

First Presbyterian Church
Phil. 4:1-9, “The Joyful Life”
by Pastor Matt Johnson, 6/14/2026

Where does the joyful life come from?

Does it arrive when we imagine our best selves?

Is it around the corner when everything lines up for a success?

When the dinner is delicious and everyone had a good time?

Well, sure. Good things can make us feel joyful.

But what about when things fall apart?

When our relationships stutter and get jammed up?

Could the joyful life also be on the way when the news is bad

and we feel like we’re watching a slow-motion train wreck?

We know from earlier in Paul’s letter that the Philippians

had been subject to some level of persecution as Christians

in the heart of the Roman Empire.

But its only in the fourth chapter that we learn about painful unrest
within the heart of the church itself.

Two leaders of the church, Euodia and Syntyche,
are at odds with each other.

Sometimes it doesn’t take much.

I know people who once left a church over the color of the new carpet.

I know of others who left a church because it welcomed
too many different kinds of people.

These don’t sound like big problems,

but what starts small can quickly fester into a putrid mess.

We stand today in chapter 4, and here Paul begins to wrap up his message.

He does so with these words,

**“Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for,
my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends!”**

The emphasis is that these people are *family* to Paul, brothers and sisters.

He loves them, he longs for them.

And out of that he calls on his *dear friends*

to stand firm in the Lord Jesus...as he has shown them.

This is unquestionably over-the-top flattery, but with good reason:

he's walking into very delicate territory.

Euodia and Syntyche are dear friends of Paul—

he says they have contended at his side in spreading the gospel.

They could well have been among the women who were with Lydia

down by the river when Paul and his friends

first came to Philippi.

Despite their strong history, these two leaders in the church

had something come between them. It was a misunderstanding of some kind,

or maybe one of them was rising to greater prominence

while the other was forgotten,

or maybe they had different styles of ministry

and were gathering followers on one side or the other.

We don't know. But we do know that there was a problem between them

that threatened not only their individual ability to stand firm,

but also the whole community's ability to remain centered in Jesus.

I bet we all know of situations in which two people who are prominent,

faithful leaders – formal or informal – who have had an issue

with each other that threatened to divide the congregation.

It's tough stuff. People hurt each other.

We can lose focus on God's priorities, and human instincts take over.

Paul could see that dark clouds were gathering around the church in Philippi.

And so in v. 3, Paul shifts his address to the person who would hand-deliver this

letter to the church – likely the letter's stated co-author Timothy.

“Yes, and I ask you, my true companion, help these women...”

He pleads for his teammate and coworker to “help these women.”

This was a problem that wasn’t going to be sorted out on its own.

They needed help! They were lucky to have Timothy.

Where do *we* go for help? One place is the Cascades Presbytery.

We share in a network of covenanted relationships
that have built in tools for resolving problems.

Additionally, here in McMinnville we have a relational covenant
that helps find a way forward. [SLIDE]

We begin and end with **Love**, because this holds it all together.

We then move through **Prayer** – asking God to join us.

Listening – taking to really hear.

Being honest – living out the truth.

Being open –situations might not go as we planned,
and finally, **Forgiving** as God forgives us.

This is our model and our goal for our relationships.

But there are times when things don’t go that way.

When we get reactive and anxious
and try to pull people onto *our* team instead of *their* team.

Can you believe that from within a situation like that,

Paul delivers the famous line of verse 4?

“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!”

Whatever is getting the better of our outlook,

whether national issues, economic issues, a situation in the church,
or personal issues with family and friends,

Paul’s call to Rejoice doesn’t come on a sunny day. REPEAT

Paul calls upon the church to rejoice—

especially when dark clouds are gathering!

With that perspective in mind, listen again to vv. 5 & 6,

“Let your gentleness be evident to all.

**The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything,
but in every situation by prayer and petition,
with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.”**

Paul’s way of being a friend in Christ leads us into a particular quality of life:
It’s the joyful life.

The joyful life has a nice ring to it, but considering the whole passage,
maybe I should have entitled this sermon,

“The joyful, gentle, non-anxious, thankful life.”

It’s longer, but it still sounds pretty good doesn’t it?
The joyful, gentle, non-anxious, thankful life.

How many of you engage in your relationships at First Presbyterian
with a sense of joy?

Joy about who we are.

Joy because (wherever you find yourself)
these are the people you love, who love you,
and who you worship the Living God with.

SLIDE

Gordon Fee reminds us that **“Christian joy is not the temporal kind,
which comes and goes with one’s circumstances;
rather, it is predicated altogether on one’s relationship
with the Lord, and is thus an abiding,
deeply spiritual quality of life.
Rejoicing...is not a Christian option,
but an imperative.”**

Christian friendship is powerful because it calls us into a life that is beyond us.

It can take us from our worst moments,
our most self-centered moments
and awaken in us the life of the Holy Spirit
that returns us to joy, returns us to gentleness,
relieves us of anxiety.

That is *how*, as Paul puts it in the final verse of our passage,

“the peace of God guards our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”

We aren’t magically protected.

Adopting the approach to relationships Paul describes
brings us within the Shalom of God.

When I lived in Minneapolis, the church I served received a grant to
host a seminar on multicultural worship.

I was invited to distribute fliers at a large pastors’ gathering
to spread the word about the seminar to people from churches
all over the area.

But I was late. And I was sick. And my car had a flat tire.

And I had to scrape the frost off my window (which in MN is a big deal!).

I broke my phone in my hurry to get out the door.

I was slamming things around on my way out of the house,
only to look up and see my little boy looking at me out the window.

I got lost on the way to the pastors’ gathering.

And I wasn’t going to be able to stay long anyway

because I had a funeral to attend later that morning.

And I still hadn’t written my sermon. (Seriously.)

It was not a good morning. It was one of *those* mornings.

And yet I knew I would have to stand before my church
and point them toward joy in the Lord.

Where was my joy? Where was my gentleness? Where was my anxiety free life?

All I could feel was anger and frustration and my sore throat.

When I finally got to the gathering and stepped out of my car,
I did not want to talk to anybody.
I didn't want to share any fliers with anybody.

Before entering the building, I finally said to myself (and to Jesus)
"You gotta turn this attitude around right now."
When I got into the building, my mood went from anger to sadness.
I just felt sad. I was just bummed out
that all these things had happened, I was tired, and sick,
and I just wanted to weep.

But then I got in there and started seeing people I knew.
I saw friends from a local church.
I got a cup of coffee.
I shared a bit of my morning with a fellow pastor and he gave me a hug.
These people encouraged me and returned me to a sense of joy.

There was a worship team singing songs of praise in the auditorium.
And the convergence of those things brought me back inside myself
and I was able rejoice.
Not that I felt good, but I knew that the Lord was near, and that life would be okay.
Slowly, by God's grace made evident in those friendships,
my anger turned to gentleness.

I'm so grateful to have had that kind of community throughout my life.
I'm so grateful I have the kind of marriage
where I can come home and say,
"I'm sorry I was so angry when I left,"
and receive grace from a woman who knows Christ deeply.
It's primarily through Sonja, through my friends and family,
through all of you, the body of Christ,
that I receive grace from Jesus himself.
That's the joyful life.

It's a gift ... a gift we have to open ourselves up to.

So what I want you to consider today is,

**“Do I pursue God’s joy in my friendships? In my family? In my church?
Especially when dark clouds are gathering?”**

I invite you to think of a relationship that needs to be shored up in some way...

- invite the joy of the Lord to be your strength in that relationship.
- ask to be reminded of the nearness of the Lord Jesus in that relationship.
- ask that your anxiety would be replaced by the peace of God.
- take on the practices described in the relational covenant.

It's hard, but we aren't on our own in this. Immanuel, God with us, is on our side.