

SEEKING A MIND OF JOY (THE BOOK OF PHILIPPIANS)

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LESSON ONE: Joyous victory in the midst of dire circumstances (Philippians 1)

The Philippian Epistle briefly introduced.

☞ The Philippian Epistle is *a Believer's Book*

"For many, Philippians is one of the 'choice morsels' to which the believer frequently resorts. The very thought of this Epistle seems to remind us of our Lord's words recorded in Mark 6:31, 'Come ye yourselves apart into a *desert place, and rest a while.*' *Philippians is specifically a believer's book. In this aspect, it is very practical.* Most of us are deluged by problems and adversity. There is a constant desire to talk with someone who understands. Paul, the writer of this Epistle, is the one...Though defeated from the worldly standpoint; he writes as a victor...He speaks repeatedly of joy, grace and peace. As he points us to higher ground there is not the slightest tinge of defeat, but rather confidence and assurance. ☞ He who loses himself to the dynamics of this Epistle, will emerge more than a conqueror through Christ" (J. Allen Blair, *Living Victoriously*, Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1962, Introduction).

The message of Philippians is found by considering three repeated words (concepts). The thesis is: ☞ Only as one has his mind set on Christ, will true joy be experienced. This stress is common in Scripture—your mind, the way you think, controls your living. This is summarized simply by the expectation that the Christian will be "self-controlled." It is easy to "control" others, but uncomfortable to control Self. Some are so obsessed with controlling others because they see themselves as needing no control. The sermon always applies to another; the diet will never work for himself; the chore that is justifiably his is left unnoticed and that which is left undone by another is criticized—"He NEVER does what he's suppose to do!"

1. ☞ The concept of "joy", "rejoice", or "gladness" is found over 19 times in this book!
2. ☞ The words "mind", "remember", or "think" are used at least 16 times!

Joy is how a believer "thinks" not how he "feels." It is his attitude toward life! It refers to a confident expectation; a blessed assurance. The term is from the Greek *χαρά* (chara) and refers to a "calm delight." Thus, the term speaks about one's internal emotions not one's external demonstration.

3. ☞ Mention of Christ is found over 70 times in this short book! On an average this is one reference to Christ every one and one-half verses.

The thesis of Philippians focuses on individual self-control. The application is not how you think it applies to another but ☞ how it convicts you! True joy can be found. Far too many ☞ fail to enjoy life because they have committed themselves to a fantasy as to how they will live the idealistic life or they have resigned themselves to the distorted opinion that joy is a dream never to be realized in life.

This thesis comments on ☞ Proverbs 23:7 ("or as he thinks within himself, so is he"). We are what we think!

The Philippian Epistle is *a Survival Manual* (There are basically four "thieves" which rob us of joy): ☞

- CIRCUMSTANCES—Things do not go "our way," you are in a terrible position and you wish desperately for your circumstances to change, the weather is terrible, the traffic is horrible, your job is a constant burden, etc.
- PEOPLE—"All of us have lost our joy because of people: what they are, what they say, and what they do" (Wiersbe).
- THINGS—Our materialistic society robs us of joy each day that we live.
- WORRY—The worst thief of all. Emotional stress chokes our faith and drains our energy.

Note: Paul tells us how to apprehend these four vicious thieves of joy. In essence he says that we must cultivate the proper mind—We must develop the MIND OF JOY! Note the response of Paul to each of these robbers.

Circumstances Chapter One

Joyful victory is possible only when you develop a single mind seeking to serve Christ (Philippians 1:21).

Contrary to the philosophy of this world, live not to enjoy circumstances, but to serve Christ! "He did not look at Christ through his circumstances; rather, he looked at his circumstances through Christ and this changed everything" (Wiersbe).

People Chapter Two

We become aggravated with people (most often) because we are not getting our own way.

The Christian is one who anxiously serves not wanting to be served (Philippians 2:3).

Things Chapter Three

The joyous victory is found only when you look at this world's goods from heaven's viewpoint and drastically change your ambitions for "success" in this life! (Philippians 3:7-8, 13).

Worry Chapter Four

Worry results from the failure to see circumstances, people, and things in spiritual ways (Philippians 4:4, 6a).

Paul lists things which helps the believer to remain confident in God's Will: peace (verses 1-9); power (verses 10-13); and provision (verses 14:23). Worry will disappear with right praying (verses 6-7); right thinking (verse 8); and right living (verse 9)!

Here is a training manual for surviving earthly living! It works. It is free. But it requires you to develop a thinking process that results in self-control in EVERY aspect of life!

The Christian can be a joyful victor in the midst of DIRE CIRCUMSTANCES (chapter 1)

The dire CIRCUMSTANCES threatening the Christian's Joy

1. 🕊️ Job's assessment is correct (Job 14:1, "Man who is born of woman, is short-lived and full of turmoil"). Man is constantly plagued by trouble and strife. As a result of this bombardment, relatively few find true joy and peace!

- a. The Christian's 🕊️ attitude toward the undesirable and uncomfortable circumstances in life gives a good insight to his self-control. 🕊️ "The brook would lose its song if we removed the rocks."
 - b. Once there lived an old woman who was always so cheerful that everyone wondered at her. "But you must have some clouds in your life," said a visitor. "Clouds?" she replied, "why of course; if there were no clouds, from where would the blessed showers come?"
2. If anyone ever had the right to claim special privileges as a "victim" of unfair circumstances it is Paul the Apostle. 🕊️ He was victimized over and over and over...
- a. 2 Corinthians 11:23-29, "(I)n far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches. Who is weak without my being weak? Who is led into sin without my intense concern?"
 - b. And now as he writes Philippians, Paul is wrongly bound in chains and imprisoned (Philippians 1:13-14; Ephesians 6:20, "I am an ambassador in chains").
3. 🕊️ A personal inventory...A difficult question asks, "Are you joyful in your circumstances?" This was the verdict of 🕊️ David after he faced unfair circumstances: "It is good for me that I have been afflicted" (Psalm 119:71).

The directives of INSPIRATION for overcoming adverse circumstances

1. 🕊️ The Lord is in control—"set" (1:16 NASB)
 - a. "Trust in yourself, and you are doomed to disappointment; trust in your friends, and they will die and leave you; trust in money, and you may have it taken from you; trust in reputation, and some slanderous tongue may blast it; but trust in God, and you are never to be confounded in time or eternity." (D. L. Moody)
 - b. κείμαι (keimai) ki'-mahee is a primary verb used to describe to one making a deliberate decision in the placement of an object or person. It can refer to the deliberate placement of a table setting or an appointment to duty. Paul is "put in place for the defense of the gospel" (Blaz, Horst & Gerhard Schneider. *EXEGETICAL DICTIONARY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT*, Vol 2. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Pub. Co., 280).
 - c. Whatever the circumstance we face, we can overcome it by remembering God is in control. God does not bring about the bad circumstances in life (James 1:13). God allows man's free-will to be exercised and that results in man's sin corrupting the world. Sin's corruption is responsible for the dire circumstances in life. But even in those dire circumstances God is in control.

Be encouraged by the fact that even though sin brings dire circumstances, your Almighty God is in control! Genesis 50:20, "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result."

2. 🕊️ The Lord will succeed—"perfect" (1:6)

- a. ἐπιτελέω (epiteleō) ep-ee-tel-eh'-o refers to fulfill completely; to accomplish, do, finish, make perfect, perform.

The linear aspect of the present tense places an accent on the completion of the process to the ultimate "finishing." The stress is on the active execution of energy to completion (Blaz, Vol 2, 42)

- b. Those developing this mind of Christ find peace in the assurance that God's work is being completed in their lives (The song aptly illustrates, "He's still working on me").

This takes determination and a willingness to change as God commands. It is an on-going action that continues as long as you live.

☞ Philippians 3:12-14, "Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."

- c. ☞ Whatever circumstances you face in life, CANNOT prevent God's will from being completed. Be encouraged by the absolute guarantee that God "WILL" complete His plan! Nothing is more powerful than the Almighty God!
- d. Man chooses to disobey God; to cast aside God's commands; to ignore God's fairness. That choice results in circumstances that impact the godly. BUT sin does not make God impotent.

Romans 8:31-39, "What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ... we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

The diligence REQUIRED ☞ if you are to experience joyous victory over dire circumstances attacking your life requires you to display these actions:

1. Thanksgiving (Philippians 1:3).

The thankful heart is not a self-centered heart. Bad circumstances often lead us to turn our vision inward—we think only of how self is being mistreated.

"I didn't sign on for THIS!"

This self-centered look erases the larger vision of all the wonderful blessings we have received and for which we should be thankful. The heart of thanksgiving is not going to allow circumstances to control them.

Be thankful for the fellowship of brethren; for the benevolence of the Almighty God.

The heart of thanksgiving echoes Paul's exclamation "Yes, and I will rejoice" (Philippians 1:18).

When you lack joy because of bad circumstances, make a list of blessings that you have enjoyed that day. This will turn your mind toward thanksgiving!

2. 🕊 Discernment (Philippians 1:10, 19)

The term translated as “discernment” refers to personal judgment. You look at your circumstances and understand that God is in control.

Refocus so you have a clear vision. Do not be blinded by the adverse circumstances that you face. Your vision sees the Almighty God in control.

Viewing bad circumstances in this way keeps you “blameless” and confident in your faith. “I know that this will turn out for my deliverance” (verse 19). Why? “Through” prayers and providence!

“Through” is from *διὰ* (*dia*) which is a primary preposition denoting the channel of an act. Thus, the solution to Paul’s dire circumstance was through the channel of prayer and providence!

3. 🕊 Focus on the mission (Philippians 1:5, 10, 12-18, 20)

Success is possible only when each remembers the simple fact—“Mission is Number One.” Do not get drawn off mission’s point by distracting circumstances. True joy comes when you keep mission focus as priority!

Matthew 16:23, “you are not setting your mind on God’s interests, but man’s.”

4. 🕊 Determination (Philippians 1:20, 27, 28)

You are on a mission and you MUST be tenacious! Do not allow this sinful world or ungodly people pull you off compass! Do not be intimidated! Do not surrender to fear! You are in the heat of battle so do not allow your faith to be paralyzed!

Tenacity is illustrated by Gideon who was “weary yet pursuing” (Judges 8:4).

5. 🕊 Realism (Philippians 1:29-30)

🕊 Life on earth is not easy—it was never promised to be easy or fair. Compromise will not ease the conflict—it only leads to greater anxiety and nervous disorders.

You are in a war and that means suffering and conflict. If you are living a devout life, then you will “suffer for His sake.”

BUT and here is a critical fact of reality, this conflict should not deprive you of joy because you are committed to God and your loyalty to God erases all other loyalties. Do you truly believe that your Master will take care of His servants! If so then your confidence will bring a blessed peace... 🕊

- Psalm 4:8, “In peace I will both lie down and sleep, for You alone, O Lord, make me to dwell in safety.”
- Proverbs 3:24, “When you lie down, you will not be afraid; when you lie down, your sleep will be sweet.”

🕊 Those who fail to accept the reality of conflict and suffering of circumstances and, in vain, try to manipulate the choices and lifestyles of others, will lose their joy. They will live a life full of chaotic anxiety.

Concluding Thoughts...

☞ We live in a world that is dominated by evil. So alluring is this evil that many are deceived into denying Christ and working against Him (1:15-17).

All have a choice in how they react to this world and those who refuse Christ (1:10). This is the crucible of "self-control." Your choice in the "little things" of life has a dramatic impact upon your choice of the "big things" in life.

☞ Sometimes YOUR plans are not God's plans. Paul wanted to go to Rome as a preacher, but he went as a prisoner! God expects His Followers to function in whatever circumstance they find themselves. 1 Corinthians 12:18, *"God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired."*

☞ When you face circumstances in life that seem overwhelming and all surrounding you seems hopeless, remember Paul's helpless and hopeless circumstances,

"(T)here was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me...Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me. And He has said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.' Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore, I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong." (2 Corinthians 12:7-10)

At the time of his serious sickness and operation in August, 1893, Grover Cleveland wrote: "I have learned how weak the strongest man is under God's decrees; and I see in a new light the necessity of doing my allotted work in the full apprehension of the coming night." (See Isaiah 38:16)

If the Christian is to have a joyous victory it ☞ results from an optimism that governs with the "mind of joy." This gives the Christian an optimistic outlook that trusts God and sees good things in every situation.

The day laborer was of a cheerful disposition that naturally inclined to seek out the good in every situation. He was a genuine optimist. Thus, after tramping the three miles from home to begin the day's work on the ditch, he discovered that he had been careless, and explained to a fellow laborer: "I've gone and done it now! I left my lunch at home." Then, suddenly he beamed happily, as he added: "And it's a good thing I did, for the matter of that, because I left my teeth at home, too."