

Surprised by Joy

Philippians 2:19-21

Pastor David Woolverton

For those of you who are visiting with us for the first time or those joining us online for the first time, my name is David Woolverton. It's a joy to share with you the word of God today. We are continuing today in our message series and the Book of Philippians, a series that we're entitling Surprised by Joy. And just to surprise you a little bit more, we're ending that series today. I should say, pausing that series today because next Sunday we are going to be led in worship by our United Women in Faith. They're going to be sharing a Thanksgiving message for us on the 20th, next Sunday, and then again on the following Sunday, believe it or not, Advent begins. Christmas is around the corner! And I know the air smells like snow outside so we're getting into the winter months. Some of you are excited. I'm counting the days till spring. That's just who I am, I need more warmth. But we're going to begin a special series for Advent that we're calling Radical Hospitality. And for the four weeks of Advent, we're going to kind of build around the Christmas story, but telling that story from a slightly different perspective. And in the midst of that, on the 11th of December, we're pulling out all the stops for both of our services. And we're going to have a Jazz Christmas. A big jazz band is coming to lead us in worship along with our bell choir bells and it's going to be a really great day. Both services are going to be in the West Sanctuary, primarily because of the set-up of the bells and the band. Once they're up, they need to stay up. And so, coming up on December 11th, it's a great opportunity for you to invite friends. It's a joyful season, people are craving a relationship with Jesus, whether they realize it or not. And music is a great way to connect people to the heart of God. So, invite them to be a part of that. And then we'll pick up back into our series Surprised by Joy, part two, on January 1st. We'll launch into chapters three and four of Philippians and dive into some additional things that the Lord wants to teach us.

But for today, we want to invite you to open your Bibles to Philippians, chapter two. If you're following us online, please do that as well via the Bible or the Bible App and please open up your heart as well to what the Lord has in mind to teach us. As we prepare our hearts, would you join with me in prayer? Lord God, open us up to your word and open your word up to us. Teach us, Father, what you would have us learn as you conform our lives into the disciples that you have called us to be. All of this, Lord, I pray in Jesus mighty name. And all God's people said Amen!

So many of you who have heard my story over the years. You know that when I started college, I started as a biology major in the pre-med program. I wanted to be a doctor ever

since I was five years old, and it was kind of a strange journey. I was just in love with TV shows like Emergency. Remember that? If you're old enough, remember Emergency? I loved the medical relations of all those TV shows. And even though I was older and watched reruns, I was drawn to TV shows like Marcus Welby, M.D. And I dreamed, ever since I was five years old, of being a doctor who actually made house calls. That doesn't happen now. With most doctors now, it's a struggle to get them to even see you, it seems, let alone come to your home. But the reality is, God had a different plan. I wanted to be that kind of a doctor until the middle of my freshman year of college. So, I started college at Albright in Reading, Pennsylvania. Didn't want to go there, that's another story. But God had something in mind and when I was there, God called me to ministry, He reshaped me. I didn't know what to study. And I went from biology, I guess I could have stayed a biology major and still done ministry, although I don't know how dissecting an amphibian would have applied to business meetings within the church, although my mind could probably make something up. But the reality is, I needed to do something, and I didn't know what pastors studied. I grew up in the Episcopal Church, not the United Methodist Church, and so I grew up in a time and with a pastor who really discouraged you from reading the Bible. In fact, I remember many times the pastor would say to all of us, I don't want you reading the Bible, because I don't trust that you're going to interpret it the right way. You need to be licensed in order to read from the Bible. I was like, well, okay, what did I know? I decided to change my major and to change my focus. I did not own a Bible and I had not read a Bible. So, I went home one day and stole my dad's Navy Bible. It was an old King James Bible and I remember sitting at my desk in my dorm room with the Bible in front of me and going, where do I begin? So, I opened it up, like you do any book, and in there it said "In the beginning", and I started reading. And my life was forever changed. I read that book cover to cover multiple times, highlighting things. I didn't know if you were allowed to write in the Bible, but I was highlighting things. I was writing things; I was learning things. I was memorizing scripture. That's why even today, the majority of the Scripture passages that I have committed to memory are in old King James language. It's because that's where I learned it, in my dad's Bible. And so, as I shaped and formed my journey of faith, I began to choose a major. I majored in two different degree programs because I couldn't pick. I majored in psychology and religion. I dual degreed. I will never forget going through all of those initial psychology courses. There was one individual in particular, Dr. Patricia Snyder, that just drew me in. Her style of teaching, not just the content, but her style of teaching was very relational. It was very poignant. It was very direct. And she had, in her unique ability, the skill of being able to pull a student, intellectually and relationally, into the learning process. And she did that with me. I took as many courses as I could with her. And by my junior year, I took a course that was called Human Cognition and Learning. She taught it. This was a course where the goal is that you would learn *how* people learn. And the way she taught; it was very experiential. She brought the students into the learning experience to learn how people learn. The ability to think, the ability to relate, the ability to process

information. And so, I was just drawn in and I was drawn in because of her unique style. Here's the thing. Even the way I'm preaching today is modeled after what she taught. It's modeled after what I saw in her. Who I am as a preacher can be traced back to Dr. Pat Snyder. I loved what I was learning. Now, she was not, by her own admission, she was not a person of faith. Psychology back then, the whole department, I wonder if anybody was a person of faith? But God used Pat and used that department to shape how I viewed life, how I viewed people, and how I understood how individuals like myself and all the people that I would eventually lead and serve, how they would learn how to learn. So, my style of preaching, my relational style, the things that you're used to, that's the way I've preached for 35 years, all traced back to my psychology professor, who modeled what it meant to engage people in their own educational journey. Now my junior year, in the midst of that course, probably two thirds of the way through it, she called me into her office one day. So I was sitting there kind of like, what do I say? And she looked at me across from her desk and she said, "You know, David, I've been watching you. I mean, I've been watching how you're engaging the material and how you're engaging the class, and I want to make an offer to you." And I said, "What's that?" She said, "I want to invite you to be my lab instructor next year." I said, "Your what?" She said, "I want to invite you to be my lab instructor. This course that you're in right now, I'm going to be teaching it next year. I would like for you to come up alongside of me and assist me with all the experiments that we do, with all the student stuff that we do. Would you be willing to do that?" And I said, "Why me?" And I'll never forget this. She looked at me from across the table and she said, "Because you get it. You understand. And I know that when I ask you to do what I'm asking you to do, it's going to be done and it's going to be done well." So I said yes, and during my senior year, in addition to everything else that I was doing, a full load of classes, touring and singing with a group that led worship in churches all over the eastern Pennsylvania area almost every weekend, I took on this additional responsibility and it forever changed my life. Hold on to that for just a brief moment.

Now, let's go into the Word of God, Philippians chapter two, starting in verse 19. Listen to Paul the Apostle who writes these words, these very affectionate words to a church of young believers that he is passionate about. He helped to birth this church, and now this church was struggling both internally and externally with many different forces, many different voices that were trying to lure them away from what it meant to be followers of Jesus. And Paul, in very passionate words, is trying to speak into that journey. And this segment of the scriptures. Listen to what he says. These words, these verses are things that for years I would just gloss over as contextual. But I really think they have something to teach us and something very important for us as we engage the process of learning how we learn. This is what it says, as Paul writes, starting in verse 19. He writes, "I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon so that I may be cheered by news of you. I have no one like him who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare." Let's pause there for a brief

moment. There's a phrase in this verse that's really, really important that struck me for the first time when I read it just a couple of weeks ago and was preparing for this message. It's the phrase, *I have no one like him*, I have no one like Timothy. I want to send Timothy because I have no one else like him. The New Testament, for the most part, was written in the ancient language of Greek, not modern Greek, although there are some similarities. This is ancient Greek. So, it is not an easy-to-speak language. When you look at what Paul is writing that phrase, *like him*, was actually one word. And it's a very unique word, it's a compound word - isopsyche. When you combine those two words, it literally means, get this, "same mind" or more literally, "same soul." So what Paul is saying, by using this word, is I want to send you, Timothy. There's no one else that I would trust sending to you, because when I send Timothy, it's like I'm sending myself. We have the same mind, the same soul. I can trust that when Timothy is with you, it's as if I'm there with you. Have you ever had that experience of either sending somebody that just he or she is the one who can complete your sentence? Or maybe you were the one who was sent because you had the same mind as the sender? There's no one else like him. No one wired just like me, other than Timothy. But there's more. He continues in Verse 21. "Everyone else is seeking their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ, but Timothy's worth, you know." Do you get that? Do you feel the weight of the intimacy of Paul's words? "How like a son with a father, he has served with me and the work of the gospel." That's powerful stuff. It's very intimate stuff. It's very challenging stuff. What Paul is saying is that I would trust no one else to do what needs to be done with you, but Timothy. Because Timothy has not only the same mind as I do, but he's also got the same heart, he's got the same passion. He gets it. He gets it. Then Paul says, "I hope, therefore, to send him as soon as I see how things go with me. And I trust in the Lord that I will also come soon." Keep in mind, Paul is in prison, right? He doesn't know what tomorrow is going to bring! So, he's sending an envoy. He's sending an ambassador. He's sending his own spiritual son to represent him with this church that he loves so dearly because he trusts Timothy. He trusts him.

Hold on to this image - Paul in prison is sending Timothy. Why Timothy? What do we know about Timothy? First, what we know is that Timothy's name means 'one who honors God.' Do we have any Timothy's in here? There is one, two. You are, by virtue of your name, men who honor God. So, we know that Timothy was born with an agenda. We know also that he's the son of a Jewish mother by the name of Eunice and a Greek father, we don't know the Greek father's name, at least according to the scriptures. We know that he was discipled by his mother, Eunice, and his grandmother, Lois. We learned that in the Scriptures. Lois, the grandmother, was praying for Timothy. Never underestimate the power of a praying grandmother! God listens to praying grandmothers, right? So, the mother, Eunice, and the grandmother, Lois, invested themselves into Timothy's discipleship and shaped his character, shaped him into the person that he became when Paul took over and eventually set him apart, or in our language, he ordained him to lead. He set him on a course. He set

him apart to lead. We also know that he became Paul's apprentice. We can see that in all of the letters that we have in the Book of Acts, we see that Timothy went wherever Paul went when he saw what Paul did. He heard what Paul taught. He watched how Paul shaped his ministry, the miracles that were done, he saw it all; the phrases that were used, he starts to say, as any good apprentice would do. Paul was clearly, clearly working in him and discipling him. We also know, according to the Scriptures, that Timothy had stomach issues, which is evidence of the fact that he was a pastor. Because it's one of the many ways that pastors embody all of the stress and anxiety that they take on from the people that they lead. That's meant to be tongue in cheek, but it's also very literal. We also know, according to tradition, that Timothy died at the age of 80. He was beaten, he was dragged through the streets, and he was stoned by an angry mob because he dared to try to intercept and prevent a procession of people who were worshiping idols. He was an 80-year-old. Back then, that was a very old person because their life expectancy was a lot lower than it is today. Imagine that. Imagine what he went through. Why did Paul send Timothy?

But there's more to this passage of scripture. There's another individual that's represented. We pick up in verse 25, Paul's writing says, "Still, I think it necessary to send to you, Epaphroditus, my brother and coworker and fellow soldier, your messenger and minister to my need, for he has been longing for all of you and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill. He was indeed so ill that he nearly died. But God had mercy on him and not only on him, but also on me, so that I would not have one sorrow after another. I am the more eager to send him, therefore, in order that you may rejoice at seeing him again, and that I may be less anxious. Please welcome him then, in the Lord, with all joy and honor that such people are due because he came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up for those services that you could not give me." He's a very interesting person. We don't know much about Epaphroditus, but his name is rather unique, right? His name, in Greek, means *handsome*. Can you imagine having that name today? So, his name comes from the root 'Aphrodite'. So, he was birthed into a very secular, pagan culture where his parents named him after one of those goddesses that the Romans and the Greeks used to worship. The male version of Aphrodite is rooted in his name. Aphrodite means glorious or beautiful. And so, the male is handsome. So, he's born with this, and somehow, we don't know how, he is brought into the Christian faith as a follower of Jesus and his life is forever changed. And because of what the Lord has done in him, he gets involved into the local church in Philippi. When the Philippians are needing to send aid to Paul while he's in prison, who do they select? Somebody that they respect, somebody that they can trust, somebody that they can count on, who is reliable and who will take all of their financial offerings, their food offerings, and their best wishes and represent them to Paul. He's a special ambassador. So, he was sent by the church while Timothy was sent to the church in Philippi from the Apostle Paul. Epaphroditus was sent by the church to Paul. And unfortunately, while he was with Paul, he got deathly ill. We don't know with what, but he almost died. And

so, all the concern of the Philippian Christians was over how well he was doing. Paul wants to send him back to lower their anxiety and probably to help with his healing. So, he sends a path for us back to the church that sent him. Knowing full well that he's going to return as a hero because Paul is making him out to be a hero. How do we know that? His letter says Epaphroditus was my brother, my coworker in the gospel, my fellow soldier, including being willing to sacrifice whatever it needed to be sacrificed for the sake of the good news of the Gospel. He was your messenger, and he was loyal to following Jesus. That's what he's saying. He's telling the story of this incredible leader in the faith.

Epaphroditus. Timothy. Each of these individuals had four traits of leaders, leaders for God. They were relational. They cared more about people than themselves. They were relevant, no matter what the need was. They came in the midst of the moment, and they responded accordingly. They were resourced and they were responsible. They networked whatever needed to be done, and they were responsible. Given a task, they followed it through, no matter what. You know, when we look at applying all of these principles to our lives today, there's a lot of people in our generation that are that are lamenting that the next generation coming up, they don't have the same values as we do and they don't have the same abilities, or the same work ethic. I don't know if that's true or not across the board, but the reality is - hold on to your seats - the next generation can't have the same mind as us if they don't know what we're thinking. Way too many times in the church over the years, what I would hear from people, especially those who have been long tenured in the church, is like, hey, we need somebody to step into this role. Then I will hear somebody say, I've done my time. As if it's some kind of prison experience. I've done my time, it's time for somebody else to take on that role. I've done my time, let somebody else lead. What we fail to do is we fail to pass on to that next generation leader the skills, the values, the ability to think the way we think. And yet, then, when they do lead - we judge them as not leading good enough because they're not leading the way that we would. What a horrible scenario that is. No wonder the Church of Jesus Christ, throughout all of America, especially, and probably globally, has been tanking. This is because we have neglected to live out this model of discipleship that Paul, through Timothy and Epaphroditus, has modeled for us. What would it take for us to look for those who are upcoming, those individuals who are relational, who are relevant, who are resourced, who are responsible, "who get it", in the words of Patricia Snyder, who are seeing in the next generation individuals who may not be able to see that see these qualities in themselves. But if somebody is looking for them in us and then can shape them in us, then suddenly we are living out the good news of the Gospel in ways that transform our neighborhoods and our workplaces and our churches and our lives and our families! **Never underestimate the power of what one person can invest in us to bring out the best in us.**

Relational. Relevant. Resourced and responsible. And for those of you who are in the younger generation, my challenge to you will be to strive to be relational. Strive to let your faith, to let your relationship with Jesus Christ embody itself in how you live.

One of my frustrations with young people - and I love young people - I love working with youth. I spent eight years as a youth pastor. I love teenagers, especially middle school. What I get frustrated with is when I see, on TV and culture, and all over is that these young people are given this apathetic 'meh' attitude as if that's cool. It isn't cool! It shows that you don't care when, in fact, I know that you do. I know that you do. If you want the respect of the generations preceding yours - be relevant, be relational, be resourced, be responsible and watch how all of us will respond and pull out the character that God has planted in you. And my challenge to those who are my age and older, and I'm young. I'm young in my mind, so for our generation, I challenge you to go looking. I challenge you to go treasure hunting. What Pat Snyder did to me changed my life and set the course for the rest of my ministry, whether she realized it or not. And what you do to invest in another individual, God can transform. Never underestimate the power of what God can do when we seek the treasure in one another. Let Timothy and Epaphroditus give you the encouragement to be an apostle Paul.

Let's pray. God, we believe that you have called and equipped us for such a time as this and not every one of us may know what is hidden in the treasure resources of who we are and who you have called us to be - but you see it. You know it. And by virtue of faith, we are trusting that somebody has seen that in us and shaped that in us for the sake of us seeing it and shaping it into someone else. Help us, Lord, to be the Apostle Paul for some other Timothy or Epaphroditus in trusting that you were sending us for such a time as this. And thank you to every Patricia Snyder and every other individual by our own names who has dared to buck the system when they ask us to engage in something that stretches us. We love you, Lord. We praise you and we thank you for loving us. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.