

SERMON TRANSCRIPT

DATE

August 25, 2019

SPEAKER

Brian Frost

SERIES

I Found Joy

PART

1

TITLE

I Found Joy In A New Identity

SCRIPTURE

Philippians 1:1-2



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You would think that it's unfindable, sort of like a diamond ring that's been lost in the ocean. No matter how many times we dive deep in order to grab what we think that we see, and we come up with handfuls of sand, there's something within our heart that simply won't turn off the search. We just won't shut things down because we know that we need it so deeply. In fact, what the fact is that we pool our resources, and we build technologies, and we even share information with each other in order to limit the search site. Yet joy, the thing that we long for, the treasure that's hidden it, seemingly, it's elusive to so many of us.

It really is the motivating force of the great majority of the things that we decide. If you think about why you save money or why you spend money, joy and happiness are associated with it. It's why we work. It's why we play. It's why we love. It's why some of us choose to leave the people that we once thought we loved. It's why we worship. It's why we retire. Some of us, it's even the reason that we choose to sin. It's in the hope that in doing something that we think this is going to bring happiness and joy to our heart, and yet it's so elusive.

The fact is, we know it's there. We know it's available to us. We've heard stories when we were little kids. They told stories to us that... Stories ended with something that says, "And in the end, everyone lived happily ever after." We see pictures, and we see other people, and it seems like that they have really sort of escaped the futility of the pains of life, and they've reached some place of euphoria, or of joy, at a particular moment in time. The fact is most of us have tasted the crumbs. We've tasted crumbs that have fallen off the table, and we know that it's there because we've known it for seasons, for bits, and days, and maybe hours, maybe weeks. But then all the sudden, the semi-truck of disappointment ran our joy off into the ditch. It's why 2/3 of Americans who have a legally protected right to pursue happiness claim to be routinely unhappy.

I want to ask you something. Is that you? You don't have to answer out loud. In fact, I would encourage you not to. But is that you? When you look at your life, when you think about where you are at, and when you lay in bed at night, and you're done talking to everyone else, and you're thinking about the condition of your life, the amount of happiness, the amount of joy, the quality of life, do you conclude, like 2/3 of people in America that you are unhappy with your life?

You see, if that is you, I want you to know that there's hope. The hope that I have is nothing I can tell you where to go buy it or what to save in order to get it. It's that there is somebody that recognized that we had a significant need, and His name is Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ came to this earth with joy in His hand, ready to distribute it to everybody who draws near to Him. He died on a cross in order to build a kingdom, a kingdom that the apostle Paul will later say is not built on rules of what we can eat and what we can't drink in order to find joy. No. His kingdom is built on righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. We're going to start a series here today. It's going to last us the next three months. It's in the Book of Philippians. I want to pray for us as we get started. Okay?

Father, I thank you for your grace in our life that you would give us the Book of Philippians. You would give us an inclination in our heart to come today and to be here. We thank you, Father, for the encouragement that we've already received in seeing people that we care about, that we love, Father, for the encouragement of singing to you. Maybe for some, that encouragement is not there. Maybe they're new and they don't know anybody in the room, perhaps their life, and the quality of their life, or the circumstances of their life, bring them to this day, in this place, and their heart is so full of unhappiness. I pray, Father, from my own heart. God, I want to be joyful. I want to know greater joy than I've known. And God, I pray. I want providence. I want to us, as a people, to experience more joy than we have known. And so would you do a work of grace for those of us who've studied and read Philippians so many times that maybe we think that there's nothing left to learn. I pray, God, that you would speak to our heart in a way that no human being can. Would you do that work of transformation within each one of us as you speak through weakness and through the million distractions that, collectively, we bring into the room? We look to you in faith, now, and we pray this Jesus' name. Amen.

It is great to see you and to sing with you. If you're new with us, welcome. We're thrilled that you've joined us. I would love for you to head, in your Bible, to the Book of Philippians 1. We're going to just work on the first two verses today. This is the second service, and so if it's like the first, I'm not going to be able to finish both of those two verses. Which, there's just a whole lot of backstory that if you really understand the backstory, you're going to enjoy the Book of Philippians even more. If you don't have a Bible, there's lots of Bibles in the chairs near you in those seats. If you don't have one at home, take that home as a gift. We would love for you to have reading it and to study it.

Philippians 1:1-2 says this, "Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi with the overseers and deacons, grace to you and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." Some foundational truths about joy. The first that we find here is this, is that joy is found in Jesus. It's found in Jesus, and this is so important that you see. These two verses are actually one sentence. There's only one period. Within that one sentence, Paul is compelled to talk about Jesus Christ three times. He's the source of everything that he's about to talk about. He's the source of his identity, of who he is, who they are, everything circles around Jesus Christ.

This is not His first and last name. These are names of purpose. They tell us something about the quality of what Jesus can do to our life and... life. The word Jesus literally means savior. Right? When He was in the womb, they needed a name. They went to His parents and said, "Listen, you shall name Him Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins." Jesus means savior. He has that quality and that ability in our lives. He can save. The word Christ is not His last name. No, Christ means promised one. All through the Old Testament, they keep saying, "Hey, there is one coming that's going to be born of woman that's going to save us, that's going to forgive us, that's going to forgive us, that's going to deliver us, that's going to bring us back into a relationship with God. He's the promised one. And now, we know who it is. It's the Christ. It's Jesus Christ.

We learn here that joy is found in Jesus. Now, most of us, we are a little confused because joy and happiness, they sort of feel the same. It's important for us to recognize how they are different. That's problematic. Let's see here. What we... I got to tie a knot real quick. What we know about joy and happiness is that we use them interchangeably. Make sure it sticks together. There it is. If this is joy and happiness, this is the white rope. Okay? On one side, I'm going to call this knot over here, okay, this is happiness, and this is joy. Sometimes we use the words, and it's just a synonym for one another. We say joy. We say happiness. Yet there's actually a difference between the two. If you understand the difference, then there's actually supreme value.

The difference is what they're connected to. Where they're connected to has a particular quality that influences the sustainability of what they can provide. Happiness over here, this knot over here, it's actually comes from the word the hap. It's all about the hap. Hap is an old English word that means luck, or chance, or circumstance. Hap, or happening, is tied to happiness. For example, if you go through a time and your circumstances are really delightful and really, really wonderful, then you feel a tremendous amount of happiness. Yet, when the circumstances change, you may lose your happiness.

Joy, on the other hand, even though it may feel the same, we may use it the same way, it's actually something very different, and it's because it's connected to Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ, we're told, is the same yesterday, today, and forever more, so He has staying power. He has sustaining power. So this is the reality of what we find is that most of us, we talk about the two as if they're the same. But when we talk about biblical joy, we're not talking about our circumstances, and we're not talking about our happenings. You've all seen somebody, and they've gone through something really difficult. Their circumstances are not wonderful at all, and yet they demonstrate this particular joy within their heart. It's usually because they're connected to Jesus Christ.

You've also seen people, right, who are tied to their happenings, and if they do not have a relationship with Jesus Christ is that they can, literally, be all over the map. They can be feeling happy, and suddenly disappointment drives down the middle of the road, and their happiness is now in a ditch. So happiness is tied to our circumstances, our happenings, and joy is tied to Jesus. So, let's define joy. How I would define it is this. Joy is a good feeling. Right? It's not a bad feeling. When we get by a car, we don't say, "Happy. I felt good." No. It's a bad, and then it's a feeling. It's not an idea. It's not a persuasion or a conviction. It may be those things, but more than this, but it's not less than this. There's a feeling. We feel joy. And where is that? It's in our soul. It's something deep within us. It's produced by the Holy Spirit of God, and it's produced by the Holy Spirit of God when we are near Jesus.

Now, when I say, "Near Jesus," right, you can be in His word, and His word brings you nearer to Him. You can find times where His word, it just brings this particular delight and happiness to your heart, a joy. You can be out at the ocean, or in the mountains, or some beautiful place that God has created. We know that Jesus created all things, so we can feel a sense of joy in being there.

We can be in a friendship with somebody where there's genuine love that's motivated by a love for Him, and suddenly we can feel joy because He's touching all of this, and we're touching something that He built, and that He loves, that we can come into this room, and we can sing to the Lord. There's times that joy just wells up in my heart. It's because we're among the people of God, that Jesus is here with us. You see, joy is connected to Jesus.

God, when He created us, we're told that He etched joy upon our hearts so that we would be led to Jesus when we were searching for it. In other words, joy has a source. Psalm 16:11 says, "In your presence, there is fullness of joy." What that means is to be near Jesus is to be near joy. That's why when Jesus came to the earth, the angel comes. What does he say? He says, "I bring you good news of great-

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Brian Frost: ... joy. Why? Because Jesus came to the earth. Then He lives His life, and the day, the night before He dies on a cross in order to pay for our sin, what does He say to His disciples? He says, "These things I've spoken to you that my joy, it's my joy, I'm the source. I'm the fountain. My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full." You see, since joy is tied to Jesus, and Jesus has staying power, joy is able to withstand our stormy happenings. Let me show you how and why. Or let me show you an example of it with Paul. Okay?

Now what we're going to find here is a pretty remarkable backstory to the book called Philippians. First of all, it starts with Paul. Okay? Earlier time in his life, he went by Saul. At one point in time, Paul... I'm just going to call him Paul for our sake. Okay? Paul was not a happy man. Okay? Or, I should say, a joyful man. Okay? It was rarely published throughout town, hey, party at Paul's house. Okay? That wasn't Paul. Paul was exacting. He was religious. He was intense. He was critical of people. He was judgmental of people. He was fixated on destroying Jesus' followers, so fixated that he went on a road to Damascus because he heard that there were some Christians there, in order to hurt them and imprison them. While he was walking on that road, Jesus, in love, came and opened up his eye, and says, "I am Jesus. Why are you persecuting me?"

Suddenly, Paul saw in Jesus two things that absolutely changed his heart. First of all, he saw perfect righteousness. You see, all of the rules and all legalism that he built his entire life on was built to secure righteousness for himself. Now, all the sudden, he's seeing a righteousness that's perfected in Jesus Christ, a righteousness that he's falling short of. He knows that he cannot accomplish this kind of glorious righteousness. But then he also is confronted with grace, a grace that Jesus would say, "If you trust in me, I will give you my righteousness, and you don't deserve it. I'll give you eternal life, though you don't deserve it. I'll forgive you, though you do not deserve it." Joy was planted in Paul's heart when he trusted Christ. He had to share it with other people.

For him to share it with other people meant that the people who he was with, who were supporting him in crushing Christianity would now be seeking to crush him. So almost immediately, he gets thrown out, or has to escape, from three different cities in order to save his life. He eventually gets to a city called Lystra. He's preaching in Lystra, and all of the sudden they drag him out of the city and stone him with rocks. Thinking he's dead, he wakes up from his unconsciousness not dead after they've left. He thought, "You know, I didn't get to finish that sermon. I'm going to go back into Lystra to finish." He goes back in there, and eventually, he goes, "You know what? I need a breather." So he goes to Jerusalem, and this is in Acts 15.

After his, what we... It's sort of a joke when me saying, "It's a breather." He really wasn't, but he went there for a time. All the sudden, they sent him back out on his second missionary journey. They send with him a man named Silas, and this is where he went. You can see the map of all the places that they went. It took them three years. They traveled 2700 miles. 1400 of those miles were by land, walking, in order to help people see, and understand, and know that they can be forgiven of their sin. You notice that one of the places that they went, they started down here in Jerusalem, they went north. All of the sudden, you keep following that line, and they get to Lystra. They went back to Lystra. You know why?

Well, I don't know why, necessarily, but guess who they pick up there? They pick up Timothy. When it says here Paul and Timothy were the, at the beginning of Acts 16, Timothy has come to faith in Christ, and he goes, "Hey, I want to join your little missionary team." Paul says, "Hey, I want you to join my little missionary team." They become fast friends. They're not just buddies. They're partners in ministry. He comes with them, and eventually, if you keep following it, look where they get. You see at the top? It says Philippi. Philippians was written to the church in Philippi. But when they got there, there was no church. There were some ladies, and they were down by the river. They were praying. There's no synagogue at the time, well, what we believe, where he would normally go and start preaching and sharing the gospel. There was no... That wasn't there. It's in Greece.

So he goes down, he hears... All of the sudden there's a lady down there, several of them, they're praying. He shares the gospel with them. One of them, her name is Lydia. Trust Jesus Christ. It says, "I want to you to come tell my family," and her family trusts Jesus Christ, the very first believers in Philippi that we're aware of. Well, later, so they keep going down, and they keep going to the place of prayer. There's this young girl who has a spirit. It's a demon. This demon keeps saying, "Hey, these people are servants of the Living God." For whatever reason, the Paul, after a series of days looks and casts this spirit out. But the problem is, this little girl could use the spirit to tell peoples' fortune. She was a slave. The owners got all uptight because they just lost their opportunity to make money in fortune telling, so they throw Paul and Silas into prison.

It says that they beat them. It says that they put them in the stocks. What that means is that they put ropes around their ankles, and they would stretch their legs open so far that it was almost to the breaking point. Then they would cramp so they could sleep.

It was a form of torture. Paul and Silas, they can't sleep, probably because they're cramping. They say, "You know what we should do tonight?" It's midnight, and they go, "I got joy in my heart. Let's sing." So they start singing in the prison, hymns to God. Now, don't forget. Their happenings are really bad, and yet they're singing. There's joy within their heart. Well, all the sudden, it says that there's a jailer and some prisoners, and they can hear them singing.

God hears them singing. There's an earthquake. All the sudden, the doors in the prison. The jailer says, "You know what, I either die now by myself, or I'm going to die tomorrow when the Romans come and they say, 'How'd you let all these prisoners leave?'" He's almost to kill himself, and Paul says, "Don't kill yourself. Don't do it. We're all still here. Come on over. We're having a Bible study." So he comes over, and he leads the jailer to Christ. The jailer says, "You know, I know it's the middle of the night. Let me go wake my family up. I'd like for you to tell them." He goes, and his family comes to faith in Christ. So Lydia and her family, the jailer, and his family are the first believer in Philippi. He leaves Philippi. He goes to several other cities, and four of those cities, there's a riot.

Finally, in Acts 20, Paul says, "You know what? I feel compelled to Jerusalem." His buddies, his real friends, they say, "You don't want to go to Jerusalem. You know all these people that are so mad at you everywhere, well they're all... They all live there, so don't go there." And he says, "But God's compelling me. I have to go there." He goes to Jerusalem. He gets arrested. He's thrown into prison, and for the rest of Acts, what we're told, is that he's literally... They're navigating him all the way to get to Rome, where he's going to stand trial under Nero. About eight years pass, and he's up there. He's in Rome since he's left Philippi. This is what happened. Check this out.

The church in Philippi, it's grown. It's not just two families now. Now they have overseers and deacons. They have a leadership structure. They hear that Paul is in prison in Rome. Their prison system was not like ours. If you didn't have friends that gave you food, you didn't eat. So they take up a love offering, and they send it to Rome. He is so overwhelmed with gratitude that he writes them a thank you letter. That letter is what we call the Book of Philippians. Now, you might think, "Wow. He probably railed away at people in that letter all the pain that he had." What we find is this is the most concentrated letter in the New Testament when it comes to joy. These are the references. Just look at the screen right here. You can see all the different places, or at least some of the... This isn't all of them, actually, where he's talking about in my circumstances, this is the reality, but I find joy. I'm rejoicing, and there's gladness within my heart.

What we're going to look at over the next three months is the passages that are built and hung upon these hooks throughout the Book of Philippians, of how is it that we can find joy. He's in prison, he says, "But there's joy. I'm lonely, but I know joy. I'm anxious, but I know joy. I'm poor, and yet I know joy." Why? Because he was near Jesus, and so his heart knew joy. Joy is found in Jesus. Second. Joy is available to us by committing our lives to Jesus. It is one thing to say, "Hey, there's money in the bank," but if you can't ever get to it, who cares?

And others say, or to say, “Hey, joy is found in Jesus,” but if you can’t get to it, well, who cares? But the good news in the gospel is He’s made it available to us by trusting Jesus Christ.

You see, in the Old Testament, is this important thing of the words that he uses. If you notice in verse one, he says, “Paul and Timothy, servants,” or bond servants. Some of your translations actually say slaves, of Jesus Christ. What’s happening here? Well, in the Old Testament, they had this thing that’s called bond servanthood. If you went into debt, you could actually sell yourself to the lender if you couldn’t pay off your debt. They would provide you food and shelter for you and your family and a job to be able to pay off that debt. Well, once it came time for freedom, there were actually some people, and so God made a provision in the Old Testament for people who said, “You know what? I really like it here. I like the protection that’s afforded to me in being in this house. I like the direction of this person. This person is actually for me.”

There were some people that say, “You know what? Being under your protection and under your direction is far better for me than me being on my own.” This is what happened to Paul and Timothy when they say we are bond servants of Jesus Christ. They’re saying, “We voluntarily are submitting our life to the lordship of Jesus Christ because we see that being under His leadership affords us greater protection and direction than being on our own.” Why? Why would Paul make this decision? Did he just lack self-confidence to be able to call the shots in his own life? No. That wasn’t it. No, what happened was he saw in Jesus Christ somebody who loved him in such a way that no one, in the history of his life, had ever loved before.

You see, Paul knew that he had a sin problem, which is why he worked so hard to be righteous. There’s nothing that he could do. His sin was separating him from God. Because joy is bound up in God, he was separated from joy. So God, in His love, He sent Jesus Christ to this earth, and He died on a cross for Paul’s sin and for ours. He was buried in a grave and he rose from the dead. When He rose from the dead, Jesus invited us to commit our life to Him, and in doing so that He would forgive us, and give us His righteousness, and give us joy. We commit our life by... The word commit, roll over upon. I used the same illustration last week, but it’s like there’s a bed. You wonder if it’s strong enough to hold you up. You can try to put some weight on it and to sort of test it, but no. To commit literally means, you know what, full flop. Here we go. I’m just jumping up and landing on it, trusting that this is going to be able to keep me off the ground, to save me.

This is what it means to trust Jesus, to commit our life to Him. It’s not saying one foot here and foot here. One god here. One god here. It’s Jesus, and Jesus alone. We do this by admitting that we cannot save ourselves, by believing in Jesus Christ and then confessing He was Lord of our life. The Apostle Paul, the same one, says in Romans 10:9, he says, “If you confessed with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.” You will be saved. You will be saved. What’s amazing, in verse 2, he says, “Grace to you and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ,” is that when Paul trusted Christ with his life, when he committed his life to Christ, he received grace, unmerited favor. He received adoption into God’s family that he didn’t deserve. He received forgiveness that he didn’t deserve. He received eternal life that he didn’t deserve.

Grace always has a running buddy, and his name is peace. All of the sudden, for the first time, Paul knew peace because he knew that he was now right with God Almighty. He said, "You know what? No one's ever loved me like you've loved me, and so I trust you with my life." This has to be the only explanation possible for why Paul kept going through the Book of Acts and why his joy kept growing. It kept growing. You see, if you go to London, you can go to the palace there, Buckingham Palace. You know they have two big flags that fly. They tell you something about what's happening inside the house, inside the palace. There's a Union flag, and then there's the Royal Standard. The Royal Standard that you see right here, this is flown when the queen is in the house. That's how you know. You see this flag. She's there, they fly this one. She leaves, they take this one down and fly a different one, so you know if the queen is in her house.

And so it is with joy. Joy is the flag that flies in the heart when Jesus is in residence. This is what the Apostle Paul says to the churches in Galacia, and he says, "The fruit of the Holy Spirit is love and joy among other fruits." You see, when we walk with Jesus, who is full of joy, we enjoy His joy. Now, let me ask you, do you enjoy His joy? Have you committed your life to Christ? You know, you can do that right now. You say, "Well, how do I do that? How do I plop down upon the bed? How do I do that?" He says, "You confess with your mouth." What do you... You pray. You talk to Him. You say, "God, I admit to you that I am a sinner, and I cannot save myself. I believe. I believe in Jesus Christ, in His accomplishments. I confess in as Lord over my life. The Bible says that when this takes place, it says that He saves us, and He allows us to experience joy.

This is how we get joy, but, now, how is joy protected? Everyone one of us knows what it's like. I think there's a lot of us in the room right now that are believers, and we experience joy, and then this semi-truck of great disappointment rolls down the center of the road, and we find our joy off in a ditch. So, how in the world is it possible for us, for this joy, to be protected? This is the last one, and this joy's protected by living in agreement with our identity in Jesus. I know that's kind of a wordy sentence, but everyone one of those words is important, which is why I left all of them in there. Okay?

Joy is protected by us living in agreement. It's one thing to agree about something. It's another to live your life in agreement with something, and that something is our identity in Jesus. To make the point, let me ask you to do something very specific. Okay? Don't yell this out loud. Just to yourself, I want to you to... If you could choose just three words, and only three words that most describe you to someone who doesn't know anything about you, or your history, or your hope, or the most important things about you, what three words would you choose? What three words would you choose to describe yourself to somebody who doesn't know you?

Now, what I want you to do is to choose three other words. These three other words is what you think the people who know you the most would choose to describe you. Three words of how you would describe yourself and three words that you think your closest friends, or family members, your spouse, your kids, somebody would say, "If you want to know something about Brian, these are the three things you need to know about him."

Now, I want you to know that whatever you chose is critically important to your life and to your future. It's because they make up a large part of your identity.

We all live in accord with our identity. Every one of us does. Our identity is simply formed by believing either what we say about ourselves, what others say about ourselves, or what God says about ourselves. See, 1 Corinthians 4, Paul writes this. He says, "It's a very small thing that I should be judged by you." He goes, "In fact, I don't even judge myself, for it is the Lord who judges me." Now, did you notice that Paul affirms that he has three judges in his life? Looking at him, observing everything about him, making statements about him. He says, "Other people judge me, I judge me, and God judges me." Three judges. You see, joy is protected when we live in agreement with what God says, because what God says is the truest thing about us.

You see, when we trust Christ, a absolute miracle takes place that's described in Colossians 3. It says, "For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ and God." Now, let me tell you what this means. Okay? Let's just say that this was not see-through as it, or see-through, that it was a great big block of wood. Right? You could see through it. If we were looking at it, right, we go... If this was Jesus, we would say, "You know what? He's holy. Look, He's blameless. He's faithful. There's no condemnation in Him. He's a saint. He's holy. He's perfect." There are all of these words that we would use to describe Him. What he says here is this, is that when we trust Jesus Christ, it actually says that we live in Him. In other words, it's like we hid behind Him. God, what He sees in Jesus becomes true of us.

We get a whole different identity. Let me show... There's over 90 attributes in the New Testament where it says we are this in Christ. Let me just show you three of them. One is, it says that we are free from all condemnation in Christ in Romans 8. Ephesians 1, he says that we are faithful. Ephesians 2, it says that we're members of God's household. Now, for the sake of time, let me show you how this works and how this protects our joy. We're just looking at the first and the last one. We're free from all condemnation. You may look at yourself and say, "I'm guilty." You may have a friend who knows everything, all the worst things you've done in your life, and they routinely talk to you, and they say, "You're a shameful person." But if you trust Jesus Christ, all the sudden He comes, and He says, "You're totally forgiven of your sin, and there is no condemnation for those of you who are in Christ Jesus."

Now, you have to make a decision of whose message are you going to live in agreement with. Your joy will be protected when you agree with God, when you live in a great with what He says about you is true. Look at the last one. He says that we are members of God's household. We're part of the church. We're part of His people. You know what? There's a lot of people who a part of the people, and yet they're not living in agreement with it because they never joined. They never connect. They never worship with, they never learn with, they never pray with the people of God. They're always at the beach, or they're always in the mountains, or they're always at home, or they're always at work, or they always have something else.

Their joy, part of the joy that God has available for us is being who He's made us to be. So, what happens is that if we are the people of God and we don't hang out with the people of God, we set aside a portion of our joy. Joy is found in living in agreement with what God says about us is true. It is so good to have friends who remind us about what He said. That's what He does here. He says, "To all the saints in Christ Jesus." He calls them saints in Christ Jesus. Jesus is a saint. He's a holy one. He says that in Christ, we are too. He calls the church in Corinth saints as well. If you know anything about the church of Corinth, then you know that this is considerable grace. That He would call you a saint, you say, "There's no way I'm a saint. I don't have a halo. You should see my past."

But if you trust in Christ, you need to see His past. What has He done? How perfect is Christ, because you're now hidden in Christ. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, "For our sake, He made him to be sinned who knew no sins so that in Him, we might become the righteousness of God." This means that because we've trusted Jesus Christ, He takes away our sin, and He gives us His righteousness. Therefore, we become a saint. To live in agreement with this is to know joy. So, let me encourage you, first of all, to commit your life to Jesus Christ. If you haven't already, we would love the privilege to be able to pray with you, that you could know Christ as your savior, and you could enjoy His joy today.

Second, let me encourage you to carve out time to study the Word of God. It is virtually impossible for us, as Christians, to rightly discern God's will for our lives or to even be aware of our new identity in Christ that's connected to our capacity for joy if our Bible remains closed. Let me say it another way. If it's true that there are over 90 things that God says about us in our new identity, could you list 10 of them? Do you know what it says? If we don't know, then we can't believe that it's the truest thing about us. So we have to be in the Bible. We have to read the Bible. We have to study the Bible. All I say, I want to help you do that. We want to help you do that.

If you say, "I want to read the Bible, but I don't know how," stop by Next Steps or come talk to me afterward and we will... I want to help you to find a way that you can understand and enjoy reading the Bible. The last thing is this. It's let's do what Christ tells us to do. You see, as we open up the Word of God, what happens is He begins to impress things upon us. When He does, let me encourage you when you know what He wants you to do, I want to encourage you go act quickly. Even if you don't understand the second rock you're supposed to step on, if He's illuminated the first, step on the first. Take the first step. You see, this is how He's built the whole thing. It's because He loves faith.

Proverbs 4:18, you know what it says? It says that the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn which shines brighter and brighter until full day. You know what that means? It means that when God tells you to do something, sometimes the only thing you can see is one step ahead of you, and it's barely illuminated. You can't even see a second step. Sometimes we think, "I'm not walking. I'm not starting until I see the whole path." But this is how God's things work. He says, "I love faith," and so you take the first step. Once you get it to the first step, and then you wait.

Suddenly, He illuminates the second. But if you never get on the first, you'll never see the second.

Is there anything you know God wants you to do today, and you're not acting because you don't know how it's going to go? Take a step. One of the things that God's Word tells us to do is to talk to Jesus about our world, and to talk to the world about Jesus. I want to show you a video of a family here at Providence whose seeking to do that. This is not the path of godliness. It's their path. God has illuminated this path to them, but I want to show you how real people wrestling with a real God, and real joy, and their gifts are seeking to implement it, so watch this video.

Video: Hi. We're Ashley and David Brown. We have three kids, Camden, Anderson, and Evelyn.

I grew up in Providence. I've been at Providence since I was nine, and it's been neat to grow up at a church that really puts emphasis on missions, and really encourages people to go.

I've had a heart for church planning, and seeing the church grow, and just God's kingdom reaching the unreached, and for a while had wondered how we could be part of that outside of Raleigh and outside of Providence, but never really found the right spot. I ended up having a conversation with Thomas West, and I started to explain some of the things that were going on in my heart about church planning and specifically, for whatever reason, the Lord had put on... My heart had questions about the state of the church in Europe. Just seeing some of the old and beautiful churches, and cathedrals, and recognizing that the life inside had faded. I was telling that to Thomas, and eventually he explained that they were thinking about moving to London to plan a church. Our intention is to go to be early founding members of the church, but to live in the city via our vocation. In this case, we're going to start a new business in the city.

It's been encouraging to me, personally, just to see people who give up everything and move, and never did I ever, honestly, think at this point in my life, that I would be doing this.

We're going to start a shared office space that will be home to a diverse group of individuals, professionals, and our job, really, will be just to care for them, provide an inspiring and encouraging space for them to work. We can get to know them and have a access and opportunity to share why we're there and what we're doing.

This process has been hard. It's been probably the hardest thing that I've ever gone through, personally. It's been hard to give up things that I've got here, but at the same time I'm so thankful. Just this morning, I was thanking the Lord for bringing me through this because it causes me to just fully trust in Him.

We have looked at specifically Romans 12, where Paul is writing and he says because of mercies of God, which we've all experienced, that we should then present our bodies as a living sacrifice to Him. If you re-wrote it, present your family. Present your home. Present your career as a sacrifice to God because He's given it to us anyway. When you think about it that way, it's really not giving up anything that we have a right to in the first place, but it's really recognizing that the Lord gives you certain things, and skills, and those are intended to be presented back to Him for His purposes, and that we find in that an incredible good for us.

What's up, Providence family? It's Thomas and Daniel checking in with you from London, England. It's been a very fruitful and productive six weeks. Thank you so much for sending us.

Browns, we know it's an important day for you guys, so we're so excited. All the planning, and dreaming, and even tears together for you guys to finally join us here in just a few short days. Looking forward to seeing you guys soon.

Providence, we thank you for sending us, for sending the Browns. We look forward to hosting our first partnership [inaudible] together in just a couple of weeks' time. Thank you so much for supporting us. We love you.

Love you guys.

Brian Frost:

So, as you know God's really placed it upon our heart to do a lot of things, one of which is to plant churches around the world. God began to stir in the hearts of several people here at Providence to plant a church in London. We've sent several already, and we're going to add the Browns to that mix. What I hope that you see here is this. Right? These aren't super-Christians. They're just real ones. Okay? God had placed upon their heart a burden for people, that people would hear about Jesus Christ. To them, this is their step of faith. They have real fears. They have real children. They have real gifts. They have uncertainties. Some of the happenings that are going to happen in their life are going to lead to a lot of not being happy. Right? And, yet, they love Jesus Christ. As a result of that, they have a lifeline of joy. That's why they go.

To be honest with you, it is bittersweet. It always is. We love the people at Providence, and the Browns, they are special to us. David had led, here at our church, our camp for our students the last several years. He's served as a deacon. He's served with students. He's served a lot. Ashley has actually served the last several years on our staff with our children. Their investment to us, as a people, has been, well, it's been real, and it's been significant. We want you to know that we love you. We're so grateful for you, and we're proud of you and your faith. In Acts 13, it actually says there that when God did something in the hearts of people and then said, "These are the people who should go," it says that the congregation, the elders, they stood up, and it says, "They laid hands on them."

It says, "They prayed and commissioned them out." That's what we're going to do. As I pray out loud, I want to ask you to pray for the Browns family as they go. Okay? Would you join me?

Father in heaven, we thank you for your amazing kindness to each one of us that allows us to be able to hear the gospel. We know there are people around the world, including London, who've never heard the true story that makes the most difference in their life. I pray that you would go before the Browns. I thank you for their children and pray that you would give them confidence, that you would give them joy, that you would open up their eyes to help them to see amazing things not only in your Word, but in the world, or what you're doing around the world. We think you, Father, for David and Ashley and for their investment in our lives and in this church family. So, it's a privilege to pray for them, knowing that as we commission them that we're sending out a part of our own, and that we have some of our own, already, who are there. We are so grateful.

We ask, God, that you would protect them. Would you provide for their needs? Would you provide the visas that they need? Would you provide the resources that they need? Would you give them favor when they arrive to be able to start a business that is sustainable, that would give them a platform to be able to tell people about the life of Jesus Christ and how much life we can have in knowing Jesus Christ? Would you bless the church and grow it? We pray, God, that very soon that the church would grow to the place that, just like in Philippi, that there would be elders and deacons that, Lord, that there would be health and continued growth. So we ask for your grace in their life as we send them out. We know that we send them with all of our heart, but we also send them knowing all the promises that you have made to us and to them are yes and amen in Christ. We look to you in faith, ask that you would bless them, and we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.



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