

Deepening Your Relationship with God

Philippians: Finding Joy in Hard Times

Philippians 3:1-8; November 4, 2018

DAY 1: Rejoicing in the Lord

1. As a junior at Baylor, our bicycle racing team won a fifty mile, indoor race. Each guy on the team won a color TV. The euphoria of victory was electric. The next year we qualified first and were the favorites to win the race, again. We had nine wrecks during the race and came in fourth. We were absolutely and completely crushed. I wept like a baby in our pit area. Six months of training, and for what?!

2. Life is like that. Sometimes you are the victor, life is going great, and other times the bottom falls out. I got tired of riding that roller coaster, and that is what embarked me on a journey to discover God.

3. Paul details a different option than roller coaster living.

Philippians 3:1 Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you gain, and it is a safeguard for you.

4. Paul tells the Christians in the Philippian church to rejoice in the Lord. What kinds of things do people “rejoice” over or rejoice in?

5. Why do you think Paul tells them to rejoice in “something” else, Someone else?

6. “Rejoice” is the choice to exult, to praise, to find joy in something.

7. What do you think Paul has in mind when he tells the Philippians to rejoice “in the Lord?”

8. Joy is not the same as happiness. We usually associate “happiness” as based on circumstances.

9. A delight in God and God’s goodness is something unrelated to the blessings or adversities of life!

DAY 2: How does a person come into right relationship with God?

Philippians 3:2 Watch out for those dogs, those men who do evil, those mutilators of the flesh.

1. Paul had once been a very committed Jewish man. He had staked his entire identity of being a good Jew.

2. But when he came to Jesus Christ, he realized that all of his previous efforts to make himself right with God were not only empty but deceptive! Not only did his religious efforts not make him right with God, but those his own religious efforts tricked him into believing he was right with God.

3. In these verses he looks back on the evil of those days with three derogatory terms:

a. “Dogs” – This was a Jewish term used to ridicule Gentiles. He now reverses the usage.

b. “Those who do evil” – Well-meaning teachers who assumed they were helping people be in right relationship with God were actually doing the opposite!

c. “Those mutilators of the flesh” – Jewish teaching believed that if Jews were circumcised it brought them into right relationship with God. It didn’t.

*Philippians 3:3 For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh--
4 though I myself have reasons for such confidence. If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more:*

4. Paul contrasts his old Jewish theology and beliefs with Christian beliefs.

“We are the circumcision.” – Instead of a physical circumcision, the bible speaks of a circumcision of the heart, a heart made right with God through the cross.

5. Paul then gives three marks of the genuine Christian in the rest of v. 3. What strikes you about these three attributes?

6. One of the contrasts is this: on whom are you relying to make yourself right with God? Are you relying on yourself (the flesh)? Are you relying on religious deeds, being “sincere,” trying to “be a good person?” Paul says he puts no confidence in his own efforts to make himself right with God! Only God can enable someone to come into right relationship with God.

DAY 3: Paul's old spiritual "resume"

1. As human beings, we naturally place our hopes for finding joy and meaning in something, or more accurately, in a number of things.

2. Paul thought he could be in right relationship with God through his religious heritage and his current religious practices.

3. Here is his brief spiritual "resume" on which he had relied.

Phil. 3:4 Though I myself have reasons for such confidence. If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more:

The "flesh" is used in different ways.

- (a) Our fallen, sinful nature that is bent on getting what it wants for its own pleasure.
- (b) Relying on our own effort, not God.

Phil. 3:5 circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee;

Phil. 3:6 as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless.

4. Paul grew up assuming that because of his rich Jewish heritage, he was right with God.

- a. Rituals—circumcision, baptism, christened,
- b. Race—Benjamin, a Hebrew
- c. Religion—Pharisee (a teacher of Jewish theology)
- d. Reputation—Zeal for the things of God.
- e. Rules—faultless as to legalistic righteousness.

"Religion" focuses on what we do toward God.
Christianity focuses on what God has done for us.

5. "The only way to peace was once and for all to abandon the way of human achievement and to accept the way of grace." William Barclay

DAY 4: What do you really value?

Phil. 3:7 But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.

1. Paul's conversion to Christ was a dramatic turnaround.

2. In this verse, Paul uses the language of **finance** to illustrate the dramatic **spiritual** turnaround.

3. Let me illustrate this in story form from our own American Civil War. When the southern states seceded from the Union (America) they formed a "confederacy" of states, and coined their own money, known as Confederate dollars.

It's as if Paul's saying, "Once, I thought that adding Confederate dollars to my bank account was the only way to go. I threw my entire confidence in building up my financial wealth with Confederate bank notes.

"Then, when the Civil War ended, I realized that all the Confederate money I had put into my bank accounts was utterly worthless. Not only had I been fooled by the illusion of Confederate money, but now I was destitute. What I had valued so highly made me bankrupt."

4. The financial illustration is a metaphor for Paul's spiritual testimony.

He had once put all his spiritual eggs into being right with God on his own religious efforts. But when Jesus Christ met Paul on the road to Damascus, everything changed.

God revealed Himself to Paul, Paul converted to Christ.

5. Look back at Philippians 3:7. Now knowing what the verse means, put this verse in your own words:

6. Perhaps your testimony is similar. You think about your religious upbringing or your religious heritage. You remember going to church at Easter and Christmas Eve. "I wouldn't willfully hurt anyone; I must be a Christian." People assume that because they live in America, are "sincere," "believe in God," or sometimes go to church that they are a Christian.

7. What strikes you from today's devotional?

DAY 5: The greatness of knowing Christ

*Phil. 3:8 What is more, I consider everything a loss **compared** to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ.*

1. Paul continues his comparison between his old life of trying to earn his way with God to the new life where God made Paul right with Himself, not through what Paul did but through what Christ did for Paul at the cross!
2. Instead of using accounting terms to illustrate the difference between the old way of trying to earn his way with God and the new way of the gospel, Paul uses some very stark language!
3. He compares his old spiritual resume to be just as valuable as ... garbage!!!
4. All the items we looked at earlier in the week that formed his spiritual and personal identity he now throws into the proverbial garbage can! Why?
5. In Phil. 3:8, what terms does Paul use to describe what he's found in Christ?
6. It's been said that Christianity is not a "religion;" it is a relationship, and this verse is evidence of that statement.
7. When we came to Christ at our conversion, we entered into a relationship with the God of the universe, through knowing Jesus, God's Son.
8. Write your own "profit and loss" illustration about the contrast between your life before you converted to Christ and your life after your conversion: