

Philippians 4:2-4:9, Part 2

1. In 2011, one of only two level-seven nuclear disasters in history occurred at the Fukushima nuclear power plant. In the wake of an earthquake and tsunami, the power plant suffered a complete loss of power, a cataclysm well beyond anything anticipated by the designers. Following the disaster, 750 workers were evacuated while a small group of workers, known as the Fukushima 50, remained to perform recovery efforts, putting their lives at great risk for the sake of others. Living in a two-story earthquake-resistant building said to be about the size of an average living room, and working in shifts, these workers had the job of stabilizing the reactors, assessing radiation levels caused by explosions, and cooling the stricken reactors. Two died and twenty were injured, but all face future health problems, potentially fatal. As their Prime Minister said, they were “prepared for death.”

In 4:8 Paul lists six *Hellenistic* (!) virtues to focus on. In appropriating these for the church, Paul models the core of this verse, that they are to focus¹ on “whatever” is true, honorable, etc., whether it is found in the church or in the world. The Fukushima 50, though pagan engineers rather than Christians, are worthy of our time and thought. What books or movies, not of an explicitly Christian nature, fit this category for you?

2. Just as *imitation* is a central theme of Philippians, so is joy: Paul prays with joy (1:4); he prefers life to death because he believes Jesus wants him to continue with them in their “progress and joy in the faith” (1:25); his joy is “made complete” by their being of the same mind; he urges them to welcome Epaphroditus with “all joy” (2:29); he calls them his “joy and crown” (4:1); and no fewer than nine times he refers to rejoicing—and all this in a short letter writing from prison! Read Gordon Fee’s quote about Christian joy (below). What Christian practices *do* spark joy for you?²

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Fun fact: In 4:3, Paul says “I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord.” In this verse four different words use the *syn-* prefix, so that the verse effectively reads, “I urge you, my *co*-companion, to *co*-assist these women, for they have *co*-struggled with me in the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of the *co*-workers” (Mark Allen Powell’s NT text, 354).

Gordon Fee on joy:

Joy, unmitigated, untrammelled joy is—or at least should be—the distinctive mark of the believer in Christ Jesus. The wearing of black and the long face, which so often came to typify some later expressions of Christian piety, are totally foreign to Paul’s version; Paul the theologian of grace is equally the theologian of joy. Christian joy does not come and go with one’s circumstances; rather it is predicated altogether on one’s relationship with the Lord and is thus an abiding, deeply spiritual quality of life. It finds expression in “rejoicing,” which is an imperative, not an option. With its concentration *in the Lord*, rejoicing is *always* to mark individual and corporate life in Philippi. They who “serve by the Spirit of God” (3:3) do so in part by *rejoicing in the Lord*, whatever else may be their lot.” (Little Fee, 173.)

Be still and know that I am God,
be still and know that I am God,
be still and know that I am God.

In thee, O Lord, I put my trust,
In thee, O Lord, I put my trust,
In thee, O Lord, I put my trust.

¹ The Greek here means literally to “take into account,” not merely to noodle about.

² Remember: Paul in Philippians has longing (1:8), is hard pressed (1:23), is anxious (2:28) and even brought to tears (3:18), and sees rejoicing as something one has to deliberately do (4:4).

C. S. Lewis on Joy:

If you want to get warm you must stand near the fire: if you want to be wet you must get into the water. If you want joy, power, peace, eternal life, you must get close to, or even into, the thing that has them. They are not a sort of prize which God could, if He chose, just hand out to anyone. (*Mere Christianity*)

I sometimes wonder whether all pleasures are not substitutes for joy. (*Surprised by Joy*)

All joy... emphasizes our pilgrim status; always reminds, beckons, awakens desire. Our best havings are wantings.

Joy is distinct not only from pleasure in general but even from aesthetic pleasure. It must have the stab, the pang, the inconsolable longing.

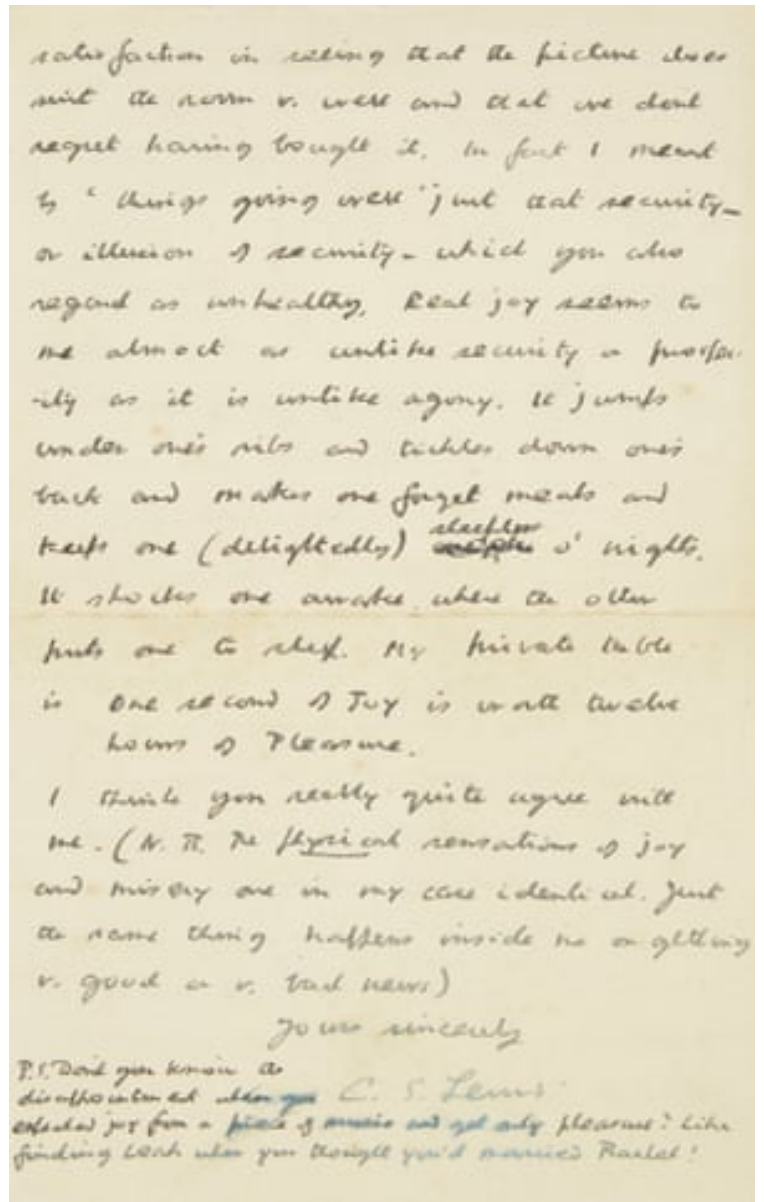
All Joy reminds. It is never a possession, always a desire for something longer ago or further away or still "about to be."

It was valuable only as a pointer to something other and outer. While that other was in doubt, the pointer naturally loomed large in my thoughts. When we are lost in the woods the sight of a signpost is a great matter. He who first sees it cries, "Look!" The whole party gathers round and stares. But when we have found the road and are passing signposts every few miles, we shall not stop and stare.

It jumps under one's ribs and tickles down one's back and makes one forget meals and keeps one (delightedly) sleepless o' nights. It shocks one awake when the other puts one to sleep. My private table is one second of joy is worth 12 hours of Pleasure.

Joy is never in our power and pleasure is. I doubt whether anyone who has tasted joy would ever, if both were in his power, exchange it for all the pleasure in the world.

(The image is of a letter by C. S. Lewis to an unknown correspondent, found later in a used book:
[https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/dec/09/unseen-cs-lewis-letter-defines-joy-surprised-by-joy.](https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/dec/09/unseen-cs-lewis-letter-defines-joy-surprised-by-joy))



satisfaction in seeing that the picture does
suit the room v. well and that we don't
regret having bought it. In fact I meant
to 'things going well' just that security-
or illusion of security- which you also
regard as unhealthy. Real joy seems to
me almost as unlike security as profes-
sionally as it is unlike agony. It jumps
under one's ribs and tickles down one's
back and makes one forget meals and
keeps one (delightedly) ^{sleepless} ~~awake~~ o' nights.
It shocks one awake when the other
puts one to sleep. My private table
is one second of Joy is worth twelve
hours of Pleasure.

I think you really quite agree with
me. (N.B. The physical sensations of joy
and misery are in my case identical. Just
the same thing happens inside me on getting
v. good or v. bad news.)

Yours sincerely
C. S. Lewis

P.S. Don't you know the
disaffection at which you C. S. Lewis
expected just from a piece of music and get only pleasure? Like
finding Loch when you thought you'd married Raquel!

Leader's Intro:

This week we focused on one theme which runs throughout Philippians: joy (and rejoicing). As a resource, the back side of the questions page has a set of quotes from C. S. Lewis about joy. The salient points here are: (a) Paul himself was not happy, happy, happy; this letter displays a full range of emotion. Joy is, as Lewis repeatedly points out and all evangelicals know, not mere happiness. (b) Joy and rejoicing are of course tied; joy isn't something we can manufacture, but rejoicing is an exhortation Paul gives, and something we need to be obedient to (see quote from Fee). The model for Paul is surely the psalter; think about Pss 42-43, which start in despair and find their way to praise. (c) It's worth paying attention to what causes Paul joy. His heart is bound up with ministry and those ministered to. They are his joy. Even if this is a particular focus brought out because the context is a letter written to them, it's still worthy of note.

The other question this week comes from the famous passage in chapter 4's paraenesis section, that the Philippians are to focus on whatever is true, pure, etc. Fee points out that by using Hellenistic language Paul is pointing them to the fact that we can and should be inspired by what is noble wherever we find it, whether inside the church or out. Another wonderful example, should one be needed, is the horse Seabiscuit, as wonderfully written about by Laura Hillenbrand. The horse and those who care for and train him are truly inspiring.

Finally, in case it's of use, another relevant quote from Lynn Cohick (224):

The phrase "whatever is true" has personal meaning for me. Right after my sister died, a friend quoted this entire verse to me as a reminder that believers are never separated from God's love (cf. Rom 8:38-39). I was to cling to that hope by continuing to think about and renew my mind on the completeness of the gospel. I confess that all I could remember was this line, "whatever is true." I would repeat this numerous times a day, willing myself to see beyond the moment to the eternal truth of the resurrection that is truer than my present grief. Paul notes to the Corinthians that love rejoices in the truth (1 Cor 13:6).