

The Joy of Relating

Philippians 4:1-3, 20-23



Celebrating your birthday is just one special time of the year which reveals the close and caring relationships in your life. Today, we are considering the **joy of relating** within the context of the Church. This is the final sermon in our series, “**Joy for the Journey**”. Have you grown deeper in the joy of the Lord? Last Sunday we considered the joy of giving and the fact that we can “*excel in the grace of giving*” (II Corinthians 8:7).



Are you connected or isolated? The English poet John Donne (1572-1631) wrote...

*No man is an island, entire of itself
Every man is a piece of the continent
A part of the main
If a clod be washed away by the sea
Europe is the less...
Any man's death diminishes me
Because I am involved in mankind*

If this is true in a general sense for mankind, how much more it is for the people of God? His plan is not just that we tolerate each other. If we are sons and daughters of God, we should find joy as we relate to one another. Let's read [Philippians 4:1-3, 20-23](#). Joy filled relationships develop in the intertwined context of Christian unity and God's glory. Within this structure we see four relational principles.

ONE: Live with stability – v. 1

Paul twice called the Philippians “beloved” and “longed” for them (see also 1:8). They were his “joy” and [victor's] “crown”. He instructed them to “*stand firm in the Lord*” (cf. “*stand firm in one spirit*” 1:27). In the NIV “*this is how*” points to 3:17-21. To stand firm reminds us of Joshua's call to courage, “*Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.*” (1:9). Satan wants to distract, disrupt, and destroy Christian relationships. We must resist. Two of his weapons are loneliness and isolation.

A new survey commissioned by YMCA Canada...reveals that a staggering 60% of Canadians feel disconnected from their community, with 16% reporting they never feel a sense of community and 44% experiencing it only sometimes....The survey revealed that feelings of disconnection are particularly acute among Canadians under 55, with 68% of 18 to 34-year-olds and 64% of 25 to 54-year-olds feeling a lack of belonging.

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TWO: Live with harmony – vv. 2-3

Musically, harmony occurs when different notes are complementary. Euodia and Syntyche were Philippians who had “*shared [Paul's] struggle*” (v.3) – they once were harmonious. But discord had occurred. Paul urged (used for each) that they “*live in harmony*” (NASB) or “*agree with each other*” (NIV) or “the same thing to think” (lit; v.2; same as in 2:2). Like-mindedness has the same foundation as living with stability – it must be “*in the Lord*”. Paul urged these women to build their relationship with each other relative to life in Christ (see 2:5). This is the call of Colossians 3:12-14 in which we see that the foundation for our mutual forgiveness is divine forgiveness in Christ. C. S. Lewis wrote, “*Everyone thinks forgiveness is a lovely idea until they have something to forgive.*” When forgiveness and restoration occur among Christians, there can be a return to harmony and to **synergy**.

- Paul solicited help from his “[genuine] *yokefellow* (συζυγε)” to be peacemaker; (lit.) “to take and bring **together**” these ladies. It is possible this was a proper or nickname: *Syzygos*.
- Paul wrote about Euodia and Syntyche having worked **with** Clement.
- Paul noted these women “*contended at my side*”; (lit.) “**together** strugglers” in the Gospel
- Paul noted that there were others who were (lit.) “**together** workers” in his ministry

This last term is the source of our English word “synergy” – a dynamic in which two efforts combined will eclipse the force individual efforts merely added together. An authentic, joyful “together” and “with” must characterize Christian relationships.



THREE: Live with doxology – v. 20

531 All People That On Earth Do Dwell.
William Kethe. The Hundredth Psalm. Genevan Psalter.

1. All people that on earth do dwell, Sing to the Lord with cheerful voice; Him
2. The Lord, ye know, is God indeed, With-out our aid He did us make; We
3. O en-ter then His gates with praise, Approach with joy His courts un-to; Praise,
4. For why? the Lord our God is good, His mer-cy is for-ev-er sure; His
Praise God, from whom all blessings flow; Praise Him, all creatures here be-low; Praise
serve with fear, His praise forth tell; Come ye be-fore Him and re-joice,
are His flock, He doth us feed, And for His sheep He doth us take,
land, and bless His name al-ways, For it is seem-ly so to do.
truth at all times firm-ly stood, And shall from age to age en-dure. A-MEN.
Him a-bove, ye heav'n-ly host; Praise Father, Son, and Ho-ly Ghost.

What is a *doxology*? It is the English term which describes an expression (or hymn) of praise. It comes from “glory” (δοξα) found in this verse. Do we connect our worship of God and the joy of relating to each other? One of the greatest deceptions our enemy can perpetrate is the idea that Christian relationships are primarily horizontal. They are first and foremost vertical. The way we worship God determines the way we love one another. If we submit to God’s command to love Him with all of our heart, soul, and mind we will be empowered to love our neighbour as ourselves (Matthew 22:37-40).

Yes, this verse brings Paul's letter to a close with praise to God – especially for the wonderful truth of verse 19. But let's not view this as a perfunctory point of praise at the close of an epistle. We must reckon with the reality that the quality of our adoration of God will impact the quality of our relationships with one another in the Church. Paul Tripp put it this way, *"If you are not requiring yourself to get your deepest sense of well-being vertically, you will shop for it horizontally, and you will always come up empty."* (**Dangerous Calling**, Crossway, 2012, 36)

FOUR: Live with connectivity – vv. 21-23

How do we live with **connectivity**? First, we must obey the command to *"greet all the saints in Christ Jesus"* (v.21a). Paul did not define style as in Romans 16:16 or I Thess 5:26 (lit. "with kiss holy"). In Romans 16 "greet" is used 21 times in 27 verses (35 proper names). In our text "greet" is intentional, personal, Christ-centered, and without prejudice. Paul shared greetings from *"brothers"* (v.21b) like Timothy or Epaphroditus, who were known; and *"Caesar's household"* (v.22) who were unknown, and would have included Roman soldiers and slaves. Paul taught that Christians must show love to all of God's family, though it may not be easy. You can check out the resources at [Courage To Connect](#).

Second, we live in God's grace (χάρις) as Paul expressed in verse 23. In the opening of the letter, Paul shared *"grace and peace"* (1:2). The source of such qualities is found in God our Father and in Jesus our Saviour. In this final phrase of Philippians there is a powerful call to live **graciously**. What does it mean to experience grace? How will it enhance our relationships? Though addressing pastors, Paul Tripp comments are applicable to all believers. *"You don't have to be afraid of what is in your heart, and you don't have to fear being known, because there is nothing in you that could ever be exposed that hasn't already been covered by the precious blood of your Savior king, Jesus."* (28)

Conclusion

Please consider carefully our **local church** relationships. How can we relate more meaningfully to one another? How can we love and support one another?



Consider also relationships we have through **ministry partnerships** (details on website and at Info Centre). There is an urgent, specific need for our response to Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (which is our October "ministry partner spotlight"). Please prayerfully respond to the issue of [Assisted Dying's Impact on Canadians with Disabilities](#).

Remember to check out worship songs of joy – see ["Paul's Picks"](#)