



Sometimes we think that God is absent during our difficult circumstances. Paul was “in chains” in a Roman prison for preaching the Gospel, yet he wrote about how much joy he had! How can someone in prison have such joy? Answer: because his joy was in Jesus and he understood that, regardless of his circumstances, God was accomplishing His divine purposes. That is why Paul would write in Philippians 1:13, “my chains are in Christ.” In this study, we learn how we can also have joy amid difficult circumstances when we have the right eternal perspective.

1. Context

- a. Philippians is a book about joy.
 - i. “Joy” or some form of the word is mentioned 14 times in 4 chapters.
 1. Proportionally, joy is mentioned more in Philippians than in any other book of the Bible.
 - ii. Philippians teaches that Believers have reasons to rejoice.
 1. **Philippians 1:6** – God will finish what He began in us.

2. **Philippians 1:12–18** – “[12] But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel, [13] so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ; [14] and most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear. [15] Some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife, and some also from goodwill: [16] The former preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my chains; [17] but the latter out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel. [18] What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice.”

3. A resilient joy

- a. Paul rejoiced despite his trials.
 - i. Paul was arrested in Jerusalem.
 1. Paul was arrested not for committing a crime, but for preaching the Gospel.
 - ii. Paul was transported to Caesarea.
 - iii. Paul appealed to Caesar.
 1. Paul grew weary of the corrupt officials not giving him a real trial, so he appealed to Caesar.

2. Paul could appeal to Caesar because of his Roman citizenship.
- iv. Paul was transported to Rome, Italy, to await trial.
 1. Paul mentions his chains three times in the passage (verses 13–14, 16).
 2. **DISCUSS:** Are you willing to share the Gospel when it costs you? How are you sharing the Gospel now?
- v. Despite all this, Paul mentions his “joy” twice in verse 18.

b. Paul encouraged the Philippians to rejoice and not be distressed for him.

- i. Paul loved the Philippian Believers.
 1. Paul wrote Philippians because of his care for the church he had founded 10 years prior in Philippi, Greece.
 2. **Philippians 1:8** – *“God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ.”*
 3. **DISCUSS:** Rather than turn inwards during his trials, Paul concerned himself with the spiritual and emotional health of others. What does that tell us about the nature of Biblical love (**1 Corinthians 13:4–5**)?
- ii. The Philippians returned Paul’s love and worried for him (verse 12).
 1. In 62 A.D., there was isolated persecution of Christians. Paul was caught up in this persecution.
 2. But in 64 A.D., persecution would worsen under Nero.
 - a. Nero blamed Christians for the great fire of Rome.
 - b. Nero introduced state-sanctioned persecution to the Roman Empire, leading to the martyrdom of thousands.
 - c. Christians were arrested, tortured, crucified, torn apart by dogs, and set on fire.
 3. Paul would be released from Roman imprisonment, only to be imprisoned again in 67 A.D.
 4. This last prison stay would end with Paul being beheaded.
 5. But while he lived, Paul shared the Gospel and comforted the Philippians with the way God was using his chains to spread the Good News of Jesus.
- iii. Paul saw an opportunity in his bonds.
 1. **Philippians 1:12–13** – *“[12] But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel, [13] so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ.”*
 - a. Paul saw his chains as an opportunity to share the Gospel with the Romans.

- b. In the first century, the only way to hear news would be for people to share it in person.
 - c. Through Paul's imprisonment, Paul was able to share the Gospel in the palace.
 - d. Paul realized God had orchestrated things to fit His good purposes.
- 2. Paul was excited that his chains emboldened others to preach the Gospel.
 - a. **Philippians 1:14** – Some brothers became “*much more bold to speak the word without fear*” after Paul was imprisoned.
 - b. **Philippians 1:15** – Others were emboldened to share the Gospel “*from envy and strife*.”
 - c. Not everyone who shared the Gospel did so with good motives. Paul rejoiced to see the Gospel spread regardless (verse 18).
 - d. **DISCUSS:** When has another Believer’s bold faith emboldened you? What was the result?
 - e. **DISCUSS:** How can we live lives worthy of Christ that can also embolden others to share their faith?
- c. Paul could rejoice because his chains were “*in Christ*” (verse 13).
 - i. Paul had a kingdom mindset.
 - 1. Paul trusted God to accomplish His will in all circumstances.
 - 2. Paul’s joy was in Jesus, not his circumstances.
 - 3. Paul saw his chains as another way to share the Gospel that frees souls from the kingdom of darkness.
 - 4. **DISCUSS:** How has trust in God completely changed your response to different circumstances?
 - ii. Paul did not have a comfort-Christianity view.
 - 1. Paul submitted to God’s purpose for his life, even when he faced difficult circumstances.
 - 2. Paul’s disposition was that of a servant who trusted his Lord to arrange every circumstance he faced for God’s glory.
 - 3. **Philippians 4:11–13** – “[11] *Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: [12] I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.* [13] *I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.*”

4. **DISCUSS:** When was a time you experienced God empowering you to “*do all things through Christ*”? How has that helped you rest in the Lord in the trials that followed?

4. A God-given mission
 - a. God gave Paul a mission.
 - i. Preaching in Rome was not part of Paul’s plan, but it was part of God’s plan for Paul.
 1. Paul faced a riot in Jerusalem two years before his Roman imprisonment.
 2. The Romans brought Paul to the barracks for his safety.
 3. In the barracks, God appeared to Paul with a promise: that Paul would share the Gospel with those in Rome.
 4. **Acts 23:11** – *“The following night the Lord stood by him and said, ‘Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome.”*
 - ii. But God did not specify how He would bring Paul to Rome.
 1. God knows we cannot always handle what the future holds, and so He tells us what we need to know when we need to know it.
 2. However, God always gives us the grace we need for each moment.
 3. **DISCUSS:** When did God answer your prayers or fulfill a promise He had made to you in an unexpected way? How did that affect your understanding of God?
 - b. Paul was centered because he viewed his circumstances in light of eternity.
 - i. **Romans 8:18** – *“I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.”*
 - ii. **Romans 8:28** – *“We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.”*
 - iii. **2 Corinthians 4:17-18** – *“[17] For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, [18] while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.”*
 1. **DISCUSS:** How do these verses help you fix your gaze on heaven? What verse do you hold onto when trials come?
 - c. God will use our “*chains*” for His divine purposes.
 - i. **Philippians 1:13** – *“It has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ.”*

1. **DISCUSS:** Is your faith evident to those around you? Why or why not?
- ii. **Philippians 4:22** – *“All the saints greet you, but especially those who are of Caesar’s household.”*
 1. Some of those in Caesar’s household were saved.
 2. God can bring good out of difficult circumstances. We must trust our Father.

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New King James (NKJV)