

WARM-UP

- What comes to your mind when you hear the word “joy”? Share a song, memory, or person you might associate with joy.
- What was the hardest thing you had to do this week? Tell us about it.
- Recall a letter you received from a loved one or friend. What did the person say, and how did it make you feel?

WORD *For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.* **PHILIPPIANS 1:21**

(Read also **PHILIPPIANS 1:12-20.**)

The apostle Paul wrote this letter to the church in Philippi while he was in prison. Ironically, this letter written from jail is Paul's most joyful one. Because he lived to serve and honor Christ, he had joy even if he was suffering. He had thrown his whole life into the advancement of the gospel and understood his purpose in both living and dying. While Paul greatly longed to be with Christ, he also knew that through his life, he could share this joy and purpose with others. In this letter, Paul declared that the Christian joy is to live in Christ—to know Him and be found in Him. Paul rejoiced in all circumstances and challenged the Philippian church to do the same. In this lesson, we will see why he could be full of joy even in suffering.

1 | Paul's suffering served to advance the gospel.

I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel . . . **PHILIPPIANS 1:12**

Paul understood that while his situation was not ideal, it was serving a greater purpose: *to advance the gospel*. In fact, people were coming to know Christ and the brothers were even preaching more confidently. As a result, even in jail, Paul was at peace. As followers of Christ, every circumstance in our lives should lead to the preaching of the gospel. According to Philippians 1:3–5, how did Paul view the church in Philippi? What caused Paul to rejoice (Philippians 1:18)?

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2 | Paul's suffering had a promise of deliverance.

¹⁸. . . *Yes, and I will rejoice, ¹⁹for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, ²⁰as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed . . .* **PHILIPPIANS 1:18–20**

Paul trusted that the church was praying for him and the Holy Spirit would deliver him. He believed that his present circumstances would eventually change. Therefore, he looked to the future with hope. Try reading this passage again out loud to the group with as much emotion as you can muster. How confident is Paul in his assurance and expectation? Why do you think he was so confident?

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3 | Paul's suffering honored Christ.

... as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. PHILIPPIANS 1:20

Paul's desire was that Christ would be honored and exalted in his life—whether he was in prison or set free, alive or dead. As a servant does all he can to honor his master, Paul, who called himself Christ's servant, wanted to do everything to honor his Lord, Jesus Christ. Paul remained joyful even in suffering because Christ was being honored. How does Paul's example encourage and challenge you? Why is honoring Christ the ultimate goal of our lives?

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APPLICATION

- Reflect on your present situation. What is your situation serving to advance? Pray that you would understand what you are going through and that it would serve to advance the gospel.
- In what area of your life do you need God's deliverance? Meditate on Philippians 1:18–20 this week and trust God to come through for you.
- How can you find joy in spite of your present circumstances? What is the source of your joy? How will you apply what we talked about today in your life?

