“How to Maintain Your Joy”
Text: Philippians 3:1-11
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Oakland, California
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PRAY!

We continue our series on “How to Enjoy the Rest of Your Life”, looking in the Bible at the Paul’s letter to the Church in Philippi. This morning we will be looking at Philippians 3:1-11 in the New Testament section.

Why is it that so many Christians lose their joy?
• They start off great. They are so filled with enthusiasm and love. When they first become a Christian everything is fantastic.
• But as time goes by they seem to spring a leak and the joy drains out of them. I meet too many Christians who are just mumbling through life – no real joy in their life.

There are a lot of kill-joys in life – things that will rob you of joy. Today I want us to look at what Paul has to say about “How to Maintain Your Joy”.
• This is a recurring theme in the Book of Philippians. Paul talks about joy 17 different times in this book. He keeps returning to this point, repeating himself. This is a good teaching tool.

Vs. 1, “Finally, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same thing to you again, and it is a safeguard for you.”
• Paul is concerned about the joy of the Philippians – that they don’t lose their joy.

In this passage Paul gives us three safeguards on how to maintain your joy.

1. RESIST LEGALISTIC ATTITUDES
   A. Legalism is a kill-joy. It destroys the joy in your Christian life. It can ruin a family, people, churches.
   B. Legalism is substituting rules and regulations for my relationship to Christ. It gets the focus off what God has done for you and gets the focus on what you have to do for God. When you flip the focus around like that, you’re going to lose your joy.
   C. This has been a problem for thousands of years. In Philippians 3, Paul is attacking the legalizers, called Judaizers, who are trying to steal the joy of the Christians in Philippi. These were a group of people who said, “Yes, believe in Jesus Christ, trust Him with all your heart but there are also some other things you must add onto your faith.” Christ plus works. They said they must keep every one of the
Jewish laws to be a believer. Paul would get furious with this group. Vs. 2-3, “Watch out for those who do evil, those dogs, men who insist on cutting the body. We worship God by His Spirit, and rejoice in our life in Christ Jesus. We do not put any trust in external ceremonies.”

E. SAFEGUARD #1: Live each day by grace.

1. Grace is the key and secret to joy. To realize that everything God does in you and through you is by grace, rather than working for it and earning it.

F. Paul uses his life as an example. Paul was the super-star legalist before he became a believer. He had tried the rules and regulations way and it didn’t work.

Vs. 4-6, “Though I myself have reason for such confidence. If anyone else thinks he has reason to put confidence in the flesh, I have more. Circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews. In regard to the law, a Pharisee. As for zeal persecuting the church. As for legalistic righteousness, flawless.”

G. Paul, the former super legalist, gives five examples of how you know when you’re falling into the trap of legalism.

1. **You begin to trust in rituals.** Paul says, “I was circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel.” We have our own rituals today. Baptism, communion, catechism, baby dedications. If you fall into this trap, trusting these for your salvation, you’re in trouble.

2. **Don’t trust in race.** “I was of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin.” Benjamin was the purest tribe. Paul was name after the first king, Saul, who was a Benjaminite. Paul says he used to trust in his heritage. Have you ever heard anyone say, “Daddy’s a Christian… My mom was a believer… My uncle was a pastor.” You can get religion by osmosis but you can’t get Christ by osmosis.

3. **Don’t trust in religion.** “I was a Hebrew of Hebrews.” Paul was a religious person. Jesus has nothing to do with religion except He’s 100% opposed to it. Religion is humanity’s attempt to get to God. Works. Jesus Christ is God’s attempt to get to humanity. That’s a relationship and that’s a big difference.

4. **Don’t trust rules.** “In regard to the law, I was a Pharisee.” Paul kept all the rules. We think of the Pharisees as hypocrites but there were also genuine, sincere ones. They were the spiritually elite of that age. They took the Ten Commandments and expanded them into 619 other commandments. And they were legalists! A Pharisee would not even eat an egg if it were laid on the Sabbath, because that was considered work. They were pros at rules and regulations.
5. **Don’t trust in reputation.** “As for zeal and legalistic righteousness, I was faultless.” Today we have people saying, “I read the Bible, I witness, I go to church…” That’s legalism. The point is there is nothing wrong with any of these things. The problem is thinking that they give me points with God. They don’t. He loves you unconditionally.

2. **REEVALUATE YOUR ACTIVITIES**
   A. A lot of people are looking for joy in all the wrong places. Paul compares the value of religion to the value of a relationship to Christ. There is no comparison. He had been a very religious person, but was lost.
   B. Vs. 7-8, “But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord, for whom I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ.”
   1. This is Paul’s profit and loss statement. All the things he talked about he considered a complete loss, worthless. Phillip’s translation: “I consider it all mere garbage compared to being able to win Christ…”
   C. **SAFEGUARD #2: Keep your priorities in perspective.**
   D. Know what is important, what is profit and loss. Don’t lose your joy over things that really don’t count. The number one reason people lose their joy is they misplace their priorities. They get too involved in things that really aren’t that important. They are afraid that they are going to have to give up something in order to become a Christian. And they’re right! When you come to Jesus Christ you give up everything you’ve got. Otherwise you’re not a real Christian. It is total commitment. And then you’ve never had it so good! What I received is worth more than everything I gave up.
   1. You give up guilt and gain a clear conscience.
   2. You give up worry and gain a power for living.
   3. You give up frustration and lack of purpose in life and gain real meaning and purpose in life.
   4. You give up going to hell and gain going to heaven.
   5. You gave up trying to solve all your problems in your own power and gain having the resources of God to help solve your problems. That’s a pretty good trade-off.

3. **REFOCUS YOUR AMBITIONS**
   A. Lasting joy comes from knowing Christ better and better. Vs. 10, “I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in His suffering, becoming like Him in His death.” Paul says his number one goal in life is to know Christ better and better. Who well do you know Jesus Christ? I know lot of Christians
who have been Christians for 5, 10, or more years and they really don’t know Jesus Christ well. The word “know” in Hebrew is the word “yada”. It means to know intimately, experientially.

B. SAFEGUARD #3: Get to know Christ better and better.

C. Never stop growing and developing your relationship with Christ. The moment you stop growing, you’re going to lose your joy.

D. How do you get to know God in a personal way?

1. Time. It takes time to know anybody, to develop a relationship. It takes time to get to know God. You need to spend time alone with God to get to know Him. Sit down with your Bible, read it, pray, talking with God about your wants and needs, listening to tapes, spending time with God and letting Him talk with you through His word.

2. Talk. You must talk to God. Pray. Relationships require communication. Listen to Him talk to you as you read His book, the Bible. John 16:24, “Until now you have not asked for anything in My name. Ask and you will receive and your joy will be complete.” Much prayer, much joy in your life. Little prayer, little joy. No prayer, no joy.

3. Trust. Relationships are built on trust. God wants you to learn to trust Him. He will allow all kinds or problems in your life so you can learn that He is reliable all the time. I didn’t learn this overnight. That is learned through years of going through problems and seeing God pull me through it and work them out. You learn to trust God throughout life.

How’s the joy in your life this morning? If you’re feeling joyless, which one of the three killjoys is the culprit? Legalism? Priorities? Trusting Christ?

A life without purpose is a killjoy. Maybe you’ve tried everything else and not found happiness. People are looking for joy in all the wrong places. Joy comes from knowing Jesus. It begins with a decision to say, “God, I want to know You personally.” Set a goal in your life to get to know Jesus Christ.

PRAY!