fun moments of life. But the older I get, the more I treasure the joy that the presence of God brings into the dark and difficult moments, as well.

[SLIDE] C. S. Lewis said, "Joy is the serious business of heaven."

Review

Welcome to National Community Church. Whether you are here in the house or are joining us online, we are excited you are here and pray that you would encounter love, joy, peace, and hope of Jesus today.

If you have your Bible with you, join me in Philippians, chapter 2. It's a letter to the first church Paul planted in Europe during his second missionary journey.

Pause for an announcement.

March 2022. Pastor Dave and I will be leading a study trip to Greece. Many of you have come to Israel with us in the past... where we seek to better understand the words of the Bible by immersing ourselves in the world of the Bible. In this next trip, you will literally follow Paul's second missionary journey from Philippi, to Thessaloniki to Berea to Athens and Corinth. For more information, check out the graphic behind me.

Last week, if you missed it, you missed it, go back and listen, we had Dr. Dick Foth in the house. He unpacked the first half of this chapter and talked about Jesus -

Jesus' obedience to the Father.

Jesus' demonstration of the saving work of God on the cross.

Jesus' display of the glory and wonder of God.

And when we get to verse 12, Paul transitions with a "therefore."

And shifts to focus from how Jesus lived his life to how we should live our lives.

[SLIDE]

Philippians 2:12-13

Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to

work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.

He commends them for their obedience. And then commands them to continue in obedience. Which is not a word we really like to hear. That's not a joyful word. And yet that's exactly what the previous 11 verses were all about.

Philippians 2:8 tells us that Jesus practiced obedience to the point of death on a cross.

Then he goes on to say work out your salvation with fear and trembling.

What does he mean work out your salvation?

I thought Jesus did the work of our salvation. I thought we couldn't earn our salvation. I thought salvation was signed, sealed, and delivered on the cross. I thought I had already been saved.

First, in Western culture, we have conflated justification and salvation. In the ancient Jewish world and in the first century church, they were two very related but still distinct things.

Justification was being declared right before God. One and done. Accomplished on the cross and offered as a gift. Past tense reality. We have been justified by Christ's redeeming work on the cross.

On the other hand, salvation was commonly understood to be an ongoing reality. It is past tense, present tense, but mostly future tense. The ongoing work of being saved, healed, and delivered.

We have been justified.

We have been saved, we are being saved, and we will be saved.

But still... isn't salvation the work of Jesus?

Working out your salvation is not a "God helps those who help themselves" kind of thing.

It doesn't say work for your salvation but work out your salvation. It's working out the work God is working within.

It's not about earning your salvation but exercising the fruit of your salvation.

It's putting it into practice, putting it on display.

The external evidence of God's internal work.

Sometimes we think we are following Jesus but we are really just fans of Jesus.

Sometimes we think we are following Jesus but really we are just in philosophical agreement with Jesus.

Following Jesus is more than being on team Jesus or agreement with a set of statements about Jesus.

Following Jesus means being a student of the words of Jesus, imitating the ways of Jesus, and partnering in the mission of Jesus.

Following Jesus means learning to live our lives from Jesus.
Verse 5- have the same mindset as Christ

Following Jesus means doing what Jesus did the way he did it.
Verse 8- being obedient to the point of death

It has to be worked out.

And then... fear and trembling. I thought this was a series on joy.

Let's start with fear. Fearing the Lord means to reverence God and reference God in all we say and do.

Reverencing God—meaning we recognize, acknowledge, and respect who he is. He is the King.

Referencing God—meaning we seek him, trust him, and obey him. He is our Compass.

But what is the trembling all about?

You know what, I'm not going to stand up here today and pretend to know because I'm still digging into it. But let me invite you into the journey with me. Here's something I do when I'm studying. New Testament writers will often quote Old Testament texts, and "fear and trembling" is one that shows up quite a bit. So I put words and phrases into a Biblegateway.com search and follow the bread crumbs through Scripture. And this is where Bible study gets fun.

Check this out... the second time that phrase "fear and trembling" shows up in the text is in Psalm 2:11:

[SLIDE]

"Serve the Lord with fear and celebrate his rule with trembling."

Celebrate his rule with trembling. I need to study more but maybe it's not like a tremble of dread or despair so much as a tremble of excitement or anticipation. Like the trembling that happens when you get to the top of that roller coaster. Like what Jenson talked about in the NCC Daily this week. A trembling at the awesomeness, the grandeur, the scandal of God almighty- the Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer of the Universe-being at work within you.

[SLIDE]

Verse 14

Do everything without grumbling or arguing,

Guys there is a whole sermon series packed in those 6 words and this is likely a reference back to Exodus when the children of Israel grumbled and complained at the work God was doing in and through them. But let's keep going for now...

so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation. Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky as you hold firmly to the word of life.

Shine Like Stars

In the beginning, God said "let there be light" and electromagnetic waves ranging in wavelength over at least 16 orders of magnitude burst into existence. Potential and kinetic energy reservoirs were deposited around the universe to fuel its existence for billions of years. The process of photosynthesis began to create life.

And from that moment on, light would be a recurring theme in Scripture.

The high priestly prayer of Numbers and the prayers of the Psalmist cried out for the face of God to shine upon his people.

The prophet Isaiah would compel the people of God would be a light to the nations.

The prophet Daniel would write:

[SLIDE]

Daniel 12:3

Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever.

Last summer, we walked through the book of Daniel together and talked about what it meant to live faithfully and counterculturally. To remember that God's got this and God's got you and Daniel and his friends were able to stand firm and stand out to shine in a warped and crooked Babylon.

Fast forward one hundred years, Jesus would declare that He was the light of the world. And then he would turn around and tell his followers: **YOU** are the light of the world And *let your good*

deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father.”

Paul is building on the writings of the prophets and the teachings of Jesus to encourage the church in Philippi. This is also your call. Your identity. Your mission in the world.

Shine brightly. Like stars in the sky.

As we work out what Jesus is working in us, we reflect his character more perfectly, we proclaim his message of hope more boldly and we offer a brighter vision to the world around us.

Shine like the stars in the sky.

What does that mean?

Inspires Hope

First, stars are beacons of hope. For hundreds of years, sailors navigated the oceans using the stars. In Homer’s *The Odyssey*, the goddess Calypso told Odysseus to keep the constellation The Bear, or Ursa Major, on his right during the voyage.

With the development of GPS and other technologies, the need to navigate using the stars went away. In 2006, the US Naval Academy stopped offering its classes on celestial navigation. Ten years later, they reinstated the classes. Because technology is great—but batteries run out, systems get hacked, and technology fails.

But the stars. Are predictable. Reliable. Unshakable.

They give us a compass to navigate our way.

Do we shine like beacons of hope? Are we reliable, stable, unshakable?

Are we people who show up. That are consistent.
Are we people who make peace and point to a better way when conversations become tense or dishonoring.

Are we people who remain calm and carry on in the midst of chaos, pressure, and tension?

Do we point to creative solutions from the heart of God to problems in the world?

Yesterday I got to listen to Pastor Joel tell the stories about the origins of the DC Dream Center, and I love their mission- a place where hope becomes habit?

Can I encourage you in some practical ways to do that today?
It might be volunteering at the Dream Center.
It might be joining our Kids Team
It might be joining our First Impressions Team.

There is a QR code on the arm of your chair. If you are watching online, it’s ncc.re/connect—find a place where you can bring hope.

Hope is the serious business of heaven.

Eradicates Fear

Next. Light illuminates the darkness. It eradicates fear. Parents—we know this. The fear vanishes when the lights come on. The monsters under the bed and the monsters in the closet magically disappear when the light comes on.

Church, can I challenge us?

Why do we have such a fight or flight mentality when faced with the darkness of the world? Daniel lived in crooked and warped generation in Babylon. Paul lived in a crooked and warped generation in the Greco-Roman world. We may look around and think this is a crooked and warped generation. But why do we get so nervous about it? This is nothing new.

Why do we feel like our options are to either flee from the darkness—avoid it, hide from it, fear it. Or to fight the darkness—to attack it, confront it, curse it.

Sometimes we get so concerned about how warped and crooked our generation is.

Sometimes we try to make things better by controlling politics, controlling narratives, controlling people.

What if we stopped worrying or running or cursing or controlling and just stepped into the darkness and let our lights shine? Light has no fear of the dark. Light is not contaminated by the dark. Light is not diminished by the dark. Light chases the darkness away.

Stars are not impacted by the environment around them; they create the environment around them.

Where there is hopelessness, we bring hope.
Where there is chaos, we bring peace.
Where there is suffering, we bring comfort.
Where there is confusion, we bring wisdom.

Eradicating darkness. That's the serious business of heaven.

Reveals God

Finally, stars tell us something about the character of God.

Joe Bohanon is a part of our community. He is a mathematician and a physicist and he loves astronomy and I asked him to give me a scientist's perspective on this passage from Paul. I wanted to know what jumped into Joe's brilliant mind when he read "shine bright like the stars in the sky?" that was going to give me mind-blowing insight or new perspective – to wow everyone listening to this message.

But this is how he answered: "I love astronomy not just because of the really cool science behind it, but also because of the beauty of a starry night."

It's so simple.

The stars in the sky reveal the beauty of God.

Here's a photograph Joe took of the Milky Way.

[SLIDE]

MILKY WAY PHOTO

Take a deep breath.

When God called Abraham to get out of his tent and look up at the stars, I don't think it was simply to give him something to count. But rather to see the magnitude of God's goodness, his power, his faithfulness, his mercy.

[LOSE SLIDE]

When the Naval Academy reinstated their celestial navigation classes, one person acknowledged that one of the added benefits was to simply give a sailor a greater appreciation of the nighttime skies when they were at sea.

When we follow Jesus, we shine the character of God to the world around us. We reveal the goodness, faithfulness, and beauty of God. We breathe joy and love and peace into the world. That's the serious business of heaven.

Timothy and Epaphroditus

Paul then spills 11 verses of ink to point to two examples of hope bearers, fear extinguishers, beauty revealers... a young pastor named Timothy and a friend named Epaphroditus. I will let you read that on your own.

But in summary, he says that there is no one like Timothy. What is the cause of that commendation? His great oratorical skills? His theological prowess? His leadership gift? His spiritual maturity. No. Verse 20...

[SLIDE]

I have no one else like him, who will show genuine concern for your welfare.

Timothy was a care-giver.

And then he mentions Epaphroditus and in verses 29 and 30 says:

[SLIDE]

So then, welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honor people like him, because he almost died for the work of Christ. He risked his life to make up for the help you yourselves could not give me.

That phrase “he risked his life” was a gambling expression meaning a roll of the dice. For the sake of Jesus, Epaphroditus was willing to risk everything. In the early church, there was a group of Christ followers called the gamblers- they would bury the dead and take care of the sick during plagues. It took reckless courage.

Epaphroditus was a risk-taker.

We will talk more about them in this week’s NCC Daily so make sure you are signed up for that.

But because Paul said “honor people like him,” I want to share two people who shine brightly like stars in the sky in my life.

[SLIDE]

Picture of Gran and Bro. Fred—Keep up for a while

Two Stars

This picture holds incredible meaning for me. These two people were beacons of hope, givers of light and symbols of God’s beauty in my life. They were care-givers and risk-takers.

The gentleman is Dr. Fred Wolfe but known more intimately as Brother Fred by those in his congregation. He was my pastor. We have counted over 100 people who sat under his leadership and went on to become pastors and missionaries.

Jerry Sutton, Matt Day, Carey Cubitt. Jack Hester, Chris Estis, Wayne Dorsett, Mike Bedford, Rob White, Raymond and Marie Parker, Heather Zempel... and the list keeps growing.

But even more importantly were the thousands of people who committed to walking in the way of Jesus- to be light bearers and hope bringers and God reflectors in their homes, their businesses, their schools- where they lived, worked and played all over the Gulf Coast.

The other is my Gran. My friends called her GranBerry and adopted her as their own grandmother. They loved visiting her house because there were two refrigerators in the kitchen with one devoted almost exclusively to sodas and desserts. There was always a cake, a bowl of Hershey’s miniature candies, and juicy fruit gum. She taught 5-year-old Sunday School for 30 years. She loved the kids in the neighborhood and they loved her. And when a new family from Eastern Europe moved in next door, she sat in the kitchen with another grandmother without the ability to communicate in the same language. But with the ability to share life and tea. And probably cake.

This picture was taken at my Gran’s 100th birthday party. This time of year was always a big celebration because her birthday was on July 5. So between July 4th and Gran’s birthday, we celebrated a lot.

[LOSE PICTURE]

Both have passed away in the last couple of years. And yet their lights are still shining. That’s what’s amazing about stars. The name Edith Berry may not be remembered by many people in the next 50 years. But her legacy will shine on to her great-grandchildren’s grandchildren.

Whose life does your light shine on?
To what generation will your light be felt?

We are giving everyone sparklers today. Just give you a little jumpstart on your Fourth of July festivities. And not to over-

spiritualize the moment, but as you light those and wave then around this weekend, would make that a moment of decision, a moment of prayer, a moment of commitment to shine brightly in our generation.

Shine brightly. To make a path of hope.

Shine brightly. To eradicate darkness and fear.

Shine brightly. To reveal the beauty of God.

Shine brightly. To the third and fourth generation.

Invitation

If you are here today and you need Jesus to save you, heal you, deliver you, you are ready to make a decision to follow Jesus, can I invite you to pray this prayer with me right now...

Jesus, I am ready to stop going my own way and ready to come home. I am ready to lay down the rights to my own life and submit to your rule and reign. I am ready to reverence you and reference you in my life. Thank you for the cross. I give you all of my life—all of my sin, all of my potential. And receive from you—all of your righteousness, all of your presence. Thank you for saving me.

And for all of us, Jesus, help us to shine brightly. Amen.