

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

STUDY THREE

Joy! Joy! Joy!

Selections from Philippians

I'm not going to wait for circumstances to get pleasant before I have joy. Paul didn't let his circumstances determine his joy.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

HAVE you noticed how little happiness there is in the world? Too many harried folks rush through life with scowls on their faces, bothered by anyone who gets in their way and complaining about every inconvenience. Where are the smiles? Where's the joy?

Pastor Chuck Swindoll puts his finger on the reason for joy's short supply:

It's because most people think that happiness is something that happens to them rather than something they deliberately and diligently pursue. Circumstances seldom generate smiles and laughter. *Joy comes to those who determine to pursue it in spite of their circumstances.*¹

If we're waiting for a wind of favor to bring us happiness, we'll be waiting a long time. We can't expect joy to come to us. We must *pursue* it . . . but where? Is it out there?

In L. Frank Baum's classic tale, *The Wizard of Oz*, Dorothy discovered where to find joy, and it wasn't somewhere over the rainbow. Even the wonderful delights of Oz didn't satisfy her heart's deepest longing. No, we find happiness right where we are, and *it's been there all along*. That's the irony.

The pursuit of happiness leads us to what we already have—the joy that the Holy Spirit, who is always with us, offers. We can take hold of His spiritual fruit whenever we want it, regardless of our circumstances. We can choose His joy today, which is a truth the apostle Paul helps us discover in the joy-filled book of Philippians.



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PREPARE YOUR HEART

Are you trudging through hard times? “The joy of the LORD is your strength!” (Nehemiah 8:10). Ask the Lord to strengthen your spirit with joy as you study His Word.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

If circumstances dictated joy, the apostle Paul had plenty of reasons to be miserable. When he wrote Philippians, he was under house arrest in Rome. A bit earlier in Jerusalem, some Jewish leaders had just maliciously accused Paul of “stirring up riots” and “trying to desecrate the Temple” (Acts 24:5–6). They secretly plotted to kill him, but Paul narrowly escaped and was taken under Roman guard to Caesarea. For two years, he was detained in Caesarea before being sent to Rome, where he would wait two more years to stand before Caesar.

For a missionary who spent his life on the go, Paul must have felt like a caged bird. To add to his ordeal, he was chained to a Roman soldier. And yet, Paul’s letter to the Philippians bore no scratch marks of a man clawing at his conditions. Instead, Paul embraced the opportunity. He wrote:

Everything that has happened to me here has helped to spread the Good News. For everyone here, including the whole palace guard, knows that I am in chains because of Christ. And because of my imprisonment, most of the believers here have gained confidence and boldly speak God’s message without fear. (Philippians 1:12–14)

Seeing the gospel spread caused his spirit to soar. *Paul chose joy by looking for God at work in his circumstances.* That’s the first principle to pursuing joy. Let’s search for other joy principles that Paul sprinkled throughout Philippians.



Observation: Reasons for Joy in Philippians

Observation is the first step in *Searching the Scriptures* to find treasures of God’s wisdom.² As you read the verses to answer the following questions, notice recurring concepts and key words that convey the principles Paul was teaching.

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Paul repeated the words *joy* and *rejoice* sixteen times in Philippians (*Philippians 1:4, 18, 25; 2:2, 17–18, 28–29; 3:1; 4:1, 4, 10*)—sometimes more than once in a single verse. “I rejoice. And I will continue to rejoice,” wrote Paul, exulting over the message of Christ being preached during his confinement (1:18). What else kindled joy in Paul’s heart? Let’s find out.

What did Paul rejoice in, according to *1:3–4*?

What positive aspects of his relationship with his Philippian friends did Paul recount in *1:5–8*?

Joy flows freely when fellow believers do what, according to *2:2*?

What motivated Paul in the face of death, according to *2:16–18*?

Why were Paul and the Philippians worried, and how did their concerns give way to joy in *2:25–29*?

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What commands did Paul give in *Philippians 3:1; 4:4–7*? What's the connection to joy?

So, what prompted joy in Paul despite his circumstances?

1. Shared purpose
2. Love and unity
3. Sacrificial service
4. Relief from worry
5. Focus on Jesus

Paul wrote Philippians under house arrest with a Roman soldier sitting next to him . . . and yet, not once did Paul complain. He wrote to the Philippian believers: “God is at work. Let me tell you why I’m so excited!”
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Choose Joy

Interpretation seeks the meaning that Paul intended his readers to understand *in their situation*. The Philippians were among the first converts in Macedonia after Paul crossed the Aegean Sea from Asia to Europe on his second missionary journey. Find Troas and Philippi on this map at insight.org: “*Paul’s Missionary Journeys*.”

In the Roman colony of Philippi, any friction between Jews and Romans sparked a firestorm. When Paul cast out a demon from a fortune-telling slave girl, her masters stirred up a mob by shouting, “The whole city is in an uproar because of these Jews” (Acts 16:20).

City officials had Paul and Silas severely beaten and thrown into a dungeon. Bruised and bleeding with their feet clamped in stocks, Paul and Silas could have cursed their plight and blamed God for leading them to this miserable place. Instead, they chose joy. How, according to *Acts 16:25*?

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Read the surprising way God worked through their troubles to grow the church in [Acts 16:26–40](#). What encouragement do you think Paul and Silas gave the believers before departing?

Paul wrote Philippians years later when, once again, he was under arrest in Rome. You can almost hear Paul’s voice still singing God’s praise from prison as he wrote the following lines:

- “Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice” (Philippians 1:18 NASB).
- “I will remain alive . . . to help all of you grow and experience the joy of your faith” (1:25).
- “I will rejoice even if I lose my life . . . I want all of you to share that joy” (2:17).
- “Whatever happens . . . rejoice in the Lord” (3:1).
- “Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again—rejoice!” (4:4).

What is God teaching you about joy through Paul? Use the space below to write a principle or two about choosing joy in any situation.

The Romans beat Paul and tossed him into a dungeon to stop him from preaching . . . but they couldn’t silence his heart from singing. Even iron bars can’t keep joy from bursting loose.

Joy has every reason to thrive and survive even though our circumstances are brutal. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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Correlation: Jesus and Joy

In the next phase of *Searching the Scriptures*, we correlate the theme in our passage with other passages to find corresponding and complementary principles. How did Jesus endure His suffering, according to [Hebrews 12:2–3](#)?

Paul viewed his suffering as a way to “suffer with [Christ]” and share “in his death” (Philippians 3:10). For Paul, the link to Christ’s cross was a link to Christ’s joy. What did Jesus tell His followers to do and what would He give them, according to [John 15:9–11](#)?

What links you to Christ’s joy right now?



Application: Finding Joy Inside

The joy of the Lord was Paul’s strength in every situation, especially in prison. Paul passed his legacy of joy from Christ through the early Christians to us. The key to rejoicing in any circumstance is to focus your thoughts on the *positives* that Paul focused on.

Ponder the following questions based on Philippians, and then select one or two to answer in the space below.

In my current circumstance . . .

1. How is God at work?
2. How am I growing closer to other believers through a shared sense of purpose?

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3. How is my love and unity with others deepening?
4. What sacrifices in my service to the Lord are linking me to Him and His suffering?
5. How can I find relief from worry by giving my concerns to the Lord?
6. How might I focus more directly on Jesus?

How do these positive, God-focused thoughts spark joy in your heart?

Joy is a fruit of the Spirit that is always available to you. Your freedom to choose joy is the one freedom no one can take away. Taste a sip of joy today . . . and sing!



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, today, I welcome joy. I ask for a joy transfer from the heart of Jesus directly into my heart. In the power of the Holy Spirit, I choose to receive Your joy, and it doesn't matter whether my circumstances improve. My storm may intensify, but I am safe within Your love and content with the love of Jesus warming my soul. In His name, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Laugh Again* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1992), 49–50, emphasis added.
2. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page, "[How Does Pastor Chuck Swindoll Study the Bible?](#)"

For the 2024 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study was developed by Bryce Klabunde, vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages. Copyright © 2023, 2024 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide. Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.

