

## **The Fundamentals of Joy**

Philippians 1:18b-26

Pastor Lyndon Unger, July 9, 2017

Good morning. It's so wonderful to be back with you guys. It's been a while.

I apologize in advance if any of your children don't learn anything in Sunday School today, because my two children are going crazy. They were so excited to come today. We told them last night at bedtime - and that was a mistake. We should have told them this morning - because I think they went to bed at 11:30. They were doing just about 3,600 RPM in bed. This morning we actually had the car in neutral and they pushed it here. They were so excited to come, I apologize if all of the sudden there's a fire downstairs or something, because they're just so excited to be here. No fires! Yes, we have too many fires in BC!

Thank you for talking about water so much! I had left my water up here in the pulpit. We were singing songs about water, and all of the sudden I got incredibly thirsty. I was sitting in the back, so I came rushing up here to get my water.

So, it's good to be back. It's wonderful - it's been a year, I think, since I've been here. Some new faces here, some same faces, and I'm so delighted to back with you guys.

Today, I want to ask you guys a question. Anybody here have too much joy in your life? Anybody have too much goodness, too much joy - like you're kind of maxed-out? Nobody? Joy is one of those things that we never get enough of. We always seem to be wanting more joy. It's one of those things that you always chase, but you never seem to acquire. We have it, but it always seems to disappear. It's this difficult thing that, as Christians, we know we're supposed to have, but getting it, finding it, hanging on to it is one of those things that prove more difficult than we think.

Today, we're going to talk about joy. Truthfully, one of the reasons is that I've never actually heard a sermon on joy. I hear joy mentioned a lot, but people don't really get down and unpack it and explain it. So today we're going to be in Philippians 1, and we are going to catch up with Paul. Now, I'll set the stage here for the church of Philippi. Paul was joined by Timothy in Acts 16:1-5. And in Acts 16:6-10, Paul gets called to go to Macedonia. Paul goes then to Philippi, the first major city of Macedonia; that's Acts 16:11-40. When Paul gets to Macedonia, a lot of good things happen, and some bad things happen. He meets Lydia, a wealthy woman who gets saved, and the church starts to meet at her house. But Paul and Silas also cast the demon out of a slave girl who was used to tell the future, and the people that owned her got very upset. Paul was dragged to court, he gets beaten without trial, and then, of course, he's freed from prison, and then the next day he's officially escorted out of town. The governor says "we don't want to know what's going on - just get lost!" And they take him to the gates and give him the right foot of fellowship, and that's it - Paul's gone from Philippi. Paul was in Philippi for a short time. The church was left. So, he writes them a letter because, of course, he left the church in Philippi in bad circumstances. There's a bad taste in the mouth of everyone in Philippi, this church that Paul had planted, because Paul and Silas were seen as big troublemakers.

And so, for Paul's first missionary journey from Philippi, he goes all throughout Macedonia. But his first missionary journey did not start very well. The church was left struggling. They were born in unfavourable circumstances, and Paul did not have a ton of time with them. He left them when they were very young. Yet, the Philippian church got to see something very important in the short time Paul was with them. They got to see Paul suffer. They got to see how he did it and he talks to them about that when he writes to them. They shared something with the church of Thessalonica. When Paul writes a letter (paying attention to the opening of all the epistles), Philippians and Thessalonians are the two churches that he never tells them that he's an apostle. When he writes them, he does not "pull rank" as if he's saying, "I'm speaking for God, therefore listen to me." because they didn't know him very long. They didn't know him in an authoritative sense. They knew him as just a tent maker who came and gave them the truth. So, when Paul writes to the church in Philippians, he writes them as a servant, not as an apostle. We see that in verse 1: "Paul and Timothy, servants of Jesus Christ." He doesn't announce his office. So it's something to point out that the church in Philippi did not know him very authoritatively, but they knew him as a fellow worker and a servant. So he writes them as that.

We're going to be in Philippians 1:18b-26. We are going to see the two fundamentals of a joy-filled life. Paul, in his letter to the church in Philippians, greets them, "grace and peace to you," and he talks about how he remembers them and he loves them, and he talks about how he was imprisoned, in verse 12. In verse 15, he talks about how some of them preached Christ to stir up trouble for him, and others preached Christ in good motivation. To him, it doesn't matter, because the power's in the gospel, not who's preaching it. He says, "What then? Only in every way, whether in pretense or truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that, I rejoice." So, he closes off in the first half of verse 18 talking about "I don't care who's preaching the gospel - I'm rejoicing that they will." And then, Paul shifts to a future tense. He says, "Yes, I will rejoice" - talking about his future rejoicing, later in verse 18. Then we will read verses 19 and 20. In these verses, we see the first element, the first foundation of a joy-filled life. Paul unpacks his God-ward perspective. His God-aimed perspective - how he looks at the world and how he evaluates all situations in his life.

Starting at the second half of verse 18 and 19, Paul says, "Yes, and I will rejoice, 19 for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, this will turn out for my deliverance."

In verse 19, then, we see two aspects of his God-ward perspective. The first is the cause of his joy, in the first half of verse 19. Paul says, "I know that through your prayers...this will turn out for my deliverance." As Paul talks about the cause of his joy, he talks about prayer right off the bat. Initially, Paul talks about prayer. He says, "this will turn out for my deliverance." He's talking about actually escaping from prison - he's writing from prison. He's not talking about getting saved. He's talking about getting out of prison and back to see them. When Paul anticipates that he will rejoice in the future, and that he will get out of prison, the first reason is because the Philippians are praying for him. That's why he anticipates having joy as his future expectation.

When we talk about having joy, we're talking about a calm and enduring delight. We're not talking about being happy, but having a calm and calculated delight. Paul anticipates that in the future because the Philippians are praying for him. He says, "I know through your prayers that this will be for my deliverance." And Paul knows the prayers of the Philippians are the game-changer in his situation. Let's stop and process that. Let it sink in for a second. He's sitting in prison. Of all the things that could happen to him, all the circumstances that God is orchestrating - and there are many - Paul's first thought is that "you guys are praying for me." That's what makes a big difference. Paul had a God-ward perspective toward his situation. He understood that prayer is what's driving all of this to happen.

In fact, Paul experienced life just like Peter did. In Acts 12, we have a funny little commentary about Peter in prison, like Paul. In verse 1:

1 About that time Herod the king laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church.  
2 He killed James the brother of John with the sword, 3 and when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. This was during the days of Unleavened Bread. 4 And when he had seized him, he put him in prison, delivering him over to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out to the people.

Reading those first four verses, we think, OK, that's the setting of what's going on. We're being told by Luke what's happening to Peter. In any story, you have the setting and the transition, but here's what's going on behind the scenes. Of all the things that can be said, in verse 5: "So Peter was kept in prison, but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church." That's the secret in the narrative! That's the secret in the story that explains what's happening after that, how he gets freed from prison. That's the "but" - "but the church was praying." All this was happening - but - Da Da DAA! The church was praying! And that explains everything that happens after that. Paul understood that in his life. When he writes to the Philippians, he knows he's in jail, but "I know through your prayers this will turn out for my deliverance." This is God-ward perspective. He understands that his joy and his future rejoicing is caused by their prayers. Both directly for his joy and also for his situation.

So Paul understood that prayer was part of the cause of his joy. That was his God-ward perspective. His perspective was seeing the cause of his rejoicing. Paul commented also in verse 19: "I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance." So he recognises that he will rejoice, he will have joy in the future, not just because of their prayers but also because of the Spirit's power. Paul understands the necessity of the power of the Spirit all too well. Keep your finger back in Acts, over from 12 to chapter 16. When Paul was in Philippi, this is what the Philippians saw. When Paul is in prison, verse 25 of chapter 16: "About midnight, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, 26 and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken."

That's the power of the Spirit that caused the earthquake. But, that's not the end of what the Spirit's doing in Acts 16. We'll keep reading in verse 29, "And the jailer called for lights and

rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. 30 Then he brought them out and said, ‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’”

That’s also the work of the Spirit in Acts 16. Paul had been in prison and had experienced a God-produced earthquake, and God had produced a change of heart in an unregenerate man. Paul knew that, for God, an earthquake and a changed heart were equally easy to do, but for him or for anyone else, they were equally impossible. I can no more change a man’s heart than cause an earthquake. But for God it’s equally easy. Paul understood that the Spirit’s power in his circumstances would lead to his rejoicing. That’s why he anticipated that in the future. He would be rejoicing. He says “Yes, and I will rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance.” And that’s his perspective in a nutshell. He understood that God was in the centre of all of this. He understood that his rejoicing came from God.

But also he understood, in verse 20, that the centre of his joy, the core of his joy was also revolving around Christ. In verse 20 he says, “As it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honoured in my body, whether by life or by death.”

And so, Paul expected rejoicing, and he understood that he would rejoice. When he says that it’s his eager expectation - he’s talking about a groaning. Romans 8:19 uses the same word - it talks about how creation groans. It’s this inner hunger, this desire, like when you’re in pain, you just want it to stop. It’s not a calculated, rational thing - it’s “ouch! I don’t like this - I want it to stop.” Also, Paul talks about hope, which is a more rational trusting in God’s promises. So, Paul is saying he both “aches and pains” to not be ashamed. He wants to glorify Christ in everything. He says that, “with full courage now as always, Christ will be honoured in my body, whether by life or by death.” That is, of course, the core of his God-ward perspective. He wants more than anything to courageously honour Christ. His focus is on Christ’s glory, not on anything involving himself.

That’s a difficult thought to process. Think of this - he’s a man who’s in prison, he’s been beaten, he’s in physical pain, he’s hungry. And I’m not talking like a kind of “missed breakfast and had a boost” - I’m talking like actually starving-hungry. And yet through that all, he wants to do one thing. He’s afraid of one thing that’s not fully honouring the Lord. That’s what drives him. So, that’s how Paul can be a man who’s beaten and bruised in a first-century Roman prison. Even in Acts 16, “at midnight”, what are Paul and Silas doing? Complaining? No. Filling out the “how was your visit to the jail” card? No. They’re singing praises to the Lord. They’re thanking God for the fact that they are there. They don’t know what’s going to happen, but they know He’s going to do something. And of course He did. And Paul’s perspective is entirely focussed on God and away from himself.

So, Paul not only counted his pleasure as secondary, but also his reputation, his comfort, and even his very life. All of that was secondary to whether or not Christ was glorified in what he did and where he was. That’s why Paul could say things like what he writes to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 4:11-13,

To this present hour we hunger, we thirst, we're poorly dressed, we're buffeted, we're homeless, we labour, working with our own hands, when reviled we bless, when persecuted we endure, when slandered we entreat, we have become and are still the scum of the world, the refuse of all things.

And yet Paul, essentially being a flogged homeless man, was rejoicing in the Lord. He was in a situation worse than any of us, by a long shot. And yet, he was delighting in the Lord, and he was singing in prison! Happy! Joyful! Because he was not thinking about himself. He wasn't focussed on what's going on with Paul, he was focussed on what's going on with God and everything else, everyone around him in prison, and all the types of circumstances which Paul faced. Honestly, we don't get that. We don't exist in those types of circumstances, especially in North America. We have suffering, yes. I'm not trying to downplay anyone who's got chronic pain or horrible relational trouble. But yet Paul suffers in a sense that is very vast. Yet Paul rejoiced. He was filled with joy to the point that he essentially looked crazy, because it didn't make sense.

When we talk about having a joyful life, we need a God-ward perspective. We need to understand the cause of our joy. We need to understand the core of our joy. And what that means for us is that we need an overhaul. A vast, powerful overhaul in how we see the world as Christians. We regularly and habitually fall into bad habits of treating joy like it depends on our will and our circumstances. But we forget even on a basic level. Galatians 5:22 says that the fruit of the Spirit is first: love, and then, joy. Joy is a fruit of the Spirit, and yet, how many of us regularly ask God in our prayers for joy? Do you pray for joy for your own heart? It comes from God. We don't do that, do we? That's something I often forget to pray for. I do not have joy - yet, you do not have because you do not ask. The Lord gives you joy - it's a fruit of the Spirit.

We filter our circumstances through everything except how this relates to Jesus and how Christ is glorified in this. We think of our circumstances as in how much time am I going to lose on this here, how much this will cost me, how difficult that will be, instead of thinking about, first and foremost, how will I bring honour to the Lord in this. And, of course, when we do that, when we think that way, we have an expectation, and when it's not met, then we're robbed of our joy. When we have a goal, and our goal is to make it to work on time, to not have this fight, to not spend this money, to not have that suffering; if our goal is for whatever it is to stop, then when that doesn't stop, then our goals and reality are at odds, and we're upset. But when our goals are changed to how Christ will be glorified, how am I honouring the Lord, how am I serving the Lord in this, then when Christ is honoured, you're joyful! And when Christ isn't honoured, you're not joyful. But guess what? Christ is always honoured in everything! That's one of the secrets that Paul knew, that the Lord always brings His ends to pass. We just have to be patient. So, we need to think of joy like Christians.

So, I'll give you some practical things here.

Number one, pray for joy. Ask for joy, for yourself, for your heart. Ask God to give it to you. If you haven't prayed for it, and you don't have it, then do the math. It's not rocket science. Ask the Lord for joy. He will give it to you - It's the fruit of the Spirit.

Secondly, ask the Spirit to grant you the power and the ability to focus on Christ in everything. And pray that regularly. At the top of your prayer list, have that as a “daily.” Lord, help me to see the world through the lens of what will honour you today. Help me to focus my problems. Help me to focus my conversations. Help me to filter everything through that question - how could I glorify you in this? Make that a habit of your life. That’s what Paul did regularly. That’s how he saw through everything. It’s part of the reason why he was overflowing with joy. In floggings, in prison.

Thirdly, Actively seek to put your own honour aside. Put yourself in situations where you actually put yourself aside. Humility is making yourself low, bringing others up, pushing me down. Me down, Jesus up. When you’re in a situation where you’re finding yourself getting angry, let that be a catch to you. What am I expecting here that I’m not getting? Why am I upset that I’m not getting what I want? Why do my wants not align with what Christ wants? The fact that you get angry means that there is a discrepancy between what you want and what’s happening. When you can change that to what Christ wants and what’s happening, your anger is going to drop a lot. All of the sudden, your goals and what’s going on are going to match a lot more.

Paul had a God-ward perspective. But then, in verses 21-26, Paul also had God-ward passions. We’ll read verse 21, 22, and 23.

For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. 22 If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. 23 I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.

And so, here Paul is talking about his passions. He has a God-ward passion that grips his heart to compel him. For he writes, “For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” That’s the propositional statement that drove his heart. Christ is all, and death is gain for me. Therefore, what is the world going to throw at me? Nothing! That is said in Hebrews 2, that the world lives in fear of death. Death is the mystical, scary boogie man, essentially. For Paul, the boogie man is gone. The boogie man is essentially Jesus, if we were to sum it up. Death is good. Death is something that he longs for. For me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. I get something better! So, Paul, with this one thought, revolutionised how he thought about everything. That one thought was a filter through which he filtered everything, it changed everything. It flipped every scenario on its head. If life is synonymous with serving Christ, and death is being with Him, your life has purpose and your death is nothing to fear. Therefore, all pain is nothing to fear, because the fear of pain is essentially the fear of death. It’s just the “ouchy” part of getting to the death. This was the passion that was fundamental to his joy.

Paul kind of ferrets this out a little bit when he talks in verse 22, “If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me.” So when he says “in the flesh,” he’s talking about living in this life. He filters everything he did in the light of “how can I best glorify Christ,” but he was also more specific and more practical, in the sense that he would seek to serve Christ. How can I serve Christ in this? We think of glorifying the Lord as something a little too vague. We can often rationalise our way around that. I could glorify God in praying, in praying and doing nothing else for this person. No, Paul sought to actively serve people. He makes a parallel here: life here is

fruitful labour for him, as in actual work. You know the saying, “there are people so heavenly minded that they are of no earthly good?” All they do is think about spiritual things? They never do anything. That’s not Paul. Life for him was doing work. He gets more specific as we move on. He’s talking about his passions here. His desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But notice this, pay attention to how he writes. Paul says that his desire is to be what? With Christ. He doesn’t say “to be in heaven.” He doesn’t say that his desire is “to be in my Sabbath rest.” The author of Hebrews talks about that - it’s a promised thing. He doesn’t say, “my desire is to not be with you - I finally get a break.” No, “my desire is to be with Christ.” He is consumed with Christ, even in his thoughts about death. “And that is far better” - when he says “far better,” he uses a sort of emphatic statement. It’s the Greek way of being in “all caps.” So, he says it’s way better. But what? Serving Christ is what he wanted to do. That is the first aspect of his God-ward passion.

But secondly, he ferrets that out. What does serving Christ really mean? What does he think that means? In verses 24 through 26, he shows his priorities.

But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. 25 Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, 26 so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again.

So Paul was not vague or esoteric, to use a dollar word. Glorifying Christ was not a euphoria of love for God like some people think. Some people talk about God as if you come to this point where your brain turns to clam chowder, and you’re just overcome with love, and you sit on a log and stare at a puddle. Paul was very practical in how he thought about glorifying Christ. Ultimately it was serving Christ, but it was serving fellow believers. That’s really what Paul gets down to in what he’s talking about. “But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account.”

Paul wanted to be with his master, he wanted to be with Christ. He says that in the previous verse. “It’s way better to be with Christ.” But, because he wanted to serve Him, he knew that his master had work for him to do on earth. That’s what pleased his Master. He wanted to please the Lord. That’s why he said, “to remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith.” Paul’s God-ward passion was not in serving Christ in his heart, but serving Christ with his hands. That means that Paul’s passion was manifest in his actions in the lives of other people. That’s the real love, that’s the real passion for the Lord. It’s not learning for the sake of learning, it’s not a euphoria that’s mindless. That’s essentially all of eastern religion. You just want to be so overfilled with love that you just drown in love, and then you’re this bloated corpse in the pool of love. No, that’s not what Paul’s talking about. Paul’s talking about getting in other people’s lives and doing things for them for the sake of Jesus.

To put it really bluntly, and to really get in your face (if I haven’t enough yet), the real measure of how much you love Christ is how much you pursue His glory in other people’s lives. Not your own - that’s the low bar. The high bar - now, we’re talking about low bar, high bar. When I was teaching drums, the guys come in and listen to a CD and thinks, I can do this. Tap, tap, tap, tap. “I’m a really good drummer.” They listen to that music and want to be a really good drummer,

and they do that. Tap, tap, tap, tap. Then you come in and say, “no, that’s the low bar. The low bar is if you can make the notes come out right.” As a musician though, as you’re playing in a band, you’re not just making the notes come out right. When you’re in an ensemble, you have to be paying attention to other people, dynamics, and phrasing. So the high bar is when you can do this and talk at the same time and not talk rhythmically. That’s the trick. Guys that practice talk-rhythmic-all-y-so-that-they-can-keep-the-beat. They don’t do that. They can hold a rhythm and talk without being rhythmic. That’s the high bar, and it’s a lot harder than it looks. You’ve got to all try that in the parking lot after on your dashes when you get out.

The high bar is the real standard of when you’re doing it well. And that’s what Paul’s getting at here. If you think that you love Jesus, we can say that Paul sets the high bar of passion for God as when you are pursuing Christ’s glory in other people’s lives. You’re not even thinking about yourselves. You don’t even enter the equation. It’s not about me at all. We say that it’s all about Jesus, but we don’t act like that.

So, why did Paul want to remain and continue with them? Paul says, “so that in me, you might have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus because of my coming to you again.” Paul’s explaining his passion for the Lord. He says that he wants them to have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus because he comes to them again. So his coming will serve to that end, that they will have overflowing cause to glory in Christ Jesus. “So that your boasting in Christ will be overflowing.” You should be boiling over with boasting in the Lord when I come to you. Your overflowing boasting in Christ will be the means of Paul coming to them again. That’s why he wants to get out of prison. He doesn’t want to get out of prison to be free. Well, I’m sure if you ask Paul “flogging or no flogging? Check a column. Well, no flogging. Bread and water or food? Ah, food.” It’s not like Paul is a masochist. But Paul is not thinking about Paul. Paul is thinking about the Philippians. He wants to go and be with them. He’s not saying it tongue-in-cheek, “I’m going to come and serve you, maybe we can have a potluck while I’m there! That would be nice!” He’s actually serious about that he wants to come and teach them and grow them. He wants them to overflow in boasting in the Lord. He wants to get out for that purpose. Paul’s passion was serving Christ in strengthening Christians. That’s the passion he has for the Lord.

The proof of his passion for the Lord was that he pursued God’s glory in other people’s lives. That’s a big overhaul again. When we think of joy and pursuing joy, when we really boil it down, we want to pursue Christ’s glory in other people’s lives. That’s the high bar in pursuing joy. If you want joy, you’ll get joy when you do that. We often need to overhaul what we think of joy and loving the Lord. We tend to think of joy as being served rather than serving. Often in our hearts we desire others to serve us, we desire God to do what we want, we desire life to run the way we expect it to, we desire care. We essentially want God and the world to serve us. So, when we get angry at the world it’s because our desires are not met. In other words, we want worship. This comes in very subtle ways. It’s not blatant. We’d never be so bold to say “Lord, show me some honour here!” But yet, when we talk, when we act in the world when we want this and we don’t get it we get upset. When the Lord’s not doing what we want and we get frustrated, what we’re doing is very subtle, very sneaky, but it is very potent. We think that the Lord’s not treating us the way we want. God’s not worshipping me in the way I desire. He’s not putting my wants and desires above His own in whatever’s going on in this. We lack perspective. We get upset.



So, we tend to want everything and everyone to serve us instead of us serving them. We tend to want God to bring Himself and glorify Himself in our lives instead of us finding Christ glorified in the lives of others with no mention of me. No thought of me, not even thanks. You get in church and serve for a while and every now and then you find that tickle in your heart that's like, "man, they didn't even thank me." You get upset, and that little, tiny termite just eats away at you, and yet Paul was not like that, Paul never got there because serving Christ was pursuing God's glory in other people's lives. He didn't enter the equation, therefore he didn't expect thanks. He expected to get whipped, beaten, and chucked into prison - when he got there, "Praise the Lord!" If that's not legitimate, if that's not a heart-felt desire for God to be glorified, you're either crazy or you're a Christian. And if that's not legitimate, you're crazy. There are people out there that are like that. They just seek abuse for the sake of abuse because they think that abuse means you're favoured by God - no, it means you're nuts and you're obnoxious. If you're doing dumb things, you get picked up by the cops. Sometimes that's what it could mean. Other times it could mean you're actually serving the Lord. It's hard to tell from the outside, but from the inside, only God sees the difference. Of course, you can tell because those guys get really upset when they don't get what they want, whereas Christians don't really care, because they say "Praise the Lord, the Lord is glorified. You know what, I got thrown in prison, I got to share the gospel with this guy. I'm in the hospital, sick and in pain, and I got to talk to the doctor about Jesus, or the nurse, or talk to the guy beside me." That's what they're consumed with, that's what they talk about.

So, we need an overhaul in our passions. We need a God-ward perspective to think of the cause of joy, where it comes from. It comes from Him. We need to think like that. We need to act like that. We need a God-ward perspective when it comes to the core of our joy as well. It is all about the glory of the Lord. Also, we need a God-ward passion to pursue joy. If you want joy, you need to change your thinking and your perspective. You also need to change your passion, your desire, and your heart-craving. That's part of what you pray for. You have to actually want the glory of God in the lives of other people. That's a divine work of the Spirit. You cannot drum that up in yourself. It's impossible. But, that's something that the Lord will do. It's something the Lord did in Paul's life, and it's what the Lord does in the lives of people all over the world.

So, here are some practical steps for that.

First, cultivate a passion for serving Christ in your life. That means studying the scriptures with the goal of planning to put it into practice in your life and other lives. And what I mean by that is not reading the Proverbs and finding something that someone doesn't do and then taking the Proverb and be like, "Look, brother, you need to repent here!" That's not what I'm talking about - pointing out the sin and the error in someone else's life. No, I'm saying studying the scriptures for the things the Lord is doing in your heart, things that you can change, and that you can also do for other people. When the Lord convicts you, you need to pray for other people. When the Lord convicts you of pride, seek to push your pride aside and serve somebody. Someone has a need. See this church, we're like a big cacophony of needs! If you can't find a need you're blind! Go out and find someone who has a need and meet it. And don't expect thanks. Just praise the Lord that He gave you the opportunity. Pray for that in your heart, because that is a work of the Lord in your heart. That is not something you will drum up in yourself. When you try to wrestle

that desire up in your heart, it'll last for a little while, but it's just not going to last for a long time. Eventually you'll get a bit bitter.

Secondly, you need to pray for Christ's glory to consume your heart. Ask God for that. I mean, you seek that, but ask God and pray like David, "change my heart, O God." "Help me to love you, help me to seek you and seek to glorify you by serving other people. Help me to seek to bring you glory in other people's lives and not mine."

Thirdly, we need to actively make ourselves slaves of Christ. Treat Christ like He's the master. Intentionally pursue to put yourself in places where you can serve and grow those around you. Look for those opportunities. Ask the Lord to change your heart and give you that passion. And He will. But seek that. Put yourself in a position where you can serve. And when you're there, shut your mouth. Don't talk, just serve. I know we all tend to get into that thing when you're serving someone and you want to encourage them to think this way or do this or think about that, and often we make so much trouble by trying to help out as we're serving. We try to critique theology or help with this or give them this idea or "maybe you could do this better." What we don't see is how much that eats them when we come not to serve them but to come in to grow them against their will. That is something that is very difficult to do as well. Seek to make yourself a servant of Christ. Serve someone, and then shut your mouth. Just bless them, and give, and leave. Don't expect thanks, don't expect them to want you to hear your advice about this or that. Give them help where they need it, love them, and then there will come a time to talk. We never have a shortage of time to talk to anybody, it's more a matter of credibility. When we serve people, and it looks like we're serving them with ulterior motives, our credibility is destroyed. So, seek to make yourself a slave to Christ.

So, cultivate passion by studying in order to serve others. Pray for Christ's glory to be consuming your heart. Seek places where you can be a slave to Christ, where you can work for the Lord and get your reward from Him too. People won't give you anything.

If you want joy, you need a God-ward perspective, seeing where joy comes from, the cause of joy, the core of joy, what it is exactly that you need to value. Also, you need a God-ward passion toward serving Christ which is manifest in serving Christians. If you pray for that - and I encourage you to pray for that - the Lord will grant that to you, and you will find that you start having a lot more joy. Your life is not going to be oriented around yourself or your "sanctified" desires, and your life is going to be oriented around the Lord. When He gets what He wants, you'll be happy. He always gets what He wants. I don't know if you've read the end. There's a little cheat sheet at the end here - He gets what He wants. And when He gets what He wants, you'll be delighted. You'll be overflowing in delight. When the Lord gets what He wants in other people's lives, which does not look like what we think, yet we're patient and we watch. How many of us 20 years ago would've guessed that we'd be here? Who has a clue? How do you know where you're going to be in 20 years? Where are you going to be? What are you going to be doing? What is the Lord going to do in your life? Who knows what co-workers will be around you? Friends, relatives, who knows who's going to be here? Who knows what's going on in your life? The Lord's doing something, and He's bringing His purposes to an end. When your purposes are His purposes, when His purposes are met, you'll be very filled with joy.

So today, if you're here and I sound like a crazy man, well, yeah, I probably am. You may be thinking of joy as completely different than what we're talking about. If that's the case, then you need a change of heart first, before we even get to this part. And, if I sound crazy - great, come and tell me afterwards that I'm crazy, and anyone on the stage here, they'd love to talk to you. And if they're crazy, they'd love for you to come tell them they're crazy too, and they'd love to have a chance to tell you how we're not as crazy as we sound. But, you may be here today and you're struggling with joy - and I know in a church this size there's a lot of us. A lot of you will be struggling with joy privately. They'll be struggling with ongoing issues, ongoing pain, ongoing trials. The Lord wants you to have joy. You need to stop and re-evaluate how you're thinking about your life and joy; what you're pursuing, what your goals are, and how you're going about it. I encourage you to ask the Lord to change your heart and give you a renewed perspective. Renew your perspective and renew your passion. Let me pray for you.

Dear Lord, thank you so much for today, thank you for your goodness and your graciousness to us. Thank you for Paul and his wonderful example, that even as he is writing a suffering church from a prison cell, he can write about how he expects to be freed and come and rejoice in that he can pour himself out in their life and build them up to be more like Christ. Thank you that he sets that example for us, to teach us what to value and what to pursue and how to think and how to crave and what to desire. Lord, I pray that you will bring those perspectives into our minds today. Help us to seek you to give that to us. Lord, we also pray for those passions that Paul had that more than anything, more than death itself, more than life itself, he wanted to bring Christ glory in the lives of other people. And Lord, we ask that you would help us to have that desire and let our hearts be overflowing with a calm and calculated delight in what you're doing in the lives of those around us. We ask all this in your Name, Amen.