

SERMON TRANSCRIPT

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SPEAKER

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SERIES

I Found Joy

PART

2

TITLE

I Found Joy In Friendship

SCRIPTURE

Philippians 1:3-11



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It's fitting on this weekend when we sort of pause just to celebrate the fact that people work so hard to ask the question, "Why are you working so hard?" There's always a reason. In fact, there's a reason for everything that we do. And one of those core reasons for everything that we do centers around this idea is that God has magnetized our heart for joy. For happiness. We pursue happiness. We're all on a quest for it.

Everything that we do, all of our decisions, what we buy, the people that we want to surround ourselves with, the places that we want to visit, the things, the various technologies that we hope to secure for our life. The fact is, is every single one of those, everything that we do in life, everything that we're building is life. It's all built, it's all aiming at the hope that it is going to eventually help turn the key that is in our heart. And eventually life is going to move from black and white to color. It's going to move from a lack of happiness to abundant joy. There's something in every one of us. We're on a quest.

In fact, this week I watched this little documentary. It was called Meru. It's of three men who chose to try to become the first and only to scale the mountain called Meru. And this is what the mountain actually looks like. If you notice right in the middle there's something, it's called the Shark's Fin. It's sort of right in the middle. It's that center peak. This shot is a little deceptive because that peak is actually the highest point up there. But what makes it so hard, in fact, what they believe is that it's the hardest climbing in the entire world.

Only three people have done it. And the reason is because after 4,000 feet near the top where you're going straight up in ice, then you get to that Shark's Fin and it's just a granite wall. And they did it when it was -20 degrees. It took them 11 days. The first time in 2008 they failed. They got almost to the top. They got 100 yards from the summit and then they had to turn around, which had to be so discouraging. A lack of joy in that for sure. And then they went back three years later.

But what was so interesting as I watched the thing ... and just a heads-up ... I always feel compelled. This may not be family night movie you put on there. Well the Pastor watched it, so it has to be okay. I heard some of the same language in Meru as I did at the NC State game yesterday in the stands. Just a heads up. Okay? There are some pretty harrowing situations and they don't know the Lord, and so they talk like it every now and then. But what was fascinating was this. Is that as I'm watching their first attempt, their failure and the three years to prep for the next, there was this very clear resounding signal throughout the entire thing. And it is this. It is joy is found at the top of that mountain.

It ends at the very end. Obviously they're up there, they come down. And guess what they say? "So what's next?" We're all on a quest and two-thirds of us, if we're like the average American who have a legal right that's protected to pursue happiness, if asked we would say that we're unhappy routinely. And what we find here in the Bible is something that is so encouraging to me if you really think about it. That God would actually devote one of the books of the Bible to where the man who is going through some of the most significant and severe pain that he is going through in his entire life, is that at that very moment he actually gives us a manual on how to live with joy.

And he shows us how to do it. It's just a remarkable thing. It's the Book of Philippians and we're going to look at a few verses from it. But first, I'm going to pray for us. So if you would, join me.

Father in Heaven we confess to you. Today that our life like so many people around the world we do not experience or maybe have not experienced the kind of sustaining joy that we want. We believe the Bible is true, and the Bible says that you've etched joy within our heart as a category for us to pursue that can only be found in you. We thank you God that you tell us that one day in Heaven that we can experience so much real true joy on the earth but one day it's going to be perfected and it'll be perfected not only in its quality but its quantity. And we look forward to that day.

I pray for those in the room right now who because of sin or social chaos or injustice or maybe things they cannot explain, they look at their life where they're at right now and they think, "This is just not the plan that I had for my life." I pray Father for those that are dealing with unhappiness.

We also pray for the people around the world who are just mourning once again. We come to you on behalf of people in West Texas asking for grace in their life as they deal with the pain of chaotic violence in the world. We need you. God, would you come? Jesus come. Come for us we pray. We pray that your kingdom would come and your will would be done on earth as it is in Heaven. And we pray now that if you choose to wait, then we want to be found worthy of what you've made available to us by living in accord with it.

And so would you please help us now? Would you give us wisdom? As we open your word, would you help us to live this week, would you help us to learn how to live this afternoon that pursues the kind of joy that you have available for us? So would you speak through weakness and help all of us? I pray in Jesus name. Amen. Amen.

I would love for you to look with me at the first chapter of Philippians. We'll actually be at Verses 3 through Verse 8. But what we find in Philippians is really this manual on joy. It's really important, and we looked at this last week, to really understand the difference between happiness and joy. Because we use them as synonyms and yet they're vastly different because of what they're connected to. Happiness comes from an old English word. It's the word hap, and hap means to come about by luck or chance. And so it's the idea that happiness is tied to, it's sown through with our happenings. So if what's happening in our life is good, then our happy meter tends to rise. And when what's happening in our life is bad, then the happy meter tends to fall.

But joy is fundamentally different from happiness. It may feel the same way, but what joy is, joy is a good feeling. It's not a bad feeling. It's a good feeling and it is a feeling. And we shouldn't be made to feel uncomfortable that we're talking about emotions and feelings. You see, God is the one who created us. He created us in his image, and the Bible says that he feels joy. That he feels happiness. That he feels sorrow. And he created emotions to be able to well up within our heart, to be able to communicate realities that are actually happening in the world, either good or bad. And so joy is a good feeling. Don't apologize for it.

It's a good feeling that wells up within our soul. it's produced by God himself, his spirit working in us. And it happens when we are near Jesus. And so our happiness is tied to our happenings, and our joy is tied to Jesus. And our happenings, they change every day throughout the day. And Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever more.

So the Bible communicates a reality that says that you will live in up and down swings of happiness your entire life, but if you are drawing near to Jesus, then you can know enduring and sustaining levels of joy. And that's what we find in Philippians.

The Apostle Paul, who's writing it, is actually sitting in a prison cell. He's chained to a Roman soldier. And he's writing a letter. And the reason that he's writing a letter is because almost, just barely over a decade before he writes Philippians, he's on a mission trip and he's going around to places and they've never heard the Gospel. And he comes into the capital city of Macedonia, and it's called Philippi. And there he leads a few people to Christ. He eventually goes to prison in Philippi. He's let out. He leaves the city, and now a decade later he's arrested again. And now he's waiting trial in Rome where he's going to sit before Nero and be judged of whether he gets to keep living or not.

So his circumstances are pretty dire. His happenings are not happening. It's bad stuff happening and yet he's full of joy. And one of the reasons he's full of joy is because of friendship. You see this church in Philippi, they hear that Paul is in prison and when you're in a Roman prison system, you didn't eat unless somebody provided you either resources or food. And so the church in Philippi so far away, they take up a love offering, they send it to him, and he is so overwhelmed with thanksgiving that he wants to write them a letter to say thank you. And in it he literally shows us how to live with joy.

Verse 3 says this. He says, "I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy. Because of your partnership in the Gospel from the first day until now, and I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. It is right for me to feel this way about you all. Because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace. Both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the Gospel. For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more with knowledge in all discernment so that you may approve what is excellent and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God."

He writes a lot of words, and there's a lot of spiritual meaning in a lot of those words. We're going to try to unpack that here this morning, even in a briefer time stint than we normally do. But before we do that, I'm conscious of this fact and that is that there are some people in this room and you've never known genuine true joy because you have never committed your life to Jesus Christ. And until you see that you need Christ, joy is always going to be a carrot that's strapped to your horse that is always one or two steps ahead of you.

Last week what we looked at is that joy is found in Jesus, and that joy is actually ours. It's made ours. It's made available when we commit our life to Jesus Christ. When we trust Jesus Christ as our savior. And what this means is that Jesus looked, he saw that we had sinned against him, that we had separated from God, that we were then estranged from joy, looking for joy and happiness under every crevice on the earth. Still separated from him. God loved us so much that he sent his son in order to rescue us. And his rescue is one that you could not make up. If you haven't heard it, in particular those that are here all the time, if you hadn't heard it as many times as you had, you literally wouldn't believe it. And that is that God killed his son to save you. To bring you back into a relationship with him. That's what he did. God sent his son, Jesus Christ, to the earth. He lived without any sin, and yet he went to a cross where he died on that cross to pay for my sin, our sin.

You have to personalize the Gospel. It should have been me and you. But he loved us that much that he would send his son. But because he's the son of God, death couldn't hold him, and so three days later he rose from the dead and he said, "If you'll admit you cannot save yourself and trust in me and my accomplishments and confess me Lord of your life, I will take away all of your sin, and I will give you joy and peace. I'll adopt you into my family."

This is where the seeds of joy are planted and what I want to do today in this passage is it talks about how joy thou grows. But listen, joy is not going to grow unless there's a seed in the ground. You must trust Jesus Christ. That's one we start in Verse 1 and 2 and not in Verses 3 through 11. Once we get the seed, now all of a sudden he wants to turn corners and he says, "Christ is Lord of our life. We now know joy. Now I want to show you how to continually perpetuate a life of joy." And where he goes is this quality, this gift, and that is friends.

Some of you are friends with each other. You're sitting next to a friend, maybe your closest friend on the whole earth. This is a friend. You just care about this person so much. And you know what, you're going to find joy in that friendship. So what I want to do, I want to show you through Paul's relationship and what he writes with this church in Philippi, I want to show you a few qualities about friendship that literally help joy to grow.

The first is this. Is that joy grows as we love one another. As we love one another. Paul was in prison, and prison affords people time to think. And in his thinking, he began thanking. He started thinking of the different memories that he had with the people in Philippi, and all of a sudden it turned into thanksgiving. He just had to thank God. He had to pray and say, "God I can't believe you allow me to experience relationship with these friends. It just gives me so much joy, and I thank you for it."

The things that took place they really are a remarkable thing. At some point, just read Acts 16. Paul doesn't even want to go to Philippi. He's made plans to go somewhere else and God stopped him twice. Finally he goes to sleep, he goes, "Well, I just don't know where to go." And he goes, "Why don't you take a nap." He takes a nap and God gives him a dream. He says, "You know what, there's this place. It's called Macedonia, and I want you to go to Macedonia." So he wakes up and he goes, "Well, what's Macedonia?" And he looks over and he goes, "The capital of Macedonia is Philippi. Let's go to Philippi." It's in current-day Greece.

So he gets to Philippi. Now think about this. He's in prison ... this is now 12 years, between 10 and 12 years after he first comes into Philippi and now he says that, "In all my remembrance of you, I'm thanking God with joy." So you see what he's doing? In prison he says, "God thank you for turning the wheel and allowing me to go to Philippi to meet these people who are so important to me. If it was up to me, I would have never met them. And now I'm eating dinner because of them. I'm so thankful for the grace that you've given to me through these friends." Some of you, you may have just moved to Raleigh and you don't even want to move to Raleigh. And you may find that your dearest friend on the earth that's going to walk with you through thick and thin happens to live in Raleigh.

You're going to make turns in life and God's going to turn the path of your life. You keep waiting. You keep seeing what he has for you. And all of a sudden he gets to Philippi, he's walking around, he goes, "There's no synagogue, there's no church here." It's Greece. He's like, "I hear there's some ladies praying down by the river." So he goes down to the river. There's ladies praying, he tells them about Jesus. And one of them, her name is Lydia, she trusts Christ. She and her family get baptized. I imagine when he's thinking when he says, "In all my remembrance of you," he's thinking back and he can see water flowing off of Lydia's face when she comes out from the water being baptized.

After the baptism we're told that there's this slave girl who a demon. That he cast the demon out. Can you imagine a heart full of Satan now full of the Holy Spirit? It changes the countenance of the face. I imagine that Paul, he's thinking, "I remember that face. It was so full of peace. I'm so thankful, God, for that young girl." 12 years, now she's now a young adult. She may have been a mother in the church. We don't know anything about her.

All of a sudden then he ends up in prison. They're singing at midnight because their heart's so full of joy. There's an earthquake. The jailer thinks, "I'm going to die, so I'm going to kill myself." And he says, "Don't kill yourself. Come over here. We're having a Bible study." Paul leads him and his family to Christ.

These are the seeds of the church, and Paul is now 12 years later, he's thinking back and all these memories of all these people and he pauses and he doesn't say, "I am so grateful for you." He looks at God and goes, "I thank my God." What's happening? He's saying Jesus is our connecting point. If there's no Jesus, there's no friendship. No friendship, no memories.

No memories, no joy. So Jesus, thank you. Thank you. You and I were all created in the image of a relational God. That's why you can talk and listen and remember and trust and fear. That's why you can hug and embrace. That's why you can forgive. That's why your heart cares for people.

Jesus, when he was on the earth, one of the things he prayed, he says, "God," he's actually praying to his father in Heaven. He says, "I made known to them your name that the love with which you have loved me may be in them." I just love that because what it says is this. Is that God the father and God the son, they've had a relationship from eternity past that's been marked by love. We were created in the image of a relational God who loves, which is why we love. It's why we relate to one another, and this is why joy can be found in friendship. It's because friendship has its roots in God's very nature. It's who he is.

But ever since Adam and Eve sinned in the garden, felt shame and then hid in the bushes, we have become masters of illusion. We've mastered the art of terminally casual friendships where we manage perception and we limit accountability and we give non-answers.

And the fact is that social media, technology, is not the cause. You look at this picture where you see a face and there could be all kinds of things happening behind the screen, and yet what the screen communicates is what everybody sees. This is life behind the bushes.

Technology is not the problem. Technology was invented by people who hide behind the bushes. To give us a mechanism to further hide behind the bushes. We were not created to run alone. We were not created to be isolated. We were not created to be unknown. And that's why Paul, what you find in all the letters that he writes in the New Testament, outside of Jesus he's the most vulnerable person. He just opens himself time and again and says, "This is everything that's wrong with me. This is my past. This is how messed up I am. This is the grace of God." There's very few people that are loving like him.

There's very few men who are strong as Paul that use the words, "I yearn for you with all the affection." If we had a men's event and we had some barbecue and one of the guys, he stands up in front of the men and goes, "You know what, I just yearn for all of you," we'd be like, "What are you talking about? We don't yearn around here." I yearn? Paul is a man. I mean, a masculine, courageous, fierce man scarred from head to toe because of his faith in Jesus Christ. He's so familiar with prison and yet he yearns to be with his friends. Saying, "I wish I was in Philippi right now to be near you."

So joy grows as we love one another. This is true of all friendship, but let me tell you something. Not every friendship will produce the same quantities of joy. And that's where the second point is so important. And it's that joy grows as we partner in ministry with one another. You can experience friendship that produces the level of joy with somebody who doesn't know Christ. We all have friends. But when you have somebody who loves Christ like you love Christ, all of a sudden the level of joy can actually be deeper. And this is why.

You see, most friendships, they're built on proximity, affinity and kindness. Let me tell you what I mean by that. Proximity. You went to high school with some people and you didn't go to high school with other people, which is why when you were growing up you knew some people and you didn't know some people. You happen to be close to people and so proximity, the people who were near you, you had the best shot of forming a friendship because they're there. You can meet them.

Affinity. That's what we like. Among the people who are close to us, we look around and say, "You know what, I love to mountain bike." Or, "I love basketball." Who else likes basketball in my circle of proximity? And all of a sudden now it narrows down and now all of a sudden it's people who are near me and who like what I like. But there are people who are near me who like what I like but they're a jerk and so you're not friends with them. Because kindness helps things and sin ruins things. And so if somebody's not kind, well the friendship goes away because I don't want to be around that kind of person. He's a bully. He's mean. Or she's mean. And so proximity, affinity and kindness.

The problem is what happens if we move? Or what if we get older? We can't do our affinity anymore? Or we change affinities? What happens when we sin? The friendship is then modified and therefore the joy is modified. That's why for those of us who are old enough to remember high school annuals and you go and you go and you look at your high school annual where all your friends that you used to think were so important and they sign, "Hey, friends forever." And you're like, "Gosh, who was that guy? I don't remember who that is."

But see, there's a particular power to forming your friendships around Jesus Christ and this is why. Jesus Christ is omnipresent. You know what that means? It means today where people are worshiping him in China, today the same day is that Jesus is with them and he's with us. And because he's omnipresent, what that means is that he takes care of the proximity issue. So we can still be friends with all the people who've moved to London. Or Central Asia. Or Greensboro. Our friendships continue even when we move. Because Jesus, if he's the central focus of our friendship, well what happens is well we still got him.

What about affinity? There's nobody cooler in the whole world than Jesus. He's the most amazing person. He's the most amazing person that's ever walked the face of the earth. It's just unbelievably remarkable, and so he takes care of the issue of affinity because he has captured our heart.

And then there's the sin issue. Who has a solution for the sin issue? It's Jesus. Jesus gives us enough grace to be able to give grace to others when we sin against one another so the friendship can continue. So friendships that are connected to Jesus Christ, they can actually intensify our joy because they become secondary fountains of joy.

You look at this fountain that might be found in somebody's garden and what you find is you could put your hand under any one of those levels and experience what feels like water. And it is water. Take that illustration and make it joy.

Joy trickles from the top to the next to the next to the next. But it's all contingent upon that very top source not going dry.

And so it is with friendship. When your friends are anchored to Jesus Christ, what happens is not only can you find joy in Jesus Christ and being with him, but you can also find joy in the people who love Jesus Christ. And that joy can be magnified because he takes care of our sin, our affinity and our need for proximity. And that's why he says, "Look, I make my prayer with joy because of your partnership in the Gospel. I hold you in my heart for you're partakers in the defense and confirmation of the Gospel."

I look around this room and I think over the last 21 years that I've been at Providence all the people that I've had the opportunity to serve with at CitiServe or with our children, our students. I think about pulling teeth with certain friends over in Iraq. Where we set up a little dental clinic, pulled teeth and then shared the Gospel with them. I think about being in the DR where we had the opportunity to build a wall and then share the Gospel. I think about being underneath houses, under flooded houses in New Jersey, putting up vapor barriers for people before we shared the Gospel with the homeowners.

And what I remember about that is not only the work but I remember the people who were next to me. And it produces so much joy thinking back of all the people. I'm looking at so many right now. I just look around, I think of memory after memory of people that because we're connecting together and growing together and serving together and going together, we're in the defense and confirmation of the Gospel. This is our family business.

Jesus, when he was 12 years old, he told Mary when she found her, he said, "What are you doing?" "I had to be about my father's business." This is our family business. Jesus came to save people, and it's our privilege to tell. And when we engage in that together, whether it's serving children or help parking cars or whether it's going overseas with the Gospel, what happens is joy continues to bubble up within our heart.

So it grows as we love. It grows as we partner. Third, it grows as we anticipate completion in one another. All of us love Verse 6. If you love the Bible, you love Verse 6. "I'm sure of this that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ." You know what I just love about that little verse? He's not talking about his own life. He's not saying, "I can't wait for the day when I feel so much joy when Jesus changes me." Isn't that amazing? He says, "You know what, I keep praying all this and what I'm anticipating and what it does is it creates joy in my heart. What I'm anticipating is when I see his work complete in you."

This is one of the realities that we have to share. Sometimes in life, I'm looking at people right now all morning long, I've seen people who I know are dealing with depression, who are dealing with cancer, who are dealing with heart disease, who are dealing with friends and family members who have taken their life. There's so much pain. There's so much sin. All of us, man do we need Jesus Christ so bad.

And sometimes when I just run out of gas and I just think, “God, it’s just heavy.” Sometimes it feels like a bucket and it’s just super heavy. But oftentimes what I’ll do is I’ll start thinking about the people I know who are dealing with depression in Heaven, where there’s no depression whatsoever. And I think about that freedom and it gives joy. And I think about people who have lost a loved one and they’re just absolutely broken-hearted over the loss of someone they cared about so much. And I just start thinking about their face when they’re redeemed in Heaven and there’s no death and there’s no sickness and there’s no crying and there’s no sorrow and there’s no moving and there’s no loss. Man, it’s going to be so good.

God says in Ephesians 2, he says, “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works.” What you find in this sentence in Verse 6 of Philippians 1 is that his work is both gradual and internal. He says he will bring ... he says he’s started, he’s not done. And he will bring it. So your life is like a movie. Did you know that none of us like movies that don’t have a problem in it? There’s no hero unless there’s a villain. There’s no victory unless there’s a threat. Every story that they say, “This should become a movie,” there’s a part of the story that’s really bad. Think about the foolishness that it would be to be watching that movie and you get to the bad part and you say, “I just don’t like this. I don’t like the way this is going.” You take it out and you say, “I’m not watching that. I hate this story.” See, this is how we judge God with our own life almost every single day. We say, “God, what you’re doing is not right.” But you’re judging God by the middle of the story. Let him finish.

Let him finish and then judge him. Because then you’re going to find that he is worthy of all glory and all power and all honor because of what he has the power to bring about. It starts internal, not external. We all care about the external because we care about what people think about us.

But God’s made us more like a Steinway piano. You guys ever heard of a Steinway piano? My understanding is they’re the most expensive pianos in the world. There’s one that sold, I think it was this year, for \$2.5 million, which we don’t have one of those up here. Just a fascinating, fantastic instrument. It takes 200 craftsmen and women to assemble over 12,500 pieces. What’s interesting is once they think that it’s all crafted and created like it needs to, they roll it into what they call the pounding room. You know what happens in the pounding room? There’s a machine that pounds every key an average of 3,200 times. In order to make sure that they fit perfectly and to break them in and to add stability because as it’s pounded, they move and they tighten. Every sequence of pounding, it makes the music just a little bit sweeter. And you see, this is ultimately God’s plan for our life.

It’s not the external. It’s the internal. How he gets to the internal is he allows us to go through the pounding room that is life. To add stability and wisdom and strength to our life and those who continue to lean towards the Lord. What they find is over time is the music of their life is just a little bit sweeter. It’s what he’s doing. He’s going to finish his work.

My favorite gravestone that I've ever seen in my life is Ruth Graham's. In the very bottom of it, it says, "End of construction. Thank you for your patience." What a perfect ... Where's that coming from? It's coming from Verse 6. He who began a good work is going to complete it.

Until that time, we need to be patient with each other. Which means we need to pray for each other. Which is the last is that joy grows as we pray for one another. He starts in Verse 3 and 4 and he says, "I'm praying for you guys and I'm thanking God," and what does he do? He ends by telling them what he's praying for. And I love what he does here. He says, "This is what I'm praying for. I'm praying that your love would abound more and more." Your love would abound. Some of us have done what I've done. And that is we plant something ... I have some bushes and I think I need to water them so I get the hose, I throw it in there, I turn it on and I say, "I'll come back in a few minutes." Then I forget and all of a sudden now I have a little swimming pool for my plants and eventually it finds a way down to the road and it's gone. I just think, "Man, too much." This is what he's praying. I mean, super abound. That's the words.

"I'm praying that love would super abound in your life." Literally he's saying, "God would you turn your hose of love on in their life and just let it run so they become so saturated that wherever they walk in Philippi, your love just kind of drifts off of them." But all of us, that's really fantastic, isn't it? We think, "Oh yeah, we should just be marked by love." But what's interesting is love, within the scriptures, is always marked by control. Control. And this is what I mean. Water is a beautiful thing, but if it doesn't have banks, it becomes a very destructive thing. And so you need to control the water so that the water touches and has the most redemptive, helpful path. And so he says, the love that we have," that he's praying for within our heart, there's two banks that control it to direct that love to the healthiest most redemptive ends. And he says, "One of the banks is called knowledge," which is experience in life. Things that we learn by experience.

And the second is discernment. And that is moral insight. Let me say it this way. When your kids whine, there's a few different ways that you can respond in love. You can give discipline. You can also give a pony. And it's love and discernment that gives you the clarity to know which one should be applied now. And he says, "I'm praying that God is going to give you love that's controlled and steered by knowledge and discernment so that you may approve what is excellent and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ. Filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus. To the praise of God the Father."

Do you pray for your friends like this? Do you have a friend that prays for you like this?

Let me leave you with just a few thoughts. First is this is I encourage you to commit your life to Jesus Christ and to find joy.

If you've never trusted him, would you trust him today and be forgiven of your sin? Would you trust him today and come face-to-face with the joy that you've been looking for your whole life? You can trust him today because he's trustworthy.

The second thing I want to encourage us to do as a church family is to thank Christ for our friends. Now it's supposed to be rocket science. We're supposed to read this and go, "You know what? Paul's in prison and he thanked God for his friends. We probably should do the same." Think about the people that God has surrounded you with. They're not perfect people, but most of us have a friend or people in our life who've contributed to us. When's the last time you thanked God for them? When's the last time you, like Paul, told your friend that you thank God for them? That might be a great afternoon activity for you. To call a friend and say, "I just want you to know, I'm just thankful to God because of you."

Third is let's honor Christ and make room for friendship. You see, Jesus came to pull us out from the bushes. You know how he did it? First he showed us the way. He chose some running mates and then he was so transparent with them. He talked about his homesickness with them. He talked about his fears. He talked about his prayers. He talked about his agenda, his plan, his identity. And then Jesus willingly went outside the city and died for our sin.

To go outside the city was a really important thing because inside the city represented community. When a criminal was killed outside the city, what it was communicating to those inside the city is they're not part of our community. And so let them die outside of it. It's different from family members that died inside the city and then there was a funeral and a burial and an honoring and a ceremony to remember their life. When people were killed outside the city, it was they don't deserve honor. They don't deserve to be remembered. They're not in our community. And Jesus willingly died outside the community to get you into the community.

When we trust him, he brings us into his family and he begins to instruct us with all kinds of things like love one another and welcome one another and forgive one another and submit to one another and encourage one another because we're a family. What's crazy is in our fast-paced lives we often relegate friend making as what we do with the leftovers of our time.

And so I want to encourage you to slow down and build a friend. Maybe start by praying, "God I need one. I got zero right now. I need one." You say, "Well, one's not very many," but it's a whole lot more than zero. One's great. He may give you two, but one is amazing. "God would you bring a friend to my life that would bring this kind of depth of joy?" And then let me encourage you to step into the streams where Christ's people gather. Now be careful here. Friendship is like joy. It only emerges where it's not a target.

If you aim for joy by pursuing joy, you won't find it. You have to go to Jesus. And it's the same thing with friendship. If you want friendship, you can't make friendship the goal. Or at least you can't make it the path. No, instead what we do is this. We make Jesus our affinity and so what we're doing is this. We're putting the hand to the plow and caring for people and serving people. We're serving children. We're taking the Gospel. And all of a sudden we look to our right and our left, and we see other people in different rows in proximity to us really close and they happen to have their hand on the plow as well. And they say, "You know what? You want to join? I could use some help here. I'll help you with yours." And all of a sudden now there's a friendship. Because there's a commonality of interest that's based on the Gospel. And so I encourage you, trust Christ and love one another.

So let me pray. Father in Heaven, we thank you for your great love for us. I pray for those in the room that are isolated. For whatever reason, maybe even not their choice, they feel like they're running alone right now. I pray that you would surround them with people. They would be able to run with friends. I pray Father that as we sing to you now and as we give, God we desire for these things to be expressions not only of our faith but God we pray that the passion that's represented in our singing and the resources that's represented in our giving would become fuel. To take this Gospel, the good news of Jesus to people who have never heard about it and yet who are on a similar quest for joy. And so would you help us now as we sing and give? And we pray all of this in Christ's name. Amen.



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