

# WHAT DESTROYS CHRISTIAN JOY

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*By the Book™* A Chapter by  
Chapter Bible Study Series  
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## Let's Begin

*Joy is not a guarantee. The quicker a Christian understands that the better. Joy is an attitude of the heart that must be nurtured and developed. It is possible, however, to live in constant joy.*

*That's what Philippians is all about! We live our lives filled with joy and peace in Jesus Christ. In today's final lesson in Philippians we learn to identify four infamous joy-killers which will, if given opportunity, choke joy completely to death in your life.*

*Let's learn to identify them so we can thrive in the joyful life Jesus intends us to have. We will follow this outline:*

- I. The First Joy-killer is Public Division of the People of God (vv.1-3)**
- II. The Second Joy-killer is Persistent Doubt Concerning Prayer to God (vv.4-9)**
- III. The Third Joy-killer is Profound Discontent about the Provision of God (vv.10-13)**
- IV. The Fourth Joy-killer is Paralyzing Distrust in the Promises of God (vv.14-23)**

## I. The First Joy-killer is Public Division of the People of God (vv.1-3)

The Church at Philippi was one of the most pleasing and pleasant Churches in the New Testament record. It very well could have been Paul's favorite. Every time he thought of them, he gave thanks to God (1:3). And, there really is a fragrance about this Church.

A Church's ministry and testimony in the community should be like a fragrant perfume—pleasing all who come in contact with it. Yet, even in the best of congregations, all is not perfect. There was a fly in the ointment, so to speak (cp. Ecc. 10:1).

Two women in the Church had private disagreement which became public dispute. Consequently, the harmony of the Church was threatened. Nothing is more deadly to joy than open division in the Church. And Paul pulls no punches as he deal with the issue.

*First, he offers a word to the people as a Body (v.1).* This verse is refreshing because of its obvious tenderness. He writes: "my brethren, dearly beloved and longed for".

Paul's heart was breaking here, his love is manifestly present. The Philippian Church was the definite object of his deep love and devotion. He "longed for" them. He also speaks of them as his "joy" and "crown". Those won to Christ were his greatest joy.

The soul-winning life is the happiest life possible. There's joy here and a crown there. Is there anything possibly better than that? But tender is not the only word Paul offered. He knew he must also be tough.

Thus, he gives them firmness—"stand fast in the Lord". The word "stand" is one used of soldiers who were expected to "stand" their ground in the heat of the battle. Paul tells them to hold the ground God gave. They must stay true to the Lord. Steadfastness in the Christian life is not a "may be" but a "must be". It isn't easy to be firm in a time like ours.

Nonetheless, standing is necessary. And there is a secret every Christian must learn here: standing is successful only when we're standing "in the Lord". That's where the believer's resources are as we will soon see

*Next, Paul offers a word to the problem in the Body.* Here Paul puts on his authority as an Apostle. Not ignoring or evading the issue, he even names names!

*Nothing is more deadly to joy than open division in the Church*



### Reflection Connection

*When does giving become a chore? Do you think more people give out of duty or because of beauty? Why or why not?*

The problem was personal. He writes “I beseech”. It means to “call to my side.” One can feel the tenderness and love in this word. Even with all the authority of an Apostle, we hear him pleading with them not making pronouncements upon them.

These two women—Euodias, meaning “prosperous journey” and Syntyche, meaning “good luck”—were strong and vibrant servants in the Church. Think of the contributions women make to the Church of Jesus Christ. These women were saved and actively serving the Lord. Nevertheless, they experienced some type of falling out.

Christians have their spats. This is inevitable. It’s how Christians settle the matter that makes the greatest impact. There is no evidence Paul was using this incident to suggest only women can present problems. Problems are no respecters of sexual gender. Men just as easily can cause division and become joy-killers on the Church.

Paul’s remedy is very simple: they were to “be of the same mind” (v.2). That is, they must “agree together” and cherish the same views. They should quarrel no more. This doesn’t mean we must all think exactly the same. But we must all play the same tune even if we play different instruments. How is this possible? It isn’t apart from being “in the Lord”.

Paul furthermore called upon assistance from fellow laborers in the Gospel to “help those women” to a harmonious conclusion (v.3). Division of God’s people kills joy in the fellowship. We are called to unity and to be of the same mind in the Lord. If so, joy will live and thrive among us.

## II. The Second Joy-killer is Persistent Doubt Concerning Prayer to God (vv.4-9)

In this section, Paul comes to the heart of a joyless Christian life. One spiritual commodity everyone needs and seems so often to lack is peace. Few people openly confess they possess it. Many who do profess peace are exposed during troublesome times for the emptiness they tried to hide. The reason peace is so important to grasp pertaining to our study is that without peace, joy cannot exist.

Peace is the soil in which joy takes root in a person’s life. *Little Peace, Little Joy-Much Peace, Much Joy* makes for a valid formula in the Christian’s life. If so, it follows that *No Peace-No Joy* follows as well. The question then becomes “Why is peace absent?” The answer is-worry has pushed peace right out of the Christian person’s life.

According to the Bible, worry possesses the reputation of being a master thief. It saps confidence in prayer, in the Bible and even in God out of the heart. Conquer worry and peace will flow. When peace flows, joy returns.

So, note that Paul gives in these few verses four sure steps from the wilderness of worry to the palace of peace and then on to the garden of joy.

*The first step from worry to peace is to refresh ourselves through vigorous praise* (v.4). The Apostle pleads with Christians to “rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, rejoice”.

### Reflection Connection

*Name some ways unity is different from uniformity. Discuss them with the group.*



### Reflection Connection

*Recall a time when greed was obviously at work. How is being greedy and being stingy different? Can a Christian become greedy?*

We noted at the beginning of this study that joy is the main theme. No where is it clearer than here—“rejoice...and again...rejoice”. The tense in the Greek is present which means to keep on rejoicing. Note also the word “always”. This implies we are to rejoice in all seasons.

Paul isn't quoting from a book or repeating what another said. He's speaking from real life. He now sits in a Roman dungeon. Yet he appeals to the Philippian believers to rejoice. Even in all situations, rejoice. This is the first step toward ending a worry-filled life which makes for peace. Joy is on its way!

*The second step from worry to peace is to restore ourselves through volitional poise (v.5). Paul writes “let your moderation be made known to all” (v.5). Though hard to translate, Paul means to willingly show forbearance and gentleness toward others, particularly toward those with whom you disagree.*

Contextually, Paul is calling these two women in the Church who had difficulties to lay their arms down. It's a sweet willingness to give in to others. Worry is bred in the heart of people who insist on having it their way.

Know we are not called to sacrifice our principles. Rather it is our privileges that may be axed on the altar of our pride. We may be called to sacrifice our rights, our pleasures and our preferences all for the sake of peace. How is this possible?

*Even in all situations, rejoice*

Paul answers “The Lord is at hand” (v.5b).

While this could be a reference to His second coming, it probably means His nearness to every believer to assist in a time of difficulty.

*The third step from worry to peace is to renew ourselves through victorious prayer (v.6). The key here is to worry about nothing but pray about everything. Our prayers—if they are considered victorious prayers—must include adoration. God can, will and does answer prayer. Believing this is the best antidote for worry. Our prayer must possess supplication. That is, prayer includes definite, specific requests. There must also be appreciation. Paul intentionally writes “with thanksgiving” (v.6b). No one can be worry free who possesses a heart of ingratitude.*

*The fourth step from worry to peace is to reinforce ourselves through visible practice (v.8-9). What you think and do has much to do with peace in your heart. The pattern of thought for the believer is impressive (v.8).*

We're to meditate on these virtues and make them real in our life. The result is the “peace of God...shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (v.7). Where peace reigns worry is whipped. Where worry is whipped, joy lives.

### III. The Third Joy-killer is Profound Discontent about the Provision of God (vv.10-13)

One of the most sought after secrets of life is the secret of contentment. If happiness is a goal, if joy is lacking, then contentment is necessary. On the other hand, discontent is deadly to joy. It chokes every opportunity for joy to live. Paul had learned the secret. He said “I know...I have learned.” What had he learned? Namely that “in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content” (v.11).

### Reflection Connection

*Do God's riches have limits? Does God limit His riches given to us? If God's riches have no limits, how are those who possess a “health and wealth” Gospel message in error?*



How can we learn this secret to being content? There are four clues that help us.

*The first clue to knowing the secret of contentment is to rejoice in your substance (vv.10, 12). You must be satisfied with what you have (cp. 1Tim. 6:7-8).*

By the book's end, it is clear this book is a book about joy. Rejoice in what you presently possess. Paul says he learned to rejoice in "whatsoever state" he found himself.

God knows what your needs are. He sees before you do. And He is prepared to answer your prayers and meet your needs in very unusual ways if He must. Whatever God provides, you must rejoice in it without complaining or grumbling.

*The second clue to knowing the secret of contentment is to rest in your situation (v.11). This is a picture of a perfectly contented man. In jail, Paul neither frets nor fumes. He is content where God has placed him in life.*

Note, though, that contentment does not mean you are self-satisfied. You should not be satisfied to be an office assistant when your abilities can make you president of a company.

You should not be happy with C's when A's are in your reach. We cannot be satisfied with conditions which are wrong but can be changed. Nor does contentment mean self-sufficiency. Interestingly, the word "contentment" literally means "to be sufficient in ones self".

The Stoic philosophers used it to mean that nothing or no one outside of ones self—including God—was required for self-fulfillment. They needed no one.

*Contentment  
does not  
mean you  
are  
self-satisfied*

### Reflection Connection

*Explain the difference between needs and wants.*

Paul took the word and employed it in a way unacceptable to the self-satisfied Stoics. For Paul, "contentment" meant "self-surrender". It means a relationship with Jesus Christ which keeps the soul unbroken regardless of circumstances.

*The third clue to knowing the secret of contentment is to realize your strength (v.13). "I can't" is the language of a pessimist and Paul was no pessimist. In fact, no Christian can be a pessimist if they are living the Christian life. Note also that "I can" is the language of presumption. It reveals the inner ego out of control. And Paul's ego was not the problem here.*

What Paul did say was "I can do...through Christ". This is the language of Paul and it is the language of power! The dynamo of contentment is revealed here—the dynamite of the Christian life. The believer is infused with the very power of Christ Himself, Who, as the verb tense indicates, "keeps on" pouring the power of God into my life.

Contentment is key to overcoming worry, fear and doubt. Discontentment is a rapid killer which drains every bit of joy from the believer's life. How content is your life?



## IV. The Fourth Joy-killer is Paralyzing Distrust in the Promises of God (vv.14-23)

Paul is coming to the close of the letter he penned to his favorite Church. He offers them a thank you note for the fellowship and support they'd given him through the years. As he does, he reveals a subtle but real threat to the Philippian Church—beneath their glowing fellowship lay a paralyzing distrust in the full promises of God to meet their every need.

He writes “But my God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (v.19). Paul uses the generosity of the Philippians themselves to teach them a final lesson about God provision (v.18).

*First, Paul speaks of the beauty of giving (vv.14-18).* His reception of the gift the Church sent him was the actual occasion of the writing of Philippians. Three things happen every time we give.

*First, our giving blesses others.* Paul spoke of the Philippians' giving as “you communicated” (v.15). They actually shared in Paul's needs. It encouraged his heart since “no Church” but them gave.

*Secondly, giving not only blesses others, as it did Paul, giving also enriches us.* Paul speaks of “fruit that may abound to your account” (v.17). He clearly is indicating that since the Church gave, fruit would be multiplied back to them.

Jesus said “lay up for yourselves treasures in Heaven...” (Matt. 6:20). Too many people assume happiness is in getting. To the contrary, according to the Bible, happiness and joy is in giving.

Giving also pleases God. Paul calls their giving “sacrifice” (v.18). For God, the giving we do is a sweet smelling aroma to God. That's the beauty of giving.

*Secondly, Paul speaks of the bounty of God (vv.19-20).* This must be kept in context. God will supply the needs of those who give to others. When your giving pleases Him, He will supply your needs. “Supply” literally means “fill to full”.

God is the *source* of that supply. He is “my God”. The mighty and majestic God is “my God”! He is my source! His riches include goodness (Rom. 2:4), grace (Eph. 1:7) and glory Eph. 1:18). Paul said “my” God. That brings a personal aspect to view. God is the *scope* of that supply. What a promise. He can meet them all—“My God shall supply *all* your need”.

Note the promise is not to fulfill all your greed. God is not a cosmic bellboy. He has no buttons you push to get your greedy wishes. He will supply your material, spiritual, social and emotional needs. God is the *standard* of that supply—“according to His riches”. This assures us no request is too big for the bounty of God. Why then do we so often become paralyzed by distrusting His promises?

A sure killer of joy in our lives is to distrust such a gracious, bountiful Giver as is our God.

*Happiness  
and joy is in  
giving.*



Thirdly, Paul speaks of the *benediction of grace* (vv.21-23). He wraps up the letter the way he began it—grace (cp. 1:2). The whole Christian life is a work of God's grace. There is *emancipating grace* (v.22). Paul was incarcerated at "Caesar's household".

These were imperial employees, caught up in the decay and destruction of the Roman Empire. Paul was no doubt in chains as he even penned this letter. Yet, even more significant was Paul's freedom within. No chains could keep him from God's grace. No prison could void the promises of God.

The grace Paul both experienced and expressed is also *ennobling grace* (v.21). He speaks of "all saints". Many of them were slaves who labored at menial tasks. They lived a lowly, humble life. But the grace God gave created them anew as people of worth and value.

Paul assured the believers there and us here that a Christian is not one to go through life with head down, feeling inferior as a person. Jesus made us fresh and new!

Finally, the grace God gives is *enabling grace*—"the grace of our Lord Jesus be with you all" (v.23). Paul did not know what lie ahead but He knew Who did. And he trusted without reservation in God Who supplies all our needs. Distrust in God's promises cannot live together with joy in God's presence. Trust God. Let joy live!

### Golden Greek Nugget

*merimnao* (v.6) translated "careful" is a word that means "to be anxious about" or to possess a "distracting" attraction toward someone or something. Paul obviously meant it in a positive sense in 2:20 pertaining to the genuine "care" the Philippians had for him.

In verse 6, however, Paul clearly cautions Christians to place all trust in God through prayer rather than be distracted by things of this world. Interestingly, the only other person in the NT to employ this term is Jesus (cp. Matthew 6:25, 27, 28, 31, 34).

### Wrap Up

*Joy is threatened in the believer's life by four infamous killers. The first killer is the public division of God's people. We are summoned today to restore unity to the body of Christ.*

*The second joy-killer is persistent doubt about prayer. Where worry reigns, prayer retreats. Joy then is killed off easily. The third killer of joy in the believer's life is profound discontent. With Paul we must learn the secret of satisfaction in our Lord's provision.*

*Finally, joy dies at the hands of a doubting Thomas who does not believe the promises of God. Grace is the answer. Living day by day on God's amazing grace—what a life!*

