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West Valley Presbyterian Church
Philippians
Being Content in Christ
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Today we finish our series on Philippians and that video just summed it up and ended with the words “Rejoice in the Lord.” We started this series with joy...and I want end it on joy.

I hope you all got a bookmark with key scriptures on it from Philippians. If you haven't already, memorize these scriptures and then write your own scripture at the bottom of the bookmark from Philippians – one that you really like - and try to remember that one too. Philippians has great verses in it that you can memorize that are key to living the Christian life.

Now last week I gave a challenge to you last ... I put it out to all of you last Sunday..... I got some great emails from some of you who took on that challenge. (“**FAST**” **slide image**) What was the challenge?

The challenge was to take a **fast** from worrying and complaining all day long...last Monday...and choose joy instead...that's what I challenged all of you to do...And I got such an amazing response, and so many of you reported back to me...that I've changed what I was going to say to you today because I just wanted to follow up a bit on last week...

Now not every one had a great day last Monday...one person had root canal and bravely tried anyway...another person person reported in...I made until 5:30....AM.

But many of you had slightly better results than that. although one report was a bit troubling making me wonder if I had encouraged the formation of a small “rejoice in the Lord” cult with a masochistic bent. Let me share the email with you. This person wrote to me the following:

In our small group Bible Study, we used this tactic in order to rejoice,

she said.... I told them...(IMAGE OF A RUBBER BAND)

Please slip a rubber band on one of your wrists. Now whenever you recognize you're not rejoicing, flick yourself. When you sense a lack of gentleness, hurt yourself. Five minutes from now when you find yourself filled with worry, nail yourself. When you begin thinking about ungodly characteristics, snap yourself silly. When you are convicted over your lack of living like a doer of the Word, draw that rubber band back and prepare to say "ouch!" If you're really audacious, take off your rubber band and use it on someone else whose not rejoicing! God wants to change you and those around you.But Kim, she wrote, the second day, one of the women emailed and said, "Can I change wrists with this rubber band? I have a welt!

As you can see, its really great to be a part of a Bible study group around here. And this kind of a story makes you want to run and join one. We give out scriptures, rubber bands and welts.....nothing like a welt to help you rejoice in the Lord.

On a less punitive note another wrote the following from the Monday fast from worrying and complaining:

I had to take time during my lunch to send you a quick note about my mission to have a joyful day. Being a single, career Mom of an almost 10 year old boy is a recipe for stress and worry. I didn't even get out of the school parking lot before I was feeling stressed. In the midst of feeling aggravated by another driver, I said out loud "nope, ... I have to focus on joy today! Be joyful!" Thinking quickly what I am thankful for, I said "Thank you Lord for my beautiful son." It worked! My blood pressure immediately went down.

As if that wasn't enough, not even an hour later, I found myself stressing over losing my new sunglasses. My favorite Kate Spade sunglasses I splurged on for my 35th birthday several weeks ago. Despite trying to not stress, I couldn't help it. Again, I said out loud, "Be joyful! Stop stressing! They are only sunglasses." Right after I said that, a song came on the radio. The lyrics that rang out through my car's speakers were: "You can have money, cool friends, a ring on your left hand, but it's never going to be enough, if you don't have love....We're all made in the image of God. But all this baggage

that we carry, hides who we really are. A picture of his love, designed to shine like gold." I couldn't help but laugh out loud, and say "I hear you God! I get it!"

(She ended her email and declared) Needless to say, I'm going to give myself an A for effort today.

I would say so...

And the last testimony of the fast from worry and complaining I want to share with you is pretty significant because this long time member of WVPC got so hooked on this idea of practicing joy...that as far as I know...this person is still on a pretty significant roll...This person wrote:

I accepted your challenge to go a day without complaining. With worrying and sleeping problems, I had become a pretty grumpy person...especially complaining to my very tolerant spouse. So...on Monday, I tried not to verbalize anything "bad" that came into my head. I think I talked less that day. And, with only one slip-up, I made it!

Well, that had worked pretty well, so I decided to try it again. Guess what?! I made it through two days.

I am now on Day 5. Not only has it has gotten a little easier not to complain, I seem to have fewer negative thoughts popping into my head. I think I will continue on....

As we close our series today on the book of Philippians I hope you won't close your hours, and days and weeks to joy...but that you too will continue on to practice choosing joy every day.

We are meant to continue on...rejoicing in the Lord...friends. Don't give that one up.

That's the message of Philippians that Paul keeps repeating and what I want you to take with you from this series. This fast of one day was actually meant to do exactly what it did for the person I just read to you about...to give you a taste of what its like to live joyfully; and I

was hoping that after you tasted a day of choosing joy, you wouldn't want to live any other way – (unless of course you were part of the rubber band cult and your wrist was swelling up.)

If you didn't try the FAST from worry and complaining last week, try it this week. My friend Christy came last week and did our intercessory prayer workshop. It was a wonderful time of praying for one another. And she told us about a church she knew that had a one word mission statement...comprised of three letters. Their one word mission statement was the word T-R-Y...try.

Try choosing joy. Just try it. See what happens.

Psychologists tell us that each person has about ten thousand thoughts per day.

Did you realize you had that many? Ten thousand a day!!

That means you have at least **a one in ten thousand chance of having one rejoice in the Lord thought every single 24 hour period!** Maybe if you are really in a bad state of mind, that's where you start.

Like the person who failed at 5:30am...maybe if you can't bring yourself to go an entire day without complaining or worrying as these brave souls did who wrote to me their testimonies, maybe you could start with being sure to have **one thought** tomorrow that expresses gratitude and joy for God's goodness to you.

Find one thing that you can be joyful about and thank God for it. The next day, go to two thoughts that are joy-filled and gradually after ten thousand days...about 27 years... you'll be rejoicing all the time.

It's a journey...but TRY. And ask the Holy Spirit to help you.

I'm not sure where we got the idea that Christianity is for serious, somber, artificially-pious, self-righteous folks, who are joyless with a furrowed brow...but that idea has been around for awhile... way before "the church lady" appeared on Saturday night live. (**IMAGE OF CHURCH LADY**) This concept of Christianity was way back when...

John Steinbeck described Liza Hamilton in *East of Eden* as:
"...a tight hard little woman humorless as a chicken ... [with] a dour Presbyterian mind and a code of morals that pinned down and beat the brains out of nearly everything that was pleasant to do."

I guess Liza Hamilton never read the book of Philippians. In case you didn't know it, one of Paul's favorite words to use as he writes his letters, is the Greek word *hilarotes*, from which we get the word *hilarity*. It literally means "laughter from the heart."

When Paul talks about joy, he doesn't mean the trivial, shallow, obscene or mean-spirited stuff we call humor today. He means bone-deep joy which flows from the center of our being, genuine joy coming from the depths. When we look at the world through the lenses of joy, a joy not depended on circumstances but dependent on our knowledge of God's great love for us in Jesus, and his faithfulness in all situations...
We find Jesus everywhere...even in the worst situations...

Alexander Solzhenitsyn spoke of his time in prison, with all its pain as an actual gift because he saw his suffering through the lenses of joy. Here is what he said..

"It was only when I lay there on rotting prison straw that I sensed within myself the first stirrings of good. Gradually, it was disclosed to me that the line separating good and evil passes, not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties either, but right through every human heart -- and through all human hearts Bless you, prison, for having been in my life."

How could he say that? Bless you prison for having been in my life?

For the same reason that Paul writing from a prison cell could say "Rejoice in the Lord always."

Wherever you are, whatever your circumstances, no matter what has happened to you, or what hasn't happened to you...God is FOR you and with you today. And when you know that deep inside, you find him everywhere...and in him you find joy...

I was watching the world series game on Wed. night when the GIANTS won their first game. **(IMAGE OF CROWD SMILING? CHEERING AT GIANTS GAME)**

The place was rocking...it was charged. Everyone was smiling, and cheering and carrying on. The stands were packed and the place electric with anticipation. When they won, the crowd erupted in cheers! Rejoicing was the name of the game!

If you think of the crowds cheering on the Giants, as those saints who have gone before us saying..."You can do it!" "God is with you!" "Never give up!" "Hit a home run out of here for God"...you get a glimpse of the reality Paul was in touch with when he said to rejoice in the Lord when he was in prison.

Paul knew he was not alone. Paul knew he was not without hope, even though he was writing from a dark prison cell. His circumstances were anything but optimal. Ad there's no question...Sometimes when circumstances don't work out the way we had hoped; sometimes when it seems like our prayers go unanswered, and God is taking way too long to respond to us...

Its hard to believe that we are being cheered on by the heavenly realms;
Its hard to believe that scripture in Romans that says "If God is for us, who can be against us?"
Cause sometimes we really do feel alone; sometimes the road is long and we get weary. I thought this week, which was kind of a heavy week for me, about [Psalm 51](#), where the psalmist prays, "**Restore to me the joy of your salvation.**" I don't know a single healthy Christian who doesn't have days when they pray that prayer.

We live in a dark world, and we have a very real enemy who wants to steal our joy in Christ.
So many things pull us out of being centered in joy..

That's why Paul says train your minds. Train them to connect in to what is true in Christ Jesus – not the lies of the enemy that are all around you that will drag you down.

Many of you know my son Jonathan is into baseball big time. And one of the trainings he went to that was so enlightening to him – taught by people involved in the major leagues was the *98% of the major league game is a mental game*. By the time you get to that level, you have the skill, you have the athletic ability, but its how you approach the game mentally that determines your success. Isn't that something?

Now there's something called home field advantage and as we're watching the GIANTS play in the World Series we are very aware that some of the games are played at AT&T park, but others are played in the (Tigers Ballfield). Now of course, the first part of home field advantage is that the home team gets to bat in the bottom of the ninth inning.

But the other part of the homefield advantage is that when players hear the people cheering, when they know the crowd is FOR them, they get excited too and feel pumped up; there is a certain momentum that takes over and there's more of a chance that someone is going to "hit it out of here".

That was so evident Monday night...and Wed. night...

But if the only time that a team would win, was when they were playing at home, it wouldn't be very suspenseful to watch, would it? In order to win when you are not at home...you've got to mentally train...to stay focused, to be confident, and to remember that even though no one in the opponents ball park is cheering, there is cheering around every TV and laptop and radio tuned into the game in San Francisco.

And knowing *that* even though you don't hear it in the opponents ballpark... helps the player who is focused and knows that the cheering is going on elsewhere...even though he can't hear it... hit the ball out of the park in the opponents territory...

We are living the Christian life in enemy territory...in an opponent's ballpark. The crowd may be silent when we make an amazing play at the plate ...we could get discouraged in well-doing...or.

we could remember Jesus' words: **"My kingdom is not of this world...but be of good cheer I have overcome the world"...**

The last thing Satan wants is for us to be so filled with joy, so encouraged in the Holy Spirit that when we are up to bat for the kingdom of God, when we are at the plate, we hit "it out of here". and ***Win the World...for Christ... Series...***

That's how Paul helps us in the book of Philippians. He doesn't just say "don't think negatively"...it's a sin. It separates you from God! Bad people!

That does not help at all. It's like if I asked you not to think about a rhinoceros. (Slide that says: **Don't think about a rhino!**) What are you all thinking about? A rhinoceros. But if I tell you now...think of a giraffe...chances are the rhino might be a little less prominent in your mind. You are thinking of a giraffe instead.

Paul redirects and focuses our minds on something better than worry and stress and fear and disappointment...and he says **TRAIN YOUR MIND** this way...as a parting shot in the book of Philippians he says..."**Finally, (in other words...I am leaving you with this last word to help you navigate through whatever trials you may be going through – train your mind to think about)...whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things.**"

And what's the result of doing all this?

"The God of peace will be with you."

R – Remember God's Faithfulness To You In The Past

E – Eliminate worry and fear for the future

J - Join with others in prayer and Bible study

O – Open your heart to the presence of the Holy Spirit daily

I - Imagine the celebration and cheering in heaven

**C - Choose joy by thinking on the things Paul mentions in
Philippians 4:8-9**

E - Enjoy the journey in enemy territory – God is for you!

May we be so filled with joy in the Holy Spirit that our lives would reflect the truth of the gospel and that whatever is true, and noble and right and pure and lovely and admirable, excellent and praiseworthy – that these things might fill our minds and in so doing we might have the mind of Christ.

Lets pray together.