

Life Story: How Relationship with Christ Transforms the Story of Your Life

Philippians 3:1-11

The Journey of Joy in Christ

A Series in the Book of Philippians

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Our world is enamored with success. We count followers, are impressed with titles, and can be obsessed with GPA's, SAT scores, salaries, and net worth. None of that is inherently wrong, but it can whisper a deadly lie: earthly achievement must mean heavenly approval. In a culture that rewards self-promotion, it's easy to slip into résumé religion, trusting our pedigree, performance, or religious rituals rather than the Person of Jesus Christ. Paul knew that seduction well, for if anyone could boast, it was the man formerly known as Saul of Tarsus. But the day he met the risen Christ, everything he once counted as gain slid into the loss column compared to knowing Him.

We need Philippians 3:1-11. This passage shows how a relationship with Christ transforms those who believe in Him. Jesus said it clearly: "This is eternal life, that they may know You...and Jesus Christ" (John 17:3). Genuine spiritual life with God is not merely understanding facts about Him, but personally knowing Him and trusting Him. We are to be Jesus-filled, not Jesus-flavored. This passage shows how a relationship with Christ and trusting in His death and resurrection transform the story of our lives.

How does a relationship with Jesus Christ transform the story of a person's life?

Relationship with Christ gives believers the following:

1. A new perspective on our past:

Confident only in Christ

3:1-8

Relationship with Jesus Christ gives us a new perspective on our past because it reshapes what we value and where we place our confidence. Paul begins with a command, not a suggestion: “Rejoice in the Lord,” which is not a fleeting emotion but an ongoing lifestyle of cultivating and expressing delight and confidence in who Christ is and what He has done. Rejoicing in the Lord protects believers from discouragement, cynicism, and deception, serving as a guardrail for the soul. Just as safeguarding steel rails on a winding mountain road protect travelers from peril, rejoicing in the Lord keeps us from veering into the cliffs of comparison, pride, or despair. When rejoicing in Christ becomes optional instead of essential, believers slide into legalism, envy, discouragement, or the lure of performance-based religion. Paul warns of this danger with a triple “beware” (3:2), describing the false teachers as dogs, evil workers, and mutilators as they promote a message that looks spiritual but leads to bondage. Modern versions of the same mindset still whisper today: “If I occasionally do good deeds or go to church, if I give enough, or avoid particular sins and take part in certain religious ceremonies, then God will accept me.” Of course, these pursuits may be commendable, but they are just not capable of saving us from the penalty of our sin and redeeming us. Salvation is secured not in what we do for God, but in what Christ has done for us.

To drive this home, Paul contrasts legalistic confidence with the true marks of a Christian (3:3): worship in the Spirit of God, boasting in Christ Jesus, and putting no confidence in the flesh. These are the opposite practices of résumé religion. Paul then illustrates the danger from his own personal experience, for if anyone had reason to boast in

human credentials, it was he (3:4–6). His list of religious achievements was impressive: circumcised on the eighth day, pure Hebrew lineage, a Pharisee by conviction, zealous enough to persecute the church, and externally blameless under the Law. Yet meeting Christ changed how he viewed all of it. He uses accounting language to describe a total reversal, declaring that everything previously listed in the “gain” column is now in the “loss” column (3:7–8). What he once regarded as spiritual assets became liabilities compared to the surpassing worth of knowing Christ. He goes further, calling it all “rubbish,” a word meaning excrement or garbage, when held up next to Jesus. This is what transforms our story: salvation is not achieved by pedigree, human effort, or religious rituals. Salvation is secured by Christ alone and received by faith alone in Him. Joy comes from knowing and trusting Christ Jesus as Lord, who gives us eternal life in Him and a new perspective on our past.

2. A new position from our God: Made righteous in Him

3:9

Relationship with Christ gives an entirely new position before God, one that is rooted not in religious rituals or inherited by birth, but in union with Christ. Paul's great desire is “to be found in Him,” meaning to be fully identified with Christ, rather than standing before God with a résumé of religious effort. Union with Christ means our identity is no longer tied to our background, failures, or supposed achievements. As God views a believer in Christ, He does not see the sins of the past or the striving of the present; He sees the perfect righteousness of His Son wrapped around us like a garment. Paul is clear that this righteousness is not “of my own derived from the Law.” He had tried that path with impeccable devotion as a Pharisee, but self-

righteousness cannot survive divine scrutiny. Like Monopoly money that looks impressive in a game but is worthless in the real economy, human effort in earning God's favor has no value in the courtroom of heaven.

In place of this failed human righteousness, God gives us something infinitely better: the righteousness of Christ credited to us by faith. Paul describes this as "the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith." This is not something we earn; it is something we receive. Our sins were placed on Christ, and His righteousness, which is His perfect fulfillment of all the Law's demands (Matt. 5:17-18), was placed on us who believe in Him (Rom. 1:16-17). This exchange was secured by Jesus Christ at the cross and applied through faith. The righteousness of Christ applied to believers is His perfect record of obedience and sinlessness, credited to them by God through faith in Jesus Christ. It is the basis of our justification and our unshakable standing before God. The Law can help diagnose our sinfulness, but it cannot deliver us from its penalty, nor can we carry out all that it requires. The law is a mirror that exposes our sin, not a medicine that cures it. Only the perfect life of Jesus Christ can fulfill what God commands and requires (Rom. 3:19-24).

Faith is not a work but an act of trust in what Christ has already done. This new position of being justified by faith produces a deep assurance and lasting joy. Even on our worst day, our standing before God does not fluctuate because our salvation was never based on us to begin with. Salvation is by grace alone through faith in Christ alone (Rom. 3:24; Eph. 2:8-9; 2 Tim. 1:9). Pride is silenced, despair is dismissed, and the soul is freed to rest in the finished work of Christ on the cross. Paul did not mourn the loss of his old religious résumé; he rejoiced in it being replaced by something infinitely better. To trust in Jesus is to be

permanently and eternally clothed in the righteousness and character of Christ. This new position from God is why a relationship with Jesus Christ is the greatest joy of a person's life.

3. A new passion for our lives:

Knowing Christ fully

3:10-11

Relationship with Jesus Christ does not just change how we view the past or our standing before God; it reorders the passion of our lives. Paul's heartbeat is captured in five words: "that I may know Him" (v. 10). This is not merely academic knowledge, but a relational, experiential, and growing fellowship with the living Lord Jesus Christ. A mark of spiritual maturity is an appetite for knowing God. The more we know Christ, the more we love and live for Him. Paul highlights three priorities in a healthy and holy relationship with Jesus Christ: knowing the power of His resurrection, identifying with the fellowship of His sufferings, and being conformed to His death.

Relationship with Christ makes it possible to live in His strength. Resurrection power is the Spirit-enabled ability to obey, endure, and live with joy in the face of temptation, fear, weakness, and pressure. A growing relationship with Christ also draws us into "the fellowship of His sufferings." For the believer, enduring difficulties because of our faith in Jesus Christ is a relational participation with the Man of Sorrows, not evidence of God's abandonment or absence. Suffering purifies our love, exposes idols, and deepens our communion with Jesus. Amy Carmichael, the Irish missionary to India, once reflected in her poem "No Scar", "If our Master was scarred, how can His servants expect to be unmarked?" The path of following Christ may be costly, but the "fellowship in His sufferings" can develop joy, intimacy, and lasting fruit in Him.

Paul also speaks of his desire for “being conformed to His death”, a daily posture of self-denial, humility, service, and obedience for the sake of Christ and the good of others. To die to self is to live like Jesus as we pour ourselves out in love. Like Paul, we live with this hope: “in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead” (v. 11). Paul is certain of the outcome. He is both mindful and humbled about the journey that will take him to be eternally with Jesus Christ, whether through death or the Lord’s return. A believer’s certain future resurrection gives power to persevere in present challenges. It keeps us from quitting when the road is long and the results seem small. This is why a relationship with Jesus is the greatest joy in life; He gives us a new perspective about our past, a new position before our God, and a new passion for our present and future. The Christian life is not Jesus-flavored; it is Jesus-filled. Let Him not just season the story of your life, let Him become the story.

The joy of a relationship with Jesus gives us a new perspective on our past, a new position from our God, and a new passion for our lives.

Passage Investigation: Prayerfully engage with the passage by reading it multiple times. Ask, “*What is this saying?*” and “*Why did God have this recorded?*” Look for the natural, normal meaning of the words and phrases and identify the meaning in context. **Write down your observations** about what the passage reveals about God, Christ, His kingdom, humanity, sin, the gospel, trials, and faith. Ask key questions: Who? What? When? Where? Why? How? Let your investigation lead to a deeper understanding and love for God and His word.

LIFE Application: Questions for our journey of joy in living out the LIFE we have in Christ (Loving God, Investing in others, Following His word, and Engaging our world)

1. Where are you most tempted to place your confidence, your background, behavior, or achievements, and how does Philippians 3 reshape that perspective? What does it look like to treat those things as “loss” compared to knowing Christ?
2. How does “rejoicing in the Lord” by cultivating and expressing delight and confidence in who Christ is and what He has done feature in your life? How have you experienced “rejoicing in the Lord” as a guardrail for your soul?
3. Paul describes believers as those who “worship in the Spirit, glory in Christ, and put no confidence in the flesh.” How are you growing in these areas?
4. What does it mean in Philippians 3:9 for you to receive “through faith in Jesus Christ the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith?” How does this gospel truth develop confidence in God and your love for Christ?
5. Paul’s goal was not merely to know about Christ, but to know Him relationally and experientially. What rhythms or habits in your life deepen your relationship and fellowship with Him?
6. How have you seen the “power of His resurrection” or “the fellowship of His sufferings” at work in your life recently?