



BOOK OF PHILIPPIANS



BOOK OF PHILIPPIANS



Friend,

Let's just be honest: **Most of us could use a little more joy right now.**

Not the kind of joy that's printed on coffee mugs or sold to us through vacation ads and social media influencers who always seem to have life all figured out. No, real joy. The kind that can survive the real stuff of life that you and I experience – strained family relationships, difficult diagnoses, a divided culture, fears and anxiety that never seems to go away. We need a joy that can break into our world because, honestly, life simply feels increasingly unpredictable, unkind and often unhinged.

The truth is: Most of us are tired. Tired of feeling like we should be happier than we are. Tired of chasing a bigger position or paycheck. Tired of the never-ending news cycle and political nastiness. Tired of marketing ourselves on social media. Tired of controlling everything, and self-medicating when life's out-of-control. Tired of seeking approval. Tired of doing it all by ourselves. Tired of discovering that none of it satisfies.

This is what makes the message found in the book of Philippians so surprising.

The book of the Bible, which you are about to read, is actually a letter written by a guy named Paul. Paul started more churches in the ancient Biblical world and wrote more of the New Testament than anyone else. And so, it may come as a surprise that Paul wrote this letter from prison. Yes, you read that right! Not from a vacation villa

at the beach. Not from a Zen-inspired mountain retreat. He wrote it while chained, uncertain of his future, separated from people he loved. This was not part of the plan. He should have been angry, anxious, depressed and/or scared. And yet, over and over again, he returns to one word:

Joy.

Not because life was easy. Not because his circumstances were picture perfect. Instead, Paul had discovered something deeper than happiness, stronger than success, and more enduring than control.

I can't wait to walk with you through this letter. Together, we'll wrestle with some of our culture's biggest misconceptions about joy and discover a joy that can survive your real life – the beautiful parts, the painful parts, and all the ordinary days in between. We've broken Philippians into 20 short daily readings. I'm no Bible expert, but I've included notes I hope will help you hear what the first readers heard. I invite you each day to read the passage slowly, reflect on the questions provided, pray about what God is saying to you, and respond by taking one small action that day. You'll get the most out of it if you do it with a friend or spouse – it's perfect for a Connect Group.

Are you ready?

Let's go find some joy!

Pastor Hans

BOOK OF PHILIPPIANS

READING PLAN

- Day 1** Philippians 1:1-2
- Day 2** Philippians 1:3-6
- Day 3** Philippians 1:7-8
- Day 4** Philippians 1:9-11
- Day 5** Philippians 1:12-18
- Day 6** Philippians 1:19-21
- Day 7** Philippians 1:22-26
- Day 8** Philippians 1:27-30
- Day 9** Philippians 2:1-4
- Day 10** Philippians 2:5-11
- Day 11** Philippians 2:12-18
- Day 12** Philippians 2:19-24
- Day 13** Philippians 2:25-30
- Day 14** Philippians 3:1-6
- Day 15** Philippians 3:7-11
- Day 16** Philippians 3:12-16
- Day 17** Philippians 3:17-21
- Day 18** Philippians 4:1-5
- Day 19** Philippians 4:6-13
- Day 20** Philippians 4:14-23



BOOK OF PHILIPPIANS

Sometime around 60-62 AD, while under house arrest in Rome, Paul wrote a letter that we now refer to as the Letter to the Philippians, or the Book of Philippians. Unlike many of Paul's other letters, Philippians was not written to correct a major theological crisis or settle a church conflict. Instead, it reads more like a deeply personal letter from a pastor to a church filled with people he dearly loved. Yet what makes this letter remarkable is not simply its warmth or affection. It's remarkable because Paul writes his letter to the church in Philippi (sometimes called the New Testament's "letter of joy") while sitting in prison, uncertain whether he will live or die.

Philippi: The Community, Context and Church

The city of Philippi was located in Macedonia, in what is now northern Greece, and was the location of one of countless churches Paul began during his missionary journeys, around AD 49-51 (you can read about it in Acts 16). It was a proud Roman colony, populated largely by retired Roman soldiers and citizens who enjoyed many of the privileges of Rome itself. Philippi valued status, power, citizenship, and public honor. Into that world came Paul, traveling through Macedonia on what we now call his second missionary journey after receiving a vision of a man pleading, "Come over to Macedonia and help us" (Acts 16:9). Philippi became the first Christian church established on European soil.

The story of that church's beginning tells us much about the type of community Philippi became. The church was founded not among

the powerful and influential, but among a diverse collection of outsiders: Lydia, a wealthy businesswoman; a formerly enslaved girl exploited for profit; and a Roman jailer who encountered God in the middle of a personal crisis. From the very beginning, the church at Philippi was a gathering of people who had discovered that true joy and meaning could not be found in wealth, status, power, or security.

Paul wrote his letter to the Philippians approximately thirty years after the death and resurrection of Jesus. By this point, the Christian movement had spread throughout the Roman Empire, but following Jesus had become increasingly costly. Christians faced suspicion, persecution, imprisonment, and social exclusion. Paul himself had endured beatings, shipwrecks, imprisonment, public humiliation, and countless hardships. And yet, throughout this brief letter of only four chapters, Paul uses some form of the words “joy” or “rejoice” sixteen times.

What did Paul mean by joy?

We often confuse joy with happiness. We assume joy comes from comfort, success, certainty, pleasure, or the absence of struggle. We believe that once our circumstances improve – once we have enough money, enough security, enough accomplishment, enough control – then we will finally experience joy. But Paul writes from prison to tell us that joy works differently than we think.

Part of the answer is simple: He wanted to thank the Philippian Christians for their support. Throughout Paul's ministry, the church in Philippi repeatedly provided financial assistance and encouragement. Unlike many of the churches Paul founded, the Philippians remained deeply loyal to him. They had sent one of their members, Epaphroditus, to care for Paul while he was imprisoned. Paul writes partly as a thank-you note to a beloved congregation.

But Paul also writes because the Philippians themselves are struggling. They are facing opposition, conflict, anxiety, and uncertainty about the future. They are asking many of the same

questions we ask today: How do you remain hopeful when life feels unstable? How do you find meaning when circumstances are painful? How do you hold onto joy when the world around you feels chaotic?

Paul's answer is surprising. He never promises the Philippians that their circumstances will improve. Instead, he invites them to discover a deeper kind of joy – one rooted not in what happens to us, but in who we are, whose we are, and what ultimately matters.

Joy in a World Obsessed with Happiness

Perhaps this is why Philippians feels so remarkably relevant to us today. We live in a culture that relentlessly pursues happiness while simultaneously reporting record levels of depression, anxiety, loneliness, and despair. We have more conveniences than any generation in history and yet often feel exhausted and overwhelmed. We chase experiences, achievements, possessions, and approval, hoping they will finally satisfy us, only to discover that happiness remains frustratingly temporary.

Paul understood something that modern psychology increasingly confirms: Happiness is often circumstantial, but joy is relational and purposeful. Joy emerges from connection, gratitude, meaning, service, and hope. Throughout Philippians, Paul repeatedly points his readers away from themselves and toward God, toward one another, and toward a larger purpose beyond their own comfort.

A Joy That Endures

Perhaps the most remarkable thing about Philippians is that Paul never denies the reality of suffering. He does not minimize grief, ignore conflict, or pretend that faith eliminates hardship. Instead, he insists that joy and suffering can coexist. One can experience uncertainty and hope. One can know grief and gratitude. One can endure hardship and still rejoice. Joy is not the reward for a problem-free life. Joy is not the absence of struggle. Joy is not something we finally discover once everything works out. According to Paul, joy is

something deeper, more resilient, and more surprising. It is a way of seeing ourselves, our circumstances, and our future through the lens of God's presence and promises.

And that kind of joy, Paul believed, could survive almost anything – even prison.



WEEK ONE

JOY $\neq$ HAPPINESS

PHILIPPIANS 1:1-18

Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus,

To all God's holy people in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons:

2 Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Thanksgiving and Prayer

3 I thank my God every time I remember you. 4 In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy 5 because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, 6 being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

7 It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart and, whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me. 8 God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.

9 And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, 10 so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, 11 filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.

Paul's Chains Advance the Gospel

12 Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has

happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel. 13 As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. 14 And because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear.

15 It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. 16 The latter do so out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. 17 The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. 18 But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice. Yes, and I will continue to rejoice.

Day 1

Philippians 1:1-2 | Finding Joy Through Belonging

As Paul begins his letter, notice what he doesn't start with. He doesn't start with a bunch of religious ideas or a sermon. He doesn't start with a bunch of theology, spiritual jargon or a list of religious rules. No, Paul starts with *people*. He starts by addressing actual people he loves in an actual place – *God's holy people in Christ Jesus at Philippi*. Paul starts with belonging. This is so important! You will soon come to find that people are key to the joy Paul exudes in his letter to the Philippians.

And, notice what comes next: He greets the Philippians with two Greek words: *charis* (which means "grace") and *eirēnē* (which means "peace"). This isn't just Paul's version of, *Hey, hope you're doing well!* Sitting in a jail cell, he starts with a reminder of God's never-ending grace and peace. Grace is God's generosity we don't have to earn. Peace is the deep sense that, even when life isn't okay, we can still be okay. Even in shackles, Paul is filled with joy. Why? Because through the people of Philippi, Paul knows God's grace – regardless of his situation, what he accomplishes, proves, or succeeds at – and, therefore, experiences God's peace.

For Paul, joy starts with belonging.

Today, belonging might be more important than ever before. Strangely, we live in a world where we're supposedly more "connected" than ever, yet we're experiencing a "loneliness epidemic." We have followers, friends, group texts, and family threads with 47 unread messages, and still wonder, *Where do I really belong?* Maybe that's our first misconception about joy: *We think joy is something we find on our own.*

Paul starts his letter by reminding us that life's deepest joy comes from knowing we belong to God and to one another.

1. Where do you feel like you can truly be yourself? And what is it about those people or places that makes you feel like you belong?
2. When life gets difficult, are you more likely to reach out to others or pull away? Why?
3. When have you been led to believe belonging relies on how you perform, score or accomplish? How might believing that you belong to God (not because of what you've accomplished, but simply because you are loved) change the way you experience joy?

Day 2

Philippians 1:3-6 | Finding Joy in God's Faithfulness

Notice what Paul does here in these short verses. I love this! Paul connects *joy* with *gratitude*. In verse 4, Paul says, when I pray: "I thank God for you" and "I always pray with joy!"

First, his gratitude and joy are because of the "partnership" they share in the gospel. The Greek word for partnership is *koinōnia*, which means fellowship, participation, sharing life together. If you've spent much time around churches, "fellowship" might make you picture old church ladies drinking bad coffee in a dingy church basement. Paul means something much bigger, and much better. They've shared life together, challenges together, and celebrated together. For Paul, joy isn't just a solo project. Joy grows when my life is connected to other people and to something bigger than myself. And, when Paul prays, he can't *not* thank God for them and he can't *not* be joyful!

But, secondly, his gratitude and joy are because of the faithfulness of God when things feel incomplete. Paul writes in verse 6: "...he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." The Greek word for completion (*epiteleō*) means to bring it all the way to its intended goal. In other words: God finishes what God starts.

That is really good news, isn't it? Even when your life feels or looks unfinished, God is still at work. The career that hasn't worked out, the kid you're worried about, the relationship that's complicated, the prayer that still feels unanswered – the part of life you thought you'd have all figured out by now. Unfinished doesn't mean abandoned. God is still doing something you simply can't see yet. And, joy doesn't require having everything figured out.

Sometimes joy is simply trusting that God is still working in the parts of your story that clearly aren't finished yet.

1. Where in your life do you feel like a "work in progress" right now?
2. Think back over your life. Where can you see evidence that something good was happening even if you couldn't see it at the time?
3. Paul trusts that God isn't finished with him or the Philippians. Where is it hardest for you to trust that God is still working?

Day 3

Philippians 1:7-8 | Finding Joy in Relationships

Even while sitting in prison – his future uncertain, and facing a problem he can't Google his way out of – Paul talks about joy. Why? He keeps coming back to *people*. In these verses, Paul gets surprisingly personal. His words are intimate, as if he's whispering to a close friend or confidant, telling the Philippians, "I hold you in my heart."

We tend to think, I'll be happy when... When I get the job. When the kids settle down. When we finally take that trip. When there's a little more money. When life gets easier. Paul has found a deeper and lasting joy. He's found that some of the deepest joy in life isn't from getting what we want, but in being connected to people we love.

In verse 8, Paul basically tells the Philippians, "I really miss you people." He says he "longs" for them with the "affection" of Christ. And here's where the original Greek gets fun. The word translated "affection" is *splanchna*, which literally refers to your guts or internal organs. Paul is essentially saying, "I love you people from my guts" (Try putting that in your next Valentine's Day card: "Roses are red, violets are blue, I love you with all my intestines." Let me know how that goes!) However, beneath this strange anatomy reference is something beautiful. Paul is sitting in prison, separated from people he loves, and realizing just how much they matter to him.

...and, maybe we need that reminder too. We live in a culture that celebrates independence: I can handle it all on my own. I don't need anybody. I'll figure it out all by myself. But joy was never meant to be a solo project.

Some of the greatest joy in life comes through the imperfect, occasionally annoying, deeply meaningful people God puts in our path.

1. Who are the people you genuinely look forward to seeing? Who are the people you thank God for most often? And what is it about them that brings you joy?
2. Some relationships can bring us tremendous joy... and others make us want to move to a cabin without Wi-Fi. What makes a relationship truly meaningful?
3. Who might God be inviting you to invest in more intentionally right now? And what is one simple thing you could do to invest this week?

Day 4

Philippians 1:9-11 | Finding Joy in Spiritual Growth

As Paul closes his opening to this letter, you would expect that this is the point of the letter where he would get serious. For example, this is the point in the letter where you would expect Paul to turn to a religious teaching he believes they've gotten all wrong, or give them a spiritual to-do list, or offer them a lecture on getting their faith right. You'd expect him to write: "Philippians, I love you, but it's time to get your act together!" But, he doesn't do that. Not at all. Instead, he prays that their love, wisdom, and ability to recognize what really matters would simply *keep growing*.

This is interesting, because most days we just want to "have it all together." We want to know we've got it "right." We've "arrived." When we look in the mirror, we tend to notice all the places where we're not where we want to be. We're impatient. We worry. We keep losing our keys, losing our temper, and occasionally losing an entire evening scrolling through videos we never intended to watch.

Paul prays "that you may be able to discern what is best." The original Greek words carry the idea of learning to recognize *what really matters*. That kind of wisdom doesn't appear overnight. It develops as we live, screw up, learn, stumble, listen, love, and allow God to keep working on us.

Pause for a minute. Think about yourself five or ten years ago. How are you different than you were five or 10 years ago? Maybe you handle conflict differently now. Maybe you're more patient with your kids. Maybe you're less concerned about impressing people. Maybe something that once consumed you doesn't anymore. You probably didn't wake up one morning

and announce, *Congratulations to me! I have officially grown as a human being!* It happened so slowly that you might not even have noticed.

That's where joy is found – not in finally arriving, but in realizing we're growing.

God is slowly shaping us into people who love better, choose wiser, recognize what matters, and live a little differently than we did before.

1. Think about yourself five years ago. In what ways have you grown or changed – for the better?
2. Paul prays that they will learn to “determine what is best.” What competes for your attention and makes it difficult to recognize what really matters?
3. Where do you sense God might be inviting you to grow right now – not because you're failing, but because God isn't finished with you yet?

Day 5

Philippians 1:12-18 | Finding Joy Despite Circumstances

In these verses, as Paul dives into the heart of his letter, remember: He is writing from prison which probably wasn't part of his five-year plan. Nobody sits down on January 1 and writes, "Goals for this year: exercise more, save some money, and spend a little time in prison." His freedom is gone, his future is uncertain, and almost nothing is going according to plan. And yet Paul looks around and realizes something surprising: *God is still at work.*

I don't know about you, but when my plans fall apart, my first response usually isn't, "I wonder what wonderful thing God might be doing here?" It's more like, "Okay, who screwed this up?" A canceled flight, an unexpected bill, the dog swallows a sock, a relationship that changes, a job that disappears, a diagnosis we never saw coming – and our brains quickly jump to: This is bad. This shouldn't be happening. Fix it. Similarly, Paul doesn't pretend prison is good. He doesn't tell us to slap a smile on or pretend everything "happens for a reason."

Instead, he shows us that our circumstances don't get the final word.

Maybe you've experienced this yourself. The job you didn't get eventually pushed you toward something better. The move you never wanted introduced you to people you can't imagine life without. The season you desperately wanted to end changed something in you that an easy season never could have.

Joy isn't pretending everything is fine. It's trusting that when life doesn't go according to our plans, God hasn't stopped working.

1. What's something in your life right now that definitely isn't going according to plan? How is it affecting you?
2. What's your typical response when life throws you a curveball – fight it, try to fix it, complain about it, laugh about it, or just hang on for the ride?
3. Where might God be at work in a difficult circumstance you're facing, even though you can't see the whole picture yet?



WEEK TWO

JOY $\neq$ SUCCESS

PHILIPPIANS 1:19-2:11

19 ...for I know that through your prayers and God's provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance. 20 I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. 21 For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. 22 If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! 23 I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; 24 but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. 25 Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, 26 so that through my being with you again your boasting in Christ Jesus will abound on account of me.

Life Worthy of the Gospel

27 Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in the one Spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel 28 without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved—and that by God. 29 For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him, 30 since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.

CHAPTER TWO

Imitating Christ's Humility

Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, 2 then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. 3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, 4 not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

5 In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

6 Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;

7 rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.

8 And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death—
even death on a cross!

9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,

10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

11 and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

Day 6

Philippians 1:19-21 | Finding Joy in Following Jesus

Paul says something here that in older, religious circles, tends to get a bit used and abused. It's found on a lot of dusty plaques that grandparents have hanging on their walls: "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain." We can only understand what Paul is getting at here when remember he is saying this from prison! Paul genuinely doesn't know whether he's going to get out of this alive. So, this isn't a clever inspirational quote. Paul is wrestling with what makes a life worth living when so much of what we normally use to measure a "good life" has been taken away from him.

If someone asked you to finish the sentence, "For me, to live is _____," what would you put in the blank? Family? Success? Travel? Work? Fishing? Grandkids? The Vikings finally winning a Super Bowl? (Careful with that last one. Paul says we should have hope.)

Most of us have some version of the life we're trying to build. We want to accomplish something, experience something, attain something, leave something behind. None of that is bad. But Paul has discovered something deeper: the meaning of his life isn't determined by *how successful his life looks*. It comes from *who he is following*. That's a very different way to think about joy.

We spend enormous energy trying to build a life that makes us happy. Paul asks a different question: What if the deepest joy isn't found in building the life we want, but in giving our lives to something worth living for? For Paul, that *something* is actually *someone*: Jesus.

1. How would you honestly finish the sentence, "For me, to live is _____"?
2. What are some of the things our culture tells us make a life successful? Which ones have you found actually deliver? And, which ones don't?
3. If following Jesus became the organizing center of your life, what might actually change about the way you spend your time, energy, or money?

Day 7

Philippians 1:22-26 | Finding Joy in Serving

In yesterday's reading, Paul said, "to live is Christ and to die is gain." So, if being with Christ in heaven would be better for Paul, why keep going? His answer today is surprisingly simple: Other people need us. What is Paul saying? He still has more opportunity to help the Philippians grow.

This is interesting, because "helping others grow" is the opposite of our definition of success, which is often, "What am I getting out of this?" We choose jobs based on what they pay us. We buy things based on what they'll do for us. Even relationships can become transactional. We've gotten pretty good at asking, "What's in it for me?"

Paul flips the question around by asking, "Whose life can I make better?"

Think about the people who have made your life better. A teacher who saw something in you. A coach who believed in you. A grandparent who always had time. A friend who showed up when everything fell apart. Chances are, the people who have mattered most weren't necessarily the most impressive people you knew. They were the people who gave something of themselves away for you.

We measure success by what we accumulate, achieve, or experience. Maybe a better measure of a life is who benefits because we lived it.

There is a kind of joy we can only discover when we stop asking, "What can I get?" and start asking, "What can I give?"

1. Who has made your life significantly better simply because they were part of it? What did they give you?
2. Where are you most tempted to measure success by what you get rather than what you give?
3. Who benefits because you are part of their life – and how could you invest in them more intentionally this week?

Day 8

Philippians 1:27-30 | Finding Joy in Courageous Faith

Paul tells the Philippians, "Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ."

It's relatively easy to live according to our values when doing so costs us nothing. It's harder when telling the truth might cost us something, when forgiving someone feels unfair, when everybody else is joining in the gossip, or when standing up for someone means we might become unpopular too. Suddenly our deeply held convictions develop some surprisingly flexible terms and conditions.

Notice, Paul tells the Philippians to "stand firm." Not to "be loud." Not "win every argument." Not "make sure everybody knows you're right." Courageous faith isn't about becoming the loudest person in the room. *It's about being the same person regardless of which room you're in.*

Success often asks, "What will help me get ahead?" Courage asks, "What is the right thing to do even if it costs me?"

Following Jesus will occasionally lead us into places where doing what is right, loving people well, and living our convictions won't earn applause. And maybe there's a surprising freedom and joy in no longer needing it.

1. When are you most tempted to change who you are because of the people around you?

2. What's the difference between courageously standing firm in what you believe and simply needing to prove that you're right?
3. Where might God be asking you to do something courageous right now, even if nobody applauds?

Day 9

Philippians 2:1-4 | Finding Joy in Humility

Here Paul gets painfully practical: "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others." Nothing? Really, Paul? How about we shoot for "most things" or "a few things" and work our way up?

We live in a world that teaches us to build our brand, promote ourselves, get noticed, get the credit, and make sure nobody cuts in front of us (especially in the Costco checkout line!). Paul offers a radically different picture: *Stop making yourself the center of every story.*

Humility doesn't mean thinking poorly of yourself. It doesn't mean becoming a doormat or pretending everyone else matters and you don't. Paul says, "not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others." Notice he doesn't say ignore your own interests. He says *notice theirs too.*

That sounds simple until somebody gets the promotion you wanted. Or someone else gets the credit. Or your spouse somehow fails to recognize the very impressive amount of dishes you've done or laundry you've folded today.

Success says, "Make sure people notice you." Humility asks, "Who am I noticing?" Maybe joy grows when we stop needing every room, relationship, and conversation to revolve around us. There is tremendous freedom in discovering that *I don't always have to be the most important person in the room.*

1. Where are you most tempted to compare yourself with other people or make sure you get the credit?
2. Who in your life could use a little more of your attention and a little less of your advice?
3. What would putting someone else first actually look like for you today?

Day 10

Philippians 2:5-11 | Finding Joy in Following Jesus' Example

Everything Paul has been saying about joy seems to come together right here. Paul tells us *to have the same mindset as Jesus*, and then describes what Jesus did: Though he had every right to power and status, *he gave them up*. He became a servant. He humbled himself. He chose obedience and love, even when it cost him everything.

This is almost the exact opposite of how we're taught success works. Our world has a pretty predictable ladder: climb higher, earn more, become important, get recognized, gain influence. We even have phrases like "moving up in the world." Nobody announces at their high school reunion: *Life's great! I've become significantly less important since graduation!*

But look at the direction Jesus moves in this passage – *down*. Jesus doesn't cling to status; he lets go of it. He doesn't demand to be served; he serves. He doesn't use power for himself; he gives himself away for others.

And then comes the great reversal: *God lifts him up*.

Paul is redefining greatness. Jesus shows us that a great life isn't necessarily the one with the biggest title, paycheck, house, platform, or list of accomplishments. In God's kingdom, greatness looks surprisingly like love, service, sacrifice, generosity, and humility.

Maybe we've been asking the wrong question: Instead of asking, "How successful can my life become?" perhaps following Jesus invites us to ask, "How much good can my life

do?" And maybe that's where joy has been hiding all along.

1. When you hear the word "successful," what kind of person or life immediately comes to mind? Where did that definition come from?
2. Jesus had power but chose to use it for others. Where do you have influence, resources, experience, or opportunity that could be used for someone else's good?
3. If Jesus – not our culture – defined greatness for you, what might you need to rethink about what makes your life successful?



WEEK THREE

JOY ≠ CONTROL

PHILIPPIANS 2:12-3:11

Do Everything Without Grumbling

12 Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, 13 for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.

14 Do everything without grumbling or arguing, 15 so that you may become blameless and pure, “children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.”[a] Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky 16 as you hold firmly to the word of life. And then I will be able to boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor in vain. 17 But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you. 18 So you too should be glad and rejoice with me.

Timothy and Epaphroditus

19 I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. 20 I have no one else like him, who will show genuine concern for your welfare. 21 For everyone looks out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. 22 But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel. 23 I hope, therefore, to send him as soon as I see how things go with me. 24 And I am confident in the Lord that I myself will come soon.

25 But I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, co-worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger,

whom you sent to take care of my needs. 26 For he longs for all of you and is distressed because you heard he was ill. 27 Indeed he was ill, and almost died. But God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, to spare me sorrow upon sorrow. 28 Therefore I am all the more eager to send him, so that when you see him again you may be glad and I may have less anxiety. 29 So then, welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honor people like him, 30 because he almost died for the work of Christ. He risked his life to make up for the help you yourselves could not give me.

CHAPTER THREE

No Confidence in the Flesh

Further, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you. 2 Watch out for those dogs, those evildoers, those mutilators of the flesh. 3 For it is we who are the circumcision, we who serve God by his Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh— 4 though I myself have reasons for such confidence.

If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: 5 circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; 6 as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless.

7 But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. 8 What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in[b] Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. 10 I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.

Day 11

Philippians 2:12-18 | Finding Joy in Everyday Faithfulness

After describing Jesus' extraordinary example, Paul brings everything back down to everyday life. He tells the Philippians to "work out your salvation," because "it is God who works in you."

First, when Paul uses the word "salvation," he means something bigger than simply "going to heaven when you die." For Paul, salvation is God continually working in us, helping us become more fully the people we were created to be. That's different from what we usually think of when we hear the word "salvation."

Second, notice Paul doesn't say *work for* your salvation, as though God is handing out awards for those who get to the finish line. No, Paul says *work out* what God is already working in you. It's not about attaining something, rather it's about what *God is doing in you*.

Then Paul gets painfully practical: "Do everything without grumbling or arguing." Everything, Paul? Have you ever tried to assemble IKEA furniture with your spouse? Driven behind someone going 52 in a 60? Been trapped in a grocery store behind someone writing a check? Our faith gets tested every day, doesn't it?

Paul says that when we live differently, we "shine among them like stars in the sky." Most of us imagine making a difference requires doing something huge. Paul points toward something that appears small and is much more ordinary. Be kind when everyone else is complaining. Be generous when everyone else is keeping score. Tell the truth when lying would be easier.

Show up. Keep your word. Love people well.

Maybe following Jesus is less about doing something spectacular and more about doing everyday, ordinary things with extraordinary faithfulness. You don't need a platform, title, or audience to shine.

Sometimes the brightest faith shows up in the most ordinary places.

1. Where does your attitude tend to go downhill fastest – work, home, traffic, social media, somewhere else?
2. Who have you seen quietly and consistently “shine” through the way they live? What makes them different?
3. What is one ordinary situation this week where you could intentionally live differently because of your faith?

Day 12

Philippians 2:19-24 | Finding Joy in Faithful Friendships

Paul introduces us to Timothy, and what he says about him is striking: "I have no one else like him." That's quite a compliment. But Paul doesn't praise Timothy because he's successful, charismatic, brilliant, or the guy everybody wants on their podcast. He says Timothy "will show genuine concern for your welfare."

In other words, Timothy's superpower is that *he actually cares*.

We all need people like that, don't we? People who ask how we're doing, and then actually wait for the answer. People who know when something is off. People who celebrate when life is good, show up when it isn't, and occasionally tell us something we don't particularly want to hear because they love us enough to say it.

Paul also says Timothy has "proved himself." Their friendship wasn't built through one great conversation. It was built over time – traveling together, serving together, struggling together, showing up again and again. That's how most meaningful relationships happen. Trust grows slowly.

We live in a world with hundreds of "friends" and "followers," yet many of us struggle to name a few people who really know us. Joy isn't found in knowing more people. Joy is found in being deeply known by a few, and becoming that kind of friend for someone else.

1. Who is someone you can call when life is really good – or really bad – without wondering whether you're bothering them?
2. What qualities make someone a truly faithful friend? Which of those qualities are you good at – and which could use some work?
3. Who has encouraged your faith simply by the way they've walked alongside you? How could you do the same for someone else?

Day 13

Philippians 2:25-30 | Finding Joy in Sacrifice

Next, Paul tells us about another friend, Epaphroditus. Great name. Not necessarily one I'd recommend for your next child, but a great guy. The Philippians had sent Epaphroditus to care for Paul in prison. Somewhere along the way, he became so sick that Paul says he "almost died." And yet Paul describes him as a brother, coworker, fellow soldier, and someone who "risked his life" serving Christ. That's quite a resume, and none of it is about what Epaphroditus accomplished for himself.

Think about the people who have sacrificed for you. A parent who worked extra hours. A grandparent who always showed up. A teacher who stayed late. A friend who dropped everything when you needed them. Chances are, some of the most important things anyone has ever done for you *cost them something*. Time. Money. Sleep. Convenience. Opportunity.

We often think joy comes from getting more – more comfort, more money, more freedom, more time for ourselves. But some of life's deepest joy comes from *giving ourselves away for someone or something that matters*.

Now, hear me: Sacrifice doesn't mean exhausting ourselves trying to make everyone happy. Even Jesus rested. But love will occasionally cost us something (If it never costs us anything, we're probably describing convenience, not sacrifice.).

There's a strange math to joy: giving something away leaves us with more than we started with.

1. Who has sacrificed something for you that you appreciate more now than you did at the time?
2. What are you most reluctant to give up for someone else – your time, money, comfort, schedule, attention? Why?
3. Where might love be asking you to willingly give something of yourself right now?

Day 14

Philippians 3:1-6 | Finding Joy Beyond Achievement

If Paul had LinkedIn, this is the section where he lists everything under "Accomplishments." He basically pulls out his religious resume: circumcised on the eighth day, Israelite, tribe of Benjamin, Hebrew of Hebrews, Pharisee, zealous, righteous according to the law. In his ancient world, Paul's credentials were impressive.

We have our own versions of this, don't we? Degrees after our names. Job titles. Promotions. Awards. The house. The retirement account. The successful kids. The number on the scale. The number of people who follow us. Even faith can become another achievement: *I go to church. I serve. I give. I know the right answers.*

None of those things are necessarily bad. Paul isn't saying achievement is bad. But he is asking: *What happens when achievement becomes the place we look for our worth?*

Because here's what Paul knows: Accomplishments make a shaky foundation for lasting joy. There's always another promotion. Another person doing better. Another goal to reach. Yesterday's achievement has an amazingly short shelf life. Eventually someone younger, faster, smarter, or with a thicker, fuller head of hair shows up!?

Paul is about to tell us that he discovered something worth far more than his impressive achievements. Maybe we need the same reminder?

You are more than what you've accomplished. And you are more than the version of yourself you're trying so hard to prove.

1. If someone asked you what makes you successful, what would you be tempted to list?
2. Which accomplishment, role, possession, or identity would be hardest for you to lose? What might that tell you?
3. How would your life change if you genuinely believed your value to God couldn't be increased by succeeding – or decreased by failing?

Day 15

Philippians 3:7-11 | Finding Joy in Knowing Christ

After listing everything that once made him look successful, Paul does something shocking. He says, essentially, "Compared to knowing Christ, *none of that matters anymore*." In fact, the language Paul uses is stronger than most English translations make it sound. The word translated "garbage" in verse 8 (*skubalon*) can mean refuse, rubbish, waste, dung – think: the four-letter word expletive "shi-". Yes, it's in the Bible.

His point isn't that everything he's accomplished was worthless. It's that he discovered *something worth infinitely more*.

Paul says, "I want to know Christ." That's interesting. Paul already knows a lot *about* Jesus. He's spent years preaching about him. He's started churches. He's written letters we're still reading 2,000 years later. If anyone could say, "I think I've got Jesus pretty well figured out," it would be Paul.

But Paul doesn't say, "I want to know *more information about Christ*." He says, "I want to *know Christ*." There's a difference between knowing about someone and actually knowing them. You can know Patrick Mahomes' stats without being invited to his birthday party. You can follow someone online, know where they vacationed, what they ate for dinner, and what their dog wore for Halloween, and still not actually know them.

Faith can work the same way. We can know Bible stories, attend worship, believe certain things about Jesus, and still keep Jesus at a safe distance.

Paul has discovered that joy isn't ultimately found in his accomplishments or reputation. It's found *in relationship*. His

deepest desire isn't to become more impressive. It's to know Jesus more deeply.

Lasting joy isn't found in building an impressive life, but in knowing Jesus deeply enough that the relationship reshapes who we are becoming.

1. What's the difference between knowing things about someone and actually knowing them?
2. When has faith felt more like information, rules, or religious activity than an actual relationship with God?
3. If knowing Jesus became more important than proving yourself, achieving more, or impressing people, what might change about the way you live?



WEEK FOUR

JOY = TRUST & CONTENTMENT

PHILIPPIANS 3:12-4:23

12 Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. 13 Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

Following Paul's Example

15 All of us, then, who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. 16 Only let us live up to what we have already attained.

17 Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do. 18 For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. 19 Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things. 20 But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

CHAPTER FOUR

Closing Appeal for Steadfastness and Unity

Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends!

2 I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. 3 Yes, and I ask you, my true companion, help these women since they have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.

Final Exhortations

4 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! 5 Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. 6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

8 Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. 9 Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

Thanks for Their Gifts

10 I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. 11 I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. 12 I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. 13 I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

14 Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles. 15 Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; 16 for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid more than once

when I was in need. 17 Not that I desire your gifts; what I desire is that more be credited to your account. 18 I have received full payment and have more than enough. I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. 19 And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.

20 To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Final Greetings

21 Greet all God's people in Christ Jesus. The brothers and sisters who are with me send greetings. 22 All God's people here send you greetings, especially those who belong to Caesar's household.

23 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.

Day 16

Philippians 3:12-16 | Finding Joy in Progress, Not Perfection

Paul became a follower of Jesus in a very dramatic way (see Acts 9:1-19, it's worth the read!) and, by the time he writes this letter to the Philippians, he has been following Jesus for several years. He's traveled thousands of miles, started churches, endured prison, preached to crowds and written numerous letters that will become a good chunk of what we know as the New Testament. If anyone could have said, "I think I've pretty much mastered this Christian thing," it would have been Paul.

Instead, Paul says, "Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal..." In other words: *I'm not there yet.*

Isn't that a relief? Most of us are painfully aware that we're not there yet either. We still worry about things we know we can't control. We still lose our patience. We still compare ourselves with other people. We still say things and immediately wish our mouths came with an "Undo Send" button.

But Paul doesn't obsess over where he falls short. He says something powerful – words we all need to hear. He writes, "Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on." Paul refuses to let either his past failures or his past successes become the place he lives.

Too often followers of Jesus confuse spiritual growth with spiritual perfection – I've got to get it all right. Following Jesus isn't about finally becoming the person who never screws up. It's about continuing to move in the direction of Jesus – sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly, sometimes two steps

forward and one step back – knowing that God's always with you.

Joy isn't found in perfection. Lasting joy is found in realizing that we're all still growing because God's not finished with us.

1. Where are you hardest on yourself because you think you should be "farther along" by now?
2. What from your past – failure or success – are you tempted to keep looking back at instead of moving forward?
3. Where might God simply be inviting you to take the next step rather than having everything figured out?

Day 17

Philippians 3:17-21 | Finding Joy Through Eternal Perspective

If there was a phrase that was certain to get people's attention, it's when Paul tells the Philippians, "Our citizenship is in heaven." Why? Philippi was a Roman colony, and Roman citizenship was a big deal. When Paul wrote to the Philippians, Rome ruled an empire stretching from Britain to North Africa and from Spain to the Middle East, an unrivaled superpower whose roads, armies, wealth, architecture, and emperors seemed to proclaim that Rome would last forever. And citizenship in this vast and powerful empire brought status, privileges, protection, and identity. People were proud to say, "I belong to Rome."

But Paul says: *You belong somewhere even bigger.*

For us, "citizenship in heaven" can sound like Paul is saying, "This world doesn't matter. Just hang on until you get to heaven." But Paul isn't telling them to escape the world. He's reminding them who ultimately gets their allegiance and defines who they are. They may live in Rome's world, but they belong first to Jesus.

If we're honest, we're not all that different from those ancient Romans. We have plenty of identities, don't we? American. Minnesotan. Republican. Democrat. Athlete. Successful. Retired. Hockey Dad or Soccer Mom. Swiftie. Pickleballer. CrossFitter. Those identities can matter deeply to us, but Paul says none of them gets the final word about who we are.

If we take that perspective seriously, it changes everything. The bad day isn't the whole story. The election isn't the whole story.

Your bank account isn't the whole story. A win or loss isn't the whole story. Even death isn't the whole story.

Joy grows when we remember that what we can see right now isn't all there is, and the things that feel ultimate today aren't ultimate at all.

1. Which identities, groups, or labels most strongly shape the way you see yourself?
2. What feels overwhelmingly important to you right now, but through the perspective of faith might look different?
3. If your deepest identity is as someone who follows Jesus, how might that change the way you live in the world this week?

Day 18

Philippians 4:1-5 | Finding Joy in Peaceful Relationships

Apparently, even Paul's beloved church in Philippi had conflict. Surprise, surprise – where passionate humans gather, there will be conflict. Paul actually names two people: Euodia and Syntyche. We don't know what their disagreement was about. Maybe leadership. Maybe theology. Maybe over how strong the church coffee was made. Maybe one of them didn't care for the style of church music. Maybe somebody moved somebody else's crockpot at the church potluck. Whatever happened, it was significant enough that news of it reached Paul in prison.

And notice what Paul *doesn't* do. He doesn't tell us who's right. He doesn't pick a winner. He pleads with them "to be of the same mind in the Lord." Then, almost immediately, Paul says, "Rejoice in the Lord always... Let your gentleness be evident to all." For Paul, apparently, *joy, gentleness, and how we handle disagreement are all connected.*

Our culture often treats conflict as a competition. Someone has to win. Someone has to lose. Someone needs the final word. Paul offers another way. Peace doesn't require agreeing about everything. It requires deciding *that the relationship matters more than winning.*

Sometimes one of the most faithful things we can do is lower the temperature, listen, assume the best, apologize, forgive, or simply refuse to add more fuel to the fire.

1. When conflict happens, what's your natural tendency? Fight, avoid, fix, defend yourself, or something else?
2. Think of someone who handles disagreement particularly well. What do they do differently?
3. Where could God use you right now to lower the temperature and become a source of peace?

Day 19

Philippians 4:6-13 | Finding Joy Through Contentment

Here we find some of the most quoted verses in Philippians: "Do not be anxious about anything..." and "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." That second verse has appeared on everything from t-shirts to gym walls to tattoos on the arms of athletes of all types, amateur to professionals. And, when we hear those words, we tend to hear: "With Jesus, I can accomplish anything!" Win the game. Get the promotion. Crush the goal. Run the marathon.

But that's not actually what Paul is talking about. Paul says in verse 11, "I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances." This is key to understanding what Paul is saying here! He knows what it's like to have plenty and what it's like to have almost nothing. He's been well-fed and hungry. Comfortable and imprisoned. And *then* he says, "I can do all this through him who gives me strength."

For Paul, "I can do all things" *isn't about achieving anything we want. It's about enduring whatever comes.*

And notice another little word: Paul says he has "learned" to be content. Apparently contentment isn't something some lucky people are born with. It's something we practice. That's challenging in a culture constantly reminding us that we'd be happier if we just had a little more. More money. More square footage. A newer vehicle. A better body. A bigger house. A better vacation. Or a robot lawn mower, a smart toilet, a golf simulator in the basement, a temperature-controlled mattress, a doorbell with a video camera, or one more streaming service.

Paul has discovered another kind of freedom: *I don't need everything around me to be exactly the way I want in order to experience joy.*

1. What's one thing you regularly think, "If I just had _____, I'd be happier"?
2. Where does comparison make it especially difficult for you to be content with the life you actually have?
3. What anxiety are you carrying right now that you need to honestly name? How might you place it in God's hands?

Day 20

Philippians 4:14-23 | Finding Joy in God's Provision

Paul ends his letter right where he began it: *with people*. The Philippians have financially supported Paul's mission and ministries more than once, and he is genuinely grateful. But then he says something interesting: "Not that I desire your gifts; what I desire is that more be credited to your account." Paul isn't simply excited because somebody sent him money. He's excited about what their generosity says *about them*.

And then, he continues with words that are often misunderstood: "My God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus." Notice Paul says God will meet your *needs*, not "God will give you *every single thing you've ever wanted*." That's an important distinction. God has apparently never promised us the boat, the lake house, perfect health, the promotion, the winning Powerball ticket, or upgrades to first class. Instead, Paul looks back over a life that has included abundance and scarcity and says: *God has been faithful*.

Often we recognize God's generosity and faithfulness best in hindsight, don't we? The friend who called at exactly the right moment. The unexpected opportunity that came your way. The meal someone dropped off. The generosity that carried you through a difficult season. The strength you didn't know you had. The people who showed up. And it's in those moments, like Paul, that we discover something even bigger: *God often provides for us through other people. And, God provides for other people through us*.

That's a fitting place for Paul to end his letter to the Philippians. Paul started this letter from prison talking about joy, and after

four chapters, his circumstances haven't magically changed. He's still in prison. His future is still uncertain. *But he has people he loves.* He has purpose. He has enough. And above all, he trusts that he has a God who is faithful.

Joy isn't everything going your way.

Joy doesn't have to wait until life finally falls into place.

Joy isn't something you find once everything finally works out.

Joy isn't waiting for you on the other side of your problems.

Joy isn't reserved for the seasons when everything goes according to plan.

Lasting joy is all about learning to recognize God's faithful presence amid the highs, the lows and whatever your everyday, ordinary circumstances might bring.

1. Looking back, when has something or someone shown up in your life at exactly the time you needed it?
2. Where might you be overlooking God's faithfulness and generosity because you're focused on something you don't have?
3. If God sometimes provides for people through other people, whose life might God be inviting you to become part of as God's provision for them?



Congratulations!

Seriously. Pause for a moment and let it sink in: You just read through an entire book of the Bible.

That may not sound like a big deal to everyone, but it is. In a world where we struggle to finish a text message before checking another app, you slowed down long enough to spend twenty days walking alongside Paul. You reflected. You prayed. You wrestled.

And here's my prayer: Somewhere along the way, you discovered something surprising about joy.

Perhaps you discovered that joy isn't the same thing as happiness. Maybe you discovered that success doesn't satisfy nearly as much as serving someone else. Perhaps you discovered that trying to control everything is exhausting (If you didn't know that before, your family is glad you know now!). Maybe you discovered that trust really does produce a peace that doesn't make logical sense. Or maybe, if you're honest, you didn't discover joy so much as rediscover it.

The strange thing about joy is that we don't usually find it by chasing it. We find it while giving thanks. While serving and giving. While letting go. While trusting. While walking through both the beautiful and painful parts of life knowing Jesus is with us every step of the way.

Paul wrote Philippians from prison, yet somehow he kept returning to joy. Not because his circumstances improved, but because he had discovered a truth that our world desperately needs to hear: Joy is not found in having everything we want – joy is found in knowing the One who holds us, even when life doesn't go according to plan.

So where do you go from here?

Keep going.

Keep reading the Bible. Read the story of Jesus in Matthew, Mark, Luke or John.

Keep praying.

Keep worshiping.

Keep connecting with us.

Keep serving & giving.

Keep choosing joy, even when happiness feels out of reach.

Most of all, keep following Jesus. Because finding joy isn't a twenty-day project. It's a lifelong journey. And the good news is this: you don't walk it alone.

I'm on the journey with you!

Hans

The Book of Philippians taken from the
Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®
Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.
Used with permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

The "NIV", "New International Version", "Biblica", "International Bible
Society" and the Biblica Logo are trademarks registered in the United States
Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc. Used with permission.

Commentary provided by Pastor Hans Dahl, Lead Pastor of
Calvary Lutheran Church in Alexandria, MN.

