



## Philippians: God of Joy

**Memory Verse:** Philippians 4:4, "Rejoice in the Lord always, again I say, Rejoice!"

### Background

Philippians is the 50th book of the Bible and the eleventh book of the New Testament. Paul wrote this letter to the church in Philippi. The ministry at Philippi marked Paul's entrance into Macedonia, which came about as a result of a vision he had in the city of Troas (Acts 16:8-12). Paul first visited Philippi on his second missionary journey, founding the church in about 51 AD. He only briefly visited the city again on his third missionary journey. There were many key converts coming from this city, including Lydia and the Philippian Jailor, converted after the earthquake that miraculously freed Paul and Silas (Acts 16:22-24). Philippi was Paul's first church in Europe, and it was most likely lead by Luke and perhaps was even his home land.

Some marvel at the irony that this church was started in a prison and the letter was written from a prison, as Paul wrote this letter in captivity in Rome, around 61 AD. It was the last of the four letters written by Paul in prison. However, a note of triumphant joy in Christ permeates this letter, despite the apostle's severe testing. Unlike the other prison epistles, which were written in response to crisis, Philippians carries a tone of encouragement and joy. Instead, he wrote to express his appreciation and affection for the Philippian believers. More than any other church, the believers in Philippi offered Paul material support for his ministry (2 Corinthians 8:11; Philippians 4:15-18).

### The Short Story

By centering our life around Christ, we can experience true joy, no matter our circumstances.

### What's the Big Idea?

Paul's joy at the mere thought of the Philippian church is undeniable in the letter, and it's that same joy that he wanted the recipients to possess as well. The secret to Paul's confident joy was his Christ centered life. Paul's whole life was dedicated to living Christ, as is seen in Philippians 1:21, "To live is Christ, to die is gain." Christ is our life, our example, our goal, and our sufficiency.

To lead the Philippians to this truth, Paul took them directly to Jesus, teaching them that a community of believers living in harmony with one another comes only through mutual humility modeled after the Savior. Paul wrote that he poured out his life as an offering for the sake of Christ (2:17), leading Paul to find great joy and contentment in Christ's service. His letter to the Philippians showed them that by centering their lives on Christ, they, too, might live in true joy. If indeed their lives were centered on Christ then their actions would demonstrate this through unity, "being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose." (2:2)

### So What? Why is this book so important? What was God's purpose for the book?

Philippians is a letter of great encouragement. At the center of all this encouragement, rejoicing, joy and hope is Christ. He is the author and finisher of our faith (Hebrews 12:2). "For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus." With this knowledge believers can have joy in every circumstance. In the tension of this world we can rejoice whether we live or die.

In living for Christ, Paul encourages us to "work out your salvation with fear and trembling" (2:12), living unselfish lives, with unity and care for one another, just as Christ did, "who, though 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...He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on the cross." (2:6-8) If this was Christ's model, how much more are we now willing to do the same for His names sake, and all this is accomplished in the power of Christ. For we can say as Paul did, that, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." (4:13)

## Teaching Text

**Philippians 4:4** “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

## Sermon-Based Discussion Questions

- Why did Paul admonish the Philippians to really press into “rejoicing”? Why is it valuable to us?
- What is the focus of the Christians’ joy? How do we receive it? How do we sustain it?
- Why is joy contagious? According to Act 2:42-47 it impacted society through the church. Why?
- Who is the one that fills you with joy? How does this happen? Can joy be increased? How?
- Look up scriptures with the word joy in your concordance. And share them in your group.

## Practical Application

- What is the difference between happiness and joy? What brings joy and a smile to your face? Why?
- What robs you of joy & erodes your outlook on life? What can you do to boost the joy in your life?
- Where have you felt let down by life and transferred that to God? How did it impact the sense of joy in your life? Where do you need a joy infusion in your life? What are you willing to do to receive it?
- List three things that you are grateful for that have come as a result of God's activity on your behalf?

## Hitting the Highpoints

- 1:21 “For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. “
- 2:14-15 “Do everything without grumbling or arguing, then you will become blameless and pure...”
- 3:14 “I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward...”
- 4:7 “And the peace of God.....will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”
- 4:11 “..for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. “

## Bonus Feature– Joy!

“Joy, unmitigated, untrammelled joy, is--or at least should be--the distinctive mark of the believer in Christ Jesus. The wearing of black and the long face, which so often came to typify some later expressions of Christian piety, are totally foreign to Paul's version; Paul the theologian of grace is equally the theologian of joy. Christian joy does not come and go with one's circumstances; rather it is predicated altogether on one's relationship with the Lord and is thus an abiding, deeply spiritual quality of life. It finds expression in ‘rejoicing,’ which is an imperative, not an option. With its concentration *in the Lord*, rejoicing is *always* to mark individual and corporate life...” Excerpted from IVP Commentaries.

## Personal Takeaways and Notes