

GLOW: Know, Grow, Go...Glow! Philippians 1:1-11

One of my favorite childhood memories is summer nights **catching fireflies** and putting them in a mason jar, remember poking holes in the top of that lid. They would just light up my backyard...in fact the darker the night was the more you could see them. I was so amazed that there were creatures that can actually glow in the dark...I still am, they are called bioluminescent. Word of the day. Now have you ever seen a firefly during the day? Probably not. They are hiding in the blades of grass during the day, mostly unnoticed by the world around them. It's in the contrast of the darkness that they glow. Just like the firefly, our faith was made to glow in the dark! In the darkness of pandemics and persecution, the early church shined. In fact, the darker their circumstances the more they would glow because they had something that darkness could not comprehend or blow out- the light of the gospel.

This is what the book of **Philippians is all about, learning how to glow in the dark** through the application of the gospel to our lives. **Philippians 2:14 ...in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world.** Friends, we need to learn how to become spiritually bioluminescent. If you feel like there is darkness in the form of pain, anxiety, depression, isolation, fear, insecurity...this series is for you. If you want to learn how to you can make an impact in a dark world with the light of the gospel, this series is for you. Is there anything this world needs more than the light? So we are going to journey together, virtually hand-in-hand from darkness to the glow of the gospel.

Some context of this book. From verse 1 we see it is written by the Apostle Paul, along with his son in the Lord Timothy, who is probably visiting him right now and may be transcribing this letter. Likely written in **62 AD** to a church that is about 10 years old in Philippi that Paul started during Paul's 2nd missionary journey recorded in Acts 16. He writes to the whole church, but specifically recognizes the leaders the Overseers (Pastors, Elders) and the deacons (the lead servants of the church) the two offices of servant leadership given by God to his church. Now a little about Philippi- Alexander the Great's father- Philip the II founded this city, Roman military colony on the interior plain of eastern Macedonia, the northern part of Greece (**show you a map**).

Now let's get into a key theme of the book in verse 3.

³I thank my God every time I remember you. ⁴In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy.

Here is the first of many references to joy. Joy is just dripping from this letter. 19 times in this letter Paul uses the words joy, rejoicing or gladness. If the Greek language had punctuation, there would be more exclamation points in this letter than any other. You might assume that Paul was writing from some festival or surrounded by his friends having a great time. Instead he is quarantined, quite literally. Except his quarantine doesn't come with our relative freedom like ours. His was house arrest- chained 18 inches to Roman guard at all times. Now for many of us that just doesn't compute. Joy? We are so conditioned to associate joy with our circumstances. One of the reasons is because we confuse the word joy with happiness.

Happiness goes up and down with what's happening. "I just got my stimulus check." Happy! "State of emergency is extended to the end of May." Unhappy. Happiness is shallow...Joy has roots in something deeper than happenings of our lives. Today we are going to uncover three sources of joy provided by the light of the Gospel. These are the same sources of that every believer can experience when we take and apply the gospel to our everyday lives. If we are going to learn to glow in the dark we must tap into these sources.

#1 A Transformed Identity:

Notice Paul calls the church in **verse 1** by the title "saints." Maybe you grew up thinking that a saint was a dead person who was made into a statue. This word has caused a lot of confusion because of the way the catholic church has singled out a special class of people with this term. Paul uses it 40 times in his letters and always plural to describe every believer in Jesus. New Testament knows nothing of canonizing a dead person. It knows everything about recognizing a living follower of Christ by this term. This word **saint means- a holy one, a set-apart one**. So is this referencing our morality, being holy or set apart in our goodness, following the 10 commandments better? Actually, this title isn't a reference to our behavior but rather our identity. Notice it says **saints in Christ Jesus**.

2 Timothy 1:9

who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began.

We can't give ourselves this title. Saint is the identity we are given when we believe the gospel of Jesus Christ and enter a saving relationship with Jesus. In fact, the irony is we become a saint when we admit that we aren't one...we are quite the opposite we are sinners. Some people think that in order to come to church, or to be a Christian you have to have it altogether. Actually, it is the exact opposite. The prerequisite to becoming a Christian is that you realize you are messed up and dysfunctional. That's why one of our mantras is "the church isn't a country club but a hospital for sinners." We must first recognize that we cannot do enough good things to merit holiness before God. And trust the gospel, the good news that lights up the darkness, that **Jesus Christ alone is our holiness**, he was perfect and out of his deep love for us paid for our imperfection and failure to live up to God's holy standard. When we trust Jesus Christ, the Father takes Jesus' identity as Holy and places it irrevocably onto us to his eternal joy and glory. **We are given a new name by the God of the universe: SAINT!** Wow, take in that identity. You may not feel like a saint, and your behavior may not live up to that title sometimes, but that is how God sees you with an unwavering passionate love and joy.

Do you see the connection between our identity and our joy? We live in a day in our society of extreme self-identification summed up in the mantra, "You do you." There is pressure from a young age from culture, in the school, in social media, from our peers to decide who you are. Are you a jock, or a nerd, or band kid, are you a gamer, are you popular or outcast, are you gay or straight, do you identify as boy or girl...and this continues as you grow up- republican or democrat, marital status, socio-economic status- all these things become our ID badge telling us and everyone else who we are. And the lie is that we can only happy, we can only be free, we

can only have joy if we claim an identity for ourselves. We are our own identity makers. Do you see the lie? Do you see the fallacy of the creature defining him/herself instead of the creator?

Finding our identity in any self-created construct will never give us what it promises. Let me give you just one example: If our highest identity is our family status-mother or father we will often feel like a failure when our kids aren't living up to our hopes or showing us the affection we desire, or we will smother them through control, manipulation and fear. And when they leave us we will go through a massive identity crisis. It will never give you what it promises. If our good creator made us in his image in his love, don't you think he should have a say in who we are? We can only find our true identity in relationship to him. And in Christ, he gives us a new identity: saint! **True joy comes when we embrace our highest and truest identity** that we really believe, not just in the head, but in the heart is that we are loved unconditionally, not based on our performance or our looks, or what we can do for God- but just because he chooses to through Christ. What is your highest and truest identity that you believe in your heart?

#2 A Transformed Character

Philippians 1:3-6, 9-11

³I thank my God every time I remember you. ⁴In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy ⁵because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, ⁶being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

⁹And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, ¹⁰so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, ¹¹filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.

The goal of the Christian life is transformation into Christ-likeness. And it is described in verses 9-11 as abounding in love, a life of wisdom and discernment, an increasing purity of character and actions, a fruitful life. Now if this is all on us, that will not produce joy, but rather drudgery. Like getting a Peloton fitness bike for your birthday when you didn't ask for one. That's not going to feel like joy but drudgery. But look what he says. , *⁶being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.* It's God work in you. He is confident that God who began a good work in you, what work is that? Work of repentance, turning to Jesus in salvation, which he began- you didn't earn it that was his work, he will be sure to complete that work, which will carry on passed this life into eternity we will Christ or he returns. The theological phrase for this perseverance of the saints, which is a work of God and not ours. What a wonderful promise it is. And unlike our list of unfinished projects that may never get finished, God never gives up, he never walks away, even when it looks like it's too much of a mess from our vantage point.

Does that mean we should just stay in bed if we are assured that God is going to do it? Well the fuller answer to that question will come in a few weeks when we get to chapter 2:12-13, the

short answer is no...a sign of authentic faith is that we join in the work of transformation precisely because He is the one doing it in us. If that's confusing, good...it will be a cliffhanger!

He's at work to transform you and one of the ways you will know is when it hurts! Some of you may be familiar with a **Steinway piano**, They really are a work of art. Not just how they look on the outside, it is the fine-tuning process of what's inside. In it are 12,500 different components assembled by 200 different crafts people who meticulously put that together. And then after it's done, the Steinway piano is taken to a special room they called the **pounder room**. That didn't sound very good, does it? The pounder room is the place where every key gets pounded at least 3,200 times. But with all that work, and all that pounding, there is a good work inside that piano. And eventually, a master musician sits down at those keys, moves the fingers around, and beautiful music comes out, only made possible by the hard work of the craftsmen.

That's God's intention for you. **Ephesians 2:10 we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works!** He wants to make music through you. Before he works through you, he's got to work in you. And sometimes you say, "Well I feel like I'm in the pounder room a lot". Trust the process. When you are going through hardship, when you don't understand, when life hurts and disappoints, we can still experience joy just like Paul and the Philippians in suffering, we can say, "God is up to something in me." Say that out loud- God is up to something in me. It is impossible to experience joy in difficult circumstances without this perspective.

#3 A Transformed Mission Together

Philippians 1:4-5, 7-8

⁴In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy ⁵because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, ⁷It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart

and, whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me. ⁸God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.

A source of joy for Paul is knowing that he isn't alone in the mission even though he's quarantined, 800 miles away from this church family. He calls the church his partners, they share in the ministry, they share in his suffering, every victory for Paul is a victory for the church. They are in it together. And their friendship and affection for each other from the very beginning was not because they had lots in common- personality, interests, same upbringing, socio-economics. If you read the beginning of their relationship in Acts 16, you will see that the first three stories of converts were a successful businesswoman, a psychic slave-girl and a suicidal prison guard...now that would be a fun small group? Sounds like the beginning of a joke. They had virtually nothing in common, and yet had everything in common in Christ and his mission to bring light to the darkness. One of the things about our church I love, and it's one of our **core values "Unity in diversity"**. Some of us couldn't be more different than each other...and you would not have picked these people as your closest friends. And yet God has developed deep partnerships, deep friendships and bonds based on something far deeper and greater than our favorite sports team or social status but our common mission to represent

Christ in our community and world. The deepest, most meaningful relationships are when we partner together on a mission much bigger than any one individual. That's what the church is about. You want joy? Partner in mission together- partner through prayer, giving to the mission, encouraging each other, going together, serving together locally, internationally. Let's make facemasks together...etc.

Let me summarize it this way: Glowing with Gospel Joy comes from when you Know, Grow and Go.

Let me tell you, this isn't theoretical. This really works. I had to fight for joy this week. First started with the news of DE extending its state of emergency, and then I was part of a webinar for church leaders that gave bleak outlook for reopening the doors of our church for in-person gatherings anytime soon. But through meditating on this passage here's what God pressed upon me. Has the gospel been diminished in anyway because of COVID-19? Has Christ lost his power in any way? Has anything changed about my identity or yours just because the church doors are closed? I'm a saint in Jesus Christ- that's my identity. Because we can't meet together physically does that mean God has stopped working on me and working in and through the church body? Absolutely not. God is up to something. Does the absence of a weekly in-person gathering mean that we are no longer on mission together? Far from it, in fact what if stepping away from the building is the very thing that God is using to spread light into the darkness, just like he did when he scattered the church from Jerusalem through persecution. The mission is all around us. The harvest is plentiful! The Spirit restored my joy and he wants to do the same for you today.