

Week 9 (Nov 5–11): Choose Joy No Matter What!

Philippians 4:10–23

“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” Philippians 4:13 is one of the most used and often, abused verses in the Bible. Often, the term “all things” is defined loosely and is applied to everything from sporting events, to dealing with difficult people, to parenting. But as with all good Bible reading, we need to understand the surrounding context to help us understand the full intended meaning of the passage.

Let’s be clear: This is a great verse! But in its context, the verse becomes less of a self-glorifying mantra and more of a humble plea in the face of adversity. In this final Philippians lesson, let’s see this verse in its context and understand how it is one of the greatest keys to unlocking Christian joy in any and every situation.

Joy Is ONLY FOUND in Jesus

Philippians 4:11–13

I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. ¹² I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. ¹³ I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

To begin, we need to remember that Paul is in chains as he writes the book of joy. Paul’s letter is littered with optimism that flows from his understanding of God. In these verses, Paul explains that his joyful attitude was the result of his contentment in the Lord. Paul knew what it was like to have a little bit. Paul knew what it was like to have a lot. But he says, the reason he can have joy and contentment in any and every circumstance is because of Jesus!

On one hand, we live in a world that says the more stuff we have, the happier we’ll be. Or slightly different: Be happy by bettering your life, getting more money, bigger house, nicer car, etc. The lie of the world is that happiness is waiting for you to go buy it or achieve it. But this kind of happiness is exhausting and fleeting.

On the other hand, our world will also fight this consumerism thought. The Chinese philosopher Laozi (Lao Tzu) said “Be content with what you have; rejoice in the way things are. When you realize there is nothing lacking, the whole world belongs to you.” But this kind of contentedness is derived from

self-empowerment and freeing oneself from the worldly pleasures by being content with one's lot in life.

While some folks may struggle with materialism and attempt to find contentment in their stuff, others may look at this word from Laozi and claim it spiritual enough to be biblical. But both are faulty. The secret of being content is not being happy with *what* we have but in *Who* we have! Our joy is Christ. Paul is not looking at his stuff wishing for more to make him happy. Moreover, Paul is not looking to his stuff declaring himself happy with his lot. He is looking to his Savior proclaiming his contentedness is only found in Jesus. What then does it mean that "I can do *all things* through Christ who gives me strength"?

First, the emphasis is not in "I CAN DO ALL THINGS, through Christ who gives ME STRENGTH." This reading places the emphasis on the individual. Instead, it should be read as, "I can do all things THROUGH CHRIST WHO GIVES me strength." Second, our normal rendering of "all things" is better translated like the NIV states, "all *this*." Therefore, what Paul is declaring is that whether in poverty or riches, he is content. How is he able to do *this*? By looking to Jesus!

Every Christian must understand Jesus as the source of their joy and contentment. Circumstances and situations will always change. But the Lord never changes. If we want to "be joyful always" (Philippians 4:4), then we must always depend on Jesus. And who is this Jesus who has been described in the book of Philippians?

- 1:21 – He is THE purpose of life and the gain of death.
- 2:5-8 – He is THE example of humility and the King we follow.
- 2:9-11 – He is THE object of worship, there is no one greater or higher.
- 3:7-11 – He is THE source of righteousness for He has done the work.
- 3:12-14 – He is THE end goal and our prize.
- 4:6-7 – He is THE peace of God.
- 4:13 – Therefore – He is THE source and totality of your contentment.

Therefore:

His Joy Should Be SHARED

Philippians 4:10, 14-18

I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it....¹⁴ Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles.¹⁵ Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with

me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; ¹⁶for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid more than once when I was in need. ¹⁷Not that I desire your gifts; what I desire is that more be credited to your account. ¹⁸I have received full payment and have more than enough. I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God.

Paul makes it clear that he is a beneficiary of the Philippians joy! In many ways this serves as a model for us. Our joy in Jesus should be evident and contagious to others. When we learn to be content in any and every circumstance, we learn to prioritize sharing that joy with others.

His Joy Is SUFFICIENT

Philippians 4:19-20

And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus. ²⁰To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

When our joy is in the Lord, we truly lack nothing. These verses are related to the previous section. Paul is admitting that whether he had a little or a lot, he never lacked anything. Furthermore, the gifts of his brothers and sisters in Christ were not given in vain. Just as they supplied his needs, so God will supply their needs.

Amid their own suffering and opposition, God will grant them material need. But this is only part of his promise. Even more, God will fulfill their spiritual needs: steadfastness, perseverance, joy, humility, grace and encouragement. God owns everything and He is willing to supply everything a believer needs for a life in Him. At no point does a believer NOT have access to His joy and contentment! God doesn't leave His people hanging. To be clear, this doesn't mean life isn't hard for the Christian (Paul's in chains!), but rather that every need will be supplied. Every believer can be filled with joy because of Christ's strength in them.

His Joy Is the Mark of HIS PEOPLE

Philippians 4:21-23

Greet all God's people in Christ Jesus. The brothers and sisters who are with me send greetings. ²²All God's people here send you greetings, especially those who belong to Caesar's household. ²³The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.

Paul closes with his genuine greetings to all the people in Philippi, to all those he loved and to all those who shared in this joy.

As we close this series, it's important to return to Philippians 4:4: *Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice!* This should be our refrain, our joyous chorus. A joyless Christian is an oxymoron. This doesn't mean we can't be sad, or we can't grieve, or we can't be upset or frustrated. Go read the Psalms! Righteous people have a range of emotions.

But this means that even in the midst of those emotions, our contentment is still in Christ. He is always on the horizon. He is always set before us. He is always in our vision. He is always alongside of us, even in the darkest nights of the soul. Contentment in Christ faces those emotions and circumstances knowing that: CHRIST IS BETTER. And though there is a time for sadness – joy comes in the morning.

May we choose His joy today!

Discussion Questions:

- Do people know Jesus's joy by the way you live in His joy?
- Do people define you as one who is joyful?
- How do you define Christian contentment? How is that different from our society's perspective? What is the source of your contentment?
- Phil 4:13 is one of those verses that our culture loves to quote. Define what the actual meaning is – and how it applies to your life.
- The last section of this letter concludes with Paul thanking the Philippians for their generosity in supporting his ministry. Discuss the connection between joy and stewardship. How do finances often reveal where our treasure is?
- Do you (and your spouse, if applicable) have a disciplined plan for giving, both tithes and offerings? Discuss how you assess which people/entities to support in addition to your church.
- When has God not met all your wants, but all of your needs?
- How does this truth build a confidence in God for you?
- What have you learned from this study through the book of Philippians?