

“These hard times are small potatoes compared to the coming good times, the lavish celebration prepared for us” (2 Cor. 4:17). Never forget that life in this world is not all there is. We live seventy to ninety years at best on this planet, and many of those days are long and difficult, filled with pain and sorrow. But there is a new order of things coming where there will be no more death, no more sorrow, no more pain or suffering of any kind (Rev. 21:4). There is a lavish celebration awaiting us, where one day we will all sit and share a feast at God’s table! Paul’s confidence and hope “in the Lord” enabled him to live every day of his life filled with joy, and by the grace of God, it will enable you to do the same. I am so excited for all of us as we continue to uncover the secrets of Paul’s ability to live a life filled with joy.

Questions for Personal Reflection or Group Discussion

1. Only true believers in Christ can experience the fullness of joy. What does “fullness of joy” mean to you?
2. Why did Paul seem to be an unlikely person to write about joy?
3. What circumstances in your everyday life rob you of your Christian joy?
4. Do you worry often? What do you worry about?
5. In what ways do you feel secure? In your job? In your family? In your relationship with Christ? Thank the Lord for these things.

May 14, 2017
Philippians (1)
Abundant Joyful Life
Philippians 1:1-6
Rev. Dr. Charles Yoon

From this Sunday on we begin a new sermon series, studying Philippians. Philippians was written by the apostle Paul when he was a prisoner in Rome about AD 62, and it was sent to his fellow Christians at the church in Philippi, a church Paul had founded on his second missionary journey (Acts 16). Paul’s letter to the Philippian church is something of a missionary thank-you, but it is much more than that. It is the sharing of Paul’s secret of Christian joy! At least nineteen times in these four chapters, Paul mentions joy, rejoicing, or gladness. Therefore, Philippians is a joyful letter. If we learn and master the truths in Philippians, we should be filled with joy as we live the Christian life!

Personally speaking, this book has helped me to grow over the years. I have found many favorite verses from this book and those verses have inspired and strengthened me from time to time. This is my hope and prayer that you might experience Christ’s joy in your everyday life as you grasp the spiritual principles in Philippians.

Let me begin with an experiment this morning. As you see, I have a cup of water. If I take off the tapes attached to the side of the cup, water inside the cup begins leaking. Likewise, joy leaks. Have you ever noticed that? This month of May is the month of graduation. Those graduates are happy and joyous on their accomplishments and achievements. I think they deserve it. But the moment of graduation is not the end of the story of ‘Happily ever after’ for them. More challenges and adventure are ahead of the graduates. One minute we can be on the top of the mountain, and the next minute in the pit of despair. To hold on to a joyful state of mind seems as pointless as trying to carry water in a holey bucket. It might work for a moment, but that is hardly enough. And yet the Bible exhorts us to *“be joyful always”* (1 Thess. 5:16). Most of us think that’s impossible. We think

this verse is just another one of those “suggestions” from the Bible that doesn’t make sense in real life. But being joyful wasn’t impossible for the apostle Paul. He seemed to be able to live his life in a perpetual state of joy, and he wanted to help others live in that joy too.

The book of Philippians is Paul’s personal manifesto on how to live a life full of joy. We see this over and over again throughout the letter: “*I always pray with joy ...*” (1:4); “*I rejoice ...*” (1:18); “*I will continue to rejoice ...*” (1:18); “*be glad and rejoice with me*” (2:18); “*rejoice in the Lord!*” (3:1); “*rejoice in the Lord always*” (4:4) And on and on it goes, chapter after chapter the word ‘joy’ drips off every page in various forms. It makes a thinking person wonder, ‘How did Paul do it?’ ‘How did Paul live in a constant state of joy?’ Was he some kind of super-saint with a faith made of different stuff than the rest of us? Did he live in a constant state of denial? Or did he live such a problem-free life that to be sad, depressed, or in despair never occurred to him?

If there is one thing that is true about the apostle Paul, it is that his life was not easy. Paul lived almost every day of his life in mortal danger and physical pain. In 2 Corinthians 11:23-27, Paul sums up the harsh realities of his life:

I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked.

As if there things were not enough, Paul also suffered from some type of physical ailment that he called a “*thorn in the flesh,*” which tormented him every day of his life (2 Cor. 12:7). Paul clearly did not live a charmed life. So then here is a question as we study Philippians: What was the secret to Paul’s joy?

In spite of his incredible hardships and daily physical suffering, how was he able to maintain a continual state of joy? How was he able to say to the Philippians, “*Be glad and rejoice with me*” (2:18)? I believe that Paul’s ability to be joyful was that his joy was “*In the Lord*” (3:1, 4:4, 4:10) rather than in the difficult, painful, constantly changing circumstances of life. It means that to find joy we must place our confidence and hope in the character and nature of God. For Paul, this happened in two ways.

First, Paul was able to have joy because of his confidence in the sovereignty of God. You see, Paul believed that no matter what happened to him, God was in control of his life; and God never falls asleep at the wheel. For instance, in Philippians 1:12-18 we discover that Paul is in prison as he writes this letter, but he is not discouraged by this. Instead he sees his chains as part of God’s sovereign plan to encourage others in their proclamation of the gospel. He didn’t view his imprisonment as an interruption in his work to proclaim the gospel, rather he saw it all playing out according to God’s sovereign plan. You see, when we trust that God is in control of all things – the good, the bad, and the ugly – we can be joyful because we know that God is working behind the scenes for our good and His glory.

Second, Paul was able to have joy because of his hope in heaven. God had given Paul a clear vision of heaven (2 Cor. 12:1-10), and this vision gave him incredible hope for the future that enabled him not only to press on throughout all the difficult circumstances of his life, but to do so with joy! “*I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus*” (3:14). Paul’s hope was in God’s promise of heaven and God always keeps His promises. In fact, Paul was so encouraged by the reality of heaven that he considered all the troubles in this life to be small potatoes: