

“Espresso Yourself—Is it in you? Enthusiasm”

[Props: coffee, cup, laser pointer, email]

Today we’re wrapping up this series called Espresso Yourself. Espresso has been a symbol for all this because it’s strong, it’s powerful, it’s concentrated and it has a caffeine kick. Those same words should describe our faith, our lives. Paul wrote this in Ephesians 6: [SLIDE...] **“Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power” (Ephesians 6:10, NIV)**. We don’t have to settle for weak, watered down, decaffeinated lives.

So we’ve been talking about things that will really help to espresso our faith and our lives. And today we’re talking about enthusiasm, or joy. To get us thinking, let’s look at the opposite. There’s a Saturday Night Live character called Debbie Downer. And she is an enthusiasm assassin. In every setting she finds the negative, the problem, or if there isn’t anything negative or a problem she changes the subject to something tragic or sad.

Have you met anybody like that? Do you see somebody like that when you look in the mirror? Contrast Debbie Downer with somebody who is overflowing with joy. I think Mark Statler is like that. When you see him or talk to him, he’s joyful, upbeat, enthusiastic. And the thing about Debbie Downer and Mark Statler is that both attitudes rub off on you. When I’m around either one, I start to feel different—these are traits that are contagious.

That’s why, to conclude this series, I’m talking about enthusiasm. Enthusiasm is intricate, and enthusiasm has the potential to make a huge impact on this earth. When I say the word “enthusiasm,” all these images are conjured up in our minds, but I’m not talking about some sweet, cheesy, hokey-pokey fake game show host-type enthusiasm. “Right for 25 points! Tell them what they have won, Johnny!” No, I’m not talking about that. I’m talking about real enthusiasm — the real stuff that comes from the inside out.

Enthusiasm. When it’s mentioned in the Bible, it’s a word that carries some serious caffeine. Enthusiasm literally means, “en Theos” — infused with God. It means to have God in you, and it also means to be in God. If God is in me, then I can be in God and I can be enthusiastic. Gatorade’s motto is, “Is it in you?” [PICTURE: Gatorade] The same question applies to us in our faith. Is God in you? Are you enthusiastic? Are you joy full? You see, our enthusiasm, God in us, his joy in us, can change the world.

I did a little research on espresso last week and found that there’s a kind of knack to making perfect espresso, I thought I’d make some today but I do not have that knack. But what I found out is that good espresso, when it’s fresh is made up of three parts. Here’s a picture of some good espresso [PICTURE: Espresso in glass cup]. As espresso, good espresso, pours into the cup, you are supposed to see three parts form right before your eyes. The bottom part is the heart. The middle part is the body and the top part is the crema. So, we have the heart, the body and the crema. The crema, this top portion, is the caramelized sugars from the coffee beans. It gives it that little zing, that special and unique taste. Let’s use that as a way to help us understand enthusiasm.

Enthusiasm starts in the heart. It’s an inward deal. The moment we become followers of Christ, the moment we ask Jesus Christ to take over our square footage, what happens? We become right with God vertically and that unleashes all kinds of good things like the fruit of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Amazing stuff that makes us enthusiastic joyful people.

I believe with my whole heart that Christians should be the most enthusiastic people around! We should be, yet so many times, we are not as enthusiastic as we should be and all that does is make us miserable and slow down the cause of Christ. One of my favorite authors, Leonard Sweet, grew up in church and then decided that he didn’t want to be a Christian any more. He “deconverted” as he called it! He wrote this: “What ignited my deconversion was the church’s funereal spirit, it’s fussy buttoned-upness. Christian’s stay-at-home-and-pickle-in-their-own-juices personalities, their vinegary countenances drained me emotionally, incapacitated me intellectually, and shut me down spiritually. The best I could say was this: by and large, Christians were kind people in a bad mood.” A lack of enthusiasm incapacitates the mission of God. That’s why this is serious stuff. And the reality is that we are going to run into enthusiasm assassins.

It'll be worth naming a few of these. The first enthusiasm **[SLIDE: "Enthusiasm Assassins: Worry"]** assassin is "worry." Do you ever worry about stuff? Worry is an inordinate amount of anxiety over something that probably is not going to happen. That's what worry is.

Whatever you are worried about, 99.9% of the time it isn't going to happen. Jesus had this to say about worry in Matthew 6:27, **[SLIDE...]"Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?" (Matthew 6:27)**. Worry kills enthusiasm because it breaks our trust in God. It's saying to God, "I don't know if I can really count on you." See how that breaks our connection to God and kills our enthusiasm?

If we are into worry, we are sweating God right out of us. We're driving God out. But if we let God in then that allows us to take appropriate action instead of worry.

A couple of weeks ago I did a little experiment. At our house we go through a lot of batteries. Mostly triple A's and double A's. I get sick of buying them, so I got a battery charger. Now the charger says right there on it, "Do not recharge alkaline batteries." The cynic in me says, "That's just the battery company's way of getting you to buy more." So I shove a few alkaline batteries, the kind that say on them, "Do not attempt to recharge" into the charger. And guess what...they didn't explode...right away! But they did start spewing acid later every where in the box where I keep my batteries. Acid that eats away metal and cardboard and makes a big mess. Worry is the same way. It will eat your enthusiasm alive. "Who of you," Jesus said, "by worrying can add a single hour, a single minute, to your life?"

That's the first enthusiasm assassin. The second enthusiasm assassin is **[SLIDE: "Enthusiasm Assassins: Stress"]** "stress." Stress. The National Occupational Board of Health and Safety estimates that stress on the American workforce costs our country about one hundred billion dollars a year. Stress, according to a *Wall Street Journal* article, can wear down the immune system and increase the risk of disease. It can damage the brain and it can cause memory problems. It can interfere with sexual performance and it can lead to heart attacks and premature death. Do I have your attention yet? Stress. What is stress? Stress is worry on steroids. It's freaking out about stuff that is out of our control. Worry and stress — the stuff we worry about isn't going to happen, and the stuff we stress about is out of our control.

You see, life is and always will be full of things that cause worry and stress. Things that kill enthusiasm, that break our connection to God. So what can we do? Let's look at some advice from scripture.

The book of Philippians is a phenomenal book. It is 104 verses of inspired mail. Fourteen times in those 104 verses, the Apostle Paul talked about outrageous, contagious, and caffeinated joy and enthusiasm. The context of the letter is amazing because Paul is writing from prison. You see, Paul spent quite a bit of time in prison for his faith. Sometimes he was under house arrest, and that wasn't too bad. But this time in Rome, he was charged with sedition and thrown in the darkest death cell in the jail. It was called the Mamertine Prison and it was a horrible place to be; it was actually built under the sewers of Rome. The prisoners were dropped through a hole in the floor and that hole was the only access to the outside world. Food was passed through there, but not by the guards, only by friends, if they could find you. Any news of the outside world was also given through that hole. Almost everyone who went down into that hole, never came back out. Paul was taken out of that hole alive and was then beheaded by Nero in 64 A.D. In that place, facing his own execution, Paul wrote about outrageous, contagious, and caffeinated enthusiasm and joy.

Paul says this about stress, **[SLIDE...]"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God" (Philippians 4:6, NIV)**. The word "anxious" means, "to choke," "to strangle," or "to pull in different directions." When stress and worry begin to stalk your spirit and pull you apart at the seams, Paul says, "Take your eyes off of the problem and put your eyes on the solution through prayer." Prayer puts our eyes back on God, and when our eyes are on God then the connection is reestablished and the joy comes back. That's what worked for Paul in that terrible prison and it can work for us in our circumstances.

Worry is an enthusiasm assassin. Stress is the second enthusiasm assassin. The third enthusiasm assassin is **[SLIDE: "Enthusiasm Assassins: Fear"]** "fear." I'm going to do a sermon series next year on fear because so many of us live in fear. What is fear? Fear is anticipation of harm. I recently read that the three greatest fears are the fear of death, the fear of loneliness and the fear of failure. Another one of the

biggest fears people have is what I am doing right now — the fear of public speaking. I get nervous every time I speak. We fear stuff.

“I fear this. I fear that. I’m anxious about this, I am worried about that and I’m stressed about that.” Fear. We love to get our fear in gear, don’t we? We are riddled with it. If you think about worry, stress and fear, if you really consider these enthusiasm assassins, then you’ll find that they run around with some bad by-products. They kick off some bad stuff. If you show me someone who is worried, someone who is stressful or someone who is riddled by fear, then I will show you someone who is critical. I’ll show you someone who has got a big honking plank in their eye and, yet, they are pointing out specks of sawdust in the other people’s eyes. I’ll show you somebody who is going rude on other people. If you show me someone who is stressed out and worried, filled with fear, I’ll also show you somebody who is ungrateful, who thinks the world owes them something.

That’s what happens when we are fearful, when we’re worrisome and stressed out. But God does not want us to live this way. Paul wrote in Romans, **[SLIDE...]** **“You did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship” (Romans 8:15, NIV).**

God wants us to be right with him, vertically. Once we connect with him and we have the enthusiasm in our hearts which caffeinates our lives, then what happens? Our enthusiasm flows from our heart into the second part of espresso, the second part of enthusiasm — the body. In other words, our enthusiasm doesn’t just fend off the assassins, it has an effect on the entire body of Christ, the church, and its mission in the world.

The scripture says the moment I bow my knee to Christ, the moment He comes into my life, I am born again. What does that mean? I am born again. I am adopted into the family of God. We are part of God’s family, the Body of Christ. Our enthusiasm should have an impact here.

Now remember, the Apostle Paul was in the deepest, darkest cell of the nastiest Roman prison when he wrote this inspired piece of mail. In 104 verses, he mentions outrageous, contagious caffeinated joy and enthusiasm 14 times. What was Paul doing? Was he singing the blues? Was he all down in the mouth? No! He didn’t go there. Do you know what he did? Paul showed enthusiasm, again. This time for the mission of the Body of Christ. Let’s check it out. In Philippians 1:12 he says, **[SLIDE...]** **“Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has served to advance the Gospel”** (Philippians 1:12). The word “Gospel” means good news.

The word “advance” is a deep word. It’s a military word. It means to move forward and take territory, to secure a position as you make your way into occupied land. Paul says, “What has happened to me has occurred to advance the Gospel.” He was telling them, “I’m clearing out the path. I’m moving the sand. I’m taking out the land mines so the Gospel can be advanced.”

I think about our church and in the 11 years I’ve been here the lives that have been changed. In fact this week I got this email from a family in the church saying how much this church, this enthusiastic body of believers had meant to them. It had truly changed their lives. All the stuff we do around here, the times of worship, the small groups, the Bible studies, the support groups, the building projects, our fellowship events, our mission work in Nicaragua, it’s all about advancing the Gospel. It’s all about clearing the path for the Gospel to be advanced. I’m constantly amazed at how many people have received the good news of Christ, because of the advancement of the Gospel through this body of Christ and its enthusiasm.

But here’s my worry (I know I’m not supposed to do that! But here it is!) It’s that at some point we forget about advancing the gospel and get wrapped up in just taking care of us—those of us that are already here. That would be losing our enthusiasm. I sometimes worry that we’ll get complacent and decide that we’ve advanced enough and this is good place to stop. But we can’t do that. That would be losing our enthusiasm, it would mean that we are choosing to no longer be in God. That’s why we’re a mission-driven church—it’s all about the mission. And what is the mission? To lead people to an active faith in Jesus Christ. And as long as there are people who are hurting, who are broken, who are empty, who are lost, who don’t know Jesus Christ, then we will be about the mission, we will be advancing the cause of Christ. We will live with that enthusiasm as a body!

It makes me think of Cindi Broaddus coming next week. What an awesome thing that she’s going to be right here on this stage telling her story of hope, and life, and forgiveness. I hope you’re excited about her being here, but I hope you take it one more step and that is to invite somebody else to come too. Somebody

else who might need to hear what she has to say. Somebody who needs a few landmines cleared out from their life.

In fact, whenever there are events, and classes, and things going on around here, don't just ask yourself, "What looks good to me? What do I want to do?" Don't just ask yourself that. Ask yourself, "Who can I invite to join me? Who needs to take the next step in their faith journey and how can I help?" That's advancing the cause of Christ. That is being enthusiastic about your faith.

Saint Paul's is one of the most enthusiastic churches I have ever seen in my life. When people visit here, they almost always tell me, "Aaron, the enthusiasm is contagious — the worship hosts, people in children's church, the student ministry, and the small groups. We feel the enthusiasm." That is a great thing! Enthusiasm is an earmark of spiritual maturity. I'm so proud to be a part of an enthusiastic church, because I always wanted to be part of a church where I could invite anyone, from any walk of life, and they could hear a life-changing message from the moment they pull into the parking lot until the moment they leave. I believe God, by his awesome grace and mercy, has given us a place like this — here at Saint Paul's. But as a church, as Body of believers, we have to continually choose to be enthusiastic. The minute we turn inward and forget the cause of Christ is the minute we lose our enthusiasm.

Enthusiasm — it starts in the heart. It flows into the body. From there, what happens? You have the third part of it. It moves into crema, the sweetness, the full flavor of the espresso. Enthusiasm gives us the flavor of life, doesn't it? That's the crema. In 2 Corinthians 9:2, Paul again talks about it, **[SLIDE...]** **"Your enthusiasm has stirred most of them to action" (2 Corinthians 9:2, NIV)**. Enthusiasm stirs others into action. Not everybody. There are always a few "Debbie Downer," type people. But, enthusiasm stirs most other people into action.

You see Paul was talking about the Corinthians' effect and influence on the Macedonians. The Macedonians' were in awe because of the enthusiasm of the Corinthians. They were giving, serving and using their talents to such a degree, and they were so enthusiastic, that the Macedonians said, "Wow, what are they drinking? What are they on? This stuff is unbelievable!" The enthusiasm of the Corinthians spread to the Macedonians. The flavor of their enthusiasm carried over into a whole other group of believers it was so good. And from the Macedonias that enthusiasm spread to others and then other and then others.

This makes me think about all your generosity to the people of Nicaragua. I went and saw and told you what I saw and the impact we can have on the lives of some of the world's poorest people, and you gave, and gave, and gave! Mark Statler delivered a check to the Rainbow Network offices a couple weeks ago. **[PICTURE: Mark delivering check]** This is Mark handing off a check for \$20,000 that together we dug deep and gave. And you gave it with gusto, with enthusiasm! And I guarantee that that enthusiastic support will spread to, will flavor, other churches and inspire them to do the same! That's the power of enthusiasm, the power of crema.

Let's end this way: Ecclesiastes 9:10 is a very practical verse. I think it brings all this together today. The writer says, **[SLIDE...]** **"Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all of your might" (Ecclesiastes 9:10)**. In other words, do it with great enthusiasm and joy. Do it with your heart, your body, your cream—all your might. If you are changing diapers, do it with all of your might. If you are preparing meals, do it with all your might. If you are doing deals, do it with all of your might. If you are running a corporation, do it with all of your might. If you are coaching 8th graders, do it with all of your might. If you are pouring coffee at Starbucks, do it with all of your might. If you are preaching sermons, do it with all of your might. If you are singing a song, do it with all of your might. Because, you are advancing the cause of Christ.

Enthusiasm is some strong espresso. Enthusiasm can change the world. Is it in you? My prayer for all of us that the elements in this series have somehow, some way espressoed our faith; made it stronger, more powerful, more concentrated than ever. And for today, that is the Good News. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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