

Week 2 (Sept 17–23): Choose Joy Today!

Philippians 1:12–18a; 2:19–30

Learning the “Hard Way” is the process of discovering what we need to know through experience and/or by making mistakes. While sometimes this way of learning is necessary in life, it is often easier (and better!) to learn something by looking at the example of someone else. We need people in our lives to show us how to do a variety of undertakings and the Christian life is no exception.

How do we learn to read the Bible? How do we learn how to pray? Many of us had a mentor, pastor, friend, parent or another relative who helped us learn those disciplines. Why? Because we learn from what is modeled to us. In the following verses, Paul provides three examples for believers to follow that model a life of joy. We will unpack these three examples and then conclude that we are called to live in the joy that is modeled to us so that we might become a model of joy for others.

The Model of Paul: Joy in CHAINS

Philippians 1:12–13

Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel. ¹³As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ.

Paul’s joy-filled example is inspiring. Even in chains, Paul expresses joy and shares the good news of the gospel. He understands that he has a unique opportunity to share the Gospel with the Imperial Guard. These were the elite military force charged with protecting the Roman Empire. This opportunity didn’t come around a lot! Rather than wasting the opportunity to loathe his situation or desire the pity of others, Paul lived out a joy that transcended his circumstances. He made it clear to every guard in every shift that Jesus was his source of joy and that they could have that joy too.

Paul is being unfairly imprisoned and rather than dwelling on the “unfairness,” he focuses in on Jesus. His example should beg the question in our own lives: What if the trial/persecution and hardship you are going through today (or have been through) is God’s way of using you to share the joy of the Gospel with people you would have never come in contact with otherwise?

The Model of Timothy: Joy in the EVERYDAY

Philippians 2:19–24

I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. ²⁰ I have no one else like him, who will show genuine concern for your welfare. ²¹ For everyone looks out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. ²² But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel. ²³ I hope, therefore, to send him as soon as I see how things go with me. ²⁴ And I am confident in the Lord that I myself will come soon.

Over and again throughout Scripture, Timothy is painted as a young, faithful follower of Christ. Timothy was a third generation Christian, born to a Jewish mother and a Greek father (Acts 16:1). He became a vital member of Paul's inner circle and was described as Paul's: Fellow worker (Romans 16:21; 1 Thessalonians 3:2); Brother (2 Corinthians 1:1; Colossians 1:1; 1 Thessalonians 3:2); Bond-servant (Phil 1:1); Beloved and faithful child in the Lord (1 Corinthians 4:17); Son (1 Timothy 1:2; 2 Timothy 1:2); and Coequal in the Lord's work (1 Corinthians 16:10; 1 Thessalonians 3:2).

Timothy models a joyfully and faithfully obedient life. Timothy is portrayed as consistent and one who did both the big and little things in a way that honored the Lord. We live in a world where consistent obedience is overshadowed by grand acts of praise. Our world loves the big grand gesture but overlooks daily obedience. Timothy reminds us to be joyful in the everyday rhythm of life.

The Model of Epaphroditus: Joy in TRIALS

Philippians 2:25–30

But I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, co-worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger, whom you sent to take care of my needs. ²⁶ For he longs for all of you and is distressed because you heard he was ill. ²⁷ Indeed he was ill, and almost died. But God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, to spare me sorrow upon sorrow. ²⁸ Therefore I am all the more eager to send him, so that when you see him again you may be glad and I may have less anxiety. ²⁹ So then, welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honor people like him, ³⁰ because he almost died for the work of Christ. He risked his life to make up for the help you yourselves could not give me.

Epaphroditus was a messenger and many scholars indicate that his illness came about as a result of over-exerting himself on his journey from Philippi to Rome or possibly because of his serving Paul in Rome. Hence the phrase “He

almost died for the work of Christ” (v. 30). In this way, he is an incredible model for us!

Sometimes we hear “preachers” say, “Follow the Lord, and you will have good health and financial blessing!” Or maybe something like: “If you have enough faith, the Lord will protect you from harm.” But how do we justify those words against Epaphroditus’ testimony? This man got sick *because* of his laboring for the Lord. Did he lack faith? Was he disobedient and therefore punished? Did he not give a large enough offering? Surely not!

The reality is that we live in a sinful and broken world. Sickness is not a part of God’s original design for creation. Whether sickness or some other kind of trial, Epaphroditus reminds us that following the Lord does not guarantee a trial-LESS life. However, he also shows us that we can have joy even in the trials of life! As James 1:2–3 reads, “Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, ³because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.”

Your Joy in the Gospel Is MOTIVATION for Others to Find Joy in the Gospel!

Philippians 1:14–18a

And because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear. ¹⁵ It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. ¹⁶ The latter do so out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. ¹⁷ The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. ¹⁸ But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice.

Paul argued that regardless of the motives of others, God is sovereign to use whatever might be said to further the gospel. Best we can tell, some people were preaching the gospel for God-honoring reasons. Others were seemingly attempting to overthrow or discredit Paul for their own status or gain. Though Paul has a lot to say about false doctrine and teaching in other places (1 Timothy 6:3–5), this passage indicates that false motives do not hinder the gospel. To be clear, he is not advocating impure motives but simply saying the Lord can use you despite your motives.

Instead, combined with the examples from Paul, Timothy and Epaphroditus the central point becomes clear: God can use anyone or any circumstance to display His glory. *Therefore, all situations and circumstances are divine*

appointments for sharing the joy of the gospel! Whether in chains or free, God has us exactly where He wants us to display His joy and be an encouragement for others around you. Paul boldly and courageously shared the gospel in chains. Timothy modeled an everyday kind of faithfulness and obedience. Epaphroditus showed us that joy transcends our trials.

How do we share the joy of the gospel today? How do we see every circumstance as a divine appointment? How do we trust God to use us for gospel advancement? According to the passage, we learn to rest our hope, satisfaction and contentment in something bigger than the present to give us the strength for the present. When our eyes remain fixed on Jesus, we recognize that even in the worst situations: God is still working and desires for us to share His joy. The world longs for the joy we have and the joy we have in Jesus is contagious. We can't allow the enemy to steal our joy and our witness. We must learn to choose joy today!

Discussion Questions:

- What factors can cause people to lose their joy in the church?
- How does Paul's perspective in vv. 12-18 demonstrate the power of true joy in the life of a Christian?
- What might the consequences have been if Paul would have reacted in a different manner?
- Think about the people in your life who best model Jesus. In what ways do they reflect His character? And what impact does that have on people around them?
- How can you find joy in your struggles?
- Why can it be difficult to be joyful in difficult times?
- How do you find joy in the day to day?
- What are things in your daily life that bring you joy?
- Why is it difficult to find joy in trials?
- Who is someone God has placed in your life who needs this joy?
- How can your group encourage you to be joy-filled?