

PHILIPPIANS - LIVING WITH JOY IN A CHALLENGING WORLD!

Author: Apostle Paul

Paul's Background:

Paul had founded the church at Philippi about 11 years prior to the letter (see Acts 16:11-40). Paul dearly loved the people of the church. The first few members are remarkable for their diversity in gender, marital status, age, race/ethnicity, economic class, personal needs, etc.!

| <i>Differences:</i> | Slave Girl | Lydia | Jailer |
|-----------------------|-------------------|--------------|---------------|
| Gender | Female | Female | Male |
| Marital status | Single | ? | Married |
| Race/ethnicity | African | Asian | European |
| Economic class | Poor | Rich | Middle-class |
| Age | Young | ? | Middle age? |
| Personal Need | Psychiatric | Emotional | Spiritual |

Sometime later Paul was arrested and placed under the guard of Roman soldiers to whom he was chained for two years. Although he was allowed to remain in his own rented quarters (Acts 28:30), he had no freedom.

That Paul was full of joy and could write so strongly about it was amazing considering his present circumstances and past history (see II Cor 11:23-28).

Background and Overview and Outline (From Dr. Bruce Wilkinson):

Philippians is the epistle of joy and encouragement in the midst of adverse circumstances. In it, Paul freely expresses his fond affection for the Philippians in view of their consistent testimony and support, and lovingly urges them to center their actions and thoughts on the person, pursuit, and power of Jesus Christ. Paul also seeks to correct a potential problem with disunity and rivalry, urging his readers to imitate Christ in His humility and servant hood. In this way the work of the gospel will go forward as believers seek to stand fast, be of the same mind, rejoice always, and pray about everything.

Introduction and Title—Paul writes a thank-you note to the believers at Philippi for their help in his hour of need, and he uses the occasion to send along some instruction on Christian unity. His central thought is simple: Only in Christ are real unity and joy possible. With Christ as your model of humility and service, you can enjoy an oneness of purpose, attitude, goal and labor—a truth which Paul illustrates from his own life, and one the Philippians desperately need to hear. Within their own ranks, fellow workers in the Philippian church are at odds, hindering the work in proclaiming new life in Christ. Because of this, Paul exhorts the church to “stand fast...be of the same mind...rejoice in the Lord always...but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your request be made know...and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (4:1, 2, 4, 6, 7). This epistle is called *Pros Philipposios*, “To the Philippians.” The church at Philippi was the first church Paul founded in Macedonia.

Date and Setting— In 356 B.C., King Philip of Macedonia (the father of Alexander the great) took this town and expanded it, renaming it Philippi. The Romans captured it in 168 B.C.; and in 42 B.C, the defeat of the forces of Brutus and Cassius by those of Anthony and Octavian (later Augustus) took place outside the city. Octavian turned Philippi into a Roman colony (cf. Acts 16:12) and a military outpost. The citizens of this colony were regarded as citizens of Rome and given a number of special privileges. Because Philippi was a military city and not a commercial center, there were not enough Jews for a synagogue when Paul came (Acts 16:13).

Paul’s “Macedonian Call” in Troas during his second missionary journey led to his ministry in Philippi with the conversion of Lydia and others. Paul and Silas were beaten and imprisoned, but this resulted in the conversion of the Philippian jailer. The magistrates were placed in a dangerous position by beating Roman citizens without a trial (Acts 16:37-40), and that embarrassment may have prevented future reprisals against the new Christians in Philippi. Paul visited the Philippians again on his third missionary journey (Acts 20:1, 6). When they heard of his Roman imprisonment, the Philippian church sent Epaphroditus with financial help (4:18); they had helped Paul in this way on at least two other occasions (4:16). Epaphroditus almost died of an illness, yet remained with Paul long enough for the Philippians to receive word of his malady. Upon his recovery, Paul sent this letter back with him to Philippi (2:25-30).

Silas, Timothy, Luke, and Paul first came to Philippi in A.D. 51, eleven years before Paul wrote this letter. Certain references (1:13; 4:22) suggest that it was written from Rome, although some commentators argue for Caesarea or Ephesus. Paul’s life was at stake, and he was evidently awaiting the verdict of the Imperial Court (2:20-26).

Theme and Purpose — This letter was written to convey Paul’s love and gratitude for the believers at Philippi and to exhort them to a lifestyle of unity, holiness, and joy. Paul evidently enjoyed a very warm relationship with the Philippian church, perhaps his favorite. They were more sensitive and responsive to his financial needs than any other church (see 4:15-18; 2 Cor. 8:11) and appeared to have no major problems in their midst. Philippians was not written because of any crisis, but to express Paul’s affection for them, his gratitude for their gift, his encouragement concerning their Christian growth, his admonitions against false teaching, and his thoughts about his circumstances. Paul gave the Philippians the latest news of his imprisonment and growing ministry in the propagation of the gospel (1:12-20), and prepared them for the coming of Timothy and possibly himself (2:19-24). He warned them of the danger of legalism, but this was more of a preventative than a corrective measure. On the other hand, Paul recognized a growing problem of disunity in the Philippian church and sought to correct it before it became severe.

Important Concept from Chuck Swindoll:

Joy is a **choice**...matter of attitude that stems from one’s confidence in God - that He is at work; that He is in full control; that He is in the midst of whatever has happened, is happening and will happen.

Note: Words related to joy are found 16 times in the 104 verses of the letter.

Outline of Philippians

| | |
|---|---------|
| I. Paul's Account of His Present Circumstance..... | 1:1-30 |
| A. Paul's Prayer of Thanksgiving..... | 1:1-11 |
| B. Paul's Afflictions Promote the Gospel..... | 1:12-18 |
| C. Paul's Afflictions Exalt the Lord..... | 1:19-26 |
| D. Paul's Exhortation to the Afflicted..... | 1:27-30 |
| II. Paul's Appeal to Have the Mind of Christ..... | 2:1-30 |
| A. Paul's Exhortation to Humility..... | 2:1-4 |
| B. Christ's Example of Humility..... | 2:5-16 |
| C. Paul's Example of Humility..... | 2:17-18 |
| D. Timothy's Example of Humility..... | 2:19-24 |
| E. Epaphroditus' Example of Humility..... | 2:25-30 |
| III. Paul's Appeal To Have the Knowledge of Christ..... | 3:1-21 |
| A. Warning against Confidence in the Flesh..... | 3:1-9 |
| B. Exhortation to Know Christ..... | 3:10-16 |
| C. Warning against Living for the Flesh..... | 3:17-21 |
| IV. Paul's Appeal To Have the Peace of Christ..... | 4:1-23 |
| A. Peace with the Brethren..... | 4:1-3 |
| B. Peace with the Lord..... | 4:4-9 |
| C. Peace in All Circumstances..... | 4:10-19 |
| D. Conclusion..... | 4:20-23 |

CHAPTER ONE

Applications we can learn from Paul's example or writing:

- 1) Paul had joy when he thought about the people within the church. Why?
 - A. He had happy memories, especially because of their involvement in ministry (v 3-5)
 - B. He had firm confidence in God (v 6)
Note: we can have confidence despite potential joy killers like worry, stress & fear.
 - C. He had warm affection towards his fellow believers (v 7-8)
- 2) Paul prayed for the people of the church – he prayed for increasing love, knowledge, discernment, purity, fruit of righteousness, etc. – and that God would be glorified (v 9-11)
- 3) Paul was joyful, despite negative circumstances (v 12-14)
- 4) Paul was joyful in spite of others, and rejoiced when the gospel was preached (v 15-18)
- 5) Paul was joyful (hopeful) regardless of uncertainties (v 19-20)
- 6) Paul was joyful (contented) because Christ was central (v 21)
- 7) Paul was joyful despite a personal dilemma (v 21-26)
- 8) Paul encouraged to stay on track despite affliction (v 27-30)

CHAPTER TWO

- 1) Unity brings joy; being unselfish like Christ promotes unity and results in joy (v 1-4)

Three keys:

- a) Never let selfishness or conceit be your motive
 - b) Always regard others as more important than yourself
 - c) Don't limit your attention to your own person interests—look out for the interests of others
- 2) If we follow the example of Christ (humble & unselfish), joy will eventually come (v 5-11; Hebrews 12:2)
 - 3) Joy comes when we keep ourselves in balance (v 12-18)
 - a) Balancing our work & God's power (v 12-13)
 - b) Balance attitude and action (v 14-16)
 - c) Balancing seriousness & joy (v 17-18)
 - 4) Friends can bring us joy (v 19-30). Good friends have a "kindred spirit; have a genuine concern for others and possess a servant's heart".

CHAPTER THREE

- 1) We need to be careful to safeguard our joy (v 1-16)
 - a) Joy can be stolen by legalists or trying to work/achieve our salvation (v 2)
 - b) Joy comes not from work/achievement, but from knowing Christ and serving Christ (v 7-16)
- 2) To make our lives count and experience joy, we need good examples to follow (v 17; see also 2 Timothy 3:10-12; I Cor 11:1)

Tips:

 - a) Choose mentors slowly
 - b) Study private lives carefully
 - c) Spend time with them regularly
- 3) We need to not let enemies of the cross steal our joy (v 18-19)

Portrait of the lost person:

 - a) Destined for eternal hopelessness
 - b) Driven by sensual appetites ("eat, drink and be merry")
 - c) Dedicated to material things
- 4) We should be joyful because we belong to those who are bound for heaven – and will have a glorious new body! (v 20-21)

CHAPTER FOUR

- 1) Standing firm in the Lord brings joy (v. 1)
- 2) Disharmony hinders joy; sometimes a mediator can help bring peace (v. 2-3)
- 3) Beware of the number one joy stealer—worry! God’s solution:
Worry about nothing, pray about everything (v. 4-7)
We need to Rejoice (v. 4), Relax (v. 5) and Rest in God (v. 6-7)
- 4) There are exercise that can help us stay worry free and therefore joyful:
 - a) Feed our minds with positive thoughts (v. 8)
 - b) Focus on encouraging models (v. 9)
 - c) Find the “God of peace” in every situation (v. 9)

“Worry forces us to focus on the wrong things”

- 5) Maturity brings joy. Some characteristics of maturity:
 - a) Affirming others (v. 10)
 - b) Being content despite our circumstances (v. 11)

“Be a Thermostat, not a Thermometer!!”
 - c) Flexible (v. 12)
 - d) Confident through Christ (v. 13)
 - e) Personal compassion (v. 14-15)
 - f) Financial generosity (v. 16-17)
 - g) Sacrificial commitment (v. 18)
- 6) Joy comes from knowing that God can supply our needs (v. 19)
- 7) Joy comes when God is glorified (v. 20)
- 8) Joy comes from the greeting and encouragement of the saints (v. 21-23)

BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES OF JOY

How can we experience consistent joy in our lives (I Thes 5:16)?

- 1) Focus on God, who is the ultimate source and object of our joy! Rejoice in God's works and in His empowering of us (Psalms 9:1, 16:8-9, 28:7; 35:9, 43:4, 92:4, 126:3; Lk 1:47; Rm 5:11; Acts 14:17; Phil 3:1, 4:4).
- 2) Keep an eternal perspective. Consider it joy even when we encounter various trials (Rm 5:3-4; II Cor 1:3-4; James 1:2; Acts 13:52; Romans 8:28). The hope of God and the hope of heaven should fill us with joy. We have eternal pleasures awaiting us in heaven! (Ps. 16:11; Is 35:10; Rm 5:2, 12:2, 15:13; Rev 21:4).
- 3) Avoid worry! Pray instead (Phil 4:6-7; Mt 6:25-34).
- 4) Be filled with the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:22-23; Rm 14:17; I Thes 1:6).
- 5) Be joyful when hated, ostracized, insulted and spurned for the sake of Jesus (Lk 6:22-23; Acts 13:52); persecution for Christ's sake enhances joy (Mt 5:11-12; Acts 5:41).
- 6) Follow the example of the angels, who experience joy over *every* sinner that repents (Lk 15:10).
- 7) Ask Jesus, who said to ask in His name and then we will receive and have our joy made full (John 16:24). Remember that Jesus wants to give us His joy and have our joy full (John 15:9-17, 17:13). Abiding in Jesus brings joy (John 15:11).
- 8) There is great joy in having our children walk in the truth, so we should train them in the truth (II John 4; III John 3-4; Proverbs 10:1, 15:20, 22:6).
- 9) Being a good steward and serving the Lord (and other people) can bring joy (Mt 25:21, 23, 23:11-12; Gal 6: 9-10; Titus 3:8).
- 10) Faith is a source of joy (Phil 1:25; Rm 15:13). Trusting God brings joy (Rm 15:13; Ps 28:7)
- 11) Word of God is a source of joy (Ps 19:8; chapter 119)
- 12) We can share in the joy of others; other believers can bring us joy and we can bring joy to them (Rm 12:15; I Cor 12:26; I Thes 2:19-20, 3:9; Phm 7; 2 John 12; Proverbs 15:30). Our obedience creates joy in others (Rm 16:19; Heb 13:7). We should rejoice with those who rejoice (Rm 12:15).
- 13) Remember that experience of sorrow can enlarge our capacity for joy (John 16:20, Romans 5:3-5; II Cor 1:4, 8:2, Heb 10:34; Jm 1:2).
- 14) Righteousness leads to joy (Proverbs 23:24).
- 15) Laughter is healthy! Some benefits; distracts our attention; reduces tension; increases production of endorphins which are the body's natural painkillers.