

How To Have Joy In Every Situation

Philippians 1:12-26

So many people don't really enjoy life – they endure life. So many in the world go through life with no real sense of joy. Life becomes a series of chores and obstacles that one must go through – just to endure it. There is no happiness – there is no joy. The dreams of – “If only” fill their minds.

You know what I am talking about. “If only” I could find the right job. “If only” I could find the right husband or wife. “If only” I could win the lottery. “If only”... “If only”... “If only.” I wonder – is it possible for me to have joy – even if – I don't have the “If onlys.”

Many people believe that happiness is based on perfect circumstances. If everything is perfect – I will be happy. Perhaps there is some truth in that – we like to find ourselves in good situations and circumstances – but having joy should just not be based on perfect circumstances. **You see – happiness is external – joy is internal.**

Paul talks a lot about joy in the book of Philippians – even though the circumstances he found himself in were rough – he still spoke about joy. The background of our focal verse today is that Paul for the last four years has been in miserable conditions. His circumstances were far from perfect. He's spent two years in prison in Caesarea on a trumped up charge. He is then put on a ship to go to Rome to appear before Nero who is NOT known for his nice treatment of Christians. On the way he's shipwrecked, stranded on an island, bitten by a poisonous snake, waits the winter there, continues on to Rome, spends another two years in prison awaiting trial to be executed. During this two year period in Rome he is chained to a guard for 24 hours a day. He has absolutely no privacy. Every four hours he gets a new guard. Follow along with me as I read our Bible verses for today:

12 Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really 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** Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly.

15 It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. **16** The latter do so in 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, **19** for I know that through your prayers and the help given by 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 joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me.

How is Paul able to show – joy? What’s Paul’s secret? How does he stay positive in prison? How does he triumph over his troubles? How does he delight in his difficulties? How does he stay so happy – positive – joyful – in spite of the fact that everything has NOT turned out the way he planned it. Our passage of scripture today gives us five essentials for living a joyful life.

Here is the first essential:

1. Look at life from God’s PERSPECTIVE

Folks, here is a fact: Everyone of you has problems.

Some of your problems are big. Some of your problems are small. But they are still problems – just the same. You brought them in here with you today and some of you are finding it hard to worship because of your problems.

But here is the secret: The way you look at that problem is much more important than the problem itself. Your perspective about the problem makes a difference. Your view of your problems – your understanding of your problems – your focus of your problem can make all the difference in the world. Your problems are not as important as how you look at your problems. Let's read verses twelve and thirteen together:

***12** Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really 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.*

Paul's imprisonment gave an opportunity for the gospel to be shared.

The second part of verse twelve in the Message Bible says:

*"Instead of being squelched, the Message has actually prospered."
Philippians 1:12b (MSG)*

God is big enough to take bad circumstances and turn them around. He is big enough to turn them inside out. He is big enough to take that sour situation and make it sweet for Him! If He can do it with the cross of Calvary – He is big enough to do it in your life too.

You remember what happened to Paul – he was thrown into prison - bound with chains – in fact Paul says:

***14** Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly. (Phil.1)*

Paul's attitude toward his problems has encouraged other people down through the centuries. Courage is contagious. It spreads like wildfire. Other believers became bold because of Paul being bold.

The perspective we need to live from – if you're going to have joy in your life – is found in Romans 8:28. Most of you may know it already – it goes like this:

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

When we get this perspective we are on the way to joyful living. Paul says that God has a purpose behind all my problems – therefore I have a perspective to live from.

Essential number two:

2. Live life with God's PRIORTIES

In life I need to know what's really important and what is not.

If you don't choose your priorities you'll spend a lot of time spinning your wheels. You will be re-active – rather than pro-active. You'll go around putting out one fire after another – living life simply from problem – to problem – to problem – and not choosing what's important. In verses fifteen, sixteen and seventeen Paul says:

***15** It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. **16** The latter do so in 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.*

In the verse above – Christ is preached! Isn't that wonderful news? Whether He is preached out of envy and strife or out of love – Christ is preached – His name is proclaimed. Rejoice that the word is getting out! Yes – Paul says - I would rather have his word preached out of love – but let me rejoice in the fact that His Word is being proclaimed.

Paul said their motives may be wrong – their style may be wrong – their delivery may be wrong – but the message is getting out! What does it matter? Christ is proclaimed!

But you say, "But, if it is not preached in love – it is wrong." Is that what Paul said? Look with me at verse eighteen and nineteen in the Message Bible. Paul is speaking when he says:

"So how am I to respond? I've decided that I really don't care about their motives, whether mixed, bad, or indifferent. Every time one of

them opens his mouth, Christ is proclaimed, so I just cheer them on! And I'm going to keep that celebration going because I know how it's going to turn out." Philippians 1:18-19a (MSG)

If you want something to steal your joy quicker than anything else, just listen to everyone who criticizes you. Believe me – other people are going to criticize you. If you do “this” – they will criticize you. If you do “that” they will criticize you. If you do “nothing” they will criticize you. So why don't you do what God wants you to do and not pay attention to the criticism? Set your priorities to God's priorities.

How many arguments in your marriage or family or work are over little things that really don't matter? Is it worth losing your joy over? No! Have a perspective to live from and a priority to live by. Know what is important and what is not. If it does not matter don't fight over it.

Paul said he wasn't going to let anybody steal his joy. No critics. No circumstances. No situations. Joy comes from setting proper priorities. Set your priorities to God's priorities and it will help you live a life of joy.

Essential number three:

3. Seek God's POWER to strengthen you.

I need strength to make it through life. I need power to keep on going. Life can wear you out. Life can drain you completely. One crisis after another will deplete your energy. You lose your energy and your power over time. Some of you are ready to throw in the towel. You say, "I'm finished – I'm fed up. I've done the best I could, but it's not good enough and I'm sick and tired of being sick and tired." You need a fresh power supply. Listen to what Paul says in verse nineteen:

19 *for I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance.*

The New King James Version reads: "I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ." Philippians 1:19 (NKJV)

Paul says, "I have two things that give me strength and keep me going."

1. The prayers of other people
2. God's supply through His Holy Spirit (the Spirit of Jesus Christ)

Prayers are powerful. Jesus said that we need to pray for strength – when He said:

"So, whatever you do, don't go to sleep at the switch. Pray constantly that you will have the strength and wits to make it through everything that's coming and end up on your feet before the Son of Man." Luke 21:36 (MSG)

We need to pray that we will have strength and wisdom – and we need to have other people pray for us too. In fact the Bible tells us that we are to pray for one another. Why? Because it is encouraging to know that God's people are praying to God – for you. We always need to rely on God's power to live our lives. Paul tells us:

"Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might." Ephesians 6:10 (NKJV)

Psalm 28:7 says:

The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and I am helped. My heart leaps for joy and I will give thanks to him in song.

God wants to give you power to live by. He wants you to live a life full of joy – with a song in your heart. We need God's power in our lives.

Essential number four:

4. Live a life of HOPE (Not LIE as in outline!!!)

Not only do I need God's power – but I also need God's hope. Let's read verse twenty this time:

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. (Philippians 1:20)

This is a message of hope. It is a message of faith. Paul knew that he would be delivered – and because of this – he could step out with boldness. Hebrews 11:1 says:

Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.

Hope and faith go hand in hand. You can't live a joyful life without hope. You've got to have hope to cope. God has given us – promised us a bright future. We should live in that hope.

Cornell University did a study of 25,000 POWs from WWII. They found that man can handle tremendous stress and pressure as long as he has hope. The moment hope is gone you're doomed. Where do you get your hope to keep on keeping on? Is that source reliable? We as Christians – more than any other people – should be a people of hope.

Our final essential:

5. Find God's PURPOSE for your life

By the time Philippians is written Paul is old and tired. He has been in prison for four years. He is ready to go to heaven. His friends are free but he is not. He is in chains. But he is sure of his purpose in life. Do you want to know what his purpose is? It is found in verse twenty one.

"For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain." Philippians 1:21

Paul is not suicidal – but he is ready to be in the presence of Jesus. He is not afraid of dying. He sees death as the doorway to better things. "To die is gain. But while I'm here," Paul says, "I have a purpose for living."

How would you fill in this blank? For me to live is _____.

What is your purpose in life? What makes life living for?

A. Some people live for POSSESSIONS

Get all you can while you can. We buy things we don't need, with money we don't have to impress people we don't even like. That's dumb! But we do it! I've got to work to keep up with the Jones' and just about the time I catch up with them he gets a raise and I'm in trouble again.

B. Some people live for PLEASURE

If it feels good – do it! Anything to make me feel good is OK. Anything to relieve my boredom for one little moment is fine. The problem with living for pleasure – is that pleasure passes away – it will not last.

C. Some people live for POWER

Other words for power are: position, prestige and popularity. We dress for success and we drive to impress. Image is everything. The problem is – one minute you're the hero the next minute you're the zero. There isn't ultimate fulfillment.

Paul had a long term goal in mind when he said: *"For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain."*

Paul is looking at things in the light of eternity. He knew what the future held – because he knew the One who holds the future.

The best thing you can do in this life – is to invest in the next one.

Everyone is going to exist for eternity. That is what the Bible teaches. You cannot change that fact. But where you spend eternity is your choice. Do you know Jesus Christ personally? Have you given your life to Him? Do you want a joy filled life? It begins by having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

My thanks to Tom Shepard with additions by David Simpson