



Chico Alliance Church

May 14, 2017



“Ode to Joy”

An “ode” is a lyrical poem meant to be sung. Paul didn’t intend his letter to be sung but the music of the letter is clear. Certain pieces of music weave carefully crafted repeated musical themes or melodic phrases thorough the entire piece. Paul wove several themes through his letter with an overriding theme of joy centered in Jesus Christ. After so much time in this letter over the past year, I noticed the complementary themes of peace and contentment in Christ no matter what.

Paul’s letter condensed to a single phrase might be, “Joy No Matter What” or “How to maintain the joy of the Lord while managing the junk of this world. The key to maintaining the joy of the Lord while living in a broken world has to do with five key focal points or life decisions.

First

We need to decide on what will be the central focus of my life. What is my axis point? Does my life revolve around family, self, success, money, possessions, happiness no matter what, comfort, notoriety or fame? Whether formally stated or not, everyone has a central axis around which they organize their life and make major decisions in life.

Second

We need to decide what governs my relationship with people. Love people and use things. Use people and love things. Me first.

Third

I need to determine what pursuit or aim holds the greatest value. This is similar to a life axis but focus more on a specific aim. Gain an education or trade? Raise a family? Become a doctor or athlete or actor or politician?

Fourth

What will define my character? What kinds of activity or lifestyle will characterize my life. Who will I model my life after?

Fifth

Where will I find the resources to accomplish my goals? Paul settled all these questions. He expressed his journey in each of these areas throughout his letter to a small minority people who had bravely embraced Christ while living in a predominately pagan Greek/Roman culture in a city in Greece called Philippi.

He began the letter with the confidence that what God starts, God finishes. He called them to seriously join God’s ongoing work in us to bring us to the point where we both want and work to please God. He finished with confidence that he could do all things through Christ who continually strengthens him. Today, I plan to review these five central factors in maintaining the joy of the Lord while managing the junk of the world. I urge you to consider these five elements as a spiritual health check list. Each one deserves some serious consideration for implementation into your life. These five elements define what it means to be distinctively Christian in our walk.

I. PICK THE RIGHT AXIS – A Passion to praise Christ 1

Praising and exalting Christ in everything always

We must first pick the right axis around which our life will revolve.

...according to my earnest expectation and hope, that I will not be put to shame in anything, but that with all boldness, Christ will even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.

In sharing his testimony and circumstance, Paul demonstrated how this life resolve to see Christ praised and exalted enabled him to view even negative circumstance as an opportunity to exalt Christ and therefore caused rejoicing.

He shared the fact that even though he was currently imprisoned, that imprisonment brought positive benefits to Christ and the Gospel. His imprisonment inspired others to boldly stand for the gospel. His imprisonment provided a platform to preach the Gospel to those guarding him.

He also struggled with those preaching the gospel with wrong motives and even hurtful intent toward him. He rejoiced even in this because his priority was the exaltation of Christ.

What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice... 1:18

His imprisonment could have possibly led to his execution. He viewed even the inevitability of death as a joy producing event. He still held out hope for deliverance through their intense prayers for him (19) yet was willing to suffer death for the sake of the gospel. His life axis of exalting Jesus enabled him to be happy with either continued ministry on earth or completed ministry in heaven.

For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. 1:21

He found positives in either scenario. He favored release to be with Christ but was willing to remain on for their benefit. If God allowed him to stay, he asked them to keep standing firm in their faith in spite of opposition and suffering for Christ's sake.

Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel... Philippians 1:27

What does your life revolve around? Success, family, fame, notoriety, comfort.

Have you even thought about what frames your outlook on life?

What gives your life experience a frame of reference to evaluate?

As long as _____, I can rejoice.

How does the conscious desire to see Jesus exalted factor into your daily life?

The **second** checkpoint deals with what directs my relationship with people.

II. PRESERVE THE RIGHT ATTITUDE – A Passion to serve others 2

Pleasing Christ through humble sacrificial service to others

Paul called the Philippian church to humble service on the basis of the ministry of Christ to us.

Since there is encouragement in Christ, since there is consolation of love, since there is fellowship of the Spirit, affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. 2:1-4

When it comes to people, opt for humility, unity and selfless service. He went as far as instructing them to do NOTHING from selfishness or conceit. It reminds me of the little definition of joy. Jesus – Others – You. We generally have a “Me first” approach to relationships. We engage with people depending on whether they bother us or benefit us. What’s in it for me? “I’m not getting anything out of this relationship.” “My stuff is more important than your stuff.” “I don’t have time to help you.”

Paul called them to adopt the thinking of Jesus. Consider the example of Jesus.

Have this thinking in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus... (2:5)

What was that thinking?

He exhibited perfect unity with the Father.

He demonstrated perfect love.

He embraced one purpose with the Father.

He showed no trace of selfish ambition or conceit.

He humbly considered the Father's agenda and needs of others more important than His own.

He selflessly looked to our need.

In the outworking of this humble service to others, Paul urged them to...

Do all things without grumbling or disputing; so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world 2:14-15

Paul offered his own life as an example of humble service.

But even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with you all. 2:17

He also drew attention to Timothy's example of humble service.

For I have no one else of kindred spirit who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare. For they all seek after their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus. 2:20-21

Finally, He included the humble servant attitude of Epaphroditus.

Receive him then in the Lord with all joy, and hold men like him in high regard; because he came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was deficient in your service to me. 2:29-30

How do you view the people God brings into your sphere of influence?

Do we consider how we could humbly aid them or handily avoid them?

The **third** checkpoint deals with our personal value scale.

III. PURSUE THE RIGHT AIM – A Passion to pursue Christ 3

Pursuing knowing Christ above everything else

What is the most important and valuable pursuit in life? All of us evaluate things according to their value to us. Is this worth my time? The answer stems from what we deem important. Unconsciously and sometimes even consciously we all have a value line on which we arrange the various aspects of our life. We rank things from important to insignificant. Out of all the things about Paul's life he could have ranked high on his value scale, there was one that he considered far above all else.

Whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ... 3:7-8

Paul considered knowing Jesus his top priority; not only knowing about Him but personally experiencing His intimate interaction in his life. He wanted to know everything; from what He suffered to His resurrection power.

He focused on the spiritual maturity stemming from knowing Jesus.

Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect (mature), but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. 3:12-14

Paul urged the Philippians to pursue the same aim.

Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this attitude; and if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you; however, let us keep living by that same standard to which we have attained. 3:15-16

He pointed out some who pursued other aims. Knowing Jesus didn't register on the value scale of some.

Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us. For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things. Philippians 3:17-19

He reminded them of their amazing heritage and certain future as Kingdom kids.

For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself. 3:20-21

Where does knowing Jesus fall on your value scale?

Does your calendar bear witness to that placement?

*Jesus said, "This is eternal life that they may **know** You the only true God and Jesus Christ whom You have sent."*

*Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the **knowledge** of God and of Jesus our Lord; seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true **knowledge** of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. 2 Peter 1:2-3*

Having settled exalting Christ as our axis and loving people as our focus and knowing Christ as our ultimate passion, Paul laid out some specific behaviors to regularly practice because of the first three priorities.

These practices become our **fourth** life check point. This melodic theme breaks into six counter melodies.

IV. PRACTICE THE RIGHT ACTIONS – A Passion to live godly 4:1-9

Practicing living like Christ

- **Stand firm in the Lord 4:1**

Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and crown, in this way stand firm in the Lord, my beloved.

Keep standing firm through God's power against all opposition.

- **Harmonize in the Lord 4:2-3**

I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche (and all of you) to live in harmony in the Lord.

Seek peace and pursue it as you determine to serve the greater cause of ministry.

- **Rejoice in the Lord always 4:4**

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!

Choose joy by reason of your connection to Jesus.

- **Cultivate the Gentleness of the Lord 4:5**

Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near.

Exhibit warmth in all your relationships by keeping aware of the continued presence of Jesus in your life.

- **Cultivate a life of persistent prayer to the Lord 4:6-7**

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. 4:6-7

Habitually tell God about everything that troubles you. Present your requests to Him. The act of shifting your trust to His all-knowing, all-powerful, all-loving hands enables you to experience a peace that often makes no human sense.

“God delights the peace of His people.” Psalm 35:27

- **Contemplate positive things 4:8**

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Philippians 4:8

Keep guard over what you expose your mind to and what you allow your mind to meditate on. Take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ. Do the things passing through you mind pass the “whatever” test of Philippians 4.

Consider whatever is true, honorable, right, pure, commendable, lovely, excellent and praiseworthy.

Refuse whatever is false, dishonorable, impure, unspeakable, repulsive, not excellent or praiseworthy. Negative thinking breeds negative living. Polluted perception promotes polluted practice.

The last thing on the life spiritual health checklist has to do with where we go for the resources to keep living according to the standard we have been taught.

V. POSSESS THE RIGHT ABILITY – Passion to trust Jesus 4:10-20

Possessing the power and provision of Christ

A. Rely on the power of Christ in all things 4:10-13

Paul revealed his secret to contentment.

This book reveals the secret to joy, peace and contentment in every situation.

Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. 4:11

I can do all things through the One strengthening me. 4:13

Paul testified that he experienced the sense of contentment in any and every circumstance because he relied on the strengthening of Christ to face life.

B. Receive the provision of Christ to provide for others 4:14-20

Not that I seek the gift itself, but I seek for the profit which increases to your account. Philippians 4:17

And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:19

As we saw last week, this passage is more about giving than receiving. Only in the context of hands empty from giving are we ready to receive God’s resources.

Paul’s letter to the Philippians reinforces the four purposes of Chico.

1. Continually cultivate dynamic relationship with God.

Our life purpose is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. Check point one and three fulfill that purpose. Do you regularly evaluate how your life exalts Jesus?

Pick the right axis – A passion to exalt Jesus in everything

Have you intentionally scheduled time to pursue a deeper knowledge of Jesus?

Pursue the right aim – A passion to know Jesus.

2. Persistently pursue meaningful connection with people

Do you consider others more important than yourself? Do you pursue harmony and oneness with others? Are you willing to lay aside self-interest for the interests of others?

Preserve the right attitude – A passion to serve others

3. Resolutely resist evil and restore righteousness

This is implied in Paul’s admonition to establish godly practices and resist destructive thinking.

Practice right actions – Passion to live godly

The ability to establish these things comes from Jesus.

Possess the Right ability – Passion to trust Jesus

In all of this we are most able to shine as lights in a dark world holding forth the world of truth that transforms lives through Jesus.

4. Reach and teach for Christ – Impact our world for Christ.

The ball is in your court so to speak. What will you do? I challenge you to take these five check points and take some time to evaluate your life. Spiritual discipline is like physical exercise. It takes will power to get started and keep consistent to the point where you truly enjoy the workout and sense the benefits. It takes persistence to overcome the inertia.

Ode to Joy **Words and Music by David Welch from Philippians**

How can we maintain the joy of the Lord while managing the junk of this world.
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We live in a world that is so full of pain and suffering that seems so inane.
Oh where can we find sweet release from it all and find joy in this life once again.
When Christ is the center of all that I do when I'm set on exalting his name.
I can manage the terrible junk of this world and find his joy in spite of the pain.

When we get caught up into only our needs and insist that our rights get first place.
We fight and we scrap for the world's useless junk till our joy in the Lord seems erased.
God tells us to think like the Lord Jesus thought when refusing to think of himself.
I can maintain the glorious joy of the Lord as I put others before myself.

This world tries to offer all kinds of good things that distract from my ultimate quest.
I'll never find joy until I set my aim, I'll never sense His wonderful rest.
I must regard all of the toys of this world as mere junk next to gaining the goal
To know Christ and to live His life better each day to rest full in his able control.

When worry and fear all come in like a flood to paralyze my faith and impair
There's no need to worry for Jesus is near on Him I can cast all of my care.
So each time a worry comes into my mind I'll share all of my struggle in prayer
He promises to strengthen me in everything all my burdens and worries to bear.

That's how we maintain the joy of the Lord while managing the junk of this world.
That's how we maintain the joy of the Lord while managing the junk of this world.