

BELPRES CHURCH

Sermon Title: Joy in Community

Sergio Chavez

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Scripture:

Philippians 1:7-11 ESV

⁷ It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace,^[a] both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. ⁸ For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. ⁹ And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, ¹⁰ so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, ¹¹ filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

Transcript:

Philippians 1:7-11 says, "It is right for me to feel this way about you all." There's a little bit of Dudley, about y'all. "About you all because I hold you in my heart, for you were all partakers with me of grace, both in the imprisonment and in the defense of the confirmation of the gospel. For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. It is my prayer that your love may abound more and more with knowledge and all discernment so that you may approve what is excellent and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God."

Bow your heads with me.

Father in heaven, thank you so much for this day, Lord. Thank you so much for the words that you've given us, Lord, through song, through scripture. Lord, just use me now as a vessel in order to preach your word, Lord. May we be grateful for the things that you've given us, even the things that sometimes seem mundane, the roof over our head, the clothes on our back, the food on our table, the breath in our lungs to live another day, Lord. Thank you so much for the community, this faith community, that you've continued to bless here at BelPres. We are just so

grateful for all that you've done for us. In your beautiful and your glorious name, together we all said, Amen.

Amen.

Well, for those of you don't know, my name is Sergio Chavez. Not too long ago, in a sermon, I shared with you guys one of the most traumatic experiences in my life, because it's what connected me to the scripture in that sermon. But I'm pretty excited today, because now I get to share with you the most happiest time of life, the most joy filled time of my life. If we can get on the screen this picture of me. Yeah, there we go. Now, if you can't tell, I'm the cat on the left, well, your left, my right, in blue. I'm about 12 years old. If you notice, I don't have a tie on there, because I'm in San Luis, Mexico, and it is hot as mother. So I took it off then. By the way, side note, this is the first time I've ever preached at BelPres without a tie on. If anybody gets bent out of shape, I got two ties in my office. If there's a problem, I'll put them both on. I'll make up for it. Whatever's needed.

But this is me with my [foreign language 00:02:23]. Mateo is right next to me. He's two years older than I'm. And then next to him is my [foreign language 00:02:26] playing the guitar. And you can just see this joy that's beaming off my face. Well, I grew up, although I was born in Mexico, I grew up here in Beacon Hill and my [foreign language 00:02:37], who was also living here, her family, when she decided to get married in the early '90s, she decided to have her wedding in Mexico. So we all piled in cars and we all drove down to San Luis, Mexico, and we had this wedding down there. And it was a very typical Christian wedding. We all piled into this little church in San Luis, which is hot as mothers up in that [inaudible 00:02:54]. Hot as frijoles over there. It's like 110 degrees during the summer and it can get up to 118. I've been there where my shoes have melted to the ground. It's crazy.

So we're all in this little church, which doesn't have HVAC by the way. I'm pretty sure there was a swamp cooler in the back that was trying to heat us all up. But we were just cooking in that joint. And it was scripture and vows and everything, so I just could not wait for this ceremony to be done. And finally, it was over and then the best part came. And that's the reception. So we all came out of this church and behind this church was this huge courtyard. And my [foreign language 00:03:27] were in the fellowship hall cooking, getting stuff ready. And my [foreign language 00:03:30] and other people from the town, because at that time, San Luis was not very big still. Today, it's a lot bigger.

And we still had a lot of ties to a lot of people there. So a lot of people knew our family. I have a very big family. But everybody was pitching in. Everybody was doing their best to make this day as special as they can for my [foreign language 00:03:48]. And so it was just this wonderful time of food and laughing and people talking and singing and all this kind of stuff. Now I've been to several weddings here in the US previous to that, but I have never experienced anything like this before or since. The entire community was rallying together to make this special for her. And the best part of it was is that my [foreign language 00:04:15], I don't

remember why, but they grabbed me and said, "Come with us." And we went out to the front of the church.

This is where we're at. We're now on the street by the church gate, playing music and laughing and telling jokes and stuff, just out in public. And people would come by and be like, "Oh, [foreign language 00:04:30]." They're like, "Oh, [foreign language 00:04:32]." [foreign language 00:04:32] was like, " [foreign language 00:04:45]." I'm sure you guys all understand that? Translation, people would come by and say, "What's going on in there?" And my uncles would say, [foreign language 00:04:53] would say, "Oh, Rena got married. The daughter of Ramona." And they're like, "Really, Rena?" Because they knew her. And they're like, "Oh, congratulations." They said, "Congratulate her yourself. Come on in." We have this phrase saying [foreign language 00:05:06], which is make yourself a taco, which translates to, get some food, have a seat, be with us, commune with us, come on in. And so we invited like six to a dozen people who were not invited to this wedding, who were just walking by, and we're just inviting them in.

Now I understand the difference in cultures. I understand that American culture and Latino culture. We're a collective culture. And we're that whole [foreign language 00:05:31] type of thing. And I know that in American culture, weddings are a little different. Obviously, you got to RSVP and you got to do the plus one. And all for good reasons, right? You want to make sure you have enough food, and you want to make sure you have enough seats. And then there's fire codes and stuff. Let me tell you right now, there was no fire code up in that joint. There was so many people at that church. The only fire code we had in Mexico is if there wasn't enough beans, that's a fire code. Call somebody, call the sheriff. Do we need some more beans down here? Fire code 1608.

So we're just inviting people in, strangers. We were like beggars on the street. But we were instead of asking for things, we were giving stuff away. And I felt like I belonged. I was so happy, outside of that church gate just filled with joy. The joy that was coming from that community was giving me confidence, was filling me up. I was so happy. You can see it on my face.

I completely belonged there. More on that later. So we're talking right now in Philippians and I'm titled this joy in community because that's what as I believe. And Philippians is a sermon about real joy. And we talk about joy. If you ask a bunch of people, it's kind of a gelatinous word, you get a lot of different sayings. But for the most part, consensus is that joy and happiness are different. Happiness tends to be with circumstances. Like I'm happy because this thing or this event happened. But joy is a deeper emotion. Now happiness can lead to joy and joy can produce happiness. But joy is a deeper emotion that is not based on circumstances. Happiness requires circumstances to continue to be happy, but joy can continue on even when things aren't great.

I talked really fast. Sounded like I was rapping. Was I rapping there? Did I need a back beat? Are you guys with me? It's dark and I can't see you and I'm talking really fast.

So I want to make sure we understand the joy that we're talking about here in the Book of Philippians, that Paul's talking about. And I think it's just best to use the description that Dr. Dudley used last week. And he said, "Joy is when you have courage, hope, and a sense of fulfillment, even when you don't have anything that you want, and you have everything you don't want." This resilient type of joy.

So let's set up the backstory real quick on what we're reading here. First of all, Paul is in prison, as we said, he's in prison and he is writing to this church in Philippi, one that he helped plant, which so happens to be one of the first churches in Europe. Not only that, because it's outside of the area of Judea and Jerusalem, all that. So now these are European, because these are Gentiles that are building up this church. And on top of that, it was started off in a woman's house, Lydia, one of the first converts in Europe. Because there was no temple there because it was outside of the area, they started it in her house.

Women played such a huge part in the beginning of this church. The Bible points that out, to get this thing running. This goes to show that everyone has a part to play in bringing a healthy community to fruition. The Bible does this over and over again. It points out that all are welcome under the umbrella of God, slave, free, Gentile, Jew, male, female. All inclusive, all people. And as I studied this scripture, it became evident to me that we could learn a bit about this, from this exciting community in Philippi. Because I believe that resilient joy comes from a group of people who are filled with the Spirit. And I want to point out seven characteristics that I saw in just this short passage of Paul writing to the Philippi, of that joy is in community, a place where people can truly belong.

And I'll just warn you now that, yes, some of the things I might say may go against counter culture to US culture, because one of the biggest principles of US culture is individualism. And I come from a Latino culture with collective culture. New Hope, who meets here, who predominantly are East Africans or Central Africans, they are a collective culture. Seattle Chinese Covenant Church who meets just down in S-150 at 11:00, they're a collective culture as well. So we function differently. And I'm going to speak into how individualism at times. I'm, I'm willing to say that the individualistic way of American culture at times does not align with the Bible. Dr. Dudley said it last week. He said, "When Paul is running, he's not running to a person he's running to a people, you all, because there's no community of one."

So let's dive in. Paul opens his letter with excitement. We read about this last week or we heard about this last week. He's so happy that God is continuing the good work that he has started in them, which brings to the very first characteristic of a community that produces joy is that it's focused on the gospel. It is God-centered. That's where it starts. God is doing a good work in them. That is what's producing everything that's going on in the community, God-centered. And

after Paul proclaims this, he goes into this Thanksgiving prayer for this community that he's been a part of, that he's continuing to journey with. Which leads me to the second characteristics of a community that produces joy, and that is a community that is committed to the gospel.

Philippians 1:7 says, "It is right for me to feel this way about you all because I hold you in my heart. For you are all partakers with me of grace, both in imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, the gospel that Jesus is Lord, that his blood paid for everyone sin so that all may have salvation."

Paul is excited that the Philippians show their true partnership with him. This community shows their commitment to the gospel. These Philippians are Paul's kind of people, because they're not backing down. Even if the person that brought them the gospel is in prison, they're committed to continue. BelPres, I don't know if you recognize this, but you are in a place that is committed to the gospel, as every church should be. Because if a church is not unified in this, well, then that's when it becomes a country club. That's when it becomes a hangout joint. And when trouble comes, whether it's external or internal, that's when a community scatters, because they forgot why they were there in the first place.

If you need another example to kind of put that into place for you, just think about the disciples. They didn't hang out with Jesus just because it was cool. They were committed to Jesus because they thought he was the Messiah. At times, it was very difficult to follow that cat, but they were committed. They believed he was the Messiah. You are in a place that's committed to that as well. Which leads me to the third characteristic of a community that produces joy. And that is one who supports one another. Now Paul is in prison. And so Philippi sends Paul gifts through this cat name Epaphroditus. They say, "Epaphroditus, go and visit Paul." And they bring him all this gift and they support him while he's in prison. They support him for his ministry. Now I never heard the name Epaphroditus. That's a new thing to me. It kind of sounds like a skin rash, doesn't it? Like, "Man, I better get out the sun. I'm getting a bad case of Epaphroditus. What's going on here? Give me some lotion."

But that's his name? Sorry, Epaphroditus. I haven't heard that name since. And if you feel like you were going to call your name Epaphroditus, you know what? Do it. Be different. Go for it. Don't listen to me. Don't worry about that. BelPres, are you supporting one another with your money, with your time, and with your talents? Now I know BelPres has a lot of outreach programs like Jubilee Reach and Auto Angels and you partner with the EA and et cetera. And those are all good things. But are you supporting one another on a personal level? Community can be strengthened through outreach. Yes, that's true. But what about when we are lacking confidence? Who is going to hold us up? What about when we are mourning? Whose shoulder are we going to cry on?

What do you do with your extra time? How do you fill it? Do you go and spend it in a community outside of here? Or do you come and spend it here, with this community? Whether it's in this building or it's in small groups or it's inviting people to dinners, whatever it may be,

where are you placing it? Because when you support one another, when a community supports another, it strengthens that community. We see it here in Paul. It deeply affects people, when you support one another. We can hear it in Paul's writing, when he continues in Philippians 1:8, it says, "For God is my witness." For God is my witness. There is no other higher witness than God. These are strong words that Paul is using, "For God is my witness how I yearn for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ or Christ Jesus."

Paul cares so much for this community that he yearns to be with them. They're supporting him, they're lifting him up, even when he is in prison. This community is where he wants to be. It's who he wants to be with, because the Spirit is moving there with them, and he feels at home with them. He yearns for them so much that he describes it as Jesus Christ, as affection for people, for us, Jesus who loves us so much that he died on a cross for every single person. That is the type of yearning that Paul is trying to describe, that he'd be even willing to sacrifice his life for them.

Which brings me to the characteristic four, a community that is willing to sacrifice for one another in Christ. Some of the strongest relationships that I have in my life are people who love me, who are willing to do anything, sacrifice anything for me, to either help me or to be with me. Back in the '90s, this totally fell through over at the 9:00 AM. I don't know what's going on over there. But maybe I got one cat in here. But back in the '90s, we had this movie called Bad Boys. I'm pretty sure that's where we got the saying ride or die. We got one. I knew I'd have somebody. This phrase is kind of funny. It's called ride or die. But this phrase ride or die means that I will be with you regardless. I'll be with you to the end. Nothing will stop. We will be together. That willingness of sacrificing for a person.

Those people in my life who sacrificed for me, these are the people that I yearn to be with. And I would do the same for them. BelPres, do you yearn to be with each other in Christ? If not, what's holding you back? If no one is taking the steps needed, then be the first. Because you are doing it in Christ. Christ will help you do things beyond the things that you think you can do. But you will strengthen this community.

This leads me to the fifth characteristics and that is pray, prayer for one another. Philippians 1:9. This is Paul again. "And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more with knowledge and all discernment." Paul's prayer here is not just for people to be in good health or have prosperity. Although, that is not a bad prayer. Those prayers are perfectly fine. But Paul is more concerned with their newfound faith and that love abounds more. The love that they now have experienced from God, that they will continue to share that amongst themselves, not just for affection for one another, but a love that leads to healthy choices and discernment.

If you can think right now of someone who you know who loves you, whether that's a family friend or a family, you know that they usually have your best interest in mind. I have three daughters, and my love for them leads me to protect them. And I do my best to have their best

interest in mind, not to just be right, but is an expression of my love for them, that I want to help them make good choices that will lead them to happiness and joy and keep them safe.

Which leads me to the sixth characteristic, and that is God's love. When God's love is in a community, there is no way there is not joy in that community. Some of us struggle with the word [foreign language 00:18:31], in air quotes, the word love. But just remember, when we do all things through Christ, we abound in things beyond ourselves. Let God lead the way.

Some of us have a lot of broken relationships in our lives. Some of us have a lot of pain, a lot of hurt and trauma in our lives. Connect with God's love, because that supersedes anything that's happening here. That love is powerful. And in a community, a God-centered community will receive the love from God. And that is the love that they share with others.

Which leads me to the last characteristics, and that is fruitfulness, not a self-centered, but Jesus and other-centered community, Philippians 1:10. This is Paul finishing off his Thanksgiving prayer, "So that you may approve what is excellent and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God."

The fruit of righteousness, God's love, leads us to places. It leads us to producing fruit, to produce love and joy and what is excellent in the eyes of God. And if we continue in this, and in doing this, it's going to tug against your individualism. Because God will slowly but surely pull you away from your self-centeredness. Because we become righteous through Jesus Christ, who makes us righteous by his grace, not our doing. Our doing would be considered self righteousness. And that is not a mark of a disciple. BelPres, if you take notes from the church of Philippi, you will find joy in your community. Because the joy does not come from you but from the moving of the Spirit among you, the type of community that I believe leads to a deep sense of belonging. And this church has done it, and this church will continue to do it because it's committed to the gospel.

So let's go back to this picture of me outside of this church gate. I wasn't just happy that day. On that day, I found my identity, because I was among my people. I was among a family that I had not fully experienced. The joy that was in that place made me feel 12 feet tall. I yearn to be there. It is a sense of community fulfillment and belonging that has stayed with me, and I think about it all the time. I could live this night every night.

Now, granted, I am an extrovert. So I was in the right place at the right time, just welcoming random people into this place. Now my wife was an introvert. She would die. This is not her thing. And so I understand that we have extroverts and introverts. But do what my wife does, or a little advice from what my wife does. In big crowds, in the community and stuff in church, she finds places to serve. Because that's where she can be in a smaller community to help. And she

uses me like a human shield. She throws me out into crowds like, "Go get them tiger. And I'm going to go over here in this corner and help these people." Which is fine. We all have a part to play. There's a place for everyone.

But I would say you still do have to meet new people in your community. Ask God to give you that courage. And I understand that my sense of community here came through family, but that's not the only place it can come from. Maybe it comes from your friends. Maybe it comes from work. Maybe it's a sport that you've done, but there's this rich sense of community, a place where you felt like you belonged. But I believe there is even a better community that could welcome all people to belong. And that is a community that's centered in Christ. This is how you have welcomed me, not a US citizen, not someone who grew up in this church. Someone who has a very different background than many of you, someone who didn't even grow up in this area, because God is the great unifier. Across races, skin color, gender, social status, whatever, God brings us all together.

So BelPres, if you are willing to set aside your individualism and preferences and forgive the past and make the Jesus of the center of your community, by committing to the gospel, to support one, another willing to sacrifice for one another, pray for one another, you will produce righteousness, and that righteousness will produce joy and love. A place where people want to say, "What's going on in there? What's going on with those people? There's something different about them and that confidence of joy that comes from God in there." Well, then that's a place that I want to stand outside of the church gates welcoming people in.

[foreign language 00:24:06]. Come and be with us. Because you will find, because we believe in Jesus, and we believe Jesus welcomes all and includes all people, you are welcome and you belong here. You can do this BelPres, and you've done it for so long, and God will continue to bless you to continue to do it.

Bow your heads with me. Father in heaven, thank you so much for your blessing upon this place, upon this community, whether it's online or in-person or in small groups or at a barbecue, wherever it may be, Lord. That you've continued to bless this church for over 60 years and you will continue to bless it for another 60 years and beyond, Lord, because you are at the center, Lord. Thank you so much. And I ask you to fill in the gaps of the words that I've said to people. If we are struggling with the sense of family or belonging or love, Lord, may those gaps that we have that seem so big be filled with you, Lord, with your joy, with your love, Lord, so that we can move forward in courage that we belong. In your beautiful and your glorious name. And together we all said, "Amen."

Amen.

Discussion Questions:

Read this week's scripture(s) & answer the below questions with your friends, family, or All In small group.

Opening Question: Looking back to last week's sermon and scripture... How did you live differently or practice what we talked about in your life this week? What did you do and how did it go?

Scripture Reflection Questions: Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following:

- What do we learn about God (e.g., traits, personality, what matters, priorities) in this passage?
- What do we learn about people, and ourselves in particular, this week?

Sermon Reflection Questions: Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following:

- Is there a time in your life where you have felt the kind of connection that Paul has for the community in Philippi in your Christian Journey (Phi 1:7-8)? If so, what were the factors? If not, what was missing?
- Paul prays that love abounds more and more, the love that only comes from Christ which leads to purity and the fruit of righteousness. Why do you believe Paul prays this (Hint read Acts 2:12-17) and do you think we should be praying for this today?

Closing Question and Application: Given what we've discussed together today, how might God want you to apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week? Who might you share this with?

Closing group prayer: Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement in the week ahead.