

Sermon
Lanier Christian Church
January 22, 2012

How To Find Joy In Your Relationships

Philippians 2:1-8

Here is a fact: God has made us to have relationships.

We can have a relationship with Him and we can have a relationship with other people. Since Adam and Eve first introduced sin into the world – maintaining relationships has been a major struggle between people - and people and God.

One of the biggest causes of unhappiness in our world is strained relationships. Conflict kills happiness. There is a daily struggle to live in a world where there is no conflict. Whether it be nation against nation or family member against another family member, to live conflict free is a struggle.

How do you handle the conflict? How do you maintain peace and unity? Unity is a key ingredient for success and fulfillment in life. To have a successful business the employees must get along and work together. To have a successful football team the players must work together. To have successful government the congress and the president must cooperate. To have a successful family the family members must work together. To have a successful church we must all work together. Very little is accomplished in life by yourself. Very little is accomplished without cooperation. When there is unity there is tremendous power and potential. The problem is people don't always get along – they don't always co-operate. How do you strive for unity? How do you reduce conflict and increase cooperation?

In Philippians chapter two Paul talks about how to have unity and co-operation with others:

1 *If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any*

tenderness and compassion, 2 then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. (Philippians 2:1-2 NIV)

Christians - we are to have unity in Christ. We are supposed to get along with one another. There ought to be fellowship among us. Paul says we are to be like-minded. We are to show love to one another – because Christ has loved us. We are to display mercy and grace – because that is what God has shown us. We are to be Christ-like in our behavior and if we are then there is unity and harmony.

Unfortunately – unity and harmony does not happen very often. But Paul gives us in Philippians chapter two - five practical steps of finding joy by reducing conflict. The first step is found in verse three:

3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. (Phil. 2:3 NIV)

These verses in chapter 2 encourage us to have joy in our relationships. How?

1. Stop having selfish AMBITIONS

I like the way the Message Bible translates this verse. It says:

"Don't push your way to the front; don't sweet-talk your way to the top. Put yourself aside, and help others get ahead." Philippians 2:3 (MSG)

All too often we compete with people who are supposed to be on our team. What type of team will ever win if they are busy competing with themselves – rather than working together? Stop fighting one another.

As a child you may have been involved in sibling rivalries. You competed with your brothers and sisters and now you're much older and much more grown up. But some of you are still competing with your brothers and sisters, trying to prove that you're better. That may be your ambition in life – "Let the world see that I am better

than my brother or my sister or my neighbor." You're an adult and you're still acting like a child! You're on the same team – you're in the same family! Stop holding on to selfish ambitions.

There is an interesting passage of scripture found in 1 Thessalonians 4:11 –

11 *Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you,*
1 Thessalonians 4:11 (NIV)

What are the ambitions in your life? How are they driving your life? Are your ambitions causing conflict? Look at what James says on the subject:

1 *What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? James 4:1 (NIV)*

Our society teaches us instant gratification. When my needs and ambitions and desires conflict with your needs and ambitions, we have trouble. We live in a very competitive world. If you want to have unity you need to check if your ambitions are selfish.

The second step in reducing conflict with other people and have joy in your relationships is:

2. Stop having selfish CONCEIT

Let's look again at verse three:

3 *Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. (Phil. 2:3 NIV)*

How many of you like conceited people? Not too many. Pride can affect us all. We should not do things just to show off our egos. An egotist is an "I" specialist. His "I's" are too close together. He is full of himself. When this happens there is very little room for anyone else – including God. All he can see is himself. Self centered pride and arrogance is the result of conceit. The Bible says "Pride goes before destruction".

Proverbs 13:10 says:

10 *Pride only breeds quarrels, but wisdom is found in those who take advice. - Proverbs 13:10 (NIV)*

The first cause of conflict is competing ambitions. The second cause of conflict is personal pride – when I've got an ego and refuse to admit when I'm wrong, there are bound to be quarrels. If you could eliminate conceit you would solve most of the people problems in today's world.

Now we get to a positive quality we should strive to attain.

3. Increase HUMILITY

Let's read verse three again:

3 *Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. (Phil. 2:3 NIV)*

Paul says don't put people down – lift them up. How? By treating them better than you would yourself. This is a radical concept! Treat others better than yourself? Yes!

That is what the Bible teaches. It is the exact opposite of what our culture teaches. The world is full of people who think they are better than everybody else. We have elevated selfishness to an art form!

One afternoon, former Vice President Dan Quayle was driving home after picking up his daughter Corinne from school. At a red light, a fellow motorist pulled alongside and rolled down his window. "You're a double for Dan Quayle!" he shouted.

"Gee, I hope I don't look like that guy," Quayle replied, jokingly.

"Yeah," the man shot back. "I know what you mean."

Ouch...that hurt!

I don't know about you, but I would rather not be humbled.

I hate to be embarrassed.

And I don't like putting myself in a situation that makes me look bad.

Humility is not thinking less of yourself – but thinking of your-self less. Your focus isn't on you – it is on others. Your focus is on other people. You are people centered – rather than self centered. The person that thinks he's humble – isn't. The humble person doesn't even know it because he's focusing on everybody else. The book of Proverbs 29:23 tells us:

23 A man's pride brings him low, but a man of lowly spirit gains honor. - Proverbs 29:23 (NIV)

We like to criticize and pick out faults of other people because it makes us feel superior. We think we build ourselves up by putting other people down. But the Bible teaches the exact opposite. If you want to decrease conflict in your life – decrease criticism – increase humility. Treat others better than you would your-self.

The third cause of conflict is when I fail to value other people, when I treat them with less respect than they deserve.

The fourth step to reducing conflict with other people and restoring joy to our relationships is:

4. Increase CONSIDERATION of others

Let's now look at verse four:

4 Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. - Philippians 2:4 (NIV)

The Message Bible says it this way:

"Don't be obsessed with getting your own advantage. Forget yourselves long enough to lend a helping hand." Philippians 2:4 (MSG)

Don't just be interested in what is going on in your life - but be interested in the lives of other people too. Look out for them. The Greek word for "look" is "scopos" from which we get the word

"scope" – like the scope on a rifle. A Telescope – a microscope – both help you see things better. Care about the lives of other people. Pay attention to their needs.

Demonstrate consideration of others. Be considerate of each other. Watch out for one another. Take care of one another. Nothing I'm saying is new – but doing it is harder than saying it.

The fifth step to in reducing conflict with other people and increasing joy in our relationships is:

5. Develop a Christ-Like CHARACTER

This next step is found in the next four verses. Philippians 2:5-8

***5** Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:**6** Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, **7** but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. **8** And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross! -Philippians 2:5-8 (NIV)*

Jesus is our model. Jesus is our example. If you want to know how to get along with people – even those who are hard to get along with – look at the example of Jesus. We are to put on the mind of Christ and develop the same attitude toward others that He had. What is this mind? What was his attitude? It is found in our verses.

Even though He is the very form of God – He didn't demand His rights. He humbled Himself and became obedient to the Father's will – even to the point of death. What death? Death on the cross as a sacrifice for our sins.

When President Nixon was the president of the United States he said in a speech that the greatest moment in human history was when man walked on the moon. But Billy Graham corrected him and said, "No, the greatest moment in history was not when man walked on the moon but when God walked on earth."

Jesus had a servant's attitude. Do you? How do you know if you have a serving attitude? Let me ask you, "How do you respond when people treat you like a servant? Do you get up-tight and demand your rights?" If that is the case you don't have a servant's attitude.

When we see the pictures of Christmas, the pictures all look so pristine.

There was no sweat, or disheveled clothing.

But that was not how it was...

God was born to peasants among all the smells that come with being in a barn.

God was born.

And as we know, birth is messy, painful, and from what I hear (and I mean from what I hear), it is mighty uncomfortable.

Jesus was right there in the middle of it.

Then He was placed in a feeding bin.

If that was not humble enough for you, Jesus was born a Jew in an occupied country.

His parents lived in the backwoods of Galilee, from a small town that hardly anyone ever heard of.

His mission as an adult was to communicate God to people.

But He had only measured success.

For Jesus championed a cause, so just, yet so radical, He was hated and condemned by every major, traditional religious authority.

Then He was betrayed by His closest friends, brought up on false charges, tried before a prejudiced jury and a cowardly judge.

Is that humiliating enough for you?

Jesus was a God you could touch, feel, hear, and see.

Jesus became human.

Jesus became human for a reason...to be our savior.

Jesus was willing to sacrifice Himself for others – are you? Most of us know John 3:16 but do you know 1 John 3:16?

16 This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life

for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.

This verse not only talks about the attitude of Jesus – but it talks about what our attitude should be. Have you got a servant's attitude? Have you put on the mind of Christ?

It's impossible to live a lifestyle of unselfishness on your own. It is human nature to be selfish – to only look out for number one. We all have that nature to do what we want to do. We are selfish – through and through. But Christ wants us to live different than that. He wants us to develop a Christ-like character. He wants us to become like He is and He asks us to...

take on the same attitude that He has....to allow His approach....His attitude...His Spirit to permeate our lives.

Allow Christ take control of your attitudes. Allow Christ to take control of your mind. Submit to Him. Follow Him. Give yourself to Him today.

Adapted from Tom Shepard, Paul Decker, Rick Warren, David Simpson