

Week 1 (Sept 10–16): Choose Joy?

Philippians 1:1–11

To “choose joy” simply means this: every believer has the opportunity to be joyful and choose to rejoice no matter life’s situations and circumstances. How is this possible? Because the good news of the Gospel is just that good!

Joy is a Christian distinctive. Anyone can be happy when things go their way. But what about when they don’t? What about when life is hard, it’s a struggle and you feel constrained? Do you still choose joy?

In this first lesson, we will provide a little background to Paul’s letter to the Philippian believers. Then, by analyzing his prayer for them, we will unpack three challenges every believer can embrace so that their life is marked by joy.

Philippians 1:1–2

*Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all God’s holy people in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons:
² Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

Philippians 1:7–8

It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart and, whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God’s grace with me. ⁸ God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.

Paul writes the book of Philippians in chains under Roman imprisonment. Normally, these circumstances would cause anger, anxiety or the like. But for Paul, he instead uses the circumstances to write the book of joy. Even in physical chains, he saw himself first and foremost as a “servant” or a “slave” of Christ Jesus. He invites these fellow saints and sufferers to have the same joy he had.

Paul loved these people. He was thankful for their faithfulness and longed to see them. Given this good relationship, Paul prays some incredible truths over the Philippians in the opening verses. These truths provide three spiritual challenges that every believer can choose to accept:

Challenge #1: PARTNER in the Gospel

Philippians 1:4–5

I thank my God every time I remember you. ⁴In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy ⁵because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now...

Paul considers the people of Philippi to be partners in the Gospel. This word partner carries with it the idea of fellowship, that they have a shared mission and vision. In this way, Paul communicates that these believers were coworkers in the gospel.

How do we “partner” in the gospel? First, consider that every believer is called to be a partner! Gospel partnership is not limited to the role of pastor or someone in ministry. Ephesians 4:12 indicates that leaders in the church are given “to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ.” We have opportunities all around us to be a faithful witness to Jesus, join the work of ministry and build up the church. We cannot neglect our call for gospel participation.

Second, we should share Paul’s vision: salvation is good enough for all people; therefore, it should be shared with all people and can be reflected in all circumstances. As believers, we must learn to believe, live and preach the reality that Jesus is better than anything this world has to offer. Whether at work, in your home, in your church or around our communities, we must embrace the challenge to participate in the gospel.

Challenge #2: WALK CONFIDENTLY in the Lord’s Work

Philippians 1:6

Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

Paul’s confidence in the Lord’s work is incredible. Since Acts 16, Paul has seen the Lord do great things in and through the people of Philippi and he is fully confident in the Lord’s abilities to make good on His promises.

When the Lord calls you to be a partner, He calls you to walk in the same kind of confidence. The Lord is the initiator, the sustainer and the finisher of His work. We are the vessels by which He accomplishes His work. To say it slightly different: If the Lord has called you to something, then He will carry it out as well. Our goal is to be faithful, obedient and depend upon the Lord.

God’s plans are never thwarted and He desires to use us. As we partner in the gospel, the Lord will call us to do what only He can do. We are simply called to walk confidently in the Lord, believing that He who began a good work will carry it on to completion.

Challenge #3: GROW in Your Love for God and Others

Philippians 1:9-11

And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight,¹⁰ so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ,¹¹ filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.

Paul is not praying as though they are in trouble or even lacking, but his desire is for them to continue to grow in the Lord. One of the greatest prayers we can pray is to grow in our knowledge and love for God. We must pray that our affections and concern for the Lord and His ways would increase as we learn who God is. This is the kind of love for God that lays the foundation for our love for others.

Initially, Paul prays for three growth areas for the Philippians: knowledge, insight and discernment. Our theology drives our godly practice. Our understanding of God drives how we obey God. Throughout the Bible, God is revealing Himself to us and is calling His people to know Him by staying connected to Him.

As the Lord allows us to know Him more, He calls us to reflect Him with godly character and fruitful living. Being pure and blameless is not a mandate for perfection so much as it is a pursuit of things that are superior (Col 3:2). Knowing God lets us properly evaluate our world and our culture by asking: Is this word or action honoring to Jesus? Furthermore, pure and blameless tie back to verse 6 as it reflects the character of one who is confidently and faithfully obedient. We must live in His grace, depend on His forgiveness and pursue a relationship with Jesus over and over again.

When we know God and reflect this knowledge in our character, we live a fruit-filled life. The passage echoes Jesus's words in John 15: "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). The more we abide and remain in Jesus, the more we will look like Jesus. Know God, be transformed through this knowledge and then produce the fruit of righteousness. We cannot flip this order! The gospel is all about becoming who Christ has made you to be through His finished work. A person who has not been transformed by the gospel cannot produce the fruit of the gospel. Instead, our knowledge of God becomes our motivation for a transformed character that works itself out in transformed actions.

Are you ready to accept the challenge?

Discussion Questions:

- Where do people today often look to find joy? How is that different from Paul's view of joy?
- What does Paul specifically call out about his Philippian church members that brings him such joy? How does that compare to the way you interact with or think about people at our church?
- Where is God calling you to partner with Him?
- Who are those you partner with in the gospel that bring you joy? Why?
- How does Philippians 1:6 inspire and stir confidence in you?
- Why is discernment (v.10) an important part of the Christian life? How do we gain discernment?
- Why should you strive to grow in your love for God?
- What are ways that you have found to help you grow in your love for God and others?
- How do you discern what is good, pure and blameless?
- Which of these three challenges is hardest to accept?