

Enjoy Life

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Philippians series & beginning of summer

Philippians 4:4-7

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People of God,

What will we do this summer? I know with COVID, our lives have all been in a different mode already. But now it's warmer. The days are longer. So from young to old, I hope we will all have some fun. I say that because God created us to enjoy life. Yes, we're created to glorify God and to enjoy him forever, as the Westminster Catechism teaches. And part of enjoying God is learning to enjoy all that he's given us. Part of glorifying God is giving him the joy of seeing us live life to the fullest, which includes a healthy dose of fun. Who can imagine fun without laughter? They go hand in hand. The Bible helps us see God's desire for us to enjoy the things he's given us by having God-honouring fun.

Fun-Killers

I want to start by considering some fun-killers. I don't know if you picked up a common theme in the three Bible passages I read. But that theme would have to be *worry*. Matthew tells us,

Mt 6:25 "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes?"

Mark says that when the gospel is preached,

Mk 4:18 "Still other (people), like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful."

And the Apostle Paul tells us in Philippians 4:

Php 4:6 "Do not be anxious [that is, worry] about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God."

So there you have it. Worry keeps us from enjoying life. We're so consumed with our life, our food and clothes that we spend all of our time worrying about how we look and what we're going to eat. Consequently, we don't enjoy what we have or what God has already provided.

Our society is a testimony to the truth of that. Retailers lure us to the shopping malls to get more stuff we don't have. We are consumed with looks, whether it's our clothes, or our body image. Some years ago, I heard about a business deal that made me laugh. The Nestle Chocolate company bought Jenny Craig, a weight loss company, for 600 million dollars. That's the ultimate in irony, isn't it! Nestle wants us to eat chocolate and Jenny Craig wants us to stop eating it because it makes us fat. But it's the perfect symbol of what's wrong with our society. First make us feel like we're missing something if we haven't had Nestle's chocolate and then make us feel guilty and worry about the weight we put on so that we buy Jenny Craig products. It's hilarious and sad at the same time.

Another manifestation of worry that kills our fun is taking ourselves too seriously. Cell phones feed our society's obsession with self. We worry about

missing a call. And the telephone companies have a heyday with us. We can get call-waiting to make sure we don't miss anyone's call when we are already on the line. We can get voicemail in case we aren't available and call-display comes pretty much standard so we can see who calls us even if they don't leave a message. We can put our phones on vibrate when we're in church, at a concert or the movies so that we can *feel* a call coming, sneak a peek at the display and possibly run out to take the call. We may not be able to be in two places at once, but a cell phone can help us feel like we're indispensable. There's nothing wrong with cell phones in and of themselves. They have many great uses. But if we're obsessed with staying connected to everyone and everything, maybe we take ourselves too seriously. Is the cell phone feeding our hunger to be needed 24/7.

Are we as concerned about being connect to God as we are about staying connected to people?. The Bible paints pictures of people who worry too much or take themselves too seriously and consequently miss out on many blessings that God has for us in this world. They aren't able to relax because they think the world rests on their shoulders. They are always uptight and can't enjoy life. They don't know how to have fun. They worry constantly. And in the worse case scenario, as Jesus pointed out in the Mark 4 reading, these people are so full of themselves that they worry about all of life. Their self-obsession even chokes the word of God from entering their heart and mind, making them unfruitful.

The Lord Jesus speaks to all of us who are over stressed and too consumed by our own importance, all who spend more time worrying than enjoying all the Lord gives us. He says this:

Mt 11:28 "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."

Rest and fun go hand-in-hand. To have good fun—fun that honours the Lord—we need to be able to throw off our worries and rest in the Lord. Rest is a biblical theme. Sunday is a day of rest. The Year of Jubilee was a year of rest. These rests remind us that God will provide. We focus on him and enjoying all he's given us and he'll take care of our worries. That's his promises. That's his desire for our lives.

A weary Christian lay in bed tossing and turning, trying to hold the world together with his anxiety. After finally calming down somewhat, he heard the Lord whisper in his heart, "My child, you go to sleep. I'll be up to take care of everything."

So suffice it to say that worry is a fun-killer. It keeps us from enjoying life by resting in Christ.

Fun as a Fruit of Joy

Secondly, let's look at fun as a fruit of enjoying life. When we get our bearings straight, with the Lord front and centre in our life, then we are free to laugh! If worry is the fun-killer, joy is the fun-maker. Matthew tells us

Mt 6:33 But seek first (God's) kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

The kingdom includes all areas of our life. As Christians seeking to serve God in all areas of life, we can't neglect the area of leisure. All the things we need include time to relax and rest and enjoy our loved ones.

But we'll only be able to do that well when we put God first and trust him to provide. The Apostle Paul reminds us that keeping God is a means to finding joy. He tells us to unload on our Father in heaven all the "stuff" that worries us. Listen.

Php 4:6 Do not be anxious [or worried] about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

One commentator tells us that "Paul writes of God's peace which 'shall guard your hearts and your minds.' When he mentions peace as a 'guard,' he uses a military term..." It's a picture of a soldier keeping a watch out for any approaching enemy. And in Paul's words, that soldier is God. As we transfer our cares over to God in prayer, Paul is telling us that God's peace given through Jesus Christ "is appointed as the silent sentry (or soldier) around our mind and our emotions, calming us within... In place of anxiety—which is the thief of joy—we pray. We push the worrisome, clawing monster of pressure off our shoulders and hand it over to God in prayer." Obviously, we need to do that over and over again but God does give us peace, rest, joy and laughter.

An elderly lady was lonely so she went to the pet shop, thinking a pet might help fill her emptiness. After looking at all the dogs, cats, fish and even snakes, she found nothing that seemed good to her. Then she spoke to the pet store owner and said she was looking for a pet that would seem like almost another human being in the house.

That tweaked the owner's mind and he suggested the store's parrot. "He's a real chatterbox. You'll be astounded at his wide vocabulary. That's also why he's so expensive."

Well, "Sold!" said the lady. She hauled him home along with a big cage. At last she had a companion to talk with. But a week passed and the bird hadn't spoken a word. Beginning to worry, she dropped by the pet store and when the owner saw her he said, "Hey, how's the parrot? He's quite a talker, huh?"

"Not a word." she replied. "Not a sound. I'm worried."

"Did you get a mirror?" said the owner. "Once the bird sees himself he'll feel more comfortable and he'll talk your ear off." So the lady took a mirror for her parrot. Over the next week, she talked to the bird for hours but he never replied.

She went back to the store again. "All that money for the bird and cage and then the mirror. And he still hasn't said a word!" "Oh?" said the owner, "but did you get a ladder?" Parrots love the ladder. He'll go up and down, look in the mirror and then he'll talk." So she bought the ladder. But again it didn't help. She gave it another week and went back again. This time the owner sold her a swing for the

bird. Reluctantly the old lady took the swing home and installed it at the top of the cage since the owner said, "I've found that parrots usually talk when they are perched on a swing!"

Well, ten days passed and the lady returned to the store in tears. "How's the parrot?" The owner said with a big smile. "I'll bet he's talking now, hey!"

"Talking!?" she replied. "He died! My expensive bird is on the bottom of the cage!"

"What!! I can't believe that," said the owner. "I'm just shocked. Did the parrot say anything at all?"

"Yes, as a matter of fact, he did," answered the elderly woman. "As he lay there taking his last few breaths, he said very faintly, "Don't they have any *food* down at that store?"

Oh, dear people, so often we turn our attention in life to the wrong things. We worry about all kinds of things instead of going to the Lord. We address all the issues around our lives but we don't get to the heart of our lives, to what we really need. We run ourselves ragged thinking we need this or that. We worry about all kinds of things. But we forget the most important, the most basic. We forget the food for our soul. We forget to get close to the Lord and, before long, everything is controlling our life except the Lord. And all of those things that worry us take the joy right out of our life whereas feeding our soul will give us life.

The Apostle Paul gives us a remedy when he says,
Php 4:4 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! ⁵ Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. ⁶ Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

What we need is the Lord. He's near to us, says Paul. But we have to learn to turn over all of stresses and worries to him in prayer. That's the only way we'll be able to rejoice so that we can laugh and enjoy life as our Lord Jesus intends for us.

Fun as a Means of Living Your Faith

In some sense, Christians ought to be the people on the earth who best exemplify how to have fun. That's our final point.

Wouldn't you agree that, in some sense, we were created to play and to enjoy life? You don't have to teach children how to play. They just do it. But often as we grow older we begin to take ourselves too seriously. We act as if the world continuing to spin depends upon what we do! Everything will fall apart if we don't do certain things. We worry about stuff we can't control.

The Lord Jesus is all for Christians being serious and being faithful in our daily work. He's all for faithfully attending worship and being involved in building up the kingdom of God. But a full vision of the kingdom also includes space for being faithful to our families and friends. And that's where we need to take time to

play and have fun, to enjoy the life of all those he's given us. Ecclesiastes tells us there is a time for everything.

*Ecccl 3:4 a time to weep and a time to laugh,
a time to mourn and a time to dance,*

All work and no play makes Johnny a dull guy. In a world that constantly wants to take more and more of our time away from family and friends, we need to be intentional about staying close to the Lord so that we can keep the joy in our lives. And out of our joy we need to savour fun times with family and friends. We don't need to apologize or feel guilty for having some needed fun.

Everything in moderation but don't short-change yourself and your loved one on fun. Our loved ones can learn as much from us about living for the Lord from the way we enjoy life as they do from the way we do our work and are faithful in our walk with the Lord. In fact, being faithful in our walk with the Lord means we all have to learn to laugh and play to the honour of God.

This balance in life starts with having the Lord in our hearts and keeping ourselves focused on him so that we know his joy. Out of that joy, life bursts forth in all of its fullness like flowers in your garden. We blossom in the areas of our work, our faith, our education, and also in our leisure. King Solomon tells us,

*Prov 15:15 All the days of the oppressed are wretched,
but the cheerful heart has a continual feast.*

This summer don't take yourself too seriously. Take your relationship with the Lord seriously. Make sure you keep or get your life on track with him and he'll fill you with joy. And his joy will fill your heart with cheer like a continual feast. It will spread like the fragrance of your flowers. Our neighbours, friends and family should be able to see that we are enjoying the life that God has given us... in our work but also in our play. So go out and have some fun. Don't break God's commandments this summer in an attempt to have fun but maybe you should break a few of your own boundaries if they are keeping you from having good, God-honouring fun with your family and friends. Break some of your work routines or whatever else is keeping us from adding a fair dose of fun to the balance of our life that God desires us to enjoy.

It all comes around, you know! When we live as God intends, we find the place of laughter, good times and fun as God intends. When we learn to enjoy life while honouring the Lord then it all turns back in praise to him. James writes,

Jas 5:13 Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray.

Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise.

When we enjoy our life, we praise God for meeting our needs and removing our worry and we praise him for our family, for our work, for our church, our school, our friends, and for the fun things he gives us to enjoy.