

Paul's hopes and expectations were not based on his success or wealth or happiness. They were all about Jesus. The measure of Paul's joy was in honoring Christ. In doing so, Paul was living fully alive.

Philippians 1:22-26 (NLT) 22 But if I live, I can do more fruitful work for Christ. So I really don't know which is better. 23 I'm torn between two desires: I long to go and be with Christ, which would be far better for me. 24 But for your sakes, it is better that I continue to live. 25 Knowing this, I am convinced that I will remain alive so I can continue to help all of you grow and experience the joy of your faith. 26 And when I come to you again, you will have even more reason to take pride in Christ Jesus because of what he is doing through me.

In what ways does Paul's humility reflect the humility of Jesus himself? When Paul refers to fruitful work, he means work that advances the Gospel. What fruitful works would you like to see in your future that would bring honor to Christ?

WRAP-UP

Paul often found himself in difficult circumstances. But rather than complaining or getting angry with God, he chose to view his circumstances from a kingdom perspective. Paul saw that God was good and could bring good out of evil. He was able to rejoice in the midst of his suffering because the Gospel was being advanced. And he was willing to live with the difficulties of his life knowing that he was helping others to grow and experience the joy of their faith in Jesus.

MEMORY VERSE.

Philippians 1:20 (NLT) 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.

PRAYER (20 MIN) Ask your group to pray for you regarding one area where you can apply this study in your life

Challenge.- You may have experienced evil and suffering in your own life. As you reflect on those times, how would you apply the foundational truths about God to gain a kingdom perspective?

“Joy in the Midst” **Prison Letters- #7**

INTRODUCTION

Paul was imprisoned on more than one occasion. But during those times, many of his friends and fellow believers were faithful to comfort and support him in his time of distress. At one point, while Paul was in prison, the church at Philippi sent him a financial gift, which prompted his writing the letter to the Philippians. Paul was touched by the care and concern of his friends in Philippi and as he begins this letter, he is careful to assure them that all is well with him despite the circumstances. Because of his kingdom perspective, Paul had joy in the midst of suffering.

Ice Breaker

Have you experienced circumstances with a potential to be devastating that turned out to serve a greater purpose? (e.g., being laid off from one job only to be offered a much more rewarding position.)

Key Passage

Phil 1:21-24 NLT 21 For to me, living means living for Christ, and dying is even better. 22 But if I live, I can do more fruitful work for Christ. So I really don't know which is better. 23 I'm torn between two desires: I long to go and be with Christ, which would be far better for me. 24 But for your sakes, it is better that I continue to live.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. It's All Good

All of us have a bad day now and then. Paul certainly had more than a few. At the time of this letter, probably around AD 62, he was sitting in a Roman prison. It is hard to imagine what it was like to suffer as Paul did;

beaten, stoned, shipwrecked and hated. Yet somehow Paul viewed his own pain and circumstances from a unique perspective. Here is what he told the Philippians to assure them that all was well.

Philippians 1:12-14 (NLT) 12 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. 13 For everyone here, including the whole palace guard, knows that I am in chains because of Christ. 14 And because of my imprisonment, most of the believers here have gained confidence and boldly speak God's message without fear

What good did Paul see resulting from his imprisonment? Paul was not in a place of his choosing but despite the circumstances, he made Christ known to many. Do you know of anyone who was a witness for Christ in an unlikely place? Has anyone's courageous witness inspired you?

2. When Bad Things Happen

Philippians 1:15-18 (NLT) 15 It's true that some are preaching out of jealousy and rivalry. But others preach about Christ with pure motives. 16 They preach because they love me, for they know I have been appointed to defend the Good News. 17 Those others do not have pure motives as they preach about Christ. They preach with selfish ambition, not sincerely, intending to make my chains more painful to me. 18 But that doesn't matter. Whether their motives are false or genuine, the message about Christ is being preached either way, so I rejoice. And I will continue to rejoice.

Paul chose to see what was happening around him through a kingdom lens. If he had been focused on himself and his own welfare, he would have been justified in saying, "That's not fair!" But Paul said, "I rejoice". Having joy in the midst of trouble means viewing our circumstances through "kingdom lenses".

What is your response to these perspectives on the cause of someone's suffering?

- *God wasn't able, or didn't choose, to protect them*
- *It was God's will for them to suffer for some reason or purpose of His*
- *It is the consequence of living in a fallen world, of sin, and of our enemy, Satan*

We view our understanding of all things through the lens of truth found in the Bible. This is especially important when we face challenging circumstances in life. These truths give us strength to stand against the attacks of the enemy.

What lies about our suffering does each of these truths counter?

- **God is with you.** *Deuteronomy 31:8 (NLT) Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the LORD will personally go ahead of you. He will be with you; he will neither fail you nor abandon you."*
- **God is good and does good.** *Psalms 107:1 (NLT) Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good! His faithful love endures forever. Romans 8:28 (NLT) And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them.*
- **God conquered sin and death** - *Romans 6:23 (NLT) For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord.*
- **Jesus is Alive** - *1 Corinthians 15:20 (NLT) But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead. He is the first of a great harvest of all who have died.*

Each of these truths is good news for us and forms the foundation of our faith.

3. It's All About Jesus (not me)

At New Life, we often talk about living fully alive.

How do you define "fully alive"?

Philippians 1:20-21 (NLT) 20 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. 21 For to me, living means living for Christ, and dying is even better.

If life is all about "me", then living fully alive might be measured by what makes me happy. But Paul had a very different perspective. His focus was on Jesus and the Gospel.