

Realign Part 8: Growing in Our Capacity to Experience and Choose Joy

Thesis: Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Group identity: Whatever we go through and whatever we experience, we are a people who choose to respond in joy, to express joy, and to live from the place of joy in Christ.

Text: Philippians 1:27-30; 4:4-9

We need to put on and to develop new capacities for what is coming in our culture. This sermon series is about developing new capacities.

Let's read Philippians 1:27-30.

Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel 28 without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved—and that by God. 29 For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him, 30 since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have (Philippians 1:27-30 NIV).

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! 5 Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. 6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. 8 Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. 9 Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

Give thanks to the Lord, call on his name; make known among the nations what he has done. 9 Sing to him, sing praise to him; tell of all his wonderful acts. 10 Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice. 11 Look to the Lord and his strength; seek his face always. 12 Remember the wonders he has done, his miracles, and the judgments he pronounced, 13 O descendants of

Israel his servant, O sons of Jacob, his chosen ones. 14 He is the Lord our God; his judgments are in all the earth. 15 He remembers his covenant forever, the word he commanded, for a thousand generations, 16 the covenant he made with Abraham, the oath he swore to Isaac (1 Chronicles 16:8-16).

Our King wants us to align with what he says, with what he does, and with how he feels.

Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ (Philippians 1:27).

- Living in a manner worthy of the gospel stands throughout this book as Paul's ultimate goal for the Philippians.
- **Where we are out of alignment, we are called to realign:** *whatever happens [with whatever you face, with whatever you go through, with whatever comes your way], conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the good news of your Messiah, of the King.*

To conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ-- no matter what happens, no matter what we face, no matter what we go through, no matter what comes our way-- **calls for steadfastness, unity, courage, and joy, even in the face of opposition and suffering.**

In this sermon series, we are exploring what it means to live in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. We are considering what it means to align with the ways of Jesus in this hour of history.

We want to grow in four capacities of alignment:

1. **Steadfastness:** *stand firm in one spirit (Philippians 1:27).* (Feb. 7). In that message, we said that if you don't quit, you win. He who endures to the end shall be saved, and God is able to help us to endure and persevere. We are invited to the extreme center with God's ministry and message of reconciliation.
2. **Unity:** *contending as one for the faith of the gospel (Philippians 1:27).* (Feb. 14 and Feb. 21). In those two messages, we talked about how to show up in a way that promotes unity and expresses humility. We also talked about the skill of differentiation of self, where we grow in our capacity to be defined and to stay connected.
3. **Courage:** *without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you (Philippians 1:28).* (Feb. 28). Fear is not supposed to rule our lives. In the face of brokenness, trials, tragedies, trauma, lies, opposition, attack, and evil, we have the capacity to choose courage and faith rather than fear and doubt... with God

helping us. One practical way to grow in our capacity for choosing courage is through having frequent transformation conversations. It takes courage to walk in the light with others (1 John 1:7).

4. **Joy:** *Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! (Philippians 4:4).* (Mar. 7)
 - a. Whatever we go through and whatever we experience, we are a people who choose to respond in joy, to express joy, and to live from the place of joy in Christ.
 - b. We can even choose joy in the face of big emotions that want to knock us off our center in Christ.

Last week, we began looking at the topic of joy as it relates to walking in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.

Today, we want to consider this question: How do we increase our joy? We want to talk about three practices that will help build joy in our lives. Before we get into the practices, we will do a quick review of last week's message. We are just hitting the highpoints. Each of these statements are spelled out more completely in the notes and in the message from last week.

Declaration of our group identity: Whatever we go through and whatever we experience, we are a people who choose to respond in joy, who choose to express joy, and who choose to live from the place of joy in Christ.

Joy in the book of Philippians.

The book of Philippians presents joy as an essential outgrowth of union with Christ in the gospel. Paul stresses the idea of joy or rejoicing in a number of ways throughout the letter:

1. "making my prayer with *joy* (*χαρά, chara*)" (1:4).
2. "I rejoice" (*χαίρω, chairō*) that Christ is proclaimed (1:18).
3. "I will rejoice" (*χαίρω, chairō*) because I will be delivered through your prayers and help of the Spirit (1:18).
4. Paul will continue with the believers for their "progress and *joy in the faith* (*χαρά, chara*)" (1:25).
5. Paul urges the Philippians to "*complete my joy* (*χαρά, chara*)" (2:2) by being united.
6. "I am *glad* (*χαίρω, chairō*) and *rejoice* with you (*συγχαίρω, synchairō*) all... *be glad* (*χαίρω, chairō*) and *rejoice* with (*συγχαίρω, synchairō*) me" (2:17-18);

7. The Philippians should “rejoice” (χαίρω, *chairō*) at seeing Epaphroditus again and “receive him in the Lord with all joy (χαρά, *chara*)” (2:28–29).
8. In several places, Paul emphatically tells the Philippians to “rejoice (χαίρω, *chairō*) in the Lord” (3:1; 4:4).
9. Paul calls the Philippians “his joy (χαρά, *chara*) and crown” (4:1).
10. Paul “rejoiced (χαίρω, *chairō*) in the Lord greatly” that the Philippians revived their concern for him (4:10).

Our King wants us to align with his joy (John 15:9-17). *I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete (John 15:11).* **So, joy is another important way to conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.**

- Paul expresses thankfulness and joy through prayer for the Philippians’ partnership (Philippians 1:3-11).
- Paul expresses joy in suffering for the gospel and in preaching the gospel (Philippians 1:12-26).
- Paul exhorts the Philippians to rejoice in Christ even in the face of opposition, humbling circumstances, the challenges of spiritual formation, and disagreements (Philippians 3:1 - 4:9)

With the Lord helping us, we can even choose joy in the midst of suffering:

- Joy and suffering are intertwined throughout Philippians. Paul writes from prison and in the midst of suffering. Despite his hardships, Paul shows the Philippians that his own joy provides a pattern for theirs: “Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me” (Philippians 2:17). This joy is present in the midst of suffering and conflict. Paul rejoices despite rival preachers, unjust imprisonment, and life endangerment (Philippians 1:12-26, 2:17). He asks the Philippians to rejoice in spite of his dire circumstances and the false teachers who seek to undermine their faith (Philippians 2:18, 3:1–2).
- Moreover, Paul’s joy is tied to the Philippians’ endurance as they confront their own trying circumstances (Philippians 2:2). The command in Philippians 1:27–30 (ESV), “let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ,” is given in the context of suffering. Paul exhorts the believers to stand firm, “not frightened in anything by your opponents.” He states in Philippians 1:29 that it has been granted to the Philippians to “suffer for [Christ’s] sake.” The church’s partnership with him is not only financial; it also involves suffering for the sake of the gospel. Nevertheless, in his final exhortation to the church, he commands

them to rejoice in the peace of God (Philippians 4:4, 7) (*Lexham Bible Commentary*).

Who else **chose to respond in joy** to whatever happened and to whatever opposition came his way? That's right: Jesus.

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart (Hebrews 12:2-3 NIV).

Whatever happens, we can choose to respond in the joy of the Lord. Where we are out of alignment, the Lord invites us to realign.

Question: How do we grow in our capacity to experience joy?

(From [The Other Half of Church](#), by Jim Wilder and Michel Hendricks.)

God designed our brains to run on joy like a car runs on fuel. And joy is found in being the sparkle in God's eye and in the eyes of others.

For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ (2 Corinthians 4:6).

The LORD said to Moses, 23 "Tell Aaron and his sons, 'This is how you are to bless the Israelites. Say to them: 24 ""The LORD bless you and keep you; 25 the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; 26 the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace""" (Numbers 6:22-26).

God designed our brains for joy, and He wants us to live in the glow of His delight. This blessing expresses a joy that can be paraphrased, "May you feel the joy of God's face shining on you because He is happy to be with you!" (Wilder, Jim; Hendricks, Michel. [The Other Half of Church](#) (p. 55). Moody Publishers. Kindle Edition.)

Unfortunately, Bible translators often lose this reference to joy in modern languages. Consider how the NIV translates Psalm 89:15.

Blessed are those who have learned to acclaim you, who walk in the light of your presence, O LORD (Psalm 89:15).

In the Hebrew, “in the light of your presence” is literally “in the light of your face.” This is not an isolated example. Over and over I discovered the neglected face of God. God’s face is connected with joy in the Bible. One of the first Scriptures I memorized when I was a new Christian was Psalm 16:11, “In Your presence is fullness of joy” (NASB). However, the original Hebrew renders this verse, “abundance of joy with your face.” Psalm 21 lists the blessings of God for the king of Israel. In verse 6, the psalmist proclaims, “You make him joyful with gladness in Your presence” (NASB). The word-for-word rendering of the Hebrew is, “You make him happy with joy with your face.” In Scripture, we see that the face of God brings us joy, but God’s face gets erased in translation.

Some versions of the Bible alter the image of God’s face shining on us, presenting a more generic concept of God’s presence and favor. Translators may do this to make the text more readable, but an important bodily sensation is lost. “The light of God’s presence” does not feel the same in our bodies as “the light of God’s face.” God designed facial recognition circuitry into our brains and linked it to our joy center. My wife’s face lights up when she sees me, and this initiates a joyful chain reaction in my brain that I can feel in my body.

Brain science reveals that this joy sensation is crucial for emotional and relational development. Our brain looks specifically to the face of another person to find joy, and this fills up our emotional gas tank. The face is key. When a Bible translation erases the picture of God’s face, our brains do not react as strongly. A right-brain dominant relational sensation (joy—God’s face shining on us) is replaced with a less corporeal statement of fact (God is present with us). They both are important aspects of God’s love for us, but they are not the same.

This may seem like nitpicking, but there is a difference in the way our bodies respond. God designed our brains to seek joy through eyes and facial expressions, through being with people who are glad to be with us. When I compared the many Scriptures that describe God’s face shining on us with what I now know about how our brains were designed, I came to three important points of convergence: (1) Joy is primarily transmitted through the face (especially the eyes) and secondarily through voice. (2) Joy is relational. It is what we feel when we are with someone who is happy to be with us. Joy does not exist outside of a relationship. (3) Joy is important to God and to us.

Reading through the Bible and replacing “joy” with the concept of God’s face lighting up gives us a better idea of what joy means and how it feels in our bodies. For example, if we rewrite Psalm 16:11 using the fuller definition of joy, “In Your presence is fullness of joy” becomes “When Your face lights up because

You are so happy to be with me, You fill me up with joy!” In John 15, Jesus talks about how He loves His disciples with the same love that the Father has for Him. Then He says, “I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete” (v. 11). If we replace “joy” with the fuller definition, Jesus’ statement would be, “My Father’s face lights up when He sees Me because I’m so special to Him. I’m telling you this so that you will feel how special you are to my Father and to Me. Our faces are shining on you with delight.” I can feel that in my body when I picture it. Can you? (Wilder, Jim; Hendricks, Michel. [The Other Half of Church](#) (pp. 55-57). Moody Publishers. Kindle Edition.)

Joy helps us regulate our emotions and endure suffering. Jesus refused to relinquish joy in the midst of His suffering on the cross. When we are able to stay relationally connected to others and God, we experience joy while we suffer. Joy does not remove our pain, but it gives us the strength to endure. Remember that joy is relational, so “joy in suffering” means that God and our community are glad to be with us in our distress. They do not allow us to suffer alone. We are able to bear our suffering like Jesus, “who for the joy set before Him endured the cross” (Hebrews 12:2 NASB). (Wilder, Jim; Hendricks, Michel. [The Other Half of Church](#) (p. 59). Moody Publishers. Kindle Edition.)

It is important to remember that joy is not strictly an emotion. We might refer to it as a supra-emotion because it can go on top of and connect with other emotions. For example, if I lose my job, this is usually not considered a joyful occasion. Instead, I am probably feeling some combination of sadness, fear, and anger. However, when I experience these unpleasant emotions and can simultaneously feel that God is with me, I have added joy into the mix. If I have close friends who are also happy to be with me in my loss, my joy magnifies even more. Now I’m feeling sad and joyful. Fearful and joyful. Angry and joyful. Joy does not replace the unpleasant emotions; instead it combines with my emotions to keep me relationally connected in distress.

The importance of joy to our brain highlights the fact that we must suffer in community. We were not meant to suffer alone. We need to lean on God and on our people in times of distress. We naturally do this when a family member dies. Everyone comes together in order to share the sadness. We tell stories about the deceased. We eat together. We sit in silence. We are joyful (not happy) because we want to suffer together. This is the definition of joy: I want to be with you. Joy is relational in its essence.

Joy is the foundation for a secure bond with God. When I trust that God is happy to be with me and is smiling at me, this joy naturally removes fear from the relationship. A goal we have in our bond with God is to nurture a loving

relationship until it has no fear. (Wilder, Jim; Hendricks, Michel. [The Other Half of Church](#) (pp. 60-61). Moody Publishers. Kindle Edition.)

How do we increase our joy? Here are three practices that will help build joy in our lives.

1. **Express gratitude to God and others** ([The Other Half of Church](#)).

In the book *Joyful Journey*, Jim and his coauthors explain the importance of gratitude: “When we keep practicing gratitude with God, our brain remembers what our connection with Him was like, making it easier for us to find our way back to Him.” **Gratitude is the first step to building joy into our lives and helps us experience a more consistent attachment with God.** (Wilder, Jim; Hendricks, Michel. *The Other Half of Church* (p. 63). Moody Publishers. Kindle Edition.)

Joy levels are regulated indirectly through relationships. **Increasing joy will involve improving our relational skills, training our brain, and getting involved in tightly bonded community.** Filling a person with joy fuels their brain with relational energy. **When our bodies can feel the glow of Jesus’ face shining on us, our joy capacity grows. As our joy grows, our faces shine on each other, which makes other people feel joy. When we throw in some intentional practices to magnify joy, we are on the way to creating a high-joy community.** We are adding an essential nutrient to replenish our spiritual soil. (Wilder, Jim; Hendricks, Michel. [The Other Half of Church](#) (p. 64). Moody Publishers. Kindle Edition.)

The first step for increasing joy is establishing effective gratitude practices.

One friend of mine likes to say, “Gratitude is the on-ramp to joy.” You read above how Jim introduced me to a gratitude exercise. The thirty-day *Joy on Demand* exercise (Appendix B) is an easy practice to introduce to your community. **When we all start practicing gratitude each day and sharing our experiences in our gatherings, we are ramping up joy together.** See Appendix B for a fuller explanation of this exercise. (Wilder, Jim; Hendricks, Michel. [The Other Half of Church](#) (p. 72). Moody Publishers. Kindle Edition.)

2. **Connect with others eye-to-eye and face-to-face, and practice letting our faces light up with each other** ([The Other Half of Church](#)). (Therefore, we need to decrease our screen time.)

Another practice for increasing joy may be uncomfortable for many Western people and may even seem risky. If joy is transmitted primarily through our faces and eyes, we need to practice letting our faces light up with each other.

In small groups, something as simple as greeting each person with a brief eye-to-eye connection and telling them how happy you are to see them raises the joy in your group. Small groups also would benefit by incorporating intentional practices of joy and gratitude. Start your group by having each person share a gratitude story from their week. We also increase joy by telling each other what we find special in them.

Families benefit when the parents intentionally build joy with each other and their children. Parents can make changes to their family structure to balance screen-centered family time with face-centered times. Looking our children in the face and telling them how special they are sets them up for a life full of relational energy. (Wilder, Jim; Hendricks, Michel. [*The Other Half of Church*](#) (p. 72-73). Moody Publishers. Kindle Edition.)

3. Celebrate.

For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness [God puts things right], peace [shalom; God brings his kingdom of wholeness, well-being, and human flourishing] and joy [celebrating; joy is found in the face of God and others] in the Holy Spirit, 18 because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men (Romans 14:17-18).

The importance of celebrating.

What I have learned over the past decade is the importance of celebrating. We must take time to celebrate. If you only focus on changing to become like Jesus and on the need to change to be like Jesus, then, the bar is always moving. It seems like it is not ok to be perfect, so we get impatient, lose compassion, or give up changing.

Celebrating is a skill I have learned. It is necessary, right, and good to be aware of progress, to recognize progress in our lives or the lives of others, and to take time to acknowledge and celebrate progress. I have had to learn to celebrate progress in my life and progress in the lives of others.

Celebrate. No matter where you are on your journey, you have something to celebrate. The fact that you are having a Transformation Conversation at all probably represents some amount of progress in your life. Where have you

grown in awareness? In what ways has God changed your desires? Where do you feel hopeful instead of resigned and cynical? Where have you experienced breakthrough? Those are reasons to celebrate ([Faithwalking 201.](#))

The spiritual practice of celebrating. ([Faithwalking 201.](#))

Celebration is a way of engaging in actions that orient the spirit toward worship, praise, and thanksgiving. It involves identifying and pursuing the things that bring the heart deep gladness and reveling in them before the Lord.

Where do you most readily connect with God? Go to that place. What do you want to tell God about the joy you receive there?

Intentionally place yourself in God's presence. Recall all of God's gifts, provisions, guidance and love toward you. Think of a way to celebrate and respond to God's work in your life—write a song; paint a picture; memorize a verse of praise; invite friends over for dinner and tell your story and listen to their stories, etc.

Think about the people in your life who bring you joy. Ask God how you might celebrate them in a way that encourages them.

Consider celebrating the seasons of the Christian calendar (Easter, Pentecost, Advent, etc.) in a new way. Start a new tradition to celebrate God's work in that particular season.

Getting aware of our emotions and becoming aware of what they indicate (from [Faithwalking 201.](#))

We believe that emotions serve an important function. Emotions function to tell you something about yourself and your circumstances—and ultimately to give you greater insight into the nature and character of God. Let's take a look at each of the basic emotions to see how this works:

Anger: is one of the most common emotions, so it can have a multitude of causes. To put it broadly, anger generally denotes that your will has been crossed or blocked. You want something, and you cannot get it. When you want something and are unable to get it, anger will often be triggered. So one question to ask when you feel angry is "What is it that I want in this situation?" Often anger is a sign that you are acting selfishly, like a little child who throws a

tantrum because the world won't make him the center of the universe. This becomes a sign that you might need **to grow more patience or self-control**.

Coming at it from another angle, you can think of anger as stemming from a **sense of injustice about a situation**. So another question to **ask yourself is "What is the injustice?"** If you see a small child being bullied by an adult, anger is a normal response, and it becomes a signal to you to get into action.

Yet another cause of anger is fear. Often when we are scared, we express that fear as anger. (Think of the parent who yells at their child when he/she comes home after curfew.) This is perhaps because it's easier to lash out at someone than to make ourselves vulnerable by simply stating, "When you do _____, I feel afraid."

In each of the three cases above, the anger was triggered by meaning that was made. Once you are able to articulate what triggered the anger, it will be much easier to see things in perspective and to know what action to take. For example, you might decide that someone cutting you off in traffic doesn't quite qualify as an injustice, so it doesn't need to be "made right." On the other hand, if you become aware that someone you love is being abused, there will be steps you want to take to bring about justice in that situation. And when you recognize that fear is underneath your anger, that gives you access to examining the source of the fear.

Sadness: **The feelings that occur on the continuum of sadness are a signal that you are experiencing some kind of loss. Ask yourself, "What have I lost?"** Sometimes this will be something very tangible, as when you are let go from a job or a loved one dies. Other times, the thing you have lost may be much more nebulous and hard to pin down, such as when you lose hope regarding some expectation about how your life would turn out.

Grief is the normal and healthy response to loss. Not all losses are created equal, but when you are aware of sadness and can identify the loss, grieving will make it possible to put the loss behind you so that you can move on.

Fear: **is a signal that you sense some kind of threat or danger, either to yourself or to someone you care about. It is a very future-oriented emotion. Ask yourself, "What am I afraid of? What am I imagining is going to happen?"** In some cases, there may be a real threat that you need to protect against. In other cases, you may realize that there is not actually anything to be afraid of. Instead, recognize that your chronic anxiety has been triggered—likely because your negative vows have been activated. If you find yourself in this situation, **ask**

God to show you where the fear is coming from. Talk out loud to a friend or family member about it. Expressing the fear can help diminish its intensity and give you access to your thinking. Then you can determine what, if any, action you need to take.

Simply being aware that you feel afraid and being able to express it to those around you (even if all you can say is “I don’t know why, but I’m scared.”) will help you. People who are driven by unexpressed fear can often hurt themselves and those around them.

At least in the moment, you will likely have minimal control over what emotions you feel. This is why you don’t need to feel shame that a particular emotion is present. The important thing is what you do with your emotions. You always have a choice about how you respond in any given situation, no matter what you may be feeling. You can choose to brood and nurture an emotion, letting it grow and grow until you really do feel powerless against it. You can focus your emotions externally, blaming others for the feelings that are yours. Doing this often results in harmful and destructive behavior towards yourself and others. Alternatively, you can choose to slow down—even if that occurs after the fact—and see what you can see about the meaning you made and the feelings you felt. This helps you get clear about how to get into action. In the early stages of this process, there will be some messes to clean up. But there is an old saying that applies here: “Practice makes progress.” If you can learn to see the work of managing your emotions as a skill set that you learn with practice, over time, then over time you will gain increasing mastery over yourself.

We do not have to be victimized by destructive feelings. Even the feelings that harm us are, for the most part, not bad in themselves, but are somehow not properly limited or subordinated. They are out of order. Feelings are, with few exceptions, good servants. But they are disastrous masters. – Dallas Willard

In addition to being signals about something going on inside and around you, the fact that you experience anger, fear, and sadness as painful and unwelcome is a sign that you were designed to have mastery of a world that inherently has injustice, danger, and loss. So in a sense, these emotions have a prophetic quality, stirring up in you a hope for things to come. These emotions can spur us to mission as they alert us to places where God wants to bring justice, protection, and wholeness.

Since the feelings associated with love, joy, and peace tend to be desirable, you may be content to simply enjoy those emotions when they come. And there is

certainly nothing wrong with that! However, these feelings can also serve to point you to your Creator and show you something about who God is. Feelings of love can remind you that God is the source of all love and that God always approaches you in love. Joy gives you a glimpse into the life of God. Moments of peace remind you that everything is held in God's loving hands. When you experience any of these things, thank God for creating you with the capacity to experience these emotions, and consider whom you might want to share them with. In this way, your emotions can become a catalyst for mission in your everyday life.

Call to Action:

1. **Reflect on whether or not you are conducting yourself joyfully in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, whatever happens.**
 - a. Where we are out of alignment, we are called to realign: *whatever happens [with whatever you face, with whatever you go through, with whatever comes your way], conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.*
 - b. What is the Lord putting his finger on in your life? Take time to lift up this question to the Lord, to listen, to pay attention, and to respond to the Lord (realign).
 - c. Good news: Where you are out of alignment, the Lord invites you to realign and he gives you the grace you need to change and practice a new way of being.
2. **Reflect on this declaration of our group identity. *Whatever we go through and whatever we experience, we are a people who choose to respond in joy, to express joy, and to live from the place of joy in Christ.***
 - a. What gets stirred up in you when you read that declaration about joy?
 - b. What do you think, feel, and believe?
 - c. Where are you resistant?
 - d. Where are you stuck or stopped, cynical or resigned, in living into this declaration?
3. **Action: practice growing your capacity for joy and your experience of joy.**
 - a. **Express gratitude to God and others.** (Wilder, Jim; Hendricks, Michel. [*The Other Half of Church*](#) (p. 217-218). Moody Publishers. Kindle Edition.)
 - i. Make journal entries of gratitude moments and reflect on those golden memories.
 1. Write down a memory for which are grateful to the Lord.

2. Write down what you felt and experienced of the Lord in that moment.
 3. In a quiet place, go back to that memory and relive it.
 - a. What did you feel in your body? Peace? Lightness? Other?
 - b. What might God be communicating to you through the memory and the peace you feel?
 - ii. In addition to practicing gratitude each day, take the time to practice sharing your experiences in our gatherings. When we share our experiences of gratitude with others, we are ramping up joy together.
- b. **Connect with others eye-to-eye and face-to-face, and practice letting our faces light up with each other.**
- i. In church.
 - ii. In Bible Study groups.
 - iii. In small groups.
 - iv. In your missional community.
 - v. In your family.
 - vi. With your friends.
 - vii. In other places.
- c. **Celebrate.**
- i. **Take the time to celebrate.** It is necessary, right, and good to be aware of progress, to recognize progress in our lives or in the lives of others, and to take time to acknowledge and celebrate progress. Learn to celebrate progress in my life and progress in the lives of others.
 1. Where are you making progress? Where are others around you making progress?
 2. Write it down and share with others what you are celebrating in your life and in the lives of others.
 - ii. **Grow in your capacity to celebrate.** No matter where you are on your journey, you have something to celebrate. The fact that you are having a Transformation Conversation at all probably represents some amount of progress in your life. Where have you grown in awareness? In what ways has God changed your desires? Where do you feel hopeful instead of resigned and cynical? Where have you experienced breakthrough? Those are reasons to celebrate ([Faithwalking 201.](#))

This message today is an invitation from the Lord. If you feel condemned or shamed, then you are not hearing the voice of the Lord. If you feel challenged and stirred up, that is good.

We need to practice intentionally in order to live into this word for the year-- **Realign**: *whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.*

If we are to embody and express outwardly the good news of King Jesus, it will take **awareness** (intimacy with God), **authenticity** (openness and honesty with God and others), and **alignment** (radical obedience; full partnership with Jesus and others on his mission).

Where we find that we are out of alignment, we walk in the light. We cast vision with clarity, authenticity, and passion. We identify our current reality and declare our preferred future in Christ. We get in action to learn skills and to develop new capacities so that we come into realignment.

Summary:

The word for the year for us in 2021 is this: **Realign**. *Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.*

There will be many opportunities and challenges in this year to see where we are in or out of alignment morally or missionally. The Lord wants to help us to realign, we might respond in ways that line up with the good news of our King.