

Day 1

July 8



Pray | Ask God to reveal the path to true joy in your life

TRUE JOY IN all circumstances is possible because of the gospel of Jesus

This week we focus on the apostle Paul, who is imprisoned in Rome for preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. While in prison, Paul wrote a letter to the church in Philippi, and the theme of this letter is **joy**. It's not necessarily a theme you would expect from someone in prison, but perhaps that's because we really don't understand what true joy is. That's our goal for the week: to learn what true joy is from the words and experiences of Paul.

Joy is one of the Fruits of the Spirit. Joy is a promised result of living life in step with the Holy Spirit, who lives inside of every Christ follower. Too often we try to equate joy with happiness which can lead to disappointment and questions when unhappy things occur. Joy, like happiness, is a feeling, but joy is so much more deep and complete. Joy is the result of knowing that the Holy Spirit will carry you through difficulties. As we'll see from Paul's words to the Philippians, the Holy Spirit makes the beauty of Jesus' gospel clear so that we can experience joy in all circumstances.



Read | Galatians 5:16,22-25, Philippians 1:1-11



Reflect | Spend some time reflecting on the following questions.

In Galatians 5:22-25, Paul describes the process of making Jesus our Lord. A person starts by “crucifying the flesh and its passions and desires,” and then moves to “living by the Spirit” and “keeping in step with the Spirit.” One practical result of this transformation is a transition from living a life seeking happiness to a life seeking joy. How do you view and apply this truth in your life?

John Piper defines joy like this: “Christian joy is a good feeling, produced by the Holy Spirit, as he causes us to see the beauty of Christ in the Word and the world” (<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/how-do-you-define-joy>). Spend a few minutes reflecting on how you see the beauty of Jesus Christ in the Bible and in the world around you.

If you are a follower of Jesus Christ, your ability to be joy-filled in all circumstances, especially in circumstances that the world would classify as “unhappy,” should differentiate you from those who have not made Jesus their Lord. Go to God in prayer and ask for the courage and strength to live an increasingly joy-filled life that draws others to him.

Day 2

July 9



Pray | That you will find ways to spread the Good News of Jesus

TRUE JOY COMES from obeying God's commands and commission.

The first reason Paul is joyful is that because of his imprisonment, the good news of Jesus Christ is being preached in new and greater ways. Not only has Paul been able to share this good news with the Roman guards that are with him continuously, but others have been emboldened to preach because of his situation. Even though Paul never met Jesus, he knew Jesus' teachings and commands. Jesus taught that the two greatest commandments were to *love the Lord with all your heart, soul and mind*, and to *love your neighbor as yourself*. In the Great Commission, Jesus commanded his followers to *go into all the world and make disciples*. Paul, more than any other person, lived a life dedicated to fulfilling that command. Because of this obedience, Paul experienced true joy - a joy that endures regardless of earthly circumstances. That joy is available to you as well. The cost is making Jesus your Lord, and replacing your priorities with God's priorities.



Read | Matthew 22:36-39, 28:18-20, Philippians 1:12-18



Reflect | Spend some time reflecting on the following questions.

If you are a follower of Jesus, take a few minutes to reflect on how your life reveals your unconditional love for God, and your sacrificial love for the people around you. Note there's an AND there, not an OR!

If you are not yet a follower of Jesus, take a few minutes to consider the reasons. The world and even the church can do things that make surrender to Jesus seem like the wrong choice. It's critical that you look past the flawed humans in those situations and focus your attention on the Jesus that is revealed in the Bible. That Jesus loves you more than you can possibly imagine and only wants what is best for you here on earth and in eternity. If Jesus is calling you to surrender to him today, go to him in prayer and share your heart.

In Philippians 1:15-18, we see that not everyone who was preaching the gospel of Jesus was doing it for the right reasons. Some were preaching because of envy of Paul and a rivalry with Paul. Paul's response seems to indicate that the "ends justify the means" in this case. What do you think? Do our motivations and attitude matter if the result is more people hearing the good news of Jesus Christ?

Day 3

July 10



Pray | That your life and your death will exalt Jesus Christ

TRUE JOY IS found in living for God's glory and not your own happiness.

Paul's next reason for joy is found in his confidence that his deliverance from prison was assured. Because his deliverance could come in the form of life or death, his greatest concern was having sufficient courage to walk the path set before him in a manner that would bring glory to Jesus. Paul sees joy and satisfaction in both paths, and in this we see the completeness of Paul's life in the Spirit. The path of death is the selfish path because it brings Paul his greatest joy sooner, his final reward in the presence of his Lord and Savior. The path of life is the selfless path. It delays his ultimate reward, allows him to continue to serve the growing church of Jesus Christ, and bring Jesus even greater glory here on earth. Ultimately Paul decides that he will surely live, because Jesus' glory is most important.

We too are called to such a Spirit-filled life, one where we can say, "For me to live is Christ and to die is gain." This is where true joy is found.



Read | Hebrews 12:1-3, Philippians 1:18b-26



Reflect | Spend some time reflecting on the following questions.

Think of a recent challenge that you faced in your life. Was your handling of the situation guided more by a concern for your own interests or how your handling of the situation would bring glory/shame to God? Take some time to reflect on how you can shift your priorities to be more God focused and less "you" focused.

If you faced death tomorrow, would you be able to handle the situation with grace and confidence, bringing glory to God through your witness, "to live is Christ and to die is gain"? How should your perspective of death encourage and challenge unbelievers?

What are your greatest challenges to living a joy-filled life, in step with the Holy Spirit? Go to God in prayer and ask for wisdom and guidance on how you can start to overcome one of those challenges.

Day 4
July 11



Pray | That your life brings joy and hope to others

TRUE JOY IS found in community - standing firm in the Spirit together.

Paul's next reason for joy is found in his anticipation of seeing the Philippians standing firm in one faith. *Standing firm* is a theme we see throughout Paul's letters to the early church because the early church was being challenged and persecuted from all sides. The Jews and Romans didn't want to see this church flourish because it threatened their status and power. Under those conditions, standing firm was not just a nice idea, it was a daily necessity. Paul had started many of these churches and he loved them dearly. He found great joy in inspiring and supporting them, and he knew that when the church did stand firm, they too would find great joy. The church of Jesus Christ today exists because the early church stood firm and united. The need to stand firm is just as critical today. The fallen world that we live in is constantly trying to dismiss the need for God and a Savior. It's our duty to continue to stand firm in our faith, to live in the Spirit, and to bring glory to God through our words and our lives.



Read | 2 Corinthians 1:23-24, Philippians 1:25-28



Reflect | Spend some time reflecting on the following questions.

In Paul's words in the passage today, we see the reciprocal nature of joy. Paul receives joy from leading and supporting the churches and seeing them stand firm, and the churches also find joy in doing the same. It's a good reminder that we as a church also have leaders who find great joy in seeing us standing firm. Take a few minutes to give God thanks for the leaders of your church, pray for their joy, and pray for the courage and strength to stand firm.

It's clear from both of our scripture passages today that "faith in the gospel" is the basis for standing firm and united in the Spirit. How is your faith demonstrated in your daily life? List some examples of how your faith helps you stand firm or where you needed a stronger faith in the gospel.

In Philippians 1:27, Paul emphasizes the importance of "striving together as one." How has being part of a church community helped you to stand firm in your faith and brought you joy?

Day 5

July 12



Pray | For the courage to live a life that is worthy of the gospel

TRUE JOY IS a product of a life on earth being lived as a citizen of Heaven.

While the ultimate joy for those who have made Jesus their Lord will be experienced in heaven, Paul makes it clear that a taste of that joy can be experienced here on earth as citizens of heaven. Jesus lived life on earth as a citizen of heaven, and his life is our example. What does living on earth as a citizen of heaven look like? It's a humble and submissive life – obediently setting aside “self” priorities and replacing them with God's priorities. It's a courageous life – overcoming the temptations and persecution of the world with confidence in the promises and infinite resources of our Lord and Savior. It's a victorious and joy-filled life – celebrating and savoring the beauty of God and his creation. That's the recipe for true joy, both here on earth and ultimately in heaven.



Read | Romans 12:1-2, Philippians 1:27-30 (NLT)



Reflect | Spend some time reflecting on the following questions.

Take a few minutes to reflect on your life. Are you living as a citizen of this world, or of heaven, or are you trying the dual-citizenship route? Based on the teachings from Paul to the Philippians and the Romans, what steps do you need to take to secure your citizenship in heaven?

Paul says that as citizens of heaven we have been given “the privilege of suffering for Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:29). Easier said than done, right? Pray for the wisdom to see and embrace suffering as a privilege.

It can be difficult to really find joy in every situation we encounter here on earth. As Christians, we have a source of joy that others do not – the promise of eternal life in God's perfect creation. One idea to stay joyful even in difficult situations is to “steal joy from tomorrow.” Allow your future hope of living with Jesus to foster present joy in living for him. How can you incorporate “tomorrow's joy” into your day-to-day life?

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