

Choose Joy (Week 1): Joy Under Arrest:

Yesterday's Sermon - In 10 Sentences or Less

1. We'll be spending four Sundays exploring the subject of joy as portrayed in the New Testament of Philippians, the so-called "Book of Joy" in the Bible, which is all the more remarkable when you consider what had occurred to the apostle Paul prior to its writing and that his very life was in jeopardy.
2. Knowing the backstory to the letter leaves us to ask - could we be as joyful and ebullient as Paul is under the same circumstances and having endured the same hardships?
3. Joy and happiness are related but not the same thing: as Dr. Pamela King puts it, happiness is short-term, joy is longer-term, happiness is fleeting, while joy is more resilient.
4. Thus, both scripture and modern psychological/neurological research concur that joy is best understood as a virtue, a positive character trait that you can cultivate and practice (see Gal. 5.22-23).
5. Because God is, in His own essence, joyful (as G. K. Chesterton posits). God wants us to share in and experience that same joy, which then conversely means that joylessness is sin, that is, less than God's ideal, inherently destructive, and deeply wrong.
6. Most of us lose the ability to experience what we see and hear from Paul in Philippians: barring a brain abnormality, all human beings are born with ability to experience intense good and bad emotions, but over time we lose our emotional elasticity and become muted in our feelings.
7. None of us are a tabula rasa (that is, a blank slate) when it comes to joy, or any other emotion for that matter: your family of origin shaped how you experience joy and what you think about it, likewise your spouse and/or close friends do it now.
8. What you see in the apostle Paul in Philippians is that, as therapist Rev. Nancy Collier puts it, we need to cultivate joy in the good times, and protect it during challenging times.
9. It is not an accident nor is it happenstance that Paul was able to be so joyful while his very life was under direct threat: joyful people prioritize joy, he'd been working at it for years.
10. John Ortberg writes in his book on spiritual disciplines that joy is the strength of the joyful, while joylessness is the weakness of the joyless.



Working on Joy This Week

We're not going to share a lot of online articles or videos during the first 3 weeks of this series on joy, and instead will focus on hands-on personal work you can do. (The online resources will come after the final sermon in the series.)

a) Spend four weeks with the remarkable four chapter letter we call Philippians. You could do this one or two ways: read the entire four chapter letter at least once a week during the series, or read one chapter a week. [Phil 1-4 NRSVA](#)

b) Intrigued by the riveting story of the last few years of the apostle Paul's life? You can read it for yourself - and you can skip the long sermons/speeches if you want. [Acts 20-28](#)

c) One online devotional this week - this one on the centrality of joy, it's what Jesus was trying to do for His disciples...and us: [For Joy - United Church of Christ](#)

d) Do a little joy work this week, developing on your own some of what you heard in the sermon:

- Do what's called a "joy inventory," make a list of everything in your life that brings you joy right now. (This makes for a great, positive spiritual habit to do every so often, by the way.)
- Fill in the blank: Joy looks like _____ for me. See what your definition of joy is, because it won't be identical to everyone else's.
- Reflect on what your family of origin or upbringing taught you about joy, good or bad, and how that might be influencing your experience of joy now.
- Do a little journaling or talk with a trusted friend about your own emotional elasticity: how high are your highs, how low are your lows, and do you feel muted in your emotional life?

e) Pray to grow in your experience and practice of joy over the next four weeks. You can use John 16.24 to shape your prayer, if you like (it's the verse Pastor Chris used at the end of the sermon): "Jesus continued, 'Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be complete.'"