

# Joy in living for Jesus

Lesson #1 of the series, "Joy"

## 1. Paul prayed with joy for the people of Philippi.

*Note:* Joy is great delight or happiness that comes from knowing that God is in control of every detail of our lives. Such joy is independent of our circumstances.

"This letter is from Paul and Timothy, slaves of Christ Jesus. I am writing to all of God's holy people in Philippi who belong to Christ Jesus, including the elders and deacons. May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace. Every time I think of you, I give thanks to my God. Whenever I pray, I make my requests for all of you with joy...." -Philippians 1:1-4 (NLT)

a. The Philippians were Paul's partners in spreading the Good News about Jesus.

"...for you have been my partners in spreading the Good News about Christ from the time you first heard it until now." -Philippians 1:5 (NLT)

*Life Application:* God wants all of us to be partners in spreading the Good News about Jesus.

"Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit." -Matthew 28:19 (NLT)

*Note:* God uses ordinary people to spread the Gospel. "The members of the council were amazed when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, for they could see that they were ordinary men with no special training in the Scriptures. They also recognized them as men who had been with Jesus."  
- Acts 4:13 (NLT)

b. The Philippians were works in progress.

"And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns. So it is right that I should feel as I do about all of you, for you have a special place in my heart. You share with me the special favor of God, both in my imprisonment and in defending and confirming the truth of the Good News. God knows how much I love you and long for you with the tender compassion of Christ Jesus. I pray that your love will overflow more and more, and that you will keep on growing in knowledge and understanding. For I want you to understand what really matters, so that you may live pure and blameless lives until the day of Christ's return. May you always be filled with the fruit of your salvation—the righteous character produced in your life by Jesus Christ—for this will bring much glory and praise to God." -Philippians 1:6-11 (NLT)

*Life Application:* God wants all of us to keep growing and maturing in our faith.

"Let your roots grow down into him, and let your lives be built on him. Then your faith will grow strong in the truth you were taught, and you will overflow with thankfulness." -Colossians 2:7 (NLT)

## 2. Paul rejoiced that the Good News was being preached regardless of his circumstances.

"I want you to know, my dear brothers and sisters, that 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. It's true that some are preaching out of jealousy and rivalry. But others preach about Christ with pure motives. They preach because they love me, for they know I have been appointed to defend the Good News. Those others do not have pure motives as they preach about Christ. They preach with selfish ambition, not sincerely, intending to make my chains more painful to me. But that doesn't matter. Whether their motives are false or genuine, the message about Christ is being preached either way, so I rejoice. And I will continue to rejoice." -Philippians 1:12-18 (NLT)

*Life Application:* It's not about me!

"It is the bridegroom who marries the bride, and the best man is simply glad to stand with him and hear his vows. Therefore, I am filled with joy at his success. He must become greater and greater, and I must become less and less." -John 3:29-30 (NLT)

### 3. Paul lived for Jesus.

"I trust that my life will bring honor to Christ, whether I live or die. For to me, living means living for Christ, and dying is even better. But if I live, I can do more fruitful work for Christ. So I really don't know which is better. I'm torn between two desires: I long to go and be with Christ, which would be far better for me. But for your sakes, it is better that I continue to live. Knowing this, I am convinced that I will remain alive so I can continue to help all of you grow and experience the joy of your faith." -Philippians 1:20-25 (NLT)

*Life Application:* We do not need to fear death.

"But thank God! He gives us victory over sin and death through our Lord Jesus Christ."

-1 Corinthians 15:57 (NLT)

### 4. We must live for Jesus.

#### a. People who live for Jesus stick together.

"Above all, you must live as citizens of heaven, conducting yourselves in a manner worthy of the Good News about Christ. Then, whether I come and see you again or only hear about you, I will know that you are standing side by side, fighting together for the faith, which is the Good News. Don't be intimidated in any way by your enemies. This will be a sign to them that they are going to be destroyed, but that you are going to be saved, even by God himself." -Philippians 1:27-28 (NLT)

#### b. People who live for Jesus can view suffering for Jesus as a privilege.

"For you have been given not only the privilege of trusting in Christ but also the privilege of suffering for him. We are in this struggle together. You have seen my struggle in the past, and you know that I am still in the midst of it." -Philippians 1:29-30 (NLT)

"The jailer... put them into the inner dungeon and clamped their feet in the stocks. Around midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening. Suddenly, there was a massive earthquake, and the prison was shaken to its foundations. All the doors immediately flew open, and the chains of every prisoner fell off!" -Acts 16:22-26 (NLT)

"Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you." -Matthew 5:11-12 (NIV)

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## Connect Group Questions

To prepare for this week's meeting, take some time to focus on the following questions and write out a few brief answers. Be prepared to share them with your group.

### My Story

1. Looking back at your notes from this week's teaching on joy in living for Jesus was there anything that particularly caught your attention, challenged or confused you?
2. How have you grown spiritually over the past year? ...over the past five years? What has helped you grow? What has held you back?
3. What brings you joy? What robs you of joy? Would others describe you as a joyful person? Why? Why not?
4. Have you ever been ridiculed or laughed at because of your religious beliefs? If so, what happened? How did you handle it?

### Going Deeper

1. What do the following passages teach us about suffering for Jesus?
  - Matthew 5:11-12
  - Acts 16:33
  - Acts 5:40-42
  - Romans 5:3-4
  - Romans 8:18
2. What do the following passages say about the importance of spiritual growth?
  - Colossians 2:7
  - 1 Corinthians 3:1-3
  - Ephesians 4:11-16
  - Hebrews 6:1-2
  - Philippians 1:6
3. Read Acts 16. How did the Church in Philippi begin? Why were Paul and Silas thrown in jail? Why were they singing in the dungeon? What happened as a result?

### Life Application

1. Read John 3:29-30 & Philippians 1:21-25. Then discuss the following prayer written by John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist Church, in 1755.  
"I am no longer my own, but thine. Put me to what thou wilt, rank me with whom thou wilt. Put me to doing, put me to suffering. Let me be employed for thee or laid aside for thee, exalted for thee or brought low for thee. Let me be full, let me be empty. Let me have all things, let me have nothing. I freely and heartily yield all things to thy pleasure and disposal. And now, O glorious and blessed God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, thou art mine, and I am thine. So be it. And the covenant which I have made on earth, let it be ratified in heaven. Amen."  
Does this prayer describe the attitude of Christians today? Should it? What would the apostle Paul and John the Baptist say? Why might some Christians be afraid to pray such a prayer? What about you? Take a minute and rewrite this prayer in your own words. Then pray it every day this week if you really mean it.

2. This Thanksgiving your nephew and his new girlfriend Madeline join your family for dinner. She becomes noticeably uncomfortable when you ask everyone to join hands and give God thanks. Then, after dinner you overhear Madeline and your nephew talking outside. Laughingly she says, "I had no idea that your family included a bunch of religious fundamentalists. Do they always talk that way? How ignorant and unenlightened are they?" To your dismay your nephew laughs along with her. How does this make you feel? What do you do about it, if anything?

3. Discuss the following quotations:

"Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, ambition inspired, and success achieved." -Helen Keller

"They say a person needs just three things to be truly happy in this world: someone to love, something to do, and something to hope for." -Tom Bodett

"Weeping may last through the night, but joy comes with the morning." -Psalm 30:5 (NLT)

"Joy is to fun what the deep sea is to a puddle. It's a feeling inside that can hardly be contained."  
-Terry Pratchett

"Joy is the infallible sign of the presence of God." -Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

"You will show me the path of life; In Your presence *is* fullness of joy; At Your right hand *are* pleasures forevermore." -Psalm 16:11 (NKJV)