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## Joyful Relationships

Relationships are important. Medical research shows that good relationships help us have less stress, better healing, healthier behavior, a greater sense of purpose, and a longer life.

Relationships are important because God created us to live in relationships. First and foremost is to be in a relationship with Him, and then also with other people.

Today let's think about one aspect of good, healthy relationships—joy.



The apostle Paul's letter to the church in Philippi highlights joy. Three basic joy words occur sixteen times in this relatively brief letter that Paul wrote ten to twelve years after founding that church.

True joy from God is a steadfast, delightful certainty that does not come from or depend on our circumstances. This true joy comes from God. Remember Jesus, after teaching the disciples about the importance of remaining in Him, told them, "These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full" (John 15:11).

The opening verses of the letter give us at least three things that are both building blocks and evidences of joyful relationships.

The first one is that whenever you think of others you are thankful. In verse 3 Paul tells us, "I thank my God in all my remembrance of you." Every time he thought of them he gave thanks to God. This was not a bit of literary flare to impress them.

Neither Paul nor the Philippians believers were perfect, or in perfect circumstances. Paul was a prisoner in Rome awaiting his trial before Caesar. He addressed a number of problems the people had in this letter, including the lack of harmony between some of them. His joy and thankfulness did not depend on everything being as it should be. One of Paul's reasons was, verse 7 in chapter 1, that they were participating or sharing in God's grace with him. While that includes the ministry of the gospel, it goes beyond this to the grace of God in their salvation. They shared the grace of being called, cleansed, being children of God through Christ. Regardless of the situation, if we know another believer well or at all, we should always be giving thanks to God for His grace that we share. This is both a building block and evidence of joyful relationships.

Secondly, we can be, we should be joyful whenever we pray for other believers. In verse 4 Paul writes, that he is “always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all.” When you stop to think about it, why wouldn’t Paul pray for them with joy? They were God’s redeemed people, God was working in them, and they were sharing in Paul’s ministry. Paul did not reluctantly pray, nor skip over a few thorny individuals. No, he always was offering prayer with joy in his every prayer for *all* of them. As we follow that commitment in attitude and practice, our relationship will be joyful, regardless of the circumstances.

The third building block and evidence of joyful relationships we see in this section is that wherever other believers are they are in our hearts. Paul wrote, verse 7, “it is only right for me to feel this way about you all, because I have you in my heart.” Another version renders the phrase “I have you in my heart” as “I hold you in my heart”, while a third states it as “you have a special place in my heart.” At the core of his being Paul held these dear friends in his heart and mind, in his prayers, plans and actions.

Now let’s add verse 8 where Paul tells them, “God is my witness, how I long for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus.” He had the same kind of love, affection, tenderness for them that Christ has for them. Indeed, it was the love of Christ in him that flowed out to them.

What about us? For all the believers we know can we give a resounding “Yes! wherever I am, in whatever circumstance they or I face, I hold these fellow believers in my heart. I love them with Christ’s love.”

There are many ideas about how to be happy, have good relationships. A classic one is “keep only cheerful friends. The grouches pull you down.” That doesn’t measure up as a building block or an evidence of joyful relationships. Rather, we can say, “keep building joyful relationships. Being a grouch will only pull you and those around you down.”

Ask God to help you take this objective truth about yourselves and others and apply it.

*Pastor Lyle*