

The Joy of All Things
Week 6: Phil. 2:17-30
The Joy of Serving
9/28/2014

Welcome/intro: expecting you, hoping you'd come—takes a lot of courage to walk into a new place, thanks for taking that step here today

If just joining us picked a great time to come, starting a new series called “The Joy of All Things”

As we go through a short little book in the Bible called Philippians here on Sunday mornings and in small groups and in our daily devotional

The title of this series is “The Joy of All Things”

because the book of Philippians invites and commands and celebrates joy and rejoicing more than any other book of the Bible

And to begin with we differentiated between *happiness* as a temporary experience based on circumstances

and *joy* as a permanent disposition of our hearts that remains in the midst of any circumstances

Paul, the guy who's writing this is in a JAIL CELL in the 1st century and jail-cells in the first century weren't exactly famous for their sparkling hospitality!

But while Paul's in jail, and he's raving on and on about joy—that has nothing to do with his circumstances and everything to do with something that's BIGGER than his circumstances

Last week we looked at a tremendous passage that celebrated the humility and sacrifice of Jesus—and we found that humility was a powerful pathway to real and lasting joy

TODAY we're going to talk about something related: the joy of serving

My family and I moved here two years ago to join y'all here at Chatham Community Church

And most everything about life in Chatham County has been simply outstanding with one minor first-world laziness problem: I hate going to the recycling center

A friend of mine and I were commiserating over our mutual disdain of the recycling center

And he was telling me how he has incorporated his kids into the recycling center run

after all in the olden days the reason why you HAD kids in the first place was to help you work the farm

Now his kids don't enjoy the recycling center run any more than he does, really, but one of them is particularly grumpy about it

And every week it was kind of this battle to get that kid to getting this thing done, badgering and nagging, etc.

And one day while in the midst of a run where they were kind of haggling back and forth, something dawned on the dad

This kid loves animals. And this kid ESPECIALLY has a heart for endangered animals—he reads books about it all the time, he's always talking about his concern for endangered animals

And so in a moment of sheer brilliant inspiration and genius, the dad STOPS saying "Help with the recycling"

And instead says "Let's go save some polar bears!"

And the dad connects the dots for this kid: when we do the recycling, it's making the world a better and safer and healthier place for the animals that you love and are all concerned about

Now perhaps it's a bit of a stretch that recycling a Coke can in Chatham County will save some polar bears in the arctic circle

but let's just call that a little parental license and give the dad a little space to exaggerate a bit for effect

And helping the kid understand how something that he was already committed to CONNECTED with this practice and behavior of recycling helped to re-frame the conversation and conflict

but someone needed to help connect those dots for that kid in order for him to really GET they "why" behind the what

Understanding and connecting the "WHY" behind what it is we're doing is really important for many of us

Next Sunday we're doing our twice a year event we call Chatham Serves—we cancel the service and we serve in the community

16 or more great projects led by some of our own incredible people

And for some of you, you're like that kid who didn't want to make the recycling center run.

And you need a “why” behind the what—you need the why behind Chatham Serves.

And not just Chatham Serves, you need a little help with the whole “why” behind serving others at all.

No matter where you are spiritually, many of us are resistant to serving other people, which makes the call to serve others sound like a lot of work!

This is me! If I was left to myself, without the influence of God or other people, I’d just assume NOT do much for other people—that’s my true confession, come back to that later

So those of us who are resistant need some help to understand the WHY behind serving

But I want to suggest to you that even those of you who *love* doing this kind of stuff that engaging just a little bit behind the ‘why’ might help you a bit as well

A number of months ago I was talking with someone who is a real do-er, loves to serve and I was asking HIM the why questions—why do you love to serve? What motivates you?

And he said to me he didn’t want to have to THINK about serving, he just wanted to DO it!

And I get that, but here’s why this is important: there’s this story in the Bible with Jesus and he’s visiting two sisters.

And one of the sisters is sitting at his feet, her name is Mary. And the other one is busy serving, her name is Martha.

And Martha gets grumpy about the fact that she’s the one doing all the serving and she says to Jesus, “tell my sister to help me!”

And you know what? Jesus REBUKES her. She’s BUSY SERVING, but she’s not serving from the right motivation and she’s caught up in all the wrong things

We can be busy serving and be busy doing all the wrong stuff—this is a stern warning to those of us who have a bias towards busyness, doing, and serving

Jesus seems to say that if we don’t have the right WHY in place
if our serving and giving of ourselves isn’t rooted in HIS something larger that energizes and animates what we do and points or steers us in the right direction

Then we can just compulsively do all kinds of things, even good things, for all the wrong reasons and that ends up making us sicker people and not healthier

I've known people who loved to serve other people because it put people in their debt.

They walked around feeling good because almost everyone they knew owed them something and they didn't owe anyone anything

It LOOKED good on the outside but really it ended up being all about POWER in their relationship OVER other people

this running tab of who owes who what was always open and everyone else was always in their debt.

And they wouldn't accept help from anyone else and they'd always keep everyone at arms length

It looked like serving on the outside, but it actually ends up being about THEM

I've seen other people who served out of obligation and duty.

You just have a deep sense of obligation and duty, this is what SHOULD be done, what OUGHT to be done

And at some level you're willing to do it but at a deeper level you just have this deep sense of obligation and guilt if you don't help out

so you saddle up and serve because if you don't nobody else will and there's this need and you've got this little voice in your head that says you've got to do it

And for you there's a sense of relief when you just check that box and move on—thank goodness that's over! Suggest to you THAT's not the path to joy!

Some of us are just people-pleasers. And we want and need people to like us. So we SERVE other people but we don't do it to serve and bless THEM

We do it because we want THEM to like us! So I need you to like me to help me to feel good about me

So I'm going to serve you to trick you into liking me by serving you—which is basically just a form of manipulation.

I want to suggest to you that none of those motives for serving are the path to joy and that for all of us taking just a few minutes here this morning to think about the “why” behind our serving would be helpful

So that our activity actually results NOT JUST in us doing good stuff but that our activity might result in us becoming good people, generating real joy at the deep places in our lives

The Scriptures declare that there IS a joy available to us in serving
but to GET to the joy in our serving, we're gonna have to make sure that
we've got a real clear and good WHY behind our serving—if we can get rooted in the
right “why” the Scriptures say we'll know the joy on the other side of our serving

Today it just so happens that in the next section of Philippians Paul is going to
celebrate the people of Philippi and thank them for their service

He's going to rejoice over not only THAT they've served but note WHY they've
served and in the process he's going to help us to and give us the why of serving that
leads to real joy

Bible/no Bible/free Bible

***...even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service
coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you. ¹⁸ So you too should
be glad and rejoice with me.***

-Phil 2:17-18

My brother was in town this past week from San Francisco, he's a seminary
professor at Fuller Seminary
and he was talking about a former student of his who is incredibly gifted and
has an incredibly dynamic personality

And what he said about this guy is that he's this total-package over-achiever, the
football captain, homecoming king kind of guy with all these gifts

Who somehow along the way decided that advancing OTHER people and sharing
and partnering with other people was what he was all about
He uses his gifts to put other people front and center

Paul here in the imagery he uses puts the Philippians front and center with himself
as a sort of side-note

When we get to the end of Philippians what we discover is that the Philippians have
given and given generously to support Paul in his ministry
And that part of the whole reason why Paul writes this letter is as a thank-
you note to the Philippians for their gift

And so Paul here celebrates their sacrifice and service coming from their faith

He's using the religious ritual language of sacrifice, and the main sacrifice, the center
stage event is the sacrifice and service that's come from the Philippians faith
And Paul's being poured out like a drink offering.

I had to do some research on how this functioned but in the Old Testament you get these main offerings on the altar that are these sacrifices of bulls or goats or lambs or even food

And then alongside that main offering, around the altar or during the ceremony but NOT on top of the sacrifice were these drink offerings, a pouring out of wine around the altar as a part of the ritual

So Paul here celebrates the sacrifice and service of the Philippians, with himself as sort of the side-note

What an incredibly generous perspective on the gift that they gave Paul considering that Paul's the guy in jail, who started not only this church but dozens of others of churches and his life might be on the line here

And for our purposes here, it's important to see that Paul celebrates that their sacrifice and service is coming from a specific location: *coming from your faith*

There are two important principles for us to grab a hold of here as it relates to FAITH:

1. True faith always results in sacrifice and serving

Last week we looked at the humility and the sacrifice of Jesus—that he was in very nature God but didn't grasp at power or position or authority

But rather used his power to lower himself and to become a servant to provide everything we need for us

And really knowing and embracing and experiencing this provision of grace from God is crucial to free us to serve for those of us who struggle to do so

I was talking this week with someone about the whole idea of serving and why sometimes most of us are resistant to it

And she said "when my mindset and my life feels like I'm operating out of scarcity or lack of margin then it's hard for me to serve others."

"But when I'm more connected to Jesus, and I live out of this deeper, truer reality that I'm provided for in him, then that gets me out of this scarcity mentality and into a place of abundance."

"And when I've got a sense of abundance and when abundance is the place that I'm living, THEN I feel like I've got more margin and energy to serve others."

If we're following Jesus, we've been given the gift of adoption into God's family. We are in God's family and heirs to an eternal kingdom and so we are abundantly and extravagantly provided for

And if we're allowing Jesus and letting His Spirit shape our lives and shape our mindsets and give us His attitude toward people in this world
then we're going to become the kind of people who serve and sacrifice
Because that's what he did.

In the passage we just read, Paul declares and celebrates the sacrifice and service coming from their faith

If we have faith in that God, and if that faith isn't off in the margins or kind of a side-note in our lives but if it's the core animating energy for our entire lives

Then it will generate this specific outcome: a life that is marked by sacrifice and service

I have friends who are so funny that I can't be around them and not come away laughing

I have friends who are such good listeners that I can't be around them and not come away feeling heard

I have friends who have such deep and thoughtful convictions about things that I can't be around them and not be challenged in some way

If we know and hang around with and follow and trust in Jesus who is THE humble, self-giving servant in the cosmos
then we can't be around him and not be shaped more into servants just like him

True faith always results in sacrifice and serving in some way

The second thing that's true from this text is this:

2. God's purposes for the work of serving are most perfectly fulfilled when serving comes from faith

Think of it this way: dads, there are two different ways or reasons or motivations behind why we can spend more time with our kids

One is because we love them and the other is because our wives bug us about spending more time with our kids—out of obligation or to get your wife off your back

Which one is the healthier motivation for spending time with your kids? Love for the kids is the better motivation for spending time with the kids

Now the reality is that for the most part, spending time with the kids is a good thing even if your motives stink

Spending time with your kids out of obligation is better than not spending time with them at all

But when we do the right thing from the wrong motives a couple things happen

First, the people around us can usually tell.

Our KIDS, for sure, are often much smarter and much more perceptive than we give them credit for

And second, the kind of person we're becoming underneath the activity is totally different

If I'm spending time with my kids out of obligation because my wife is bugging me about it

Then when it's over I'm this weird mixture of both relieved to be done and I feel very self-righteous and proud about all of it

Look at me, I've done my duty, I might even be under the self-deception that I'm a spectacular father and human being because I'm so very dutiful

And over time, doing things strictly out of obligation and not out of love, you know what that generates?

You do know, because you've either experienced it or know someone who has

Anger, bitterness, self-righteousness, a feeling of being hemmed in and piled on feeling like you've worked and served and nobody's recognized you, nobody's realized all you've done for them or for others

Some of you have people in your life who say those kinds of things regularly; others of us hear those voices complaining in your head all the time, don't we?

You can spend time with your kids out of love for them or out of guilt or obligation and it might LOOK the same on the outside

But the person you're becoming underneath the activity are two completely different people

If we're doing the right thing from the wrong motives then the person that we're becoming underneath that activity is not the man or woman God designed us to be

In fact, it's often the exact OPPOSITE, it's often reinforcing all our worst internal-world traits:

pride, self-righteousness, self-pity, increased frustration with the people around us who AREN'T doing all that we're doing

This matters because God cares more about who we're BECOMING than he cares about WHAT WE'RE DOING

Of course the DOING matters, but the more important piece is the question of who we are BECOMING

All of us are becoming beings, we're all becoming something, all of us are on a path or a trajectory toward becoming more of something—be that healthier and more alive, or more un-healthy, more broken

Last week I told you about the authors who have influenced me along the way and I shared a quote from one of them, Dallas Willard, and I've got another one this week that captures what we're talking about

He says that in Jesus' run-ins with the religious leaders in his day, the fundamental conflict was over the nature of goodness

The Pharisees and the religious leaders defined goodness as doing good things; Jesus defined it as becoming good people.

And there's a world of difference between those two things

God designed our faith in him to be the motivation behind how we serve and why we serve.

And when that's the HEART work behind the ACTIVITY that we're doing, THEN the activity works to make us the good people he intends for us to become.

Now at some point we'll have to do some heavy-lifting about the idea of faith because for some of you this is a major obstacle to this whole thing

But for now, let's just do some light-lifting around what faith is and how it works to frame up and properly motivate our serving and doing

Throughout the Scriptures *faith* is both the mechanism by which we know and experience God [***how we connect with God***]

AND it's the mechanism by which we act in obedience in our lives [***how we live our life for and with God***]

Faith is both the vertical work of a relationship with God, a connection with God, as we grow in trusting him and knowing him and his character

AND faith is the horizontal work of living it out, we live by faith, we act by faith, we serve and we sacrifice by faith

And it has three components to it: past, present, and future

As it relates to the **past**, we have FAITH in what God has done for us in Jesus.

I have faith in Jesus' life, death, resurrection—grace upon grace poured out for us from God in Jesus

The work of God on my behalf that reconciles me TO God

Faith as it relates to the **present** is all about gathering up that past and applying it to our today in real-time:

I have faith that not only has God acted in Jesus 2,000 years ago, he's the most real acting agent in the world right now this very moment

I'm leaning into his presence even if I can't see it, even where it's confusing or hard or I'm struggling to believe it

Having faith is believing that grace isn't just a past event but a present reality that shapes our lives moment-by-moment.

And we're embracing that grace, living into it, enjoying it, speaking about it to others, leaning into it here and now by faith

But faith also has a **future** element to it. Hebrews 11 defines faith this way: ***Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.***

And then that same passage goes on and on to celebrate people all throughout history

who have acted BY FAITH, IN FAITH on the promises of God, like Noah, who builds an ark when God tells him to, even though he lives in the desert!

Hope is always about the future, isn't it?

Not only is there grace in the past in Jesus's life, death, and resurrection, and NOT ONLY is there grace active in real-time in our lives now

But ALSO there's this enormous grace that we're hoping for, we have a whole host of promises from God that we've hooked our lives into
and that's part of what motivates us into obedience

I remember hearing someone speak once about how he moved from a Christian going through the motions and just doing the religious thing

To a real spiritual awakening in his life, you know what he did? He went through the New Testament and started cataloguing all the promises that he could apply to himself in there.

He listed every promise of God that has been made to us and then he said what he did was he “hooked his life into those promises.”

Promises like “if you lose your life, you’ll find it.”

There’s an if-then conditional clause here: if I trust Jesus and walk in his ways, he’s promising me that I’ll find real life in his name.

Promises like “Behold, I am making all things new!” There’s this promise that YOU will be made new, that YOU will know and be made perfect

AND there’s this rich promise that very much applies to Chatham Serves that everything that is created will be made new.

And as we serve next week, together we’re participating in and looking forward to the day when everything will be made new, when Chatham County will be made new

Faith is the assurance of things hoped for: I’m hoping in the tremendous grace of God coming at me and waiting for me in the future
and I RECEIVE God’s grace and EXPERIENCE it in my life in particular ways
as I take steps of OBEDIENCE

Faith operates looking backward at the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus
it operates in our present as we trust him and lean into his presence in our lives in real-time
and faith looks forward to the future with hope and trust that as we take steps of faith, God delights to meet us all along the way, our experience of grace grows richer ahead of us as we take walk in his

So when Paul talks here about ***the sacrifice and service coming from your faith,***

This service is motivated by faith in what God did for us 2,000 years ago: I look at Jesus, he was a servant, I’m called to be a servant, too

Service by faith is also fueled by faith at work in the present: God’s grace is at work in my life right now and I’ve been taken care of! I live in real-time in the abundance of God’s gracious provision

And service is fueled by faith in God’s promises for the future: that when we serve by faith there’s more life waiting for us

Promises like “whoever loses their life for Jesus’ sake will FIND it again.” If we serve by faith in Jesus, we look ahead to the promises of Jesus

Trusting that as we serve in his name, we meet Jesus. And as we meet Jesus, as we walk in step with him, in HIM and in His presence is all the peace and joy in the cosmos

That’s the serving that has been generated by faith

When THAT kind of serving happens, there’s a straight line between meeting Jesus, knowing Jesus, worshipping Jesus
and SERVING as the natural next-step and natural extension of our worship

I want to land the plane by thinking about how we might integrate God’s “why” into our serving
and hopefully this will be helpful for all of us, no matter where you are spiritually or what you do or don’t believe—invite everyone into this process

First, ***if you’re resistant to serving***, if this whole serving others thing is just hard for you, I encourage you to ***find the why behind your resistance***

When I just don’t want to do something, typically what I think is “I just don’t WANNA!” and that’s enough, end of conversation—I’m bowing to my lack of desire to serve

But for this week can you try something: can you name the why behind the what?

I hear that you just don’t WANNA serve, but can you dig just another level behind that and ask WHY you don’t wanna do this?

Is the source of your resistance a sense of scarcity?

You just feel swamped and overwhelmed with your own life, you don’t have bandwidth to do anything about anyone else’s?

Is it laziness? Is it pride? Is it selfishness? Is it just not important to you?

You might not know yet, or you might be embarrassed to even think about it or say it out loud

you might be shocked at what you find if you take a step into your resistance to find the why behind it

but it’s helpful to actually name and articulate the why: why am I resistant to serving?

Second step, once you’ve surfaced that why: are you willing to ***pray and offer it to God?***

Even if you're not especially religious or don't even know what prayer is or why people do it—just give it a shot this week

Once you've named the why behind your resistance, offer that up to God in a short prayer

God, the honest truth is I'm pretty lazy when it comes to serving others and I just don't want to do it—can you work with that? Can you start to change that?

In most instances, PRAYER is the place where internal transformation starts to happen

This past week in my small group we were talking about this whole idea of cooperating with God's work in our lives

And over and over again we came back to the things that hold us back:

we're afraid of what God might want to do to us, what he might take away, what he might want us to do, who he might want us to become

And we talked about how at the core of much of that is all about control and not wanting to give up control

But we all agreed that the only way to really experience the fullness of life that God has for us, is for us to be willing to cooperate and participate in the work he wants to do in our lives

God wants you to know HIS permanent joy, including the joy of serving. You can trust him!

there is joy waiting for us on the other side of serving but we have to follow him down that path and do it in his way

Lastly: *serve*.

For those of us who are resistant to serving, if we waited for every motive to be lined up just perfectly, we'd never get around to doing it

But if we are willing to open ourselves up to the work of God in our hearts and minds and our motives

then the DOING can be a big part of that changing and shaping

A couple of years ago I was talking with someone who had been stuck in depression for a long while

And the thing that helped to lift her OUT of that depression was this sense that she was supposed to be serving others

So she took a small step toward serving in her local community and doing that helped her to get traction out of her pit
serving was the tool that lifted her out of her depression, or at least was the start of her exit

That serving happened in the larger context of prayer and opening herself up to God's work in her heart

God was willing to help her but the doing was a part of the re-shaping, the activity was going to be a part of the re-making

Sometimes God does a work to change our hearts simply through prayer, study, and confession of our brokenness and our need for him

More often, it STARTS with the internal world of confession and thoughts and prayer and study

But often what that does is create a CONTEXT where your ACTIONS can now be an active part of your transformation

If you're resistant to serving and you just suck it up and serve, it might go any number of ways: make you resentful or grumpy and never want to do THAT again OR it JUST MIGHT help you overcome your resistance

But if you take a little time to do a little bit of tilling the soil of your heart by doing some internal work of asking the Lord to take your resistance and do his work with it, it creates a soft and teachable heart

Where your actions can now participate in the work of God.

So that when you act it is much more likely to be beneficial, much more likely to make you the kind of person that God wants you to become underneath the activity

Find the why behind your resistance. Pray and offer that why and the source of your resistance to the Lord. Then serve, and see what happens!

If you're more of a *natural do-er*, again, this whole conversation might be a bit annoying to you
most do-ers I know would rather just do stuff and not have to think too much about it

But bear with me for just a moment because Jesus knew and loved someone just like you

And there was some work that he needed to do in her heart to reset and re-center her doing around his being

So here's a little work for you to do:

1. Name the why behind your doing.

Why do you love doing?

Some of you can draw a clear line between your relationship with Jesus, your gifts and interests, and your serving—it's not that hard or complicated

But for others of you, you've never really thought about this and I want to help you.

Do you love to do simply out of compulsion? Is it people-pleasing? Is it obligation? Is it just what you've always done and what you were taught to do?

Is there some sort of weird power thing or pride in it for you?

You know how you can tell if it's some sort of weird power thing or pride thing?

If you ALWAYS have to be the one who GIVES help and can NEVER ACCEPT help, then that's not healthy.

YOU were NOT made to be the PERPETUAL GIVER!

If you're always the GIVER and cannot accept or ask for help

then serving for you has become a smokescreen or a tool of some sort to keep people at a distance or in your debt or get them to like you

but it's not the serving that comes from faith, it's not an extension of your relationship with Jesus or an extension of your worship

The Jesus-picture of a healthy serving is someone who can BOTH give AND receive from one another in inter-dependent unity and sharing

2. Offer any unhealthy motives to the Lord

My name is Alex and I'm a recovering lazy people-pleaser!

So serving and doing for others doesn't always come naturally to me, I've had to ask Jesus to help me overcome my laziness and natural tendency toward selfishness

And then when I do serve others, because I've naturally got a strong people-pleasing streak in me

I have often done so with the goal of getting people's approval rather than as an extension and outworking of my faith

So I have to ask the Lord to take that part of me and redeem it, cleanse it, to purify me and my motives so that when I'm serving people I'm actually serving them not just using them to prop me up

Because serving out of false or faulty motives over the long-run is NOT the path to real joy, only serving out of faith, hope, and love does that

So I confess my selfish and mixed motives to the Lord

3. Serve.

Because that's what you were made to do, what God gifted you to do, and Jesus invites you into it and the world needs it!

Let's serve, freely and joyfully and recklessly! Let's plunge in with joy and in faith, knowing that the God who served us and blesses us and equips us and calls us to serve

He's faithful to bless our serving, bless our doing as we offer it back up to him, thank him for the gifts he's given to us

And knowing that as we open ourselves up to his work in our lives, he's good to go to work to shape our hearts and root us in his power and his story that bears the fruit of joy in our lives

Next Sunday, Chatham Serves, it's a great and fun day, full of opportunities to enter into the joy of serving.

My prayer for those of us who are resistant is that we might overcome our internal resistance to serving, offering that up to the Lord, and then come ready to meet with him as we serve—that we might experience the joy of serving

And that for those of you who love this stuff, you might do a quick heart-check before you come, offering to the Lord anything that's not healthy inside of you that might need to be purified or cleansed

So that when you come next Sunday, you're not only ready on the OUTSIDE to serve, but you're ready to enter into and enjoy the fully joy of serving deep on the inside.

PRAY