

PHILIPPIANS

JOY

NO MATTER WHAT

WEEK 1: Joy ... In Every Circumstance

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Series Overview

This series is written for a small group setting. The goal is to help students find joy no matter what life circumstances they face.

Lesson 1



Week 1: Joy... In Every Circumstance



Bible Verses: Philippians 1:9-11; 1:12-14;
1:18b-21 (NLT)



Bottom Line: Because of Jesus, we can experience joy in every circumstance – in good times and in difficult situations.

TEACH

INTRODUCTION

The Apostle Paul wrote half of the New Testament, including the Epistle to the Philippians.

This particular “epistle,” or letter, to the church in Philippi was written in approximately AD 61 while Paul was a prisoner in Rome.

We first read about Paul (Saul) in the Book of Acts.

He was a Pharisee, a pious, religious leader who persecuted followers of Jesus.

However, he had an encounter with Jesus that transformed his heart from a tormentor of Christians to a preacher of the Gospel.

Paul’s role in the early church was vital to its formation.

In the books of the Bible written by Paul, you often find him addressing problems, arguments, differences in beliefs, and disruptions among believers.

But the letter to the Philippians reveals a compassionate and loving side of Paul towards the church.

Paul had planted this church during one of his missionary journeys in AD 51.

In this letter, he took time to encourage Jesus’ followers by sharing how often he thinks about them and prays for those within the church.

Keep in mind that these believers often faced persecution for their belief in Jesus and faith in God.

Knowing that Paul cared about the circumstances they were facing brought joy, comfort, and peace to them.

God often sends people like Paul into our lives when we need them the most.

These people take time to let us know that they’re thinking about us and praying for us.

They care about our well-being and want to know that we're doing okay.

While they are unable to take away our cares and burdens, their concern and compassion for our circumstances can help ease the burden of what we're feeling.

But whether it's an unexpected event in our lives or something else that troubles us, we can still grab hold of the unshakeable joy God offers to us.

This joy can affect our hearts and minds and allow us to see things through God's perspective.

As we take a look at what Paul had to say to the Philippian church, we can be encouraged.

Even though our circumstances are constantly changing, God never changes, and His Word still applies to our lives today.

LESSON

Throughout Philippians, the words "joy" and "rejoice" are used 16 times.

This theme is emphasized throughout the entire book.

People often find joy in what they do, but Paul wants us to understand that joy isn't earned, it's produced in our lives as a result of our relationship with God.

Read Philippians 1:12-14 (NLT).

And I want you to know, my dear brothers and sisters, that everything that has happened to me here has helped to spread the Good News.

For everyone here, including the whole palace guard, knows that I am in chains because of Christ. And because of my imprisonment, most of the believers here have gained confidence and boldly speak God's message without fear.

Here at the beginning of Philippians, we read that not only was Paul a prisoner, but he lived his life chained to a prison guard 24 hours a day.

He never knew if he would be released from jail, soon face death, or live to see another day.

His life was in limbo.

It would be reasonable to think that this letter to the Philippians would be full of worry and anxiety, but that wasn't the case.

You also might assume that somewhere in this letter, Paul would ask for help to get out of prison or that he would complain about his situation.

But... he didn't.

Paul's life, even inside of a dirty and lonely jail, was a testament to his faith in God.

Because Paul lived with such a strong faith in God, other believers "gained confidence" and were bold in sharing the Gospel.

Discuss the following questions:

1. What unexpected event has troubled you in your life?
2. How can you find joy in your current situation? What opportunities might be present?
3. Who in your life encourages you when you're going through a tough time? What do they do to encourage you?

Read Philippians 1:9-11 (NLT).

I pray that your love will overflow more and more, and that you will keep on growing in knowledge and understanding. For I want you to understand what really matters, so that you may live pure and blameless lives until the day of Christ's return.

May you always be filled with the fruit of your salvation—the righteous character produced in your life by Jesus Christ—for this will bring much glory and praise to God.

Paul understood that following Jesus meant constant growth in order to become more like Christ.

He prayed that his fellow believers would continue to grow closer to God and that His character would be produced in their lives.

In nature, anything that is living is growing; if it isn't, then it's dying.

As we grow in our walk with God, we begin to look at things differently.

We can look at things in our lives, and with God's wisdom, we can understand what really matters.

Some situations we encounter can be incredibly frustrating, but if we can grasp their actual importance and evaluate them through God's eyes, then we have a proper perspective.

Most likely there is something you want or want to have happen now that you have to wait months or years to happen.

Or there is something hard you may be going through at home or school that you wish could be done now...but you have to wait to work through the process.

We can choose to become annoyed and impatient, or we can ask God what we can learn from living with these circumstances – how can we grow?

Often, the frustrating circumstances in our lives are the tools that God is using to teach us to depend on Him, grow closer to Him, and grow in our character.

Discuss the following questions:

1. Is your current situation bringing you closer to God, further from God, or neutral to God? Explain.
4. What aspects of your character are being challenged right now (patience, compassion, boredom, etc)? Why?
5. Is your love for others growing or shrinking right now? Explain.

Read Philippians 1:18b-21 (NLT).

...so I rejoice. And I will continue to rejoice. For I know that as you pray for me and the Spirit of Jesus Christ helps me, this will lead to my deliverance.

For I fully expect and hope that I will never be ashamed, but that I will continue to be bold for Christ, as I have been in the past. And I trust that my life will bring honor to Christ, whether I live or die. For to me, living means living for Christ, and dying is even better.

Paul had a perspective on life that we should strive for – he knew where he had come from and where he was going... and it went far beyond this life.

So many people spend their entire lives searching for meaning and purpose. Paul understood that his life had meaning because he lived for God.

He had the joy that can only come from a relationship with God.

All of us have relationships with friends and family that bring us happiness and some level of joy, but they can also be a source of pain and sadness.

True joy is an inner happiness that is unchanged by the circumstances you are facing.

Joy is part of God's character that is seen in us as we live our lives with Him.

God's joy is inside of you during the tough times or in the absolute best times of your life.

Sometimes the pressure of what's going on around us can squeeze the joy out of our lives.

But if this joy is continuously being reproduced in our hearts and minds by the power of God, then we will never ever run out of joy.

That is how Paul was able to "rejoice" in a prison cell, chained to a prison guard, not knowing if he would live or die.

Paul was compelled to live a life that honored God that was propelled by God's joy inside of him.

No matter what circumstances we encounter, we can experience that same kind of joy today.

Discuss the following questions:

1. On a scale of 1-10, how difficult is it for you to really embrace the idea of experiencing joy no matter what? Explain.
6. Does Paul bring you hope that it's possible to experience joy no matter what? Why or why not?
7. Is there someone in your life who is a good example of embracing the "joy no matter what" attitude? Who? Tell us about that person.