

CELEBRATION

FIVE STEPS TO SUCCESSFUL LIVING

Philippians 4:4-9

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You were created to be successful. When God created you in his image, he did not intend you to be a failure. Deep in your heart is a desire to be successful though we may not all agree on what that means. In the Bible there are many success stories, but the greatest of them involves a man who conquered sin and death. That man Jesus said that he came that we might live life to the fullest. That means he came so we would succeed in this thing called life.

Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. When Jesus called himself *the way*, he called us to a journey. "I am the way" means "I am the choice and direction for you." That is a path. Following that path requires steps or action on our part. That's why successful living is a journey not a destination. Success is not a state. It's a way. It's a way of living rather than a result from living. We don't one day arrive at success, instead we live successfully. That doesn't mean there are no failures. There are always falls. Success isn't a point where there are no falls or a pinnacle beyond failure. It is a path where failure occurs but doesn't win. It is a path where failure is present but beaten. Success may involve stumbling, but in the end it is walking with our heavenly father and fulfilling his purpose for us each day.

The Apostle Paul did that. Though he was in prison chains when he wrote to the Philippian believers, he lived successfully and laid before them steps to successful living. Paul's letter to the Philippians is literally a treatise on success. In chapter one he offers the perspective of success. In chapter two he coaches believers in the attitude of success. In chapter three, he offers a testimony of success; and in chapter four he gives us five steps to success. We will examine these steps over the next five weeks.

The order of the steps is not important. They are simply actions we must take as believers to live successfully. This counsel is for believers in Jesus Christ. Given that you believe in Jesus, you will do well if you do these things. The steps do not constitute a new law. Instead, they are natural to a developing confidence in Christ. Yet, they require our choice. We must take action. The first listed in Philippians 4 is celebration.

Paul writes:

Rejoice in the Lord always! I will say it again: Rejoice! (Philippians 4:4)

Paul commands believers to celebrate. He tells us to celebrate "in the Lord." He tells us to celebrate "always," and he repeats himself for emphasis: "I will say it again: Rejoice!"

Paul does not write, "Rejoice because of the Lord," "Rejoice with the Lord," or "Rejoice about the Lord." Paul wrote, "Rejoice in the Lord." That little preposition *in* is important. It is virtually the same as the Greek preposition and would be very clear if Paul commanded, "Rejoice in the temple;" however, one cannot open the door to the Lord Jesus, walk inside him and begin celebrating. The term *in* must mean something else. Perhaps, one cannot walk inside the physical body of Christ, but one can come into the presence and under the influence of Christ's Spirit. To rejoice in the Lord is to celebrate with Christ. It is to acknowledge and actively enjoy his presence. But it is more. To rejoice in the Lord is to celebrate because of Christ. It is to recognize the impact of Christ and celebrate. But it is even more. To rejoice in the Lord is to celebrate under the influence of Christ. Like a tourist struck by the majesty of a mountain, a hiker awed by the beauty of a canyon, a worshiper hushed by the grandeur of a cathedral, we can celebrate influenced by the presence and greatness of our Lord.

One night Paul and his traveling companion Silas sat in a filthy prison. They could have indulged in self-pity. They could have fretted about what was to come. They could have sizzled in anger over the injustice. They could have resented or blamed their heavenly father who asked them to endure such opposition. They chose differently. At midnight they were singing... for joy. They celebrated their Lord and they celebrated in the Lord while inmates listened. Power was released. Not just emotional strength. Heavenly power was released. Power was released that loosed every chain on every inmate and flung open every prison door (Acts 16:25-26). You can bet an earthquake wasn't in their plan when they began celebrating. They were just celebrating with Christ, because of Christ and under the influence of Christ. They were rejoicing in the Lord with simple songs.

Paul didn't tell us how to celebrate. He just told us to do it. I'm sitting at this table all decked out with a table cloth, a candle, china, a crystal goblet, not because I'm going to eat anything. I didn't bring any food. I simply am making a point. Even as I showed the special *Red Plate* to the children in our worship service only moments ago and shared about our family celebrations, so I am emphasizing by sitting here, that there are many ways to celebrate. Whether I am banging on a tambourine, clapping my hands and dancing, or enjoying a candlelight dinner, I am celebrating, and that is what we are called to do.

We are not called to do that occasionally. We are called to do that when? Always! *Always* is not once a week on Sundays. *Always* isn't once a day although it wouldn't hurt to plan conscious celebrations every day. It would be good to have a planned celebration every day. However, *always* means celebrating all through out the day, every day. Do you celebrate every day? Do you party everyday? Do you celebrate even when you are tempted to wallow in self-pity, fear or anger. Moments of fear, anger or despair come. They are unavoidable. However, they need not stay. Celebration is a choice. Indeed, that

choice will be easier if it is a habit. Paul tell us to make it a habit. Do you think you could make celebration a habit? Would you like to? You can do it best when you are under the influence. Not of alcohol or other drugs, but of Christ.

This is such a critical choice that Paul repeated the command. "I say it again: Rejoice!" I think of three reasons why he emphasizes this. First, celebration is appropriate. When your team wins, do you sit on your hands or applaud? When your children succeed, do you congratulate them or leave them feeling that your not satisfied? Given the facts regarding Christ, celebration is appropriate. Second, celebration is beneficial. Paul and Silas experienced that benefit in jail. Divine power was released to change their situation. King Jehoshaphat witnessed that same release of divine power in defeating an overwhelming, invading army in 2 Chronicles 20. Often, the release of divine power comes as inner strength. Instead of changing the situation, it changes us. Nehemiah instructed his weeping nation to celebrate, to prepare feasts. He told them, "The joy of the Lord is your strength." I've found that to be true for me. Celebration lifts my spirit and energizes. Believe me it is better than anything powering the Energizer bunny. Third, celebration is corrective. It helps us grasp reality. Satan uses deception to darken our lives. Celebration helps us open our eyes to the inescapable truth of God's love and power for us. God is greater than the woes we face. Heaven celebrates that. We should too.

I don't think I comply fully with Paul's command to rejoice in the Lord always. But I want to. How about you? Let's plan to. Let's make it a great habit.