



Joy in Suffering (Philippians 1:1-30)

Identify the area in your life where you are experiencing despair, and ask three questions. First, are you inward focused? Second, are you going through it alone? Third, are you allowing God to use your despair for ministry to others? Your answers are most likely, “Yes,” “Yes,” and “No.” In the first eleven verses of Philippians, Paul introduced a paradigm shift from despair to joy amidst suffering, the theme of his letter to the church that he helped found in Philippi. That’s right; it is possible to experience joy, to take pleasure in Christ, even when we suffer. The opposite of joy is despair, (anxiety or sorrow), our typical response to trials.

Joy Begins with Humility

First, Paul demonstrated that *joy begins with humility* (Philippians 1:1-2). Notice that Paul referred to himself as a servant of Christ. Paul communicated the countercultural theme that he was a servant...by choice. Consequently, any suffering was seen through the eyes of a servant, eyes that refocused from inward to outward.

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Continually recite, “I’m a servant of Christ.” Bend the knees of your heart to Him, and watch your despair begin to be transformed into joy.

Joy Grows in Community

Second, Paul communicated that *joy grows in community* (Philippians 1:3-8). Paul’s reason for joy was the church’s partnership for the gospel (1:4-5). This meant that they had surrendered all of their resources for the cause of Christ. Joy was perpetuated by Paul’s confidence that God, who began a good work (salvation) in the church, would complete it.

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Rather than going it alone, share your burdens with another person and discover how they can be divided. At the same time, communicate your joys and watch them be multiplied.

Joy Prays for Ministry

Third, Paul taught that *joy prays for ministry* (Philippians 1:9-11). Paul’s prayer request was that love would abound more and more through experience and intimacy so that the church would be *sincere*, literally judged by the light. *Sincere* meant that pottery or marble was the same all the way through. Potters and marble cutters would cover flaws with wax. The only way that their pieces were proven either genuine or full of wax was to be held to the light. When we pray for ministry, that God will use our suffering to draw others to Him, our despair is transformed into joy. Consequently, His light shines through our lives so that we reflect Christ’s image.

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Pray that God will use your suffering to draw others to Him. Exchange your despair for joy as you reflect Christ's image. He can use you to save a life from suicide, restore another for eternity, free a grudge-holder from the prison of withholding forgiveness, or further someone's journey to full surrender. Rejoice! He who began a good work will complete it.

Chains of Suffering

What chains are holding you back from joy? Typically, the answer is one that deals with our personal discomfort rather than Paul's chains referenced in Philippians. Paul was imprisoned for advancing the kingdom of Christ. Our chains are often a result of advancing our own kingdoms. Paul's paradigm shift links our circumstances with Christ in order to find joy amidst suffering. We are to link our passion, perspective, and priorities with Christ (Philippians 1:12-30). If any of these three links in our chain are broken, then we will not be able to experience chains of joy.

Link Our Passion with Christ

First, we *link our passion with Christ* (Philippians 1:12-18a). Paul was chained to a Roman soldier for his passion for Christ. As a result of Paul's passion, the gospel advanced through the entire palace guard. Passion flows from the heart.

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What gets you up in the morning? What energizes you? What makes you cry? The answers to these three questions reveal your passion. Link your heart with Christ to experience joy amidst suffering.

Link Our Perspective with Christ

Second, we *link our perspective* with Christ (Philippians 1:18b-26). Whereas, passion is a matter of the heart, perspective is a focus of the eyes. Paul saw every opportunity as one to advance Christ's kingdom. Regardless of the circumstances, Paul exalted Christ.

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What is your perspective of your chains? Find a friend to pray with you to have Paul's perspective. Allow the Holy Spirit to refocus your eyes.

Link Our Priorities with Christ

Third, we *link our priorities* with Christ (Philippians 1:27-30). Priorities are what we do first and foremost. They are pictured in the direction of our feet. Paul challenged the church at Philippi to prioritize Christ by walking worthy of the gospel. *Worthy* was the same Greek word for scales, *axios*. It meant that their walk would be balanced with Christ.

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Go first and most often where you can advance the kingdom of Christ. It might be a walk across the office to a co-worker far from God, a walk across the room to a spouse to reconcile your relationship, a walk across the street to serve someone in need.

Conclusion

As we humble our hearts as servants of Christ, sharing our burdens, and praying that God will use them for the advancement of His kingdom, our despair will be transformed into joy. Our passion determines our perspective, which determines our priorities. When we link our hearts with Christ, we can link our eyes with Christ, so that our feet will walk with Christ. Our chains of suffering will be transformed into chains of joy.