



MOMENTS TO PONDER  
UNVEILING JOY:  
EXPLORING THE BOOK OF PHILIPPIANS

Episode 89: Phil. 2:12-18

Hi Friends! Welcome to Moments to Ponder. This is a podcast designed to help you spend a few moments in God's Word wherever you are and take away something to ponder.

We live in a loud, busy world that can make it hard to find the time to get into God's word and I'm grateful for these moments we have to ponder the book of Philipians. I'm Betsy Marvin and this is episode 89.

(music fades)

Let's begin with the section of verses for today, Philipians 2:12-18. Paul has just finished sharing the beautiful hymn about Jesus, and he uses the previous poetry to remind the Philipians of the Gospel and then...reminds them that they have to grow into maturity and own their own faith. They have to take responsibility for what they believe and live it themselves.

Have you ever had something laid out in front of you and you think – bless your heart - how in the world will I do that?

The following verses lay out the how, and Paul begins in verse 12 by saying:  
*<sup>12</sup> Dear friends, you always followed my instructions when I was with you. And now that I am away, it is even more important.*

He continues:

*Work hard to show the results of your salvation, obeying God with deep reverence and fear. <sup>13</sup> For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him.*

Paul is mirroring what he just shared about Jesus. Obedience. Doing the will of the Father. When we live like our salvation matters, when we remember that God is at work transforming our hearts and minds to align with his, we are living with the attitude of Christ. Paul goes on:

*<sup>14</sup> Do everything without complaining and arguing, <sup>15</sup> so that no one can criticize you. Live clean, innocent lives as children of God, shining like bright lights in a world full of crooked and perverse people. <sup>16</sup> Hold firmly to the word of life; then, on the day of Christ's return, I will be proud that I did not run the race in vain and that my work was not useless. <sup>17</sup> But I will rejoice even if I lose my life, pouring it out like a liquid offering to God,<sup>[e]</sup> just like your faithful service is an offering to God. And I want all of you to share that joy. <sup>18</sup> Yes, you should rejoice, and I will share your joy.*

As I prepared for today, verses 14-15 grabbed my attention. I like how the Message shares these verses:

*Phil. 2:14-15 Do everything readily and cheerfully—no bickering, no second-guessing allowed! Go out into the world uncorrupted, a breath of fresh air in this squalid and polluted society. Provide people with a glimpse of good living and of the living God. Carry the light-giving Message into the night so I'll have good cause to be proud of you on the day that Christ returns.*

When I was growing up, my mom would use a couple of different scriptures quite often in her parenting. One was the proverb, *a soft answer turns away wrath*. And then other, *do everything without grumbling or complaining*. I can remember rolling my inner eyes – I mean- when your mom quotes scripture you can't really talk back. It was actually genius. We were reminded that a soft answer does deescalate an argument and – with the grumbling and complaining - we just stopped and did whatever chore it was. This simple phrase framed how I see complaining – not that I don't do it – but that I realize how much this type of language affects how I see the world and how I see others.

Take a moment to ponder, how many times have you grumbled or complained in the past few days?

I would add, who are you complaining to? I feel like our world thrives on complaining and arguing..

There will always be things to complain about, but, our attitude can either be a shining light, a breath of fresh air in this crooked polluted society, or we can join in with the rest of the complainers. I was curious, so I looked up what complain means – it's to express grief, pain, or discontent, to express dissatisfaction or annoyance about something. We do need to express our

grief and pain – but it’s the mindset that’s the problem. Complaining is speaking of whatever it is without the courage to change anything. We’ve all met someone that seems to like to complain, meaning they like to talk about what’s wrong or what’s bothering them – but they don’t actually do anything to change it. Think Eeyore. How can Christ-followers be a breath of fresh air if we continually focus on the negative?

For clarification, venting is addressing an issue in such a way that you are seeking an answer, an action. You get it out and are seeking change, advice. When we wallow in complaining, we bring on an attitude of defeat and frustration. If we want to stop complaining, we have to have the courage to face life and do something about it.

Paul’s description of the world in these verse refers back to Deuteronomy 32. It’s a nod to the complaining and arguing among the Israelites as they went through the wilderness. They lost sight of all that God provided and focused in on their discomfort and complained over and over again to Moses. N.T. Wright says that in these verses *“Paul’s sees the church as the people of the new Exodus – brought of out the Egypt of sin and death through the Passover action of God in Jesus, and now on the way home to the real Promised Land. And this time – they are going to get it right – which is still the challenge today.”*

The Philippians are arguing, grumbling against each other and that wasn’t the way God’s children should live. They needed to be examples, showing a community shaped by love.

Have you ever noticed that complaining begets complaining? That as you listen to someone share their complaints, you find yourself thinking – yeah! And, before you know it, you’re complaining to someone else about the same thing. It’s a habit and when we begin the habit of complaining, the world will never seem right enough.

So, what can we do? Our world is full of complaining and arguing. Social media, the news, our families, our churches, there is disruption and challenges everywhere. Paul’s world had its fill of this too – yet he speaks of joy and he wants the Philippians to adopt that same attitude. Joy not based on circumstances, but in the reality of Jesus and his gifts and love.

A few years ago I read the devotional based on Ann Voskamp's book, *One Thousand Gifts*. It was a game changer – or I should say, mind changer. Paul will address this more in chapter 4, but I can't help but reference gratitude here. Gratitude is the antidote for complaining. Gratitude gives perspective into disputes. It shifts our minds and reminds us of where our true focus should be.

In her book, Ann speaks of writing out one thousand gifts, things she is grateful for, even in the midst of trauma and hard. She shares this research:

*“When we express gratitude... our brain releases dopamine and serotonin, the two crucial neurotransmitters responsible for our emotions.... By consciously practicing gratitude everyday, we can help these neural pathways to strengthen.” Research concludes: “People who express gratitude have been shown to have a higher volume of grey matter in their right inferior temporal gyrus. Grey matter in the brain serves many functions, but is primarily responsible for processing information.”*

Why does that matter? Because when our brain is focused on thanks, it turns on all the lights in the dark. It literally changes our brain! Which, then, helps us to be the shining lights our dark world needs. By contemplating the gifts and goodness of God, with thanksgiving, we strengthen our ability to see the good in our lives. This moves us toward sharing, passing those gifts, the grace, the goodness of God so we can...*Go out into the world uncorrupted, a breath of fresh air in this squalid and polluted society. [Providing] people with a glimpse of good living and of the living God. Phil. 2:14(MSG)*

Reading that book prompted me to start a gratitude journal, which I still write in almost every day. I know many people keep one, and for me, as I look back, I can see how it has changed how I think, it's changed where I focus. If, as you ponder this podcast, you find that complaining is a challenge for you – I encourage you to begin a gratitude journal. Write something everyday, you'll be amazed at what you start to notice in your world.

Here are some words from a blog Ann wrote:

*When your eyes are on God, your heart bursts into a flame of thanks ... and **thanks** burns back the dark. When your eyes are on God, **your eyes see gifts.***

*If eyes are on God — how can a heart not fill with thanks?*

*Gratitude is an overflow of keeping eyes on Him. When your eyes keep seeing gifts of grace, you're given the courage to keep going. Do we know how much our eyes, our attention, is fixed on Him — by how much gratefulness is in our hearts?*

*Giving thanks is always worth it, because the fight for joy is always worth it, and God is always worthy of it. The only way to not grow old and bitter is to have habits that protect all the hard, from making your heart hard.*

*And the way to keep your heart soft in a hard world, is to keep giving thanks through the hard things. (<https://annvoskamp.com/2022/11/when-its-kind-hard-to-give-thanks/>)*

I have found that the Christian life, being a light in this dark world is hard, but it is best done through the lens of thankfulness. **The lens of gratitude lets us see hope — because it lets us see the face of God still here. (Ann Voskamp)** And, it is there that joy lives.

*Do everything readily and cheerfully—no bickering, no second-guessing allowed! Go out into the world uncorrupted, a breath of fresh air in this squalid and polluted society. Provide people with a glimpse of good living and of the living God. Carry the light-giving Message into the night so I'll have good cause to be proud of you on the day that Christ returns.*

Dear one, may you take a moment today to put your focus completely on God. Allow your mind to ponder those things in your day that you can be thankful for, AND then point your heart to the One you can thank for those things. God is at work in you, allow him to give you new eyes to see your world, yourself, through his eyes of love and grace.

Amen.