

"The Epistle of Joy"

When life is filled with troubles and uncertainty, how do you find joy? Hello, I'm Phil Sanders, and this is a Bible study "In Search of the Lord's Way." Today we're examining the path to true joy.

Welcome to In SEARCH of the Lord's Way! We're here to search the Scriptures for God's will. When all of life seems to be going the wrong way, we need to stop and see the larger picture of what God has provided for us. There's always a reason to give thanks and to rejoice for the Christian. The Christian life shown to us in Scripture opens the door to contentment and abundant reasons for hope and joy. Now if you're torn up inside, look up to the One who can help you. Thanks for taking time with us today. We'd love to hear from you and want to be a part of your life each week.

Suppose you had been in jail for two years in Caesarea, had slowly been shipped across the Mediterranean Sea enduring storms and a shipwreck, and had come to Rome where you spent two years in a rented house, constantly chained between two guards, and awaiting your trial before Caesar, Nero. You didn't know whether you would live or die. While you're there, a church you loved remembered you, collected funds, and once again sent gifts to supply all your needs. With Timothy at your side, you wrote with joy to thank and encourage them.

Because you wanted them to realize your unjust situation would turn out for the best, because God was with you. You wanted them to know that your chains didn't keep you from your task of winning souls to Christ. You wanted them to see the tremendous blessing of being a Christian and to encourage them to stand firm in their faith. You wanted them to realize that heaven awaits them, and you didn't want them to miss this eternal blessing of joy and peace. And I too don't want anyone to miss the joy and peace that heaven provides.

Now this is an important study on true joy; and we offer it free! If you'd like a printed copy and you live in the United States, mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or, you can call our toll-free telephone number. That number is 1-800-321-8633. We also have free materials on our website at www.searchtv.org. and you can also see us on YouTube.

We'll now worship in song. We'll read from Philippians 4:4 to 9, and explore the inspired path to true joy from the epistle of joy.

Our reading today comes Philippians chapter 4 verses 4 to 9.

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things. The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

Oh what a wonderful bit of advice for joy, true joy. Let's pray together. Father we're thankful that You provide for all of our spiritual needs including peace and joy. Help us to follow Your will. To love You always and to serve You. In Jesus name, Amen.

While Paul was living in chains in Rome, a church he loved remembered him, collected funds, and sent gifts to supply all his needs. With Timothy at his side, he wrote with joy to thank and to encourage them. He wanted them to have the same joy that he had. And he expressed his love in Philippians 1:3 to 8. He said, "I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all, in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now. For I am confident of this very thing, (he says) that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus. For it is only right for me to feel this way about you all, because I have you in my heart, since both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers of grace with me. For God is my witness, how I long for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus."

Then Paul prayed, "And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ; having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God" (Verses 9-11).

Now he said his while he had chains on. He said his chains didn't keep him from preaching the gospel. He said, "Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel, so that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else, and that most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear" (that's verses 12 to 14).

Now even those people who envied him, those opposed him, and caused him trouble, he could rejoice could rejoice about them. He said in verses 15 to 18 of chapter 1, "Some, to be sure, are preaching Christ even from envy and strife, but some also from good will; the latter do it out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel; the former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition rather than from pure motives, thinking to cause me distress in my imprisonment. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this (he says) I rejoice."

He rejoiced that Christ is exalted, even though he was in prison and may die. He said in verses 19 to 20 of Philippians 1, "Yes, and I will rejoice, for I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayers and the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, according to my earnest expectation and hope, that I will not be put to shame in anything, but that with all boldness, Christ will even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death."

Paul expects to live and work but he realizes being with Christ is "very much better." He said in some verses Philippians 1:21 to 25, he says, "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. But if I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose. (he says) But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better; (and) yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake. (now) Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith, so that your proud confidence in me may abound in Christ Jesus through my coming to you again."

Paul encouraged the Philippians in verses 27 to 30, he said, "Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel; in no way alarmed by your opponents—which is a sign of destruction for them, but of salvation for you, and that too, from God. For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but

also to suffer for His sake, experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear to be in me.”

There were some personal conflicts in Philippi, and Paul wanted them to remain unified. He wrote in chapter 2 verses 1 to 4, “Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.”

So he pointed to their need to imitate the mind of Christ. So he wrote in Philippians 2:5 to 8, “Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”

God saw Christ’s obedience and blessed Him. Verses 9 to 11 say, “For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

How then should they act? Paul explains, “Do all things without grumbling or disputing; so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I will have reason to glory because I did not run in vain nor toil in vain. But even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with you all. You too, I urge you, rejoice in the same way and share your joy with me.” How we live today affects where we will spend eternity.

Paul then begins chapter three, “Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things again is no trouble to me, and it is a safeguard for you.” Paul then describes his past accomplishments in order to show there’s something more valuable. And so he said in chapter 3 verses 4 to 6, that “If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more: circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless.”

But what Paul had before he knew Christ didn’t compare with what he had in Christ. He wrote in verse 7 to 11, “But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. (and) More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.”

Paul was determined to follow the Lord and to reach for the prize. He said in verses 12 to 16, “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. (then he said) Let us

therefore, as many as are perfect, (that is mature) have this attitude; and if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you; however, (he says) let us keep living by that same standard to which we have attained.”

Now he says all this to say to the church at Philippi in verses 17 to 19, “Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern (that) you have in us. For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things.” I tell you my friends, it matters how we live. We’re citizens of heaven and followers of the Lord Jesus, not followers of Satan or our desires.

He says in Philippians 3:20 to chapter 4 verse 1. He says, “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state (the one we have right now) into conformity with the body of His glory, (we’re gonna have a glorified body like His and He’ll do this) by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself. Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and (my) crown, in this way stand firm in the Lord, my beloved.”

In chapter four, Paul present the path of true joy and peace. And as we read a moment ago he wrote in Philippians 4:4 to 9, “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, (he says) whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things. The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.”

Now he assures the Philippians that God will care for them. He wrote in 4:11 to 13, “I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.” Verse 19 he reassures them and says, “And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.” Yes God cares for His people. He will be with them, bless them and give them His promises. Would you pray with me. Father we’re thankful for the reassurance of the book of Philippians the epistle of joy. And Father help us to follow those things that are taught there. To stand firm in our faith and to set our minds to be like Jesus and to do what is right. Father we pray that You will forgive our weaknesses and help to do Your will. In Jesus name, Amen.

The apostle Paul wrote in Philippians 3:20 to 4:1, “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself. Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and crown, in this way stand firm in the Lord, my beloved.”

Many of the Roman soldiers who retired in the first century were given citizenship and land near the city of Philippi. These soldiers took great pride in their Roman citizenship. And Paul too was a Roman citizen, but he reminded them that they were citizens of heaven. There’s more than this life, and none of us is destined to live on this earth forever. I don’t want anyone to miss being a citizen of heaven and having an eternal home with the Father and the Lord.

Now to become a citizen of heaven, you must first become a citizen in the kingdom of God in this life. To do that you must believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God and that He's Lord. Treat Him as Lord by turning from sin in your behavior and your attitudes; do what is right. You must confess Jesus Christ is the Son of God and be baptized into Christ. Now baptism is an immersion in water; that's what the word baptism means. That's what people who became Christians did in the book of Acts. They didn't sprinkle water on infants. When they were immersed in water, they received the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38 and 22:16). Now follow the biblical example not some human tradition.

We pray that today's study about the path to true joy in the epistle of joy, the book of Philippians, has helped you see God's provision for you. If you live in the United States and you want a free printed copy of this message, mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or, you can call the Search office toll-free at 1-800-321-8633. Now there's also a schedule of our programs and a map with the location of churches that are in your area at www.searchtv.org. You can also watch SEARCH anytime on YouTube! Now subscribe to our channel, "SearchTVMinistry." And be sure to like the programs you watch; this helps spread the program. We also offer free Bible Correspondence courses. Don't worry, we're not asking for money. We're here to help you draw close to God.

We do ask that you focus your heart on God by worshiping at church. Everybody needs a church family. And I realize that some of you for health reasons can't come to church, but some can and please do. There's probably a church of Christ near you. And if you're looking for a healthy, Biblical church home, we'll gladly help you find one. We'll be back next week. So keep searching God's Word. And God bless you and we love you from all of us at In Search of the Lord's Way.