

THE JOY OF LIFE IN JESUS

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

As we noted in the Introduction, Philippians is Paul's book on joy. No Christian should live his life without joy. Joy attracts the world which is under condemnation for its rebellion against God. When unbelievers observe that even in the most difficult times, Christians are joyful despite the suffering they endure, an open door exists to tell them about Jesus and how joy can be theirs.

In chapter one, let's see three keys to the joyful Christian life:

- I. The First Key to Joy is a Proper Relationship with Christ (vv. 1-2; 20-26)**
- II. The Second Key to Joy is a Prayerful Record for the Church (vv. 3-11)**
- III. The Third Key to Joy is a Positive Response To Circumstances (vv. 12-19; 28-30)**

I. The First Key to Joy is a Proper Relationship with Christ (vv.1-2; 20-26)

Verse 1 says "the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi." At Philippi is where they got their mail so that's their geographical location. But then "in Christ Jesus" is their (and our!) spiritual address. Every chapter of Philippians begins with that phrase (2.1; 3. 1; 4.1). What does "in Christ" mean? Simply, it is another phrase that explains what it means to be saved. When you come to Christ, when you trust Christ as your Savior, then the Bible says you are placed "in Christ"; you are located "in Christ"; you are now in the sphere of Christ. There are two words to notice in verse 2: "grace" and "peace". These two words point out where joy must begin: joy begins with a proper relationship to Jesus Christ.

First, we first note the beginning of the Christian life (vv.1-2)—*how the Christian life commences*. It starts with grace and peace. Saving grace—"for by grace are you saved through faith" (Eph. 2:8)--that's how it starts. One may notice throughout the Bible the order is never changed.

It's always grace and then peace, because that's God's approach to the soul. God always meets us in grace before we can experience His peace. Joy is a product of grace; grace does not come from joy.

Grace means "unmerited favor." It's God's undeserved mercy to us. That's the only possible way salvation comes.

Next, we see how the Christian life continues with grace. This same grace is love in action. *Remember:* joy begins with being born again but it certainly does not end there. Rather, joy is an experience that continues throughout the Christian life.

And just as grace leads to joy when one is saved, grace sustains the believer's joy all through life.

The Christian life finally concludes with grace. When our life is complete, grace will see us through and make sure our joy does not fade. Joy is meant to be eternal.

Secondly, we see the Christian life builds a Christian mind (vv.21-26). ⁽¹⁾ These verses offer to the believer tremendous insight into how to help yourself to life--joyous life in Jesus Christ. Christ is the beginning of life, the basis of life, the beauty of life. He is the All in all of life: "To me, to live is Christ and to die is gain" (V.21).

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Reflection Connection

Do you think it is easy to confuse true Christian joy with basic happiness unbelievers may experience due to life's circumstances? Why or why not?

Can you name a time in your life when you were joyful but did not have a clue why you should be? Share it with the group.

Here the Apostle Paul offers building blocks for the Christian mind--a Christian philosophy of life. Our building blocks must be personal: "to me". Christianity is a personal experience, a personal journey. Nothing can take the place of first-hand experience.

When Jesus comes into a person's heart, He comes because you invite Him. Have you invited Him into your heart? Will you invite Him?

Also, our building blocks must be *practical*: "to live". All of us are involved in the business of living.

Too many people do not live; they only exist. Life is a daily grind. It's just for weekends. And, for those who are religious, their rituals do not connect with their daily lives.

For Christians, believing is a way of life. That's why it is the way of joy. When Christ is our life, our life is lived out in an entirely new dimension.

Finally, a Christian mind is *productive*: "to abide in the flesh is more needful for you..." (vv.24-25). Paul was needed to help them grow in their Christian walk.

Our lives are filled with joy because of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ which shows itself practically in our daily life by producing good fruit in other people's lives.

All this is possible through Jesus Christ our Lord--"to me, to live is Christ".

Joy begins with a proper relationship to Jesus and then builds a Christian mind from there.

II. The Second Key to Joy is a Prayerful Record for the Church (vv.3-11)

What a statement: "I thank my God upon every remembrance of you" (v.3). Could you make that statement about a group of people? Most of us could not make that statement about one person, much less an entire Church. Joy overflowed out of Paul's heart as he pondered the Philippian congregation. The Church was in Paul's mind (v.3), in his prayers (v.4) and in his heart (v.7). No wonder his joy was full! He possessed the *joy of communion* (vv.5, 7).

Paul had a partnership in sharing the Gospel. "Fellowship" does not mean coffee and Krispy Kreme donuts. It means to "have in common", to "share together a common interest." Only true believers may experience real communion, real fellowship. First and foremost, fellowship begins with sharing the Gospel. It's a communion in the Gospel.

It also means the *joy of completion* (v.6). This verse is loaded with blessing and assurance that God will complete what He begins. Here, we discover:

(1) *The Initiation of God's Good Work*. "Begun" goes back to the beginning of the believer's life. It's their conversion day. God began to work mightily in their lives. Salvation is always and completely of the Lord.

*Fellowship
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Reflection Connection

Do you think joy will be different in Heaven that it is on earth? How?



Reflection Connection

Is there a time when you think God gives up on a person? Why do you think He continues to work in our life even when we sometimes disobey Him?

(2) *The Location of God's Good Work.* God began to work "in you". Sometimes we get sidetracked attempting to find out where God is most at work. Is He working in the world? Yes. But God's major project is in the lives of people!

(3) *The Culmination of God's Good Work.* He "will perform it". What God started constitutes the guarantee that He will finish it (1 Thess. 5:24). God will not abandon a project. No unfinished music remains with the Lord.

Finally, there is the joy of compassion (v.8). "Bowels" is a word we rarely use. The Greeks viewed the inner organs as the seat of the emotions of the human person.

Laughter, fear, grief were all related to the bodily organs. Thus, when Paul was using this word, he was speaking of a *deeply emotional longing*. He wrote: "I greatly long after". He's pursuing them with an all out love.

This is the kind of love God desires we possess for fellow believers. Jesus said "by this all will know you are my disciples if you have love one for another" (John 13:35).

In addition, this was a *divinely supernatural loving*. We simply cannot on our own love this way. If we try to, we'll be a total failure.

It is not our love poured through Christ. Rather it is Christ's love poured through us. Jesus is the One Who puts love in our hearts (Rom. 5:5).

God proved His love for humanity at the Cross. Now He wants to get it to them through each and every believer. Prayerful concern through intercessory prayer for others is vital if joy thrives in our life. We cannot rejoice when our desires are inward and only selfish. When the Church is most prayerful, the Church is most joyous.

God proved His love for humanity at the Cross

III. The Third Key to Joy is a Positive Response To Circumstances (vv.12-19; 28-30)

Circumstances were not so good for Paul. He was arrested illegally, shipwrecked, marooned, and in chains. All the while other preachers were giving him a very hard time (vv.14-16).

Most of us are fine as long as things are going well for us. The bills are paid, the job is pleasant, the TV works, and our favorite team is winning. But when things go wrong, we fall to pieces. We virtually are wiped out. Paul was not like that. Why?

First, he saw his circumstances as an opportunity for the Gospel to be extended (vv.12-13). When Paul was imprisoned, many saw it as his ministry ended. Not Paul. He saw it as his ministry extended!

He speaks openly of the "furtherance" of the Gospel. That word means "to cut before". Paul was a pioneer. He saw the Gospel going where it never had gone before.

Reflection Connection

Can you think of a time when God used your difficulties to encourage someone else in their heartbreak? How has someone else's example encouraged you?



Golden Greek Nugget

Hagios is the word translated in v.1 as “saints” and basically means “separated”. In Scripture, the term is used of men in so far as they are separated to God. It is also used pertaining to the Temple of God in the Old Testament (cf. Hebrews 9:2). Unfortunately, saints has become a term designating some Christians as completely devoted to God whereas some are not— Saint Jude, Saint Thomas, etc. Paul writes to the entire Church at Philippi as “all the saints in Christ Jesus.”

Wrap Up

Three keys Paul offers open up the room where joy awaits. The first key settles the question about our relationship with Jesus: is it intact? Do we trust in Him with all our hearts? The second key focuses on prayer: unless we learn to pray for others, joy will never take root in our lives.

Finally, Paul nails down the proper response in bad circumstances: trusting God when things are rotten. Do you? These are the three keys necessary to open up a life of joy. Do you have them? Do you use them?

Thus, his imprisonment was just another mission field the way he saw it. Every circumstance in life can be and should be an opportunity to witness our faith in Jesus. This is the foundation plank of all joy in a believer’s life—bringing someone to Jesus.

Secondly, he viewed his circumstances as a means for other to be encouraged (vv. 14-18). Paul’s example served as an inspiration for others to be both bold about and faithful to the Gospel claim on their lives: “And many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear” (v.14).

Some of the Christians in Rome, because of the intense persecution experienced, were timid, fearful and hesitant to speak about Jesus. Courage has a contagious nature about it. Others see someone do what they thought was impossible and they are inspired to do the same.

Thirdly, he viewed his circumstances as an opportunity for Jesus to be exalted (vv.19-20). Paul firmly held that he would be delivered and Jesus would be glorified by his chains. He writes: “For I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ” (v.19). Note that Paul was not here referring to his being saved from sin. Rather he was acknowledging his confidence that as the Philippians prayed for him, the Holy Spirit would assist him and his joy in Christ would salvage what seemed to all to be a most helpless situation. It would all turn out to the good and Jesus would be exalted in the process.

Finally, he viewed his circumstances as an opportunity for his faith to be examined (vv.27-30). Paul speaks of something here about which it is almost unheard.

He notes suffering we endure as also something we must embrace: “For unto you it is given in behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for His sake” (v.29).

Suffering is connected with grace and glory. Jesus suffered for us. And the suffering we endure will result in glory in our lives (cp. Rom. 8:18). Our afflictions work for us. And for Paul, suffering is a time for our faith to be examined to see what is it made of.

Bad circumstances will bring out our true colors. Faith remains under intense examination during difficult times. Does joy exist in your life then? It did in Paul’s.

*Every
circumstance
in life
can be an
opportunity
to witness*

⁽¹⁾I am indebted to Dr. Warren Wiersbe for the helpful insight that not only is “joy” found many times in Philippians, but also “mind” which may make it the second most significant word Paul uses.

