

KNOW JOY

NO MATTER WHAT

WEEK 1 GROUP GUIDE | MESSAGE BY SHAWN JOHNSON

START

To get things started, let's go around the circle and answer this question:

Think about all the things that make you happiest in life. Don't worry about talking on the surface here; what are some things that just plain make you happy?

SHARE

Look around; life has its ups and downs. We can all agree that some days are better than others.

Some days are just terrific ... the sun is shining, we get that front parking spot, that relationship is getting better, our favorite show is coming on and we have no distractions, the boss tells us we are doing a great job, we have on a pair of new shoes and our kids go to bed without a hassle. These are those things that can make us feel happy. Then there are those difficult days, where it's raining and you have to park a football field away from the mall, you get that irritating text about a situation that is out of your control, maybe that health set-back just continues to get worse, that relationship just continues to be an outright pain, and that area of your life you felt was getting better just got worse. These are the difficulties that can make us feel down and frustrated.

Now imagine, whether life is good and the sun is shining or life is difficult and unrelenting ... that you have an incredible strength on the inside that doesn't waiver. You have this secret weapon called "joy." Joy is not dependent on a new pair of shoes or a raise at work. Joy does not shrivel up when we experience the hardships of life. This kind of inner strength comes from God alone. In Nehemiah 8:10 it says, "... the joy of the LORD is your strength."

Throughout this series, we are going to look at what it means to "Know Joy," no matter what. No matter what happens in life, we can truly know joy at all times. As a church, we are going to walk through the book of Philippians. We are going to get to know the Apostle Paul and listen to what God has to say to us about living a life with a true inner joy.

This week, Shawn kicked off the series talking about the fact that God wants us to have a strength, confidence, and peace deep within us called joy. Regardless of what we face in life, whether good or bad, we don't have to lose our joy. Joy comes from knowing and experiencing Jesus Christ through it all. If there were ever anyone who had more ups and down in life, it was the Apostle Paul, so hopefully we can all relate to some of his struggles throughout this series.

Let's read 2 Corinthians 11:24-29

Paul experienced painful circumstances, constant dangers, daily pressures, and concerns. Today, what would you say is one of your biggest concerns that can seem to rob you of having joy?

The Apostle Paul was an extraordinary leader, scholar, teacher, writer, and friend; yet according to verse 29, he struggled like we do. Is it hard to believe that an Apostle in the Bible – who helped write the Bible – struggles just like we do?

GROW

Paul was no stranger to difficulty, loneliness, and pain. If there were anyone who had a really airtight argument as to why they don't have joy, it would have been Paul. He had the best education and upbringing, yet it didn't make life easier. He was betrayed, imprisoned, beaten, stoned, flogged, whipped, tortured, shipwrecked, lost at sea, and even when he reached the shore ... was bitten by a poisonous snake. Despite enduring all of that, Paul got back up every day because he had an unquenchable inner joy that could only come from God.

Read Philippians 3:3-14

In Anders, M. (1999). *Galatians-Colossians* (Vol. 8, pp. 243–244) we get a fresh perspective on why Paul was so passionate about following Jesus:

3:7. While these credentials and accomplishments are impressive, Paul placed no “stock” or confidence in them. Jewish observers would place him at the top of the religious elite. He placed it all in the debit or loss column. Why? Nothing belonged in the profit column except Christ. His relationship with Christ is far superior to his Jewish background.

3:8. Paul emphasizes his point by restating it. The things of the world—all human accomplishments—are viewed as **rubbish** or garbage in comparison to gaining Christ. Paul's focus changed completely. No longer did personal religious ritual and obedient religious acts occupy center stage. All eyes were on Christ and on him alone. Paul wanted to know Christ.

3:9. Why such single-minded devotion to Christ? Because he is the only source of righteousness—that is, of right relationship with God. Righteousness comes as a gift from God and is by faith in Christ, the true way to God in contrast to human merit or works. Here is Paul's doctrine of salvation and philosophy of life. In regards to eternal salvation, humans deserve nothing, can achieve nothing, and have no reason for pride or self-assurance. God has done everything: created, disciplined, had grace, given his Son Jesus on the cross for our sin, raised Jesus, declared us righteous and justified, adopted us as his children, and promised us resurrection and eternal life. The only human part in all this, in faith, is to accept what God has done.

Paul did not see that he deserved anything from God, because he lived so much of his life as an enemy of the cross. Paul even saw his impeccable merits and accomplishments as worthless in comparison to knowing Jesus and his grace in his own life. He even went as far as calling all human accomplishments just “garbage,” or in the Greek translation, “skybala,” which literally meant “dung” or “domestic waste” in comparison to knowing Jesus.

Paul used to be extremely religious and judgmental of anyone who did not live up to the standards he did. What so deeply changed his life?

What can make a person righteous?

What made Paul so resilient in the face of trials?

What stands in the way of you being the joy-filled Christ follower God designed you to be?

MOVE

So what do we do when we recognize a gap between the people we want to be and the person we are? Do we try harder? Do we study more? There is no short cut to cultivating joy. Paul pointed to Jesus as the source of his strength and joy. He considered everything else worth nothing compared to just knowing Jesus. The key to joy is to know Jesus and the power of God. Only God can change our hearts and transform us. When we try by our own power and “white knuckle will” things to happen, we will fail again and again. Let’s view those failures as God reminding us that the power to change comes from him alone. Jesus made this clear to us in the book of John when he reminded us of the most fundamental truth about how life change happens.

Read John 15:5-11

What is the key thing Jesus asks us to do to stay connected to him?

What does it look like to actually “remain” in Jesus?

Why is embracing and accepting God’s love for us so crucial for us to have a continual inner joy?

PRAY

As a group, spend some time praying for each other and the struggles that we all face. If you are in a co-ed group, consider breaking up into men and women’s groups to talk more freely.

TO GO

Philippians 1:25

[Paul speaking] Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith ...