



*Functions*  
JOY AGAIN

# contents



introduction



best. news. ever.



more than a warm fuzzy



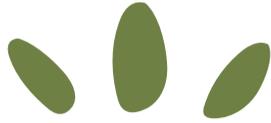
unshakable joy



enough to go around



what's next for you?



# *introduction*

## ready for a change

Joy. How much do you have right now? It's one of those traits that everybody loves. We all want to have it, and we all want to be around people who have it. If you have it, you can attract people and opportunities to you; if you don't, the opposite can happen. People with joy seem to dance through life, unhindered by obstacles or setbacks. They have the resilience to get back up every day with a smile on their face and a spring in their step. Those with real joy don't pretend that life is without hardship; they simply refuse to let hardship define their lives. They have an inner strength that lifts them up and carries them forward. And, as a result, they lift up the people around them.

### **Do you have it?**

Maybe you've been in a season that's taken more than you had to give. Maybe your joy has suffered a hit. You're ready for a break, but the challenges keep coming. Your daily grind has ground you down.

### **How can you find joy again?**

Thankfully, we have a roadmap to help. It's time-tested and proven to work in any culture or circumstance. If you're ready to get the spark back in your life, then keep reading.

Flash back a couple thousand years to the land of Turkey, in a city called Philippi. It was a time of incredible change and turmoil. Though the culture and times were different, that universal human craving for joy was driving a new community to discover more than just survival. And they did. Despite their bleak circumstances, their joy became uncontainable—even legendary. Because of their newfound belief in Jesus, they were persecuted and passed over. They were often in need but always generous. They consistently made the choice to rise above adversity, and their story has echoed through history for our benefit.

As we look deeper at their remarkable attitude, we discover that joy is not something you have; it's something you choose. It's something you were created to experience every day. It's knocking on your door, waiting for you to open.

**Are you ready?**

01.

*best.  
news.  
ever.*



# 01.

## best. news. ever.



### God is working in you

If you're ever tempted to think that you're all alone without help or support, then this chapter is for you. It's a terrifying thought . . . the prospect of having no help in this universe. The good news is, that's not the case! The Bible teaches us that God is with us and God is for us. That's one of the things that drove the people of Philippi to establish such a deeply rooted characteristic of joy.

When the Apostle Paul wrote to the Philippians, he was facing imminent execution. And yet, the New Testament letter of Philippians is considered "the joy book of the Bible." Paul writes from a place of hardship to a people in hardship, and yet his letter is filled with joy.

A quick glance at this word might bring thoughts of *happiness, ease, or favorable circumstances*. But joy is defined differently. According to Paul, **joy is perseverance fueled by perspective**. In other words, joy transcends circumstances and endures the toughest situations because it knows what is coming after the trial.

In Philippians 1:6, Paul said,

**"And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns."**

Kay Warren said, "Joy is the settled assurance that God is in control of all the details of my life; the quiet confidence that ultimately everything is going to be alright; and the determined choice to praise God in every situation."

### Bad News

How do you react to bad news? Personally, I don't like it. It's easy to start the day off strong, especially if you have a good morning routine. Get up, drink coffee, have breakfast, absorb some inspirational content, stretch, plan your day, and you're off to the races.

But then . . . BOOM. Someone drops a bomb. Your babysitter cancels. Your roof starts leaking. Your kids get in a fight. Your boss blames you for a mistake. A pandemic breaks out.

And then what?

Then you have to make a decision about your attitude.

A while back my wife went to the gym (a very religious activity for her). But it was during COVID and she forgot her mask. We don't live very close to the gym, so she couldn't just run back home and grab it. As she realized that her trip was wasted and she would need to reschedule, she worked to restrain her frustration. Headed back to the car, a friend spotted her and asked how she was doing. When she said, "I forgot my mask so I can't go in," her friend said, "I have a brand new extra in my car—want me to get it?" *What a turnaround!* At that moment she realized someone had her covered and she could get back on track with her day. That's what it's like when someone is watching out for you. And when you believe in advance that God Himself is the One at work, then circumstances can't kill your joy.

**When you believe in advance that God Himself is the One at work,  
then circumstances can't kill your joy.**



I have a 1974 MG Midget. The dashboard is simple and elegant. It tells me the speed, the temperature, the oil pressure, and the RPMs of the engine and how much gas is in the tank. That's it. Sometimes I wish it had the weather, my bank balance, my calendar, my task list, the Dow Jones, and my "Big 3" for the week on it as well. But it doesn't—it's an old car! And that's probably for the better, since I would just be distracted by so many stats. The truth is, sometimes I pay too much attention to those things. In fact, sometimes I depend on those stats to determine my level of joy. Can you relate?

In contrast, the Philippians were people in poor circumstances with incredible attitudes. If you want to become the kind of person that rises above your circumstances and inspires everyone around you to do the same, you need to embrace two fundamental guiding principles for your attitude.

## 2 Principles for Better Perspective

### 1. God is working *in* you, so nothing you face is final.

My friend Brandon has been through hell on earth. As a young person he got mixed up with the wrong crowd and ended up spending years in prison. You would think that kind of rough start would ruin a person for good, but not Brandon. His story is one of redemption, impact, and joy. You can check it out here: [Brandon Part 1](#) | [Brandon Part 2](#).

God has begun a good work in you. Do you believe that? Have you allowed Him to begin? Are you holding Him back from continuing?

In the Gospel of John, Jesus encounters a man named Nicodemus, who is searching for joy, among other things. Jesus teaches Nicodemus that he needs to be made alive, to be "born again." That's a dramatic phrase to describe what happens when God gets ahold of your heart. He really does start something new, something powerful, something that brings a smile to your face when you realize that you're not alone and that the Creator of the Universe is at work in your everyday life.



**The God of this universe has started something in you, and He is a Finisher.**

I love the word that Paul uses in Philippians 1:6—“until.” He says God will continue His work *until* it is finally finished. The reality is, God is more interested in your character than your comfort. Maybe that’s why hard times are allowed. He is calling you to be a learner because your soul is under construction. And He isn’t going to stop until it’s done. There’s no setback that can hold God back. There is no lack, no loss, no letdown that can get you off course when you realize that God is the One driving your destiny. The God of this universe has started something in you, and He is a Finisher.

## **2. God is working through you, so every seed you plant is significant.**

Once in a while you hear about someone you’ve impacted for good. Isn’t that a mood-booster? It’s awesome to know that your life is making a difference. The trouble is, you don’t usually realize *what* you’ve done that has actually helped. It’s easy to assume that nothing is helping and your life is useless.

On the contrary. Paul says in Philippians 1:12,

**“I want you to know, my dear brothers and sisters, that everything that has happened to me here has helped to spread the Good News.”**

Everything has helped.

Here’s the truth: God uses all the seeds you plant to make a difference. There’s no doubt that God is on a mission of restoration. He has a **universal purpose** for every person on the planet. He wants to restore your life and every life to its intended beauty. He wants everyone to experience His love and grace. He wants every individual to reach their ultimate potential. When you realize that God is orchestrating the details of your life so that He can accomplish His beautiful purpose through you as you simply complete your assignments, you can keep going.

In addition to that universal purpose, God has a **unique purpose** for your life. It involves your specific passions, strengths, and calling. It is formed by your experiences—all the good ones and even the hard ones. Someone once told me, “your misery becomes your ministry.” How amazing to know that God can create beauty from ashes.

I have a friend named Andrew. He is a well-known speaker and teacher. Andrew’s life has not been easy. He endured years of struggle, doubt and disappointment. He made many choices he is not proud of. But then He discovered God’s love and

purpose. Now he spends his life as a full-time evangelist, telling people about the Good News of Jesus, sharing hope and life. Not long ago Andrew texted me in a group chat to say, “I wanted to encourage you all about what Paul said to the Philippians . . .” His text came the exact day I was beginning to develop these thoughts on joy, based on the book of Philippians. In all transparency, I was struggling with my own self-doubt that day. I wondered if anything I was thinking made any sense, and whether I needed to completely scrap my plans. Andrew’s text was timely; it reminded me that God was working through me, and that He wanted to get His message of encouragement out to even more people.

The Apostle Paul was always so full of hope for others. He said in Ephesians 2:10:

**“For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.”**

Have you ever thought about what God has planned for your life? Did you know that He planned out even *today* for you? You were made for a mission, and when you’re plugged in to that mission, your joy increases because you know that your life matters.

On a shelf in my office I have a bottle with a scroll inside of it, made for me by a group of people I used to lead. One time in one of our meetings we did an encouragement exercise, where everyone wrote down an encouraging statement about the rest of the group members. That exercise was a hit, and the group talked about it for a long time afterward. One day, the group presented me with this bottle that had a beautiful little scroll of parchment paper inside. It was fixed up to look ancient, with burned edges and tied with a string. I accepted the bottle with gratitude, and later (privately) I opened it to see what it said. On that scroll were words of affirmation for me from everyone in our group. One of the members, Shane, had written the words, “You make people feel like they can achieve anything.” I’ve never forgotten those words. And on my darkest days I’ve opened that bottle to read those words once more. Our group planted seeds of encouragement in me that day, and those words have made a tremendous difference in my life. Those words have kept me going.

## What keeps you going?

Just because you don’t see the light at the end of the tunnel; just because you don’t see the answer right now—that doesn’t change the fact that God is working in you, and God is working through you, and He isn’t going to stop until He’s finished. If you have the faith to believe that, those truths can give you the power to choose joy today. Your life is significant beyond your comprehension, because it was planned by God and for God.

All that’s left is for you to embrace the truth and receive the joy.

(Want more? Listen to the sermon that inspired this chapter [here](#).)

---

**Just because you don’t see the light at the end of the tunnel . . . that doesn’t change the fact that God is working in you, and God is working through you, and He isn’t going to stop until He’s finished.**

---

02.

*more  
than a  
warm  
fuzzy*





## more than a warm fuzzy

I spent my freshman year of college in Springfield, Missouri. As a Northwest native, I was a long way from home. The humidity was high, the accents were thick and the bugs were big. They were so big that people had bug zappers—those hanging electrical death chambers for insects. Now, I had seen bug zappers back home in Portland, but they made them a little bigger in the Midwest. That's because neutralizing these bugs required more voltage. You could see the lights flicker in the neighborhood when some of these bugs met their maker.

Did you know that joy has a zapper too? Sometimes you're just going along in your life and *Zap!* Your joy is dead. And sometimes it doesn't take much. It could be a look of disapproval from someone, a mistake you made, or an assignment you don't want to do. In our work-from-home world it could be Zoom fatigue or child management. So many little things have the ability to zap your joy, don't they? Have you ever stopped to ask yourself if that's okay?

### **The problem is, we're living in a world that we don't always like.**

What we need is the ability to replenish our joy faster than it's going out. We need more than a warm fuzzy. We need a level of joy that's unzappable.

When I was in middle school I had to take an IQ test. It was complicated and confusing, and it took a long time. But every day, everyone you know is giving you a JQ test. If IQ stands for "intelligence quotient," then JQ stands for, "joy quotient." It measures how happy you are. And do you know what the test is?

Your smile.

That's it. That's all people need to see in order to assess your joy.

"That's not fair!" you might think. "I want a retake!"

I get it. Some days it seems like my ability is just not there to keep joy strong in all my conversations and challenges.

Ever wonder what powered the "Greats?" The people you admire, your inspirations—what kept them smiling during their struggles? Think about Nelson Mandela. He was one of the key figures in the dismantling of apartheid in South Africa. He spent years in turmoil and adversity, and many years in prison at Robben Island. And yet he never gave up. I'm sure if you asked him, he would say that there were many moments when he was angry. There were many moments when he didn't have that "birthday

party” kind of joy. But he never gave up, he was fueled by something greater than himself, and he gave off joy to everyone who followed him.

What about the Apostle Paul? He wrote his New Testament letter to the Philippians knowing full well that he may be headed to the execution chamber at any time. He was ready to die for his faith, yet he maintained a joy that defied his circumstances.

And then there was Jesus. Hebrews 12:2 says, he “for the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame.” Jesus is the ultimate example of smiling through the suffering. Nothing could stop his joy, because *you* were the prize he was motivated by.

In Philippians 2:1 we learn that it is the idea of belonging that gives us encouragement; it is fellowship that provides our comfort. And when you look at the lives of the people you want to emulate, you realize they have an uncommon connection that leads to their uncommon joy. That connection is first with God; and then with God’s family. Those things are enduring. They don’t change with the seasons or the circumstances. They remain through all the ups and downs of life. If you are a follower of Jesus, then you belong, and that reality can give you more than a warm fuzzy; it can give you the fuel—the joy—to keep going when the going gets tough.

The Bible says, “So now you . . . are no longer strangers and foreigners. You are citizens along with all of God’s holy people. You are members of God’s family” (Ephesians 2:19). There is something life-changing—attitude changing—about that truth. You belong. That changes everything. You have a Heavenly Father and He wants to meet your needs. You have peace with your Creator because of what Jesus has done for you. If you believe, then you are now part of God’s family and that status is not dependent on your performance. That status depends on something that has already been done.

2 Corinthians 5:18 says, “And all of this is a gift from God, who brought us back to himself through Christ.” God brought you back to Himself through Jesus, and that is a cause for joy!

## So how do you raise your JQ?

Here are three truths that can give you the happiness edge you’re looking for:

### **1. Because you belong, you can find common ground.**

“Make me truly happy by agreeing with each other...” (Philippians 2:2a)

Strained relationships are a major joy zapper.

I recently had to file an official complaint at a business my family has relied upon for over twenty years.

**When you look at the lives of the people you want to emulate, you realize they have an uncommon connection that leads to their uncommon joy.**

I'll spare you the details, but let's just say I had cause for complaint. It was interesting how my attitude changed depending on whether I was speaking with the local representative or the corporate representative. For some reason I had more compassion and sensitivity toward the local representative. Maybe because I had to talk to him in person. Maybe because he knew my name, my wife's name, and the name of my church. Maybe because we knew each other a little and we had some things in common. Either way, I was way more willing to work with him than with the person on the phone that I didn't know, and would never know.

Relationships were designed to foster love, not hate. What do you think gets in the way? Common ground is the place where there's an overlap in our differences, where we can stand together. Maybe we've been more focused on our differences than our similarities. Maybe it's time to shift that focus. I learned a long time ago that you don't have to see eye to eye to walk hand in hand. Whether it's in your household or your neighborhood, decide now to get together on the most important aspects of life. Decide to be interested in someone else, not for what you can get from them, but because you are connected to them and you have an opportunity to invest in them.

Someone once said, "interested is interesting." People are drawn to those who take an interest in them, because they sense that those people are willing to focus on common ground and work toward a common goal. That gives joy.

## **2. Because you belong, you can show uncommon love.**

**"Make me truly happy by . . . loving one another" (Philippians 2:2b).**

We have a responsibility to love people better. Have you noticed that our world is more divided now than ever? Our recent history has challenged our sense of togetherness. And that sad reality is calling out to us—will we step forward to close the gap and make the difference?

When God wants to grow a characteristic in your life, he doesn't put you in that environment. In other words, if he wants to develop a drive for unity in you, he isn't going to put you in a tight-knit group of like-minded people; he's going to put you in a group of people that rub you the wrong way and challenge all your assumptions. We all have those "sandpaper people" in our lives. And though we lament them, God is using them to rub the rough edges off our lives so we develop our character and potential.

I recently had the privilege to sit down with my friend Bond to hear his perspective on some of the most difficult conversations our culture is having right now. See his thoughts here: [Bond's Story](#).

**We all have those "sandpaper people" in our lives . . .  
God is using them to rub the rough edges off our lives  
so we develop our character and potential.**

“

Not long ago I was coming home from work and as I pulled into our cul-de-sac, I noticed some of our neighborhood kids playing soccer. I was struck at the diversity of this little soccer team. When I got out of my car, my neighbor's son yelled out, "wanna play?"



I had a dilemma. I'm not typically the type to say yes to this sort of thing. I was kind of on a mission. It was a busy week and my mind was focused on getting dinner with my family and then finishing up some important work priorities.

But those words rang through my heart—"wanna play?" In that moment my better self yelled back, "sure!" So I hopped out of my car (without my computer bag) and started playing soccer with my neighborhood kids. To be honest, I only played for a short time. But for some reason this made a huge impression on those kids. After that evening, my neighbor's son started calling me by name every time I'd pull in from work. He wanted to show me his new bike, his new basketball hoop, his new scooter. He wanted to talk, to hear me talk, and to just know that we are connected. Sometimes the simplest actions can bring the most amazing transformations. We belong to one another, so we can show uncommon love . . . and that brings great joy to each one of us.

**3. Because you belong, you can work for the common good.**

**"Make me truly happy by...working together with one mind and purpose . . ." (Philippians 2:2c).**

Our generation will be defined by how we respond to the challenges we face. And those challenges are vast, are they not? We are part of an important cultural moment. Are you ready to come together to make a difference?

*Why am I here?*

*Why do I get up in the morning?*

*Why do I go to work each day?*

These are haunting questions, because they call out our greater selves. The easiest thing in the world is to find a way to divide. The noble thing is to find a way to unite.

Lin Manuel Miranda was on his honeymoon in the Dominican Republic in 2008 when he was inspired to write the Broadway sensation "Hamilton." He says that he took a bunch of books on his honeymoon. If you're married, you may wonder why he needed books on his honeymoon? At any rate, he was pursuing his dream and as he read and wrote, he pondered the question, "could my life make a difference?" Unless you've been under a rock for the past few years, you know the answer is yes! How inspiring it is to see someone living into their purpose. How about you? Could it be that the reason your joy is leaking is because you're not sure that your life matters?

The truth is, God has offered you not only reconciliation but also purpose. When Jesus prayed the words, "May your Kingdom come, may your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" he was thinking of you. He knew that you would be a key piece to the puzzle. And when you do take your place, you will feel a rush of joy like you've never experienced.

So the question to ask is, do you *know* that you belong? Have you received that gift?

God is ready to give you more than just a passing sense of joy; more than just a warm fuzzy feeling. He's ready to give you enduring, overcoming joy.

(Want more? Listen to the sermon that inspired this chapter here.)



03.

unshakable  
joy



## unshakable joy

**Rollercoaster**

My oldest son lives in Santa Cruz, California where he serves at a local church with his band. Whenever we go to see him, we always like to visit the Santa Cruz Boardwalk. It's like the Coney Island of the west. Funnel cakes, corn dogs, carnival games, and—you guessed it—roller coasters. There's something so thrilling about a good roller coaster. It's got the high highs and the low lows. The twists and turns and the one thing that everybody pays for: surprises. Why is it that we love those dynamics at an amusement park but we hate them in our daily lives? At the Santa Cruz Boardwalk we'll pay good money for the very thing we aggressively avoid in the rest of our lives. We even describe our darkest days with the words *roller coaster*.

That's because in our heart of hearts we don't want to live some days in the clouds and some days in the abyss. We want consistent joy. But how do you get that when your circumstances are like a roller coaster?

The secret is this: you have to detach your significance from what changes and instead attach it to something that doesn't change. Your events, your success, your relationships, your career, your finances, your health—all of these things are going to constantly change throughout life. However, two things that won't change are the character of God and the promises of God.

The Apostle Paul said:

**“Whatever happens, my dear brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord. I never get tired of telling you these things, and I do it to safeguard your faith.” —Philippians 3:1**

Imagine having the kind of joy that *could not be shaken*. What if you could get through any circumstance, any trial, any conflict or turmoil—and not lose your joy? What if you were unshakable?

You probably know someone who has lived up to that ideal, but you may doubt whether you can. If so, welcome to the human race! It's hard to live a joyful life in a difficult

**The secret is this:  
you have to detach  
your significance  
from what changes  
and instead attach  
it to something that  
doesn't change.**



### Who is your joy hero?

world. But that's the question we all have—how do you *get and keep joy*?

Paul teaches us that we get joy from the person of Jesus. He says, “rejoice *in the Lord*.” He did not say, “rejoice in your circumstances,” or “rejoice in your popularity.” He said to rejoice in the Lord.

Maybe he knew that you and I needed something bigger than ourselves and our circumstances. Maybe he knew that the only One that would truly satisfy us and bring us joy was Jesus. After all, the alternative is to set our hearts on the events and circumstances of the world. Honestly, how happy can you be if you're looking at the stock market, the news headlines, or the ups and downs of your life to bring you joy?

It seems Paul had considered all these possibilities. Don't forget, he was the one who was facing imminent execution. And in that context he said, “Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of *knowing Christ Jesus my Lord*. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ” (Philippians 3:8). For Paul, somehow this one relationship made up for all the disappointments of life.

### Hero

Who is your joy hero? Who is the person who is constantly encouraging you, pointing you toward good things, and helping you to help others become more joyful?

One of my joy heroes is my father-in-law, Ken. He embraced me as a son when I was younger and he has trusted me with his daughter for over 25 years now. He is always checking on me, sending me encouraging cards, stopping in to tell me an encouraging story, and reminding me that God has good plans for my life. As a pastor, I need that. And the fact that he was the pastor of the same church before me—well that's just the icing on the cake. He truly knows my situation and knows that God is working in big ways to transform everything.

Recently, Ken called me with a question. When the phone rang I wasn't sure what he might need. Since we still work together, I thought he might need something church-related. But as it turns out, he was simply checking on me. “How are you doing?” he asked. “How are you really doing? Is there anything I can do for you?” Those words were music to my soul. He is such an encouragement to me!

I've often wondered what makes Ken tick. Why is he always so bright, positive and cheery? How does he face his own struggles with a smile and still have joy to pass on to others? I think I've figured it out. I think he is running a different race than most people. Most people are running the race of achievement, or status, or self-actualization. But not Ken. Ken is running the same race that the Apostle Paul was running. Paul said,

**“I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us” (Philippians 3:14).**

Like Paul, Ken is looking forward to a better future—an unshakable future. “But we are citizens of heaven, where the Lord Jesus Christ lives. And we are eagerly waiting for him to return as our Savior” (Philippians 3:20).

## **Only an unshakable future can give you an unshakable present.**

When you find your identity in a relationship with your Creator—

- the One who loved you enough to send his only Son for you
- the One who offers you total forgiveness and new life
- the One who is able to restore all things
- the One who promises to love you and keep you forever
- the One who is coming back for you

—when you're convinced that this is your future, then your present circumstances are put in their rightful place as a temporary testing ground for the greater purpose of life.

What about you? Are you ready to make the shift? Are you ready to detach your significance from the rails of the roller coaster and instead anchor your hope in heaven? That doesn't mean you won't have ups and downs. It means your ups and downs will no longer define you. Rather, your connection with your Creator and his unchanging character will define you. And your anticipation of what he has in store for you will drive your attitude.

Yes, it takes faith to make the switch. But it's so worth it.

(Want more? Listen to the sermon that inspired this chapter [here](#).)

04.

*enough  
to go  
around*





### Drying up?

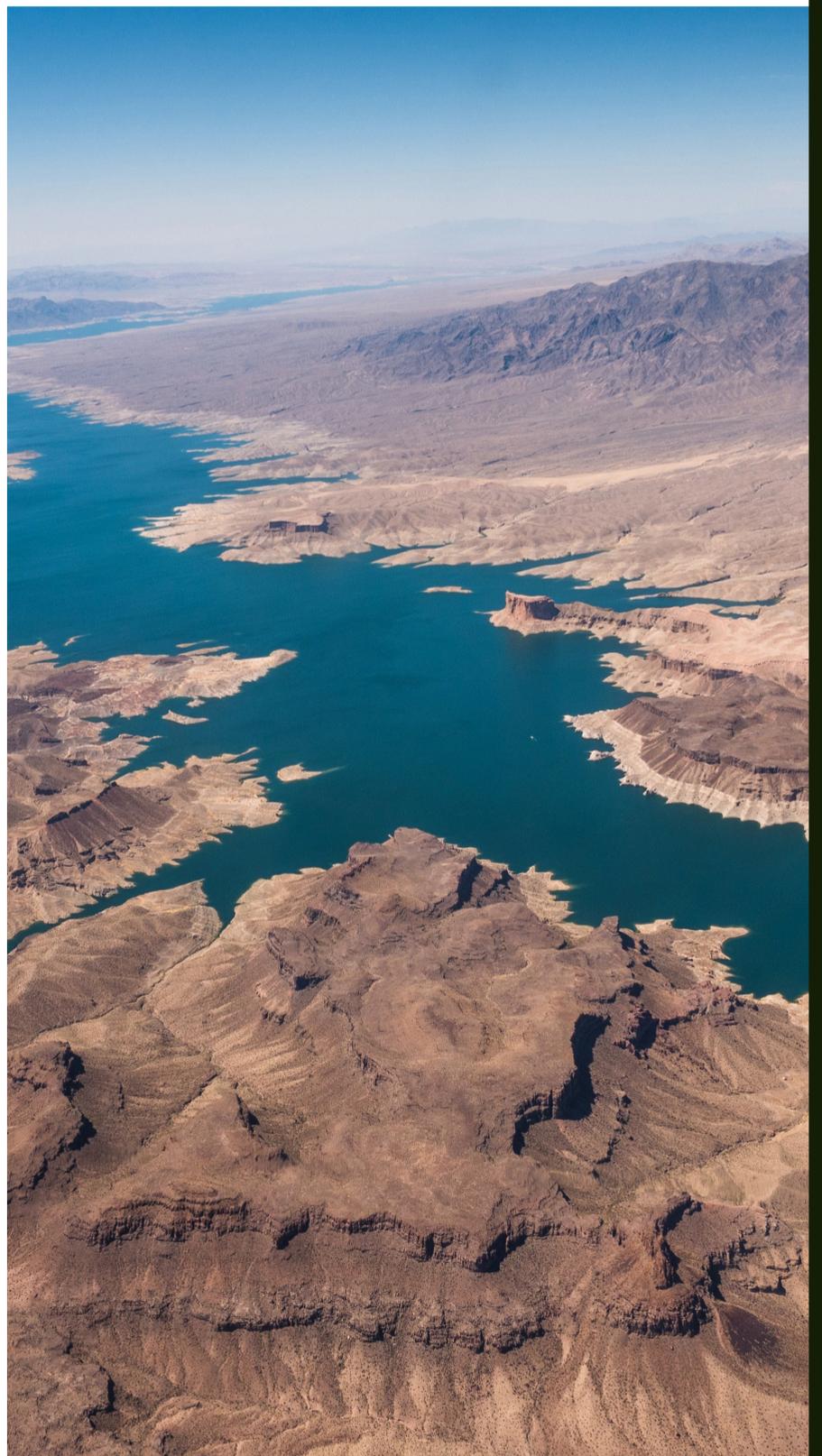
Last summer my family went on a big road trip. We needed a change of scenery and so we headed south from Portland, Oregon toward Las Vegas. We stopped in Ashland, Oregon; Reno, Nevada; Yosemite, Lake Tahoe; and, of course, Vegas. My wife is convinced you haven't truly lived until you've had a cannoli from Carlo's Bake Shop at the Venetian hotel. I think she's right. That was our first stop in the city, and we explored from there.

We also drove out toward Lake Mead, 24 miles east of the Las Vegas Strip. Lake Mead is the largest water reservoir in the United States, formed by the Hoover Dam on the Colorado River. It's a sight to behold, and it's the essential water supply for 90% of southern Nevada.

That's why the Bureau of Reclamation is concerned. Lake Mead appears to be drying up. Experts warned of problems if the water level dropped to 1,070 feet. Currently the level is at 1,073 feet—hundreds of feet below the “full pool” level, and only a few feet away from crisis. Any further drop could create a problem of epic proportions.

Do you ever feel like that in your life? Like you're just barely hanging on? The smallest event or problem could plunge you into crisis mode. One negative comment or disappointing day could send your joy spiraling.

That's a pretty fragile way to live, isn't it?



Compare that with how Paul teaches us to live in his letter to the Philippians. This resilient group of people kept on dipping into their reservoir to share with Paul and others, and yet they never dried up. They kept giving joy, energy, people and money to help others, never worried about what might happen to them. As the struggles grew, so did their smiles.

Philippians 4:19 says:

**“And this same God who takes care of me will supply all your needs from his glorious riches, which have been given to us in Christ Jesus.”**

The amazing news is this: **we can choose joy independent of the water level in our lives**, because we have a loving Heavenly Father who is able to supply anything and everything we need. We have no fear of drought.



## Modesto

Another stop on our family road trip was Modesto, California. I know, it's not a well-known travel destination, but we were coming out of Yosemite and needed a place to stay the night. Plus my son had some contacts in the area and wanted to show us around. We had just parked the car and started our downtown Modesto exploration when a lady rode up on a bike and blurted out, “Let me sing a song for you.”

Something about the situation was familiar to me, and I instantly put my hand over my wallet in my front pocket. I guess I was subconsciously going into *protection mode*. But rather than ask us for money, this lady asked us for something beautiful: a value exchange. She said, “I want you to let me sing a song for you and then you can pay me for it—whatever you would like to pay.”

Intrigued, we asked her what songs she liked to sing. She replied, “Aretha Franklin.”

“OK this could be good” we thought. So we agreed to this performance and we were amazed as she sang the most beautiful rendition of Natural Woman. We were stunned, and I reached back inside my pocket to find what might be in my wallet.

Secretly, I had hoped to discover some one dollar bills. Maybe two or three of them. But there were no ones in my wallet. So I took the next smallest bill—a five dollar bill—and gave it to her. She seemed quite happy, and we went on our way.

Oddly, something was bothering me after that interaction. I felt like I had cheated her. I had a bigger bill, and to be honest her song was worth more than five dollars. But we were on a family trip and I was trying to preserve cash. Looking back, I wish I would have given more. In the grand scheme of things my family wouldn't have suffered if I had doubled, tripled, or even quadrupled the payment for that beautiful song. We wouldn't have really felt any sacrifice. And she would have experienced a tremendous lift. As it was, that interaction probably wasn't very memorable for her.

Now it serves as a great lesson for me. **I can share abundantly because God provides abundantly.** I don't need to protect and preserve my joy. I can bring my joy generously and enthusiastically to any and every situation, with no fear of running out.

That's how the Apostle Paul lived. And if the truth were told, the Philippians picked up their contagious joy and generosity from him. Hidden inside this little letter he wrote is his final secret, which I want to share with you.

Paul makes three statements as he wraps up his encouragement: (1) I have learned, (2) I can do, (3) this same God who cares also provides. Let's break this down and then look at how we can truly find joy again.

### **1. I have learned.**

**Paul said, "I have learned how to be content with whatever I have" (Philippians 4:11).**

Even Paul had to learn that he couldn't base his joy on his water level. How did he learn that? By not having enough and surviving anyway. By thinking he was going to run out and watching God show up instead. It is experience with God that builds our confidence in God. And so Paul learned that he could keep the joy flowing even when the resources weren't.

### **2. I can do.**

**"I can do everything through Christ who gives me strength" (Philippians 4:13).**

Paul learned to make room for God's power to show up in his situations. The verse says God gives us strength. Strength is a gift from God, not something we inherently have. Often we think that admitting weakness is the last step on the descent into a miserable life. But actually the opposite is true. The sooner we admit that we can't, the sooner we can embrace the truth that God can.



The sooner we admit that  
we can't, the sooner we can  
embrace the truth that

*God can.*

### 3. This same God who cares also provides.

**“And this same God who takes care of me will supply all your needs from his glorious riches, which have been given to us in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19).**

Who comes to your rescue when you're in need? If you have someone, you are one of the blessed ones. Paul was referring in this verse to the Philippian Christians who had sacrificed so greatly for the welfare of others. He was reminding them that God sees every tear, every prayer, every kind word. He sees every sleepless night and every hard decision. And when we align ourselves with his vision, he rushes His resources to us. We can't expect that kind of care when we're driven by selfishness and greed. But when we are on mission with him, he makes a way. God's provision flows to his vision.

A while back I was on a long flight and I had finished up my work, so I figured I'd look for a movie to watch. When I came across *Murder Mystery* with Adam Sandler (“Nick”) and Jennifer Aniston (“Audrey”), I thought to myself, “This is the one.” So I fired it up, and the laughs were good for my soul.

In one scene, Nick and Audrey are headed on a European vacation to get the spark back in their relationship. They're on the plane and Nick is asleep. Audrey decides to get up and go explore the plane. She walks up front and stumbles into a giant secret lounge for exclusive customers only. She gets in a conversation with a businessman and manages to stay in the lounge despite her seat status. Nick wakes up and notices that she's not in her seat, so he gets up and looks for her. He also stumbles into the lounge and immediately gets called out for trespassing. He starts backpedaling when the businessman calls out to the flight attendant, “It's OK, they're with me.” Suddenly they're royalty.

If you think about it, that's a great parallel to God. “I'm with him.” That's what Paul was saying, and that's what changes everything for us.

What do you need? What do you lack?

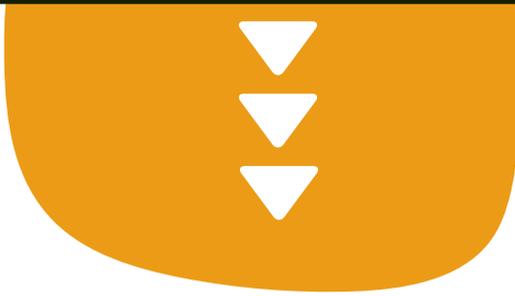
Whatever you lack is simply an opportunity for you to look *up*. In looking up to Jesus you will find your provision, your purpose, and ultimately . . . your joy.

It's my prayer that you'll find that joy *today*.

(Want more? Listen to the sermon that inspired this chapter [here](#).)

what's  
next  
for you?





If your heart has been sparked in reading this little book, I want to encourage you to keep going and taking next steps. Here are a couple practical steps you can take.

## Say Yes to Jesus

First, If you've never said yes to Jesus, I want to urge you to do that now. Obviously, I'm sold. I think he's the greatest. I've found new life in the relationship I have with him, all made possible by his offer for ultimate forgiveness and restoration. You can experience that same new life, freedom, peace and joy. If you're ready to make that move, tell him! He is listening right now. If you're not sure how to tell him, take a look at this prayer I've written out:

**Jesus I give you my life. Thank you for saving me. I believe in you. Your life. Your death on the cross. And your resurrection. Forgive me of my sins. Fill me with your Holy Spirit. Lead me. And teach me to follow you. And I ask it in Jesus name.**

If today you said yes to Jesus, we'd love to know so we can celebrate with you, pray for you, and give you some information to help you grow in your faith. Just **text the word JESUS to 503-905-9067** and we'll connect with you. Congratulations!

## Philippians Reading Plan

If you'd like to anchor this message about joy more deeply in your soul, consider reading through the New Testament letter of Philippians in the next 10 days:

**Day 1 | Philippians 1:1-11**

**Day 6 | Philippians 2:19-30**

**Day 2 | Philippians 1:12-19**

**Day 7 | Philippians 3:1-11**

**Day 3 | Philippians 1:20-30**

**Day 8 | Philippians 3:12-21**

**Day 4 | Philippians 2:1-11**

**Day 9 | Philippians 4:1-9**

**Day 5 | Philippians 2:12-18**

**Day 10 | Philippians 4:10-23**

To take your learning to a higher level, respond to the following questions after each reading:

- What did I notice?
- What does it mean?
- What should I do next?



## about the author

Gabe Kolstad is the Lead Pastor at [Westside Community Church](#) in Beaverton, Oregon where he serves with his family. He and his wife, Melissa, host the [Marriage Monthly podcast](#) and love to travel and hang out with their kids.

Westside Community Church is a non-denominational Christian church in the Portland, Oregon area that welcomes people from all walks of life, takes a practical approach to faith, and gets deeply involved in the communities they serve.

*the end*

churchfuel.com

