

JOY AND THE PEOPLE I'M WITH

Philippians 1:27–2:30

Dr. George O. Wood

Philippians 1:27 and we'll be looking through the end of the second chapter (2:30). I'm using an outline that was developed by Scripture Press called "The Life of Continual Rejoicing." This one has a real helpful way of looking at Paul's letter to the Philippians. The message this evening is "Joy and the People I'm With."

The letter of Paul to the Philippians is a letter that deals with relationships. In fact, when you look carefully within the letter itself, you can pick up at least four reasons why Paul wrote the Philippian letter. All the reasons relate to relationships. A priority in the letter is to give them a thank you for the gift, the financial gift, they sent by hands of a gentleman by the name of Epaphroditus. We'll talk about him later. That little thank you note is tucked away in 4:18. But in many senses, the whole letter is a lengthy thank you note.

Then he also wants to tell them of Epaphroditus' welfare. Another aspect of relationship, while he's writing the letter. This gentleman who has brought the letter has brought it in spite of great personal danger and has fallen ill. He wants the Philippians to know how their close friend and leader in the church at Philippi is doing.

Then thirdly, Paul wants, by way of relationship, to share with them his own welfare. They have perhaps heard many stories about his prison experience in Rome. He is concerned to tell them how he is doing and what his inner spirit is like. He doesn't do just one of these cliché kinds of things of, "I'm fine, thank you." He really lets us in on his inner life.

Then the fourth thing that motivates Paul to write to the Philippians was that there is an interpersonal problem in the Philippian church. It comes out in 4:2. It is between two very strong

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women leaders in the congregation named Euodia and Syntyche. I have a personal suspicion that a great deal of the early part of the Philippian letter is directed to these two strong leaders. And that Paul, by allusion and in inference and by hinting, is trying to get at a resolution to this loggerhead problem that is in these two ladies in the church.

Therefore, this letter deals with human relationships. There are several aspects to human relationships that we will look at as we break this passage down for study tonight.

I. The first thing I'd like for us to look at, in 1:27 through 2:11, is the stresses discerned in human relationships.

There are two kinds of stresses that were on the Philippian believers, that Paul talked about, that are on us as well. There is opposition from the outside and there is tension from within.

A. The opposition from the outside, that is, a stress on relationships, is spoken of in verses 27–30, where Paul exhorts them to conduct themselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then verse 28, “without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you” (NIV). They’re to do this by standing firm in one’s spirit.

It was not easy for them to live for Christ in Philippi. There were stresses. There was danger.

There was opposition. As it so happens when there are people who oppose us and people who are ugly to us, it is very conceivable that we can become ugly in our own spirit. That we can become bitter. And we can blame God or blame other people that there is such pressure in our life. I

know I am not always the happiest of persons when I am under a full set of external pressures. I have the kick-the-dog kind of mentality, the displaced anger—one thing acting upon another.

When we are dumped on in society and dumped on in our work and when we’re under a lot of pressure and stress, we need, most of all, to hear Paul’s words in our interpersonal relationships, to live a life that is worthy of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

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How do we live? What is the tone in our voice? What is the characteristic response we have when asked to do something when we least feel like doing it? Stresses on the outside can affect our attitudes, our actions, and our speech. It may be that what a relationship that you are involved in most needs is some communication to occur, and some consideration to happen. Maybe in the world in which you live, you feel like the stuffing is being knocked out of you. It means you have to go the extra mile to open the doorway of communication.

The great thing I appreciate about Jesus, in watching how He related to His disciples, is that the more the stress was on Him, the more He carved out time to spend with His own and the people who were closest to Him. That is in reverse of what I often do. When we're most under the gun, we don't carve out that time that is necessary for the significant relationships in our life.

These Philippians had been met with persecution. But Paul is urging them, nevertheless, to stand firm in one's spirit, contending for the faith, not to be frightened. That they are going through the same struggle there in the midst of that to be worthy of the gospel.

B. Paul also knows that, not only are they (and we) going through stresses from the outside, but we have tension within. Tensions within close personal relationships. Paul heads in to talking about those tensions in a very discrete way, by saying, "If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, any comfort from his love" (Philippians 2:1, NIV). Are you encouraged by being united with Christ? Are you comforted by His love? Maybe your relational levels are not ones that are feeding you a great deal of warm fuzzies. Paul writes to people who can know the comfort. Do you have the fellowship of His Spirit and tenderness and compassion? Paul says, "[If these things are present] then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in

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humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others” (Philippians 2:2–4, NIV).

Fellowship is destroyed by a selfish spirit. I’ve come to this conclusion when thinking of selfishness, and that’s kind of what Paul is broaching here. In the midst of the stresses that are on your life, relationships and fellowship gets injured when we only look at it from “What’s in it for me?” What am I getting out of this?” I’ve come to the conclusion, looking at the whole theme of selfishness, that by and large, selfish people do not seem to recognize their own selfishness. It is as though you can give a message and take a portion of the Bible and hold it up as a mirror and the selfish person, for one reason or another, has a blockage and cannot see themselves. So when you say “selfish,” that individual goes away from the service saying to someone else in their family, “Did you hear that message? It was directed straight at you!”

Several indicators of selfish people: Boasting is a mark of selfishness. A continuance—almost a compulsive need—to concentrate on what’s happening with you rather than what’s happening with someone else, talking all the time rather than listening some of the time. I think selfish people by and large tend to be stingy. You will find this at Christmas time and other times. What can we get by least with, in order to meet the social conventions necessary with giving? Selfish people find it difficult to be generous. I think sometimes their giving is more in the order of “Throw the dog a bone” kind of variety, that says, “How can we keep this person from biting us another year? Giving them the minimal of bone.” And selfish people are highly critical. They focus on the changes they would like to see others make and insist that their life would be happier if only other people would make these changes. Sometimes, the selfish person may have some self-analysis, but more likely the selfish person is not so much critical of themselves. It is insisting that “Things would be different if you would change.” Then selfish people often are

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two-faced and sneaky, because they're out for number one. They'll do things behind your back. Their attitude is often, "What have you done for me lately?"

Paul is saying, "In your life, stay away from that." "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves" (verse 3, NIV). That goes all the way to something as simple as the chores around the house. Paul is saying, "You can settle the stress from within by taking the attitude of a servant and by being humble."

II. A second part in this treatise of joy and the people I'm with is not only discerning the stresses, but learning the secret of living with the stress (verses 5–11).

The secret of living with the stresses that injure relationships, whether they are stresses from the outside or tensions from inside, is to have the same attitude as Jesus Christ. Paul says, "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:5–11, NIV). This, it is thought, was a hymn of the Early Church. That's why in the Bible you'll find it in new translations in poetic verse. It's also been used as a great theological statement on Christ. A whole theory of Christ emerged from it called "the emptying of Christ." Theologians have discussed what is meant in the emptying of Christ—when He became obedient to death. Did He empty himself of all divine attributes? This statement about Jesus is a fantastic statement about His nature—that He is fully God and fully man. Paul, in the Greek language, makes a very

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distinct difference between two Greek words: *morphe* and *schema*, that we would identify in the English language as “morphology,” and “scheme” or “schematic.” The word “morphology” means “study of form or structure.” And for the Greeks, that was a form or structure that was basic, essential, and unalterable. “Schema,” a synonym, represented that aspect of form which was transitional and changing. When they applied to a human being, for example, maleness or femaleness would be *morphe*. But my *schema*, my outward appearance, is under continual change. What I looked like when I was five, that *schema* has changed. What is intriguing about Paul’s statement in respect to Jesus is that he says He was in the very nature, the *morphe* of God. The essential, unalterable structure of God. He took the very nature, *morphe*, of a servant, a slave that He, in every respect, is fully God and fully man. In being in the *morphe* of a slave, He took on the *schema* of maleness, the outward appearance of man—in His basic identity and nature, He was human—a servant. He describes Jesus emptying out. In the human relationships, someone has to give.

Someone has to love enough to make human relationships successful, that they will, if necessary, die for the other person, or maybe sometimes the hardest thing to do is to live for the other person. But the great thing about this theological statement is that Paul never intended it in writing—in the context of Philippians—to serve as some sort of theological text. This little statement was meant to serve as a guidebook to relationships. What I think he really did in including it was sort of begin to inch in to this controversy that comes up later in Philippians 4, between Euodia and Syntyche, who won’t budge and have very fixed opinions and are like two bulls in a pasture that are ready to lock horns—neither of them is going to give up their turf. So before Paul heads into that problem, he is coming at it sideways. Someone has said they’d rather sideswipe a bull any day than meet it head on. So he’s coming at it sideways. He’s saying, “How

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did Christ relate to you?” There was an absence of a limit in Christ’s nature and love. He became obedient, which was for Him “obedient unto death.” In any step in this ladder of descent of this emptying process, Christ could have said, “This is all the further I’m going to go. I’m going to go this far and that’s the limit to which I’ll let myself be pushed.” He could have said, “I don’t mind leaving the glories of heaven, although it’s difficult, but don’t send Me as a servant. If I leave heaven, the least I ought to go as is a prince or a king.” But when He leaves heaven, He becomes a servant. He could have said, “If I’m going to become a servant. That’s where it’s going to end. I’ll stop at being a servant. But I will not suffer. It’s one thing to be a servant; it’s another thing to suffer.” But He didn’t stop there, with being a servant. He didn’t say, “I’ll suffer, but I’m unwilling to die. Especially not the death of crucifixion.” But He didn’t stop there. He went all the way, no limits to His love. An absence of living life with a limit.

We will do well in relationships if we learn the secret of living with relational stresses. That glory of being able to give up ourselves without doing it in a compromising way. There are times when we have to stand our ground in order to preserve a relationship. I’m not counseling softness all the time and simply “give in and let someone else have their way.” But there is a spirit and a mentality of the crucified life that is able to look at our own motives and say, “Why am I holding out for this? Why am I so strong in this position? Is Christ calling me, at this particular moment in my life, to die to self and to follow Him to the cross, that I might give life to this relationship?” Therefore, we need to know that there are no limits upon our relationship. We might say to the Lord, “I’ll do anything You want me to do. Just don’t ask me to do that.” That’s putting a limit. Or “Lord, I want to love everybody. Just don’t ask me to love...” then fill in the blank. Or “Lord, I’ll forgive, but I don’t want anything more to do with her/him.” The absence of a limit.

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I find that great Christians find it very easy to slip along and do unnoticed things. Things that you wouldn't expect for someone that was really serving the Lord with such distinction. Lord, help us to be willing to do the quiet, nameless, unremembered acts of kindness and love. Jim Elliott, the martyr to the Auca Indians, prayed a prayer that described so eloquently this emptying process. He said, "Father, let me be weak, that I might lose my clutch on everything temporal—my life, my reputation, my possessions. Lord, let me lose the tension of the grasping hand." Isn't it amazing how God gave him the opportunity to do that?

The Lord's love for the Father and the Lord's love for us knew no limit. His hand was open. Jesus never came into life with a clutching hand. He never tried to clutch anything. On the cross, you will not find Him with a clutched fist, but you will find Him having died the way He lived—with an open hand. The mind of Christ is one of utter selflessness. What happened to Him was not fair, but He, in the words of Peter, "was clothed with humility" (1 Peter 5:5) as with a slave's apron. Relationships prosper when we really seek to serve one another.

III. A third thing about joy and the people I am with: not only discerning the stresses and learning the secret of living with the stresses, but serving with the absence of a limit.

There is a sequel desired (verse 12–18). Once this change comes as a result of the giving life, the sacrificial life wants to produce some things in the lives of the Philippians and us. Philippians 2:5–11 is somewhat doctrinal in modeling the identity of Christ, who became man and went to the cross. Every doctrinal section has an application section and a practical section. Doctrine is meant to relate to duty. What we believe is intended to influence how we behave. If we really believe certain things about Jesus, then what we believe has got to affect how we live. That's why Paul, in verse 12, starts out with "therefore."

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I once heard an Episcopalian minister who preached a sermon. He was about ninety years of age and clear as a tack. He preached a sermon on the word “therefore.” He went through the major passages of the New Testament where that word is used, and showed in almost every major passage where the word “therefore” was used, that it is sort of like a funnel. Everything coming into it has been doctrinal. Now that we know what we are to believe, then the connection is made: Here is how we are to behave. Since this is true, then this should be done—whereas, then, therefore.

Paul now is seeking a certain sequel in the lives of the Philippians. Some of the things that he is looking for, as continuing progress and convincing witness and a demonstration of his teaching.

A. First, a continuing progress. “Therefore, my dear friends” (Philippians 2:12, NIV). He doesn’t say, “Therefore, you slow learners.” One thing I appreciate about the apostle Paul is that, in dealing with people, he’s never talking down to them. I suppose when you consider yourself the chiefest of sinners, you don’t ever look down at people. We need more of that kind of humility in the body of Christ. But he wants continuing progress. He says, “As you’ve always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling” (NIV). Paul here is not speaking of salvation in the sense of being saved from sin. He’s thinking about salvation in the terms of emerging as a more whole person. He’s saying that requires investment and work. Salvation that involves forgiveness of sins, that’s bought for us at the cross. It’s free and we don’t earn it. So we’re not working out our own salvation in the sense that we’re doing something to get on God’s good side. God will never love me better than He loves me right now. He will never love me better than He loved me on the cross. He will never love me better than He loved me when, as a ten-year-old boy, out of fear of

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going to hell, I gave my life to Him. His love will never increase. It has no need to, because right from the moment He found me and I found Him, His love for me has been complete.

So I don't need to earn acceptance with God. I've already been given acceptance, and you have too. That's hard for us to learn psychologically, because we so often feel like we've got to do something to get in better standing with God. If we understand the gospel, we understand that Christ has given us all the standing we need. We have all of God's love given to us, completely and totally, without any reservation at all.

So what is this "work out your own salvation"? It is the deliverance and the process of wholeness that comes into our life as we follow Christ. The salvation in the Philippian context has to do with continuing to serve the Lord faithfully in the midst of stresses. Stresses on the outside and stresses on the inside. Those kinds of stresses can kill us and make us less of a person. The possibility always exists that we can be physically maimed and the possibility that in life we can become spiritually and emotionally and psychologically maimed.

Therefore, our salvation, in the sense of being the whole person Christ wants, may be incomplete, because we have somehow, along in our development, been injured. That continuing progress we need to make in our life involves our input, because we're not passive people. God didn't make us to be passive. We need to get around Scripture and around God's people and growing people and good resources and reach out for every help we can get. That's kind of what Paul's talking about. At the same time, he says, "While you're at work, God is working. God is working in you. You're working, and God is working, to will and to do, according to His good purpose."

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I think it's a sign of maturity in these Philippian believers that progress is being made in their lives in spite of Paul's absence. That's a mark that he did a wonderful job of pastoring this church, that they're growing after he's left. He wants continuing progress as a sequel.

B. A second thing he wants, in verses 14–18, is a convincing witness in the world.

This convincing witness consists of three dimensions. It consists of an absence of grumbling (verse 14). “Do everything...” Paul, don't you mean “most things,” “some things,” “a majority of things”? But did Paul really mean “Do everything”? Yes, everything! “Do everything without complaining or arguing” (NIV). That's the ideal. Is anybody here at the ideal? This is a problem for me. The word for “arguing” means the person who wants to talk back to you. If they can't talk back, they're going to snarl at you with their attitude or the tonal level of their voice. An absence of grumbling and complaining.

That is a convincing witness to the world. People who can be counted upon to pick up the cross without calling attention to the heavy load they carry.

Then Paul wants the presence of purity as another aspect of a convincing witness (verse 15).

“[Don't argue and complain] so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe” (NIV). Isn't that glorious language? Paul notes the three aspects of purity in the Christian's life.

The Christian is to be blameless. This describes what a Christian is to others. When the word is used, it can be used of a piece of metal in which there is no snag or flaw or no fault line. If you try to get a hold of it, it's so smooth your hand will slide right down it. There are no protrusions in it. It is blameless. Paul says, “Make this the goal of your Christian life.” And, by the way, that is a requirement for leadership in the church, that there not even be a suspicion of scandal in

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respect to leadership. Be blameless. What you are to the world—nothing in your life is protruding and snagging and catching others.

Then he says, “Be pure.” This is what a Christian is in themselves. Purity is unadulterated. It’s not part world, part Christian. It’s living the Lord without any hypocrisy. Paul is saying to the Philippian believers, as he’s saying to us: “Let your life be a pure one. Don’t dilute it with that which is hurting you.”

Then he says another aspect of purity is that we’re without fault or blemish. This, I think, is what a Christian is in the sight of God, what Christ makes us before Him. That blamelessness and purity and without fault nature makes the stars shine in a crooked and perverse generation. So Paul wants a sequel of continuing progress, a convincing witness, and then a demonstration of teaching (verse 16–18). In his own personal life, he’s demonstrating how this sequel is working out with him. “As you hold out the word of life—in order that I may boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor for nothing. But 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. So you too should be glad and rejoice with me” (Philippians 2:16–18, NIV).

They’re seeing a demonstration of living with joy in relationships lived out in Paul. He describes his life as a Christian as both a race and a libation. A race is something that you enter knowing that you have a goal. The Christian race is not a sprint. It is more in the nature of a marathon. One must stay the course. Paul is urging these Philippian believers to stay the course, even as he’s staying the course.

He says, as he looks ahead in the future, he’s discovering that his life is being poured out as a libation. That’s a word that we don’t use much in our culture. So we have to take a moment and think about what a libation was. In the times in which Paul lived, a libation was a very common

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word. It was the most common form of sacrifice among the pagans. It simply involved a lifting of a glass of wine and pouring it out in honor of a god in every meal, every public banquet, every civic banquet, every meal within a home that had a formal ring to it—some kind of a libation, where a drink was poured out to the god.

Paul says, “My life is like that. I’m living my life poured out to God. I’m continually pouring it out. I’m not saving it. I’m giving it away in this marathon race.” He’s asking the believers to do this. Continuing progress and a convincing witness is essential in our personal life and in the body of Christ, if we’re to have wholesome relationships.

IV. Then Paul has not only talked about the stresses and the secret of living with the stresses and the sequel desired in us, but he also closes this particular section telling us about the samples displayed (verse 29–30).

He singles out persons who are close to him who model the kinds of things in personal relationships that he is asking of the Philippians.

A. One thing he is asking is the kind of unselfish concern that Timothy demonstrates, “I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. I have no one else like him, who takes a genuine interest in your welfare. For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel. I hope, therefore, to send him as soon as I see how things go with me. And I am confident in the Lord that I myself will come soon” (Philippians 2:19–24, NIV).

“I have no one like Timothy who will look out for others’ welfare.” There are many motives people have for doing things in the Lord’s work. Some of them are selfish in orientation—but not Timothy. It’s such a badge of honor to be a person in the kingdom of God that others can

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look to as a person who can be absolutely relied on to pursue what's best and not what's selfish. They'll always put the good of others and the good of the whole in front of their own good.

When you have that kind of modeling going on in the body, there's health and there's life in the body. When people are trying to put themselves first, then there are divisions.

Timothy was one of these unique people who are content to be themselves—and not feel like he was a failure, because he wasn't like Paul. There's this whole thing that happens in the Christian life, where we have so many models of success paraded before us in the media and in the church, that we sometimes get the idea "I'm not a successful Christian if I'm not like them." Forgetting that God has not called us to be like them. God has called us to be us, and we can serve God and be content in that service right where we are, being who we are. Timothy never made the mistake of saying "God would love me more if there were more power in my ministry or if I could bridge into new territories, like Paul, and start new works and have an apostolic ministry. But until I have an apostolic ministry, God really won't love me like He loves Paul." He was content to fill that unique role that God had given him.

B. Then there is Epaphroditus' service. "But I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger, whom you sent to take care of my needs. For he longs for all of you and is distressed because you heard he was ill. Indeed he was ill, and almost died. But God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, to spare me sorrow upon sorrow. Therefore I am all the more eager to send him, so that when you see him again you may be glad and I may have less anxiety. Welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honor men like him, because he almost died for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up for the help you could not give me" (Philippians 2:25–30, NIV).

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Between the lines, you could read here and later on in chapter 4 that evidently Paul had gotten wind that there were some people in the Philippian church that were concerned that Epaphroditus hadn't done his duty, and he had been sent to Paul to bring their offering and now he is wanting to come home prematurely. And there are some saying, "The fact he's coming home prematurely and he fell sick may show that he had lack of faith." Others are saying, "If he wants to come home prematurely, maybe he wasn't strong enough for the task, because we sent him to stay with Paul." Or, "Maybe Paul hasn't found him useful." So Paul must find a way to get Epaphroditus back to Philippi and in the good grace and honor of the congregation there. So he pulls out all the stops by praising him. "He has been tried in common conflict and has risked his own life and fallen nearly into death because of illness. But he has been true."

It's interesting that Paul himself, at this moment, is facing an appeal of his hearing before Caesar, and the Philippian letter could have been a reflection of all of Paul's anxiety, as he headed into that moment. But instead of getting lost in his own trouble, he takes time to think of the troubles of his friends. And he makes sure that they can have an easy entrance back among their own people. Epaphroditus had gambled his life.

It's very clear, as you read this section of Philippians, that Paul is at peace with the people he is with. It's clear, as well, that he is urging all of us to live the kind of lifestyle that puts us at peace with others.

If there's stress in a relationship, it's probably that we haven't adequately set out the garbage in our life and dealt with it. And communication is a painful thing. The only way I know of to get garbage out is to talk and talk, and forgive and pray and keep talking. If you're having relational problems, they're directly related to communication problems. Communication gets stopped when we bottle things up, when we don't forgive one another, when we say, by our silence, "I

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don't care enough to repair this relationship. I'm going to keep the garbage in and I'm going to nourish my bitterness and my anger and my hostility." Part of joy in living is cleaning house. And living the way Paul has said, without grumbling or complaining. Living pure and blameless. That describes a person who has been working at the fundamental problem of relationships, things that pile up and accumulate that need to be cleaned out in our life.

Joy and the person I'm with. If you had different people close to you, would you be happier? If you say "yes" to that, there's progress that God's calling you to make in your own Christian walk. Joy is not dependent upon the people who are closest to you, in a Christian sense. Perhaps in a worldly sense it is, but Christian joy is not rooted in someone else. It's rooted in our own walk and relationship with Christ. You say, "What joy could I have if I'm going through a relationship where there's not a lot of joy and there's a lot of stress and there's absolutely no comfort in that relationship? All I get are barbs and hurts and neglect. What possible joy is there in that?"

I would say to you that the joy is when you, in that relationship, behave and believe and speak in the way that Christ would believe and behave and speak. You'll find a satisfaction moving into your life when you are following in Christ's footsteps, and the satisfaction may not be that the other person all of a sudden has begun to change. But the satisfaction and the joy will be because you're making changes, and because Christ is being the Lord of your life and you're taking His lordship seriously. And you quit scapegoating your problems on the other person and saying, "All of the problems in my life are because of someone else—because of their attitudes and hostility and meanness." Relationships get like that. Especially in marriages and families, after years, we accumulate a lot of ways of digging at one another. It's when we quit scapegoating, quit waiting for the other person to change, and begin relating to Christ and say, "Lord, what

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does it mean for You to be Lord of my life in this situation?” “What does it mean for You to be Lord of my thoughts in reference to that other person?” “What does it mean for you to be Lord of my emotions in reference to that other person?” “Be the Lord of my attitude and of my conduct and of my speech.” When we begin to say that and really mean it from our heart, and realize that we’re not going to treat our relationship like something disposable—that people are not throw-away people in our life, that God put people in our life and meant us to work through that relationship without running from it—it’s when we come to that settled and deep conviction in our heart that a deep satisfaction begins to move into our life. We feel like we’ve touched the ground level and we find that Christ is there. And our nose is not submerged under the water of trouble, and we say, “Christ has given me joy. Christ is perfecting my character in this relationship. Because He’s changing me, I know that ultimately He’ll work on the relationship as well.” That, I think, is the essence of what it means to have joy with the people I’m with in the circumstances I’m in.

Closing Prayer

Father, we hear these words with different levels of intensity, because we have different levels of problems. Some in the audience this evening have not actually needed this, maybe at this moment, because things are well with them in their basic relationships with the nearby people in their life. For others, it is like turning a light on in a darkened room, opening a window of hope and saying, “I see! I’ve been waiting for the other person to change and all along, Lord, You’ve been wanting me to change. All along, Lord, I’ve been wanting to push that other person out of my life or reform them, when the problem is really not so much with them as it is with me and my need to be like Jesus in that relationship.” Lord, we take this word from Philippians, that little letter filled with so much joy from a prison cell, and we ask that the Holy Spirit will write His

JOY AND THE PEOPLE I'M WITH
Philippians 1:27–2:30

words very large on our hearts and make our life an instrument of Thine. And make our relationships sparkle with Your presence. Strip out of our relationships the tonal edge in our voice, the anger and the hostility and the selfishness, and put within us the heart of Christ, who's always reaching, always embracing, always helping. If there's any encouragement in Christ, any comfort in Him, we pray to think about these things. In Jesus' name. Amen.