

Spiritual Wellbeing

A study in Paul's letter to the Philippians.

There is nothing better that you could say about yourself than to say, "It is well with my soul!" Your spiritual wellbeing is found in Jesus Christ. This is the main theme of Philippians.

In eight lessons, we are going to sketch an outline of the various elements of joy in Jesus --"joy" being the shorter term for spiritual wellbeing. Make sure you read the verses in Philippians where joy is mentioned. If you want an outline summary of Paul's letter to Philippi, these lessons will serve that purpose very well...

The Eight Elements of Joy

- A United Purpose
- Strong Spiritual Growth
- Praiseworthy Conduct
- Generous Sharing
- A humble Attitude
- An Eager Hope
- A Christ-like Love
- Self-confidence in Christ



1. A United Purpose

Many Christians are *go-it-aloners* and are “untied” not “united”. They are not tied in to the local church or fellowship of Christians. Sometimes this is not their fault, nevertheless being untied instead of united deprives one of the joy of brotherhood, sisterhood, and common purpose.

(A) Our Common Purpose Gives us Joy

Philippians 2:2. Paul said to the saints at Philippi, "**Fulfill my joy, being likeminded, having the same love, being of one mind**" (Php 2:2).

Paul was saying, "*if you think as I, love me as I love you, and if you are one mind with me in our common purpose, then it will be well with my soul; you will fill up my joy to the full.*"

Surely the Philippians would likewise be happy and spiritually well, if they had that unity locally among themselves, with one another as well as with Paul.

(B) God's Glory is Our Common Purpose

Philippians 1:11. What is this common purpose in which Christians are to be joined? Paul says that we are to be "**filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ to the glory and**

praise of God" (Php 1:11). That last phrase, "**the glory and praise of God**", is our common purpose. There is no higher purpose in life than to praise and glorify God, and no greater joy than fulfilling that purpose together.

Philippians 3:14. The glory of God is a glory we will share, and for those who answer God's call to glory, unbounded joy is the prize. Paul says, "**I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus**" (Php 3:14). What sense of purpose in those words! What joy or spiritual wellbeing is derived from helping one another answer God's call and helping one another strive for the prize of glory in God.

(C) We are True Companions in Our Common Purpose

Philippians 4:3. In this common purpose, we become true companions laboring together. Paul says, "**True companion, help**

A United Purpose (Continued)

those women who labored with me in the gospel" (Php 4:3).

In the same verse Paul speaks of his sisters and brothers in Christ as "fellow workers whose names are written in the book of life" (Php 4:3).

If your name is written in the same book as mine, and I don't mean the telephone directory, I mean the register of the citizens of the eternal city of God —well surely you and I share something too wonderful for us to be divided.

What could be so important to divide us, compared to the common purpose that unites us?

Philippians 1:27. Paul encourages the Philippians to be "striving together for the faith of the gospel" (Php 1:27).

In many cases, sad cases, Christians are "striving" together in the worst sense of the word. They are strife-torn, fighting each other, instead of fighting the good fight together.

We must strive together in the best sense of the word --laboring together as fellow workers, showing unity of purpose.

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Jesus comes first

Others come second

You come last

2. Strong Spiritual Growth

(A) Progress and Joy

Philippians 1:25. There is a link between joy and spiritual growth. Paul says, "I shall remain with you and continue with you all for your progress and joy of faith" (Php 1:25). Note the link, "Progress and joy". God wants us to make progress. It may not be progress as ordinary mortals tend to see it, and we may not always seem to be making progress. But our progress is in spiritual development, in things which the human eye does not always perceive and appreciate, for they are seen with the eye of faith. These are the things which lead us on toward heaven.

(B) Being Perfected in the Lord

Philippians 1:6. We should always be aware that it is God who furthers our progress in the faith. Yes, we must put in the effort, but God is the one who started us in the way, and he is the one who will lead us on to the end. Paul says, "He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Christ" (Php 1:6).

Philippians 3:12,15. The scriptures use the term "to perfect" for this progress, this process of strong growth. To make perfect means to bring to full maturity and completion. Paul says, "Not that I have already attained, or am already perfect, but I press on... Let us, as many as are mature, have this mind" (Php 3:12,15).

Maturity, if not absolute perfection, is a strong development toward it. The attainment of maturity brings us joy.

Paul understands, and he intends us to appreciate, that while we are pressing on toward perfection, the sacrifice of Christ makes us perfect in God's sight. But the sacrifice of Christ, when he became obedient unto death, also impels us to obedience of our own after his example, working out our salvation by strong growth in righteous thought and conduct. God wants us to become mature and to excel in this.

(C) Standing Fast in the Lord and His Word

Philippians 4:1. We can stand firm and strong in the Lord. Paul says, "My beloved, my longed-for brethren, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, beloved" (Php 4:1). There is a sense in which many Christians "stand fast" but it is the wrong sense. They stand fast in the sense of being stubborn, unyielding, unwilling to leave behind the things which are past, their old habits of thought and conduct.

Philippians 2:16. One should stand fast in the Lord, not in the old self that should have been crucified with the Lord. God wants to see vigorous and unretarded growth in his spiritual children who are "holding fast the word of life" (Php 2:16).

3. Praiseworthy Conduct

(A) Our Conduct Must Fit Our Purpose

Our conduct must fit our faith in Christ's sacrifice for our sins, and our conduct must fit our purpose which, as we have seen, is to bring praise and glory to God. Therefore when we say, "Our conduct must be praiseworthy", we mean it in the special sense that the praise and glory redounds to God rather than lighting upon ourselves.

Philippians 1:27. Paul says, "Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ" (Php 1:27). It is well recognized from experience that a simple life of Christ-like conduct and attitude makes a stronger "sermon" than any oration.

(B) Being a Pattern for Others

Philippians 3:17. The lives of Christians should be patterns and examples to others, yet without affectation, legalism, or self-righteousness. Paul, without any boast, recognized such a pattern in his own life. He said, "Join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern" (Php 3:17).

Philippians 4:9. Paul lived what he taught. Thus he was able to say, "The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do" (Php 4:9).

Note that they not only "heard" but also "saw" the gospel in Paul. Many others "so walk" as exemplars of the gospel. Let us follow their example and so become patterns ourselves for others to follow.

There is no greater joy than to know that by your example you have caused or aided another to follow Jesus.

(C) Living Blamelessly

Philippians 2:14. This is Paul's exhortation: "Become blameless and harmless, children of God in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world" (Php 2:14).

The simple song, "This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine" is really quite profound.

When we try to affect a form of conduct in which we do not have our hearts, we become nothing better than hypocrites. Praiseworthy conduct comes from a heart set upon such. Thus Paul says,

Philippians 4:8. "Whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue, and if there is anything praiseworthy, meditate on these things" (Php 4:8).

4. Generous Sharing

A Lack of Sharing

Philippians 4:15. One of the few instances of any hint of criticism and dissatisfaction in Paul's letter to Philippi, is his remark, "No church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only" (Php 4:15). There should be no lack of sharing, and giving.

Giving and receiving are causes of joy—especially the giving, for Jesus once said, "It is *more blessed to give than to receive*" (Acts 20:35)

(B) Sacrifice in Sharing

Philippians 2:17. The reason that giving and sharing is not always in evidence as it ought to be, is simple enough. Sharing (or fellowship) is a matter of sacrifice and service.

People have mixed feelings about making sacrifices for others or to being the servant of others. Paul, however, had no problem applying himself in sacrifice and service. "I am being poured out on the sacrifice and service of your faith" (Php 2:17).

Philippians 2:7. Although sacrifice in sharing is a concept alien to some people, it is essential to the attainment of true joy.

Jesus manifested the spirit of sacrifice and service. "He emptied himself and took the form of a servant... became obedient to the point of death" (Php 2:7).

The writer to the Hebrews points out that Jesus did this to achieve joy: "For the joy set before him he endured the cross" (Heb 12:2).

Philippians 3:10. The spirit of generous sharing is the spirit of the crucified Christ. Paul recognizes this when he states his aim, "That I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings" (Php 3:10).

(C) The Fruit of Sharing

Philippians 4:17. The reason that sharing, sacrifice, and service produce joy is that they produce fruit. Paul says, concerning the gifts given to him, "Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account" (Php 4:17).

When we see the *fruit* of our sharing, we are *glad* that we shared. Fruitful giving is a key to happy living. One of life's paradoxes is that when we *lose* what we have by sharing it, only then do we really *gain* from it.

5. A Humble Attitude

(A) Meek But Not Weak

Humility, meekness, and lowliness are often associated with feebleness and insipidness. But if meekness is weakness, then Jesus was weak, for he was certainly meek and lowly.

Philippians 2:3,5. Paul says, "Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others as better than themselves... Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus " (Php 2:3,5).

(B) Our Self Esteem

Esteeming others as better than ourselves, is humility, but not low self-esteem. It means valuing ourselves as useful to others rather than valuing ourselves as a cut above others.

When you judge your own worth in terms of winning prestige, power, riches, and so forth, that leads to boastfulness. However, If you consider yourself an instrument for others' good, and a servant whose ministry is needed by others, you certainly don't have a sense of worthlessness or a low self-esteem. You have a true self-image which reflects the image of Christ and the better and eternal world beyond.

(C) Giving Thanks

Philippians 1:3-4. Thankfulness is part of a humble attitude. Paul was a man of thankful prayer. He said, "I thank my God on every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy" (Php 1:3-4).

Philippians 4:6. When we pray, we do two things. Firstly we give thanks and praise to God. Secondly we make requests of God.

We teach our children to say please and thank you. Well, that is about how simple prayer is. Paul writes, "With thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God" (Php 4:6).

Prayer, offered in an attitude of thankfulness, will enable all the other elements of spiritual wellbeing to develop.

Why put off praying until we feel we have achieved something for God, or until we have trained our hearts to hold right attitudes?

On the contrary, bring to God in prayer your problems and struggles in trying to attain these attributes. God will then help you to improve and excel in them.

6. An Eager Hope

(A) A Hope of Heaven

Philippians 3:20. Paul states the Christian view when he says, "Our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Php 3:20).

Limiting the "better world" concept to this world, is called "the social gospel" and that so-called gospel results from the intrusion of humanism into Christian teaching. Humanism discards God, eternal life, heaven, and spiritual hope. Humanism, when disguising itself as Christianity, does not discard those terms, but it discards what they mean and uses them for something else.

(B) A Hope to Live By

Philippians 1:20. Paul states this view at a personal level when he says, "According to my earnest expectation and hope... for me to live is Christ and to die is gain" (Php 1:20). Paul hoped that his own life in this world would magnify Christ, and Paul's altruism toward people like the Philippians is clear.

A hope of heaven is not irrelevant to our life on earth. We do not have hope in this world only, but our hope of heaven makes our life in this world worthwhile.

But that is only part of the story. To die was gain for Paul, and it will be so for us, because beyond this life and this world lay a better life eternal, and a better world by far.

(C) Earnest and Eager

Notice the adjective and adverb used to describe this attitude of hope in the life to come. It is an expectation described as "earnest" and something awaited "eagerly" (Php 1:20).

Perhaps this expectation may be likened to the feeling we have all experienced when we have been at length away from home. When the day for our homecoming draws near, there is such a sense of eager expectation.

Do we feel like that about the homecoming to end all homecomings, do we feel like that about the big day yonder when we will see our heavenly home?

Philippians 3:14. Paul states his own eagerness: "I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." You too can expect your own upward call from God. Are you earnestly pressing on toward it and eagerly waiting for it with joy?

7. A Christ-like Love

(A) The Affection of Christ

Philippians 1:8-9. Paul was a man of love —both for the truth God had revealed to him, and for the people to whom he preached it. "God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ" (Php 1:8). This was not mere sentiment, but a genuine and generous love. Paul prays, "That your love may abound still more and more" (Php 1:9).

Paul did not love with a love of his own. He loved with the affection of Christ. To love as Christ loved, is to truly love.

True love does not cover up or ignore sin, but helps the sinner to conquer. Such was the Saviour's love.

Sin sickens the soul; love heals the soul. Spiritual wellbeing depends on conquering sin, just as physical wellbeing depends on conquering disease. One does not love a sick person by failing to notice that person is ill.

(B) Love in Knowledge

Philippians 1:9. Paul calls this love a *love in knowledge*. "That your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment" (Php 1:9)

True love is truth-based love. A love blind to truth is a counterfeit love. Love must always help people know the truth and apply it to their lives.

Philippians 1:10. Next, Paul mentions sincerity. That is immediately followed by the mention of righteousness (Php 1:10). A person who ignores or hides what is wrong, instead of discerning it, is neither sincere nor loving.

We know that a sincere person stands up for what is right. Yet we are more likely to speak of the person who does not notice sin as a sincere loving person, and the person who stands up for what is right as a trouble maker or a bigot. Sincerity, however, must be linked to righteousness.

Of course, love is tolerant and understanding of peoples failures when they are trying to overcome sin, but that is quite different from pretending the sin isn't there.

(C) The Comfort of Love

Philippians 2:1. Paul recognizes that everybody needs to love and to be loved. Paul speaks of "*the comfort of love... affection and mercy*" (Php 2:1). That is essential to everyone's spiritual wellbeing.

8. Self-confidence in Christ

(A) True Self-confidence

We all know that confidence is important to our wellbeing. A salesperson for example will not meet her quotas if she lacks the confidence in herself, her company, and her product.

Philippians 2:24. The Christian's confidence is based in the Lord. For example Paul said, "I trust in the Lord that I shall come shortly" (Php 2:24). His coming to them shortly was a particular goal which he felt confident of achieving. But his trust (or confidence) in the Lord was a general motivation that spurred him on in everything.

(B) False Self-Confidence

Philippians 3:3. In one sense, Paul lacked confidence. He claimed to "have no confidence in the flesh" (Php 3:3). Paul uses the word "flesh" here to represent everything of a worldly or physical nature.

Many people base their self-confidence in worldly knowledge, achievement, power, and wealth. In such things Paul had no confidence. His confidence and joy was in Jesus.

(C) Confidence in Christ

Philippians 4:13,19. Paul expressed true confidence when he said, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Php 4:13).

He also expressed true confidence when he said, "My God shall supply all your need according to the riches of his glory by Christ Jesus" (Php 4:19). You will find many more expressions of Christ-based confidence in Paul's letter.

The lovely thing about putting all your confidence in Christ, is that he will never let you down. He will constantly strengthen and empower you. Of course your confidence must not be about what *you imagine* he will do for you, or help you to do. Your confidence must be about what *he has promised* you in his word.

There are three threads that run through the eight elements we have studied. These threads are...

- **ATTITUDE**
- **ACTION**
- **ACHIEVEMENT**

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