

“Living a Life of Joy: I’ve Got a New Attitude”

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SCRIPTURE READINGS

2 Corinthians 4: 16-18

¹⁶Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. ¹⁷For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. ¹⁸So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

Philippians 4: 8-9

⁸Finally, brothers and sisters, 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. ⁹Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

My family and I had a great week in Washington DC just a week ago. We mostly walked the mall, visited the museums, and took in the sights and sounds of DC. It’s great to share moments like these with my son Zechariah. In fact, as we were standing just outside of the domed Capitol Building, I turned to Zechariah who was standing on the grass and said, “Look at that beautiful building with such history.” He looked at me for a moment, then noticed a squirrel and chased after him. Then he found a leaf. Then he found something else to look at. I guess it’s all a matter of perspective and an acceptance of where he is in his own development. One day he will notice things like monuments and the Capital Building, but for now, he is appreciating the things directly around him.

This week, as we continue our study on joy, I have the task of looking at acceptance, which is closely aligned with perspective, which Pastor Steve preached on last month on the first week of our series. They are closely linked, so much so, as I was attempting to facilitate the Monday Morning bible study this week, I told the class that we’re going to go back to the first topic in the book for the pillars of joy, which is perspective. Steve looked at me funny and quickly reminded me that he already preached on that topic. We were both confused, mostly because these two topics are connected. Instead of preaching on one or the other, today I’m inviting us to consider a new pillar of joy, one not listed in the book, but one I’m calling the pillar of attitude.

Ann Turnage is an inspirational person. She is a cancer survivor who is now dedicating her life to helping others fight cancer. She developed a cancer ministry called Can-Care. Its mission is to improve the quality of life for cancer patients and their families. At its first National Cancer Survivor’s Day luncheon, Ann spoke and shared some about her experience. She could have chosen an attitude of giving up, of letting cancer beat her, but she chose to fight. So much so, she began this amazing ministry. She talked about the importance of having a good attitude in life and she said, “Attitude is your paintbrush; it colors every situation.” This story is shared in the book titled off this quote *Attitude is Your Paintbrush* by the United Methodist pastor James Moore.

Attitude is so important. It paints everything we see and do and even think. It determines how we live day by day and moment to moment. On some level it even determines who we are and how we interact with others.

In his book *Man's Search for Meaning*, Dr. Victor Frankl, an Austrian psychiatrist, who was a prisoner of war in a Nazi concentration camp, wrote, "We who lived in concentration camps can remember the ones who walked through huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread. They may have been few in number but they offer sufficient proof that everything can be taken from us but one thing: the last of the human freedoms- to choose one's own attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way."

How we look at our circumstances or even the world will influence and impact how we paint our perspective of them. It will also determine our attitudes toward them. For example, if we get up in the morning and think, "Ugh another day. I have to go to work. I have to battle through another day." It will negatively affect your attitude toward that day. What if we woke up and immediately said, "Thank you God for another day." Again, I think we would look at our day completely different. What if we were walking into church thinking, "Another Sunday here. I'm sure the sermon will be long and boring." That's the sermon you will hear. What if when we arrived we immediately thanked God for this church and we asked God for the grace to experience worship with joy and peace. Again, our perspective would be different.

I freely confess that this is not always how I look at my day. It can be hard depending on our circumstances to be open to the gift of another day, but how I look at, my perspective, will impact my attitude. It's something I'm working on. For whatever reason, it can be easy for me to slide in the negative. My wife Candace will remind me about my attitude by simply saying, "I've got a new attitude" as a reminder and an encouragement to get a new attitude. Our attitude really depends on what we place in our minds.

Psychologist Dan O'Grady writes that our negative and critical thoughts are like Velcro, they stick and hold; whereas our positive and joyful thoughts are like Teflon, they slide away. We have to deliberately choose to hold onto the positive thoughts so that they can "imprint." Anything negative, fearful, or hateful, our minds hold onto like Velcro. This is probably true for all of us. Think about a day at work. We interact with many people throughout our day, most of them positive, but what are the ones that wake us up at night or stick with us? They are the moments of challenge or negative interactions. I can receive 100 emails in one day, 99 of which are positive or neutral, what's the one that will keep eating at me, it's the negative one. How do we allow the positive to shape our lives, our perspectives, and our attitudes?

The world has experienced many natural disasters and hurricanes recently. I realize that in those moments, it might be hard to find the positive or joy. My only experience with a hurricane or typhoon, as they're called in the Pacific, was when I was in the Philippines as a missionary. I have told the story before of flying from Tokyo to Manila just before the typhoon made landfall. I survived, but it was bumpy ride. When we finally arrived at the retreat house I was staying in, the winds picked up, the storm rocked the building and pulled off the roof of our home. Water came rushing in from the roof and other cracks in the house. It was a scary experience.

We ended up in the basement of this building and, as you can imagine, I was down in the dumps. I kept saying, "Why did I even come on this trip? This was a dumb idea." In fact, one of the other Americans had a hot spot, that apparently still worked during a typhoon, who would have guessed, and I was able to message Candace a few times. She tried to calm me down as I was agitated, upset, and nearly angry. Yes, I was tired and hungry and concerned, but my mind wasn't in the right place. It wasn't until a few of the locals came in to offer us water and food did I realize that everything was alright. The locals who came to cook for us and take care of us had no idea if their home was still standing after the storm. They didn't know if their families in other parts of the island were ok or even alive, and yet, they took the time to take care of us. It completely changed my attitude. I turned from self-pity to gratitude. I went from anger to acceptance, from negative to positive, from my own form of despair to joy.

This is why the Apostle wrote, "Whatever is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, or praiseworthy, think about those things." Keep those things on your mind. For me, every one of those descriptors could have been used for the locals who came to offer us care and hospitality in the midst of a typhoon. They were being Christ for me.

This concept of finding joy in our attitude is more than just the power of positive thinking, its thinking on the promises of God, then living into those promises. It's keeping our eyes focused on God. Whatever is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, or praiseworthy; all descriptions that can be used with God, we are to think about such things. The Greek word for "think about" means to reckon, to consider, or to take account of.

Paul is calling the Christians in Philippi to take an account of, or remember what they have experienced not only from Paul, but from God. It's about what we place on our minds.

I shared before about what Dan O'Grady wrote regarding how our negative thoughts stick to our minds like Velcro and how anything positive, joyous, good or lovely are like Teflon and fall away. Father Richard Rohr teaches that if we have one of those beautiful, positive, loving, joyous moments, we have to savor it for a minimum of 15 seconds or it does not imprint on the brain. To find joy is to take those moments that Paul described to the Philippians as noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, and praiseworthy, and hold onto them. When you see that little child's face light up in complete joy, hold onto the sight for 15 seconds. When you notice the beauty of creation, the wind against your face, the leaves rustling in the breeze, hold onto to the moment for 15 seconds. When you see a piece of art that enlightens you, when you hear a piece of music that moves you deeply; hold onto those moments, sit with them, and experience the goodness and joy of God. Fr. Rohr calls this contemplative prayer. You are sitting with the joy of God, you are taking it all in, and you are having an imprint of joy placed on your mind and in your soul. In doing this, you will have a new attitude and I know you will find joy.

As I close this morning, I want to invite each of us to think about a moment of pure joy that you have experienced recently. What would that be for you? Cup your hands. Receive it again as the gift it is and let us simply sit with it for 15 seconds giving thanks to God for that gift of joy we hold in our hands, in our hearts, and in our minds. Let us be in silence....

Thank you God for these gifts of joy. Help us to hold onto them, that they will change us deeply and will give us a new attitude, a new hope, and a new joy all found in Jesus Christ our Lord. May it be so. Amen.