

Norman C. Schwab
Yacolt EVFree
October 13, 1996

Gut Level Love
Philippians 1:7-11

At the 1992 Winter Olympics in Lillhammer, Norway. Picabo Street raced to win the first American woman's downhill skiing gold medal in Olympic History. She became an overnight hero back in the states. I heard somewhere that her home town Boise Idaho, at the time was building a new wing on their hospital and wishing to honor her achievement, a group that was pushing for the new Intensive Care Unit to be named after the lightning fast skier. I'm afraid, however, it would not inspire great confidence to the one lying on a hospital bed ready for surgery to hear over the pa system. Dr. Brown, Dr. Brown report to Picabo ICU. Dr. Brown Picabo ICU. I've been just waiting to get that joke in somewhere.

Intensive Care waiting rooms. These are the places where the frivolous get swept out of the way and real life meets real people.

In *One Church from the Fence*, Wes Seelinger writes: "I have spent long hours in the intensive care waiting room ... watching with anguished people ... listening to urgent questions: Will my husband make it? Will my child walk again? How do you live without your companion of thirty years? "The intensive care waiting room is different from any other place in the world. And the people who wait are different. They can't do enough for each other. No one is rude. The distinctions of race and class melt away. A person is a father first, a black man second. The garbage man loves his wife as much as the university professor loves his, and everyone understands this. Each person pulls for everyone else. "In the intensive care waiting room, the world changes. Vanity and pretense vanish. The universe is focused on the doctor's next report. If only it will show improvement. Everyone knows that loving someone else is what life is all about."

When life places us in the intensive care unit how can we possibly catch joy? Intensive Care waiting rooms are some of the last places you'd look to find contagious joy...And yet here is Paul writing from a prison. From his own personal intensive care unit he writes a letter that exudes

a contagious joy. How can we catch joy in the midst of tough times? Turn with me to the book of Philippians.

Paul has been praying and thanking God for the people who attend the church at Philippi. In verse 6 he shares a profound confidence in the God who started a work in their hearts will work to see it to completion as God moves them progressively toward becoming more like Christ. Paul has a great joy and confidence when he sees God working in the lives of the Philippians. We come to our passage this morning. Read with me verses 7-11. (READ)

Point #1 Do you want to bring joy to a troubled heart? Then stick around when the going gets rough. Standing together through tough times..deepens relationships and brings joy to troubled hearts. Look at verse 7 "I have you in my heart since imprisonment and defense." Paul experienced the embarrassment and suffering and official condemnation of Roman captivity. The government was saying we think you have done something wrong! It wasn't healthy to befriend a man on trial by the government. But that didn't stop the Philippians. They stuck with Paul through thick and thin. They were there to support him during his defense of the gospel. Paul uses the term defense (apologia) a technical term presenting a case before an official judge. Paul is far more concerned with defending the gospel than defending himself. He views himself as expendable..but the gospel is not. The Philippians supported him financially even when he wasn't out there witnessing and preaching. Even when he wasn't able to be an international evangelist..the Philippians stuck with him. While others were taking advantage of his imprisonment (v.15) they stood up and supported Paul and sent encouragement to him, and that brought great joy.

The end of verse 7 Paul writes "you all are partakers of grace with me." They stood with Paul partaking of grace. They were not content to merely say, "God..thanks for the grace you've given, let me put it up here on the shelf where I can look at it." No. They partook. They received and devoured God's grace. That grace, the unmerited favor laid on undeserving sinners by almighty God. One who has been awakened and devoured God's grace cannot be proud. He will not be one to look to take advantage of another when their down. He will not look disgustingly down at the other in their prison saying "I don't struggle in the area. That

area doesn't enslave me..get over it!" No, the one who has consumed grace humbly knows he too is undeserving and sees rightly his position before God and others. This one who has devoured grace will not be proud, but will be consumed by thankfulness, gratitude and contagious joy and delight.

Affection is fostered through consistent teamwork in tough times. There was this guy in high school who liked the same girl he thought I liked. He didn't tell me this, he just decided to hate me. I became the target of his jealous venom. He always wanted to fight me, tell untruths about me and pull my friends away from spending time with me. Many guys I once called friend drifted during that sophomore year in high school, but there was one guy who stood by. I was questioning him one afternoon trying to find out why last years friends were now so mean. He told me something that has forever endured my heart. It helped me through a tough time. Don told me "I don't know why they are acting that way, but I don't care what those other guys say or think...I'm going to be your friend no matter what" And he was, he stuck up for me when they started the joking, ridicule and mocking. It brought great joy to my heart. It still does when I remember his loyalty. Have you ever had someone stick with you at a intensive care time in your life? Maybe they stuck when you weren't very lovely to be around. Joy does not come to those who run away when the fire gets hot. Joy is absent to those who escape, and duck out for a flashier model, who try to escape and hide from the pain. Joy comes when you are fully known and yet fully loved. Sticking around when things get tough, brings joy to a troubled heart.

Point #2 Do you want to develop joy in your relationships? Then get them into your heart. Look at verse 8. "How I long for you all with the affections" (you all Those folks down south really believe that Paul was from Texas always saying You all v.4, 7,8) Paul expressed great affection for the believers in Philippi. He loved them. The Greek word Paul used for affection is splagxnois. Literally it means bowels. In the 1st century the seat of emotions was thought to reside in the intestines the bowels, the liver, the guts. Paul was using the most emphatic expression of love he could come up with. Philippians, I love you with all my guts!

Do you love people? Some of you may say, "I love the world, it's just the people I can't stand!" If you want to develop joy in your relationships...you must get them into your heart. Let them get under your skin and past your nerves so they can rest on your throbbing heart. If you desire to be a joyful friend, a great Pastor, Sunday School teacher, AWANA leader get them into your guts...love them. If you want to be a great husband or wife, a great LIFE Group leader, mother, father, brother or sister or son or daughter, get the people you live with into your heart. Develop a love for people.

You may think, that's not my personality. I'm not Mr. Happy outgoing. I have a tough enough time loving myself, let alone anybody else. My background, my life has been one big mistake. Every time I make an effort to reach out in love, the piano lid comes down and my fingers get smashed.

I think If Paul were here, he would tell us that developing a love for others can be quite independent of personality, talent or past history. Paul could list for us quite a load of strikes against him why he himself should be a angry, resentful, untrusting, and unloving person. But it is his being overwhelmed by the grace of God and the position of confidence that affords him the joy of loving when all others would not love. Loving others to many of us has been viewed as an obligation. "She's my wife..the feelings aren't there but I feel obligated to love. Sure I married him but the flame fizzled out a long time ago...I'm his wife, I'm supposed to love him. Folks, love is not an obligation. It is not a duty. It is a response. We can love because He God, first loved us. We respond to the overwhelming incredibly sacrificial love God has for us when He sent his Son to die on our behalf to pay our sin debt. He gave sacrificially in order to restore our broken relationships. With God and with others. We can get others in our hearts by the degree that God gets into ours. But how do we develop that affection? The feelings of love..when we don't feel like loving.

Point #3 Do you want to see the contagious joy of a changed life? Then begin to strategically pray for character in those you love. Those relationships you are struggling with. The ones you feel an obligation to love but the feelings aren't there. Have you been praying for them. Not just that God would hurry up and fix them. Have you been praying that

God would develop their strengths? Have you been praying specific character traits to be folded into their lives? Look what Paul does in verse 9-11. "I pray..real love..more and more in real knowledge and all discernment...approve of the excellent things in order to be sincere."

How would you like to have somebody consistently praying for you like that. Man! How encouraging. Paul prays to encourage their strengths. He wants God to hyperabound the love that is in them so that they can experience a progression towards greater love. I think Paul wants this them to love God more and others as well. We see Paul's desire that they love other more in 1:16 and 2:1-2. Love for others fits very well with his theme for unity in the body of believers. At the end of verse 9 Paul prays something incredibly wise. He prays for increasing love coupled with. Look. Real spiritual knowledge and discernment. What a great thing to pray for someone. A deep heart felt love based on a solid foundation, with reason. This kind of love Paul prays for is not just excitable blind emotional love. It's the long-lasting joy-giving good stuff. This love is coupled with discernment. Discernment is the ability to not only judge between the good and the bad. Discernment can distinguish between the good and the best. Discernment has insight that can discover things that may be hidden or obscure, discovering things that are not readily seen. One who has more love and discernment does the right action in a given situation. They are much better equip to love. They can get into other peoples shoes. Less prone to offend. They develop a wise sensitivity to people and relationships.

Love and discernment is quite a combination. You certainly wouldn't want one without the other. Love without discernment would lack focus and purpose. It would press us into liberties that at first may seem loving, but in the long-term would prove quite the opposite. Love unchecked by discernment blindly donates money, time, resources to any cause that comes to the door. Love without discernment rarely disciplines their children. This love is short-term thinking. Love without discernment never will confront when it sees a destructive behavior in a friend. It's like the North Fork of the Lewis river this last spring. It spilled over the containment banks and flooded the homes and low areas. Love uncontained by discernment can wreak havoc.

Likewise, discernment without love would produce the resident critic and judge. It feasts on cynicism. It is acid to the soul and a smotherer of contagious joy. Sodium is an extremely active element and is found in nature only when it is combined with another element. Chlorine, however, is a poisonous gas, it's the stuff that makes your eyes sting when you open a bottle of bleach. When it's all alone it can be deadly. But, when the two are combined to form NaCl you get...Salt. This is the stuff we use to preserve meat and enhance flavors in our food. Truth and love can be a lot like chlorine and sodium. Love without truth can be blind, flighty, willing to latch on to anybody or any doctrine no matter what. Discernment by itself can be like Chlorine gas. If it is spoken without love it can be offensive, stinging and sometimes deadly. However, the combination of truth and discernment can be an incredible demonstration of what Jesus wants for us believers to be. A salty flavorful attraction to the world. It's contagious. It's engaging.

Paul prayed these character traits into the lives of the Philippians because verse 10. He wanted them to approve of the excellent things. He didn't want them to settle for the OK, the satisfactory or even the good. He wanted them to experience the best of what God had in store for their relationships, their ministries, their families. He prayed their lives be marked by being sincere and blameless.

The word sincere comes from a combination of Latin words sine cere. These words were stamped on pottery that was made without wax. The finest pottery in ancient times was very thin walled and fragile. It was easily prone to cracking while being fired in the kiln. Some irreputable craftsmen, instead of throwing away the pot they'd worked so hard on, would fill the cracks with wax and then finish over them, disguising it's flaw. They would then take it to market and attempt to sell it as the "good stuff". But one could take the pottery out of the dark shop, into the street and hold it up to the light. The truly good stuff would not show the thin translucent sign of a wax filled crack. The truly good stuff would be sine cere. sincere without wax. Paul prayed for the Philippians that they would be sincere genuine, not presenting to be something they are not. Blameless. Blameless means their actions would not cause another to stumble.

Two practical questions to ask yourself. Will this action I am doing cause a young believer to possibly stumble? Would I be ashamed if Jesus returned and found me doing this? We typically think of drinking alcohol, going to a movie or dabbling in some overt sin. I think our anger, gossip, criticism, apathy of spiritual things can be some big stumbling blocks for young believers. Paul wanted the Philippians to have lives that attracted others to Jesus, that demonstrated contagious joy.

But, it wasn't for just so that they could have smoother sailing in their lives. The reason Paul wanted these traits in their lives was so that their lives could (verse 11) be a praise and glory to God. God may choose to use some difficult circumstances in your life to show to the world His work through you. Are you willing to let Him? Don't be resistant. Joy comes to the heart that

Do you want to develop contagious joy in yourself and others? Then take Paul's example. It is not an organ recital of all his aches and pains. You hear none of that. Paul strategically prays for others. There is nothing more encouraging to have someone call up and say, "Hey I've been praying for you in that situation...how is it going?" Look through these first 11 verses of Philippians. Paul's prayer is marked by humility, joy, thankfulness. He prays consistently not for just a few of the saints but for all those, even the ones he didn't like. Paul prays for specific qualities to be folded into the lives of the Philippians with a strong confidence that the One who began a good work in their lives will finish what He started.

When life has placed us into the intensive care unit. How can we capture joy? We need to stick around others who are hurting. We need others to stick around us. Standing together in tough times brings joy to a troubled heart. How can we bring joy to our relationships? Get them into your heart, but by engaging in strategic prayer for them.

Practical application. I want everyone to make a mental note right now a relationship that you feel an obligation to love but there is no love response. No feeling. Will you commit to praying for that individual? Commit to praying more than. God bless Mr.----- Commit to praying that God would fold specific character qualities into their lives that they might be marked by a progressive move toward more and more love coupled with discernment. Close your eyes in prayer and ask God to reveal that

person. If God has prompted you to commit to sacrificial praying. I want to see your hands. Let's pray.