

# Philippians - Finding JOY In Hard Times



- Would you say your outlook on life is more optimistic (happy) or pessimistic (sad)? Do you struggle with trusting God with your problems?

The Book of Philippians is the epistle of joy. It teaches us to trust God in every detail of our lives, to deliberately choose to thank God, and to rejoice when we have problems.

Paul was well qualified to speak on this subject. He had suffered much for Christ. He wrote this epistle while sitting in a Roman jail for preaching the Gospel. According to Acts, more than once, riots broke out when Paul preached the Gospel (The riot in Philippi, Acts 16:16-40; The riot in Thessalonica, Acts 17:5-9; The riot in Ephesus, Acts 19:23-41; The riot in Jerusalem, Acts 21:26-22:11). They were started by the Jewish religious leaders who opposed Christianity and the Gospel. Yet, the Gospel was not confined while Paul was in jail. Many of the Roman guards had been led to Christ and other Christians were inspired to boldly proclaim the Gospel (Philippians 1:12-14). Paul's courage and example moved them.

Paul was able to experience joy in suffering, hardship, and imprisonment (See Acts 16:22-25; Philippians 1:18). What was Paul's secret? Paul was not gazing at his hardship but merely glancing at it. He was gazing at the power of His God to work through his difficulty. We can have joy in hard times because joy does not depend on outward circumstances. It depends upon an inward relationship with Christ. It depends upon trusting in God's strength and control over the details of our lives. It depends upon intentionally choosing to rejoice. *We can have JOY in the hard times by glancing at our circumstances and gazing upon our God.*

## Central Lesson:

We can have JOY in the hard times by **GLANCING** at our circumstances and **GAZING** at God.

**Author:** The book identifies the Apostle **PAUL** and **Timothy** as its authors (1:1). The early Church Fathers (the disciples of the apostles and successors in leading the early church) also wrote in their commentaries that Paul was the author.

**Date:** Philippians was written about A.D. **61** from Rome while Paul was in prison. Philippians is among a group of letters called "Prison Epistles" because it was written while Paul was in a Roman jail around A.D. 60-62 for preaching the Gospel. The Prison Epistles are Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon.

**Title:** The book's title is named after the recipients—Christians living in the city of **PHILLIPI**. The book of Acts records Paul in Philippi in Acts 16:12-40 where he started the local church there. Philippi was a large city in what is now northern Greece. In Paul's day, it was in the Roman province of Macedonia. The city of Philippi was named after Alexander the Great's father,

King Philip. Paul visited the city twice on his missionary journeys (Acts 16:12-40 and Acts 20:6) before being arrested and put on trial in Rome.

**Key Verse:** Philippians 4:4. *"Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again—rejoice!"*

**Key Chapter:** Chapter 4. It conveys the theme of *rejoicing in hard times*.

**Key Words:** **REJOICE** (1:18; 2:17-18; 3:1; 4:4) and **JOY** (1:4, 25; 2:2 [NLT uses the word "happy"], 29; 4:1). The word "rejoice" or "joy," or other similar words appear **sixteen times** in this short letter. The joy Paul mentions is not the happiness of an adrenaline rush. Instead, it is a sense of lasting peace and contentment, regardless of life circumstances. This contentment comes from knowing that God is with us and that we don't have to face our problems alone—He will help us. Life's problems may make us sad, disappointed, or even discouraged, but far beneath those feelings is a joy rooted in our relationship with God.

**Outline:** The *Life Application Bible* outlines the book as:

- I. Joy in Suffering (Chapter 1)
- II. Joy in Serving (Chapter 2)
- III. Joy in Believing (Chapter 3)
- IV. Joy in Giving (Chapter 4)

**Key Truths:** God is at work in our hearts & lives (1:6; 2:13). Live a life worthy of the gospel (1:27). Christians must seek to maintain unity (2:1-4, 14-15, 27; 4:2-3). We must be humble and Christ-like in our attitudes (2:5-11). The *knosis* (the Greek word for "emptied") refers to Jesus Christ *limiting* himself from his divine powers to become a man and die on the cross for our sins (2:6-8). We are citizens of heaven (3:20). The importance of prayer in facing hard times (4:6-7). We should guard our thought life and think about wholesome things (4:8), Model our lives after Godly Christians (3:17; 4:9), and learn to be content (4:11-12). Christ enables us to do anything that life demands (4:13). The promise that God will meet all our needs (4:19).

**Theme:** We can have JOY in the hard times by glancing at our circumstances and gazing upon God. Joy in the hard times does not depend upon outward circumstances. Instead, it depends upon trusting in God's strength and control over the details of our lives. The *Life Application Study Bible* explains:

**"Although Paul was writing from prison, joy is a dominant theme in this letter. The secret of his joy is grounded in his relationship with Christ. People today desperately want to be happy but are tossed and turned by daily successes, failures, and inconveniences. Christians are to be joyful in every circumstance, even when things are going badly, even when we feel like complaining, even when no one else is joyful. Christ still reigns, and we still know him, so we can rejoice at all times." Also, "We can have joy, even in hardship. Joy does not come from outward circumstances but from inward strength. As Christians, we must not rely on what we have or what we experience to give us joy, but on Christ within us."** (p.2144)

**Central Lesson: We can have JOY in the hard times by  
GLANCING at our circumstances and GAZING at God.**

- ▶ Accept Christ as your Savior. ▶ As a Christian, dedicate your life to Christ. ▶ Invite someone to next Sunday's study. ▶ Attend a small group. ▶ Read the Bible this week. ▶ Pray for friends that need Jesus.