

## Philippians Chapter 1- John Karmelich

1. If you could describe how God expects us to behave in one word, what would it be? If you could use one word to describe yourself, what would it be? Are you happy, quiet, a complainer or just hopeful? What if I told you the one word that God most desires to describe us is the word joyful? So does that shoe fit? Realize our circumstances of the moment have nothing to do with joy. Our life can be filled with troubles, and we could still have a joyful attitude. Let me give a quote that fits well here: "Christians as constantly in trouble yet constantly joyful". That's by Ray Steadman, a great bible teacher who past away a few decades back. What he meant was the Christian life is full of struggles, but the Christian still is a joyful person in spite of the problems they're facing in their life. It's a tough thing to learn, but it fits living the Christian life well.
2. Let's be honest, joyfulness is contagious. Would we rather hang around a person who's full of joy or one who's complaining all the time? There's a classic expression that we can't control what will occur in our lives, but we can always control our attitude about it. What if you think I'm just not a joyful person? My goal here isn't to fix your problems, but for us to realize how God expects us to live as we go through whatever we're going through.
3. Given all of that, my lesson title is that Ray Steadman quote. To state it again, the Christian is one who is constantly in trouble, but constantly joyful. It describes Paul well. When you study Paul's letters or his life in the book of Acts, you notice he was constantly in trouble. At the same time we get the impression Paul was the ultimate optimist. How else could he sing praises to God locked up in prison after being whipped for preaching the Gospel? How can he preach Jesus in another town, after being kicked out of the last one? You'd think that after all those beatings, shipwrecks and attempts to kill him, Paul would have said, enough of this, I'm going back to my life before I became a Christian! What would motivate someone to live like that, endure that much pain and still have a joyful attitude? The answer stems from the belief it's all worth it! We can be living in horrid pain or suffering from an incurable disease. We can look at life and think, "Wow, my life is cursed or we can think, God created me with some divine purpose to make a difference for Him despite my situation!" That's how God expects us to live as a witness for Him!
4. Ok, I got on a roll, and I've yet to explain anything about Paul's letter to the Philippians. I'll begin where I usually do with the "who, what, when and why's" of this letter:
  - a) There is little scholarly debate about the author. As the veterans know, Paul wasn't one of the original 12 apostles. He came on the scene after the resurrection. Paul was Jewish but came from a foreign city, (Tarsus, in Turkey today). He became a devout Jewish believer who became a Pharisee and studied under the leading Jewish rabbi of his day. When the Christian movement began in Jerusalem, Paul was living there and worked feverously to crush that movement. He got converted to Christianity around two years after Jesus rose from the dead. That meant Paul began his Christian life around 34 AD. After it occurred, he spent a few decades traveling around much of Europe and Asia preaching the Gospel wherever he could. By the year 60AD, Paul had made it to Rome as a prisoner, and spent two years in prison essentially for the crime of preaching Jesus to others. Paul eventually got released, and was arrested again in 66AD, where he was killed for the crime of being a Christian. Some see Paul as a wasted life. Most Christians do see him as the greatest man in history after Jesus Himself. This book is about his letter to the Philippians which is the city of Philippi in Greece was probably penned about the year 61 to 62 AD from prison.
  - b) That's the "who and the when". The letter appears to be delivered by "Epaphroditus" who is named in Chapter 2, Verse 25. It's assumed the letter was not only delivered, but it also circulated, as this letter became famous enough that it became part of the bible. By the 4th century AD, when Christian persecution by the Romans stopped, the New Testament as it stands today was organized and this letter was deemed worthy to be a part of the bible.
  - c) Bottom line: Paul wrote it from a jail cell, it got delivered and it was "bible worthy".

5. I could give you more background on who the Philippians were (See Acts 16), but I'll just say it's a non-Jewish city in Greece that Paul first visited in 51AD where he was whipped, thrown in jail for preaching the Gospel and founded a church there. Of all the places Paul traveled to, I'd think there had to be other places that Paul would associate with joy more than this place. However, it is a perfect place to write in effect, "Forget all the suffering I went through there ten years ago, I'm writing to say how joyful I am when I think about you Philippians!"
6. At this point, let me define joy. The Jewish "word picture" for this word is like one's jumping up and down in excitement, as one is so excited. When I think of happiness, I think it's based on our circumstance of the moment, like getting good news or some unexpected reward. Joy is based on a positive attitude no matter the circumstances. It's about having a positive outlook in spite of the issue of the moment. As I said in the opening of this lesson, we'd much rather be around a person who is full of joy than one who is always complaining about our circumstances. That's what Paul was like. Let's be honest, it's contagious and most of us would rather hang around a person who has that type of attitude than one who's complaining all the time!
7. With all that said, let me summarize Chapter 1 for all of us, and hopefully you'll see why I picked the one word "joy" as the title for this lesson:
  - a) First realize as we go through this chapter and this book, we're going to read of all sorts of things Paul did. My point is that Paul didn't just walk around being joyful and that's that. He had his trials, his issues, his battles and despite all of that, Paul discovered the secret of how to have a good attitude in spite of all of that. As we work our way through this book, hopefully we'll pick up a few lessons on how to be more joyful ourselves. That is my goal as I teach this book as I desire that all of us be more joyful as we deal with whatever we're dealing with in our lives. With that overview completed, let's talk about Chapter 1.
  - b) Paul starts with his introduction. He states his younger companion Timothy was with him as he penned this letter. Paul states that this letter is to all the Christians in Philippi. Paul singles out the leaders of that church as if to say, "May God bless those leaders as they are leading others in a closer relationship to Jesus".
  - c) Paul then spends a bunch of verses saying how grateful he is for the Philippian church. It is full of compliments of how they've helped Paul survive through his ministry work and Paul's grateful for their help and Paul effectively promises God will bless them for it. He's telling them their prayers for Paul and support of him hasn't gone unnoticed. Since this letter made it to the bible, obviously, it's meant as a reminder to us that God desires we all work as a team to make a difference for the Gospel. That's an underlying message here.
  - d) He then reminds the Philippians that he's still in prison. He didn't say that to make them feel guilty for not praying hard enough. Instead, He's saying that being in prison worked out for God's glory. Paul realized he's expendable, but the gospel will be preached as it is His will. He's grateful that the Gospel message is being spread in spite of what motivates people to preach it. It's like the old expression, "I don't care what you write about me, as long as you spell my name right." That's the reminder that in life, usually any publicity is good publicity! Paul applies that principle to teaching about Jesus, not his own life!
  - e) What Paul is getting at is whether he gets released from prison or dies there, either way it is a victory. That's because either Paul gets to preach Jesus some more, or go to heaven to be with God. That should be the Christian attitude as well: Either we'll have more time to make a difference for Jesus or we'll be with Him. That's the attitude we Christians should have about life and yes that is what should make us joyful about our lives.
  - f) Bottom line time: No matter what we're dealing with in life, remember God knows what we are going through, He cares about us and has us where He wants us for a reason. That just means until God says, "That's a wrap for our time here on earth", God desires that we use the time He's given us to make a difference for Jesus. That's why we were called to be a witness for Him in the first place. Yes we still have to work and get chores done, but as we do that and whatever time we have, we must use it to make a difference for Him.

8. With that speech out of my system, let me break down and start Chapter 1: Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons:
- a) Verse 1 focuses on the who's: Who this letter is written from and who it's written to.
  - b) The fact that Timothy's name is given next to Paul does not mean that Timothy co-wrote it. It most likely means that Timothy took dictation since Paul was chained to guards!
  - c) It may help to discuss Paul's "House Arrest" status. Paul was arrested in Jerusalem for the crime of preaching Jesus. At that trial, the Roman leaders effectively said, "Paul we would let you go free, but since you appealed your case to Caesar, off you go!" (Acts 25:12). Now that Paul is in Rome, he's chained to a couple of guards. He's allowed to have visitors. It's Timothy who's the visitor of the moment, taking dictation from Paul while the guards are forced to listen to Paul dictate away this letter. Finally realize what's hanging over Paul's head here: If the Roman emperor finds Paul guilty, it's death. If he's found innocent, then he can go free. Try having a good attitude while living through those circumstances!
    - i) Stop and think about that fact alone. Paul didn't say, "Pray for me, I'm about to die here in prison." Instead he's going to use this four chapter letter to tell us of the joy we can all have in Jesus despite whatever circumstances we face. We'll get to that soon enough, right now, let's get back to the introduction.
  - d) Notice what Paul says and doesn't say about his life. He doesn't say, "Hey, I'm the famous apostle that God Himself has called to plant churches all over Europe and Asia. Raise up an army to break me out of this prison!" Instead he refers to himself simply as a servant of Jesus. The word Christ is simply the Greek translation of the word Messiah, which means "King". It's not Jesus' last name! The point is Paul thought of himself as a loyal servant of Jesus and if it's His will for Paul to be in prison at this time, Paul must accept His will.
  - e) OK enough of Paul. Let me discuss the letter's recipients: It's written to believers in the Greek city of Philippi. A little background on this city would be helpful here. The history of that city keys upon the father of Alexander the Great who was also a great general. The short version is he conquered that city and renamed it after himself. It's located in the southeast area of Greece on the water. It had gold mines nearby which was it's income source. It was also famous in Roman times: The first Roman Emperor, Julius Caesar got assassinated by Brutus and Cassius. Thank you William Shakespeare for teaching all of us that! Realize these two men controlled an army. Another Roman army was controlled by Mark Anthony and Octavian. Anyway, each side had about one million men and a great battle was fought in Philippi and that determined the fate of the Roman Empire. Bottom line, this city has had a famous history long before Paul showed up on the scene.
    - i) Speaking of Paul, Acts Chapter 16 tells us that when he came there, there were not enough Jewish families to start a synagogue. That's why that chapter tells us Paul went to the waterside to look for devout Jewish believers. That's where they'd go if there were no synagogue. Anyway, Paul founded a church in that city along with a husband and wife couple Paul lead to Jesus. Philippi is in ruins today, but it's a popular tourist destination. One can visit the probable location of the first church building there. This city was essentially a non-Jewish (i.e., "Gentile") church.
    - ii) Anyway Paul's grateful for that church as we'll discover later in this book that they helped financially support Paul on his missionary journeys and even in prison. All I'm saying is the Christians in Philippi were grateful to Paul for leading them to be Christians and Paul uses this letter to express his gratitude for their support of him in all of his trials.
  - f) Finally Paul singles out the leaders and the deacons. Since those people made the decision to help Paul, he was grateful to them. Different Christian denominations define leaders as well as deacons in different ways. The short version is the first group is the leaders, while the deacons carry out the desires of the leaders. Hey look, there's a verse 2!

9. Verse 2: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ
- a) Here we get Paul's favorite salutation. It was a common expression among the Christians of Paul's day. It's important to realize the order of those two words of important. The idea is that because God's grace has been poured out on believers, we can have peace with God as well as each other. It is essentially the gospel message: We Christians accept that Jesus paid the complete price for our sins, so we don't have to work to earn our salvation. That's how God's grace is poured upon us. For those who don't know, grace refers to receiving a gift we don't deserve. We deserve to be punished for our sins. We accept God Himself did pay for those sins, so we get His grace upon us. I know that's the basics, but we're only on the first two verses of a four chapter book, so let's establish that now.
  - b) All this means is we can have peace with God and therefore peace with fellow believers as the complete price for our sins is paid for. So why is only God the Father and God the Son listed here and not the Holy Spirit? That's because the function of the Spirit is to draw us to Him and closer to Him. It's God the Father that provides us that peace and the God the Son who did the "dirty work" to provide that grace and peace. I realize that I'm preaching to the choir here, but it's essential we establish those facts before we get into the "meat" of this letter. Speaking of getting into the "heavy meat" of this letter, let's examine Verse 3:
10. Verse 3: I thank my God every time I remember you. <sup>4</sup> In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy <sup>5</sup> because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, <sup>6</sup> 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.
- a) Picture Paul sitting or standing in a jail cell being chained to a couple of guards. Paul saw them as a captive audience. He didn't say, "Hey get me out of here, or help me as I'm in a lot of pain here!" Instead, Paul states his gratitude to the Philippian Christians. I'd bet that made a great impression on the guards, as here was this joyful man in spite of the fact he's tied to a pair of guards in prison. Imagine being in that situation being chained to people around the clock. You then state that you're spending lots of time praying for people. You spend time stating your gratitude to others for being "partners" in the Gospel message. If you do want joy in your life, it's essential that you begin with gratitude. Even if you are living in a horrid situation, you can always find something to be grateful for!
  - b) Paul's not saying, "Get me out of this lousy prison!" He's saying how grateful he is that he has the privilege of preaching the Gospel message. He's grateful that others are willing to also do whatever it God demands of us and use our lives as living witnesses for Him until God says to each of us, "OK, that's a wrap for you". The greatest purpose one can have to life is to use one's life to make a difference for Jesus. Paul realized that and he expresses a major sense of gratitude as he realizes that the Philippian church "gets it". That church did not write Paul off as saying, "OK, he's in jail now, let's find other missionaries to support!"
  - c) Let's be honest, for most of Paul's Christian life, he needs other believers to give him that mental strength to push on. What if you think, "Nobody cares about me, so why should I care about others?" Caring about others starts by simply asking others about their lives as to be interested in them and making other's lives part of one's own. That's how one starts a relationship with others. I can't think of a better purpose for a relationship than to use it to further the Gospel message. That's what Paul and this church had in common. Paul is expressing his joy over that relationship and let's be honest it's contagious! I suspect most of us want to be around joyful people. Despite the horrors of Paul's situation he used that time to express joy both to God through prayer and to others so that others can also have a sense of joy as together we make a difference for Jesus.
  - d) Finally Paul reminds his readers that God will continue to work on us until the day He is done with us. It's a reminder that God finishes what He starts! If our job is to live for Him then we can have confidence that God will never abandon us. He can't abandon what He started and that's the purpose of the final statement of Verse 6.

- e) Let me ask the reverse question: What if we stop believing in God? Will He abandon us at that point? I can't see anyone being in heaven or hell who wasn't meant to be there. All I'm saying is God gives us free will, so from our perspective, it's up to us if we want to use our lives for His glory. I can't see a God who loves us unconditionally ever giving up on a person He's called. It's like the classic expression, "God's not talking to me, who moved!?" I've heard some pretty amazing stories in my life of those who've walked away from God and have come back essentially because they were miserable without Him. Again, I don't see anyone being in heaven or hell or wasn't meant to be there. From our perspective we don't know who's on the "nice or naughty list" so we witness to all people.
  - f) Finally, let me ask the question, "How do I know if I'm on the "nice" list? The issue isn't if we're good enough for God, as no one is. The question is simply do we believe Jesus paid the full price for our sins, He's God and He's in charge of our lives? If we say yes to that, and we are seeking a relationship with Him, we can be assured that no matter how much we mess up in life, it is eternally secure as we're not the one's securing it, God is!
  - g) Meanwhile, speaking of people who trust in that Gospel message, time to get back to Paul as he's still getting started in this letter he's dictating to the Philippians.
11. Verse 7: It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart; for whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me. <sup>8</sup> God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.
- a) To paraphrase Paul, "Despite my situation, it's the right thing for me to do to feel this way about you Philippians". My question is "What way is that?" It'd be the belief that God will complete a good work in them. Let me put it this way: What if one of the Christians who lived in Philippi back then died a day after Paul's letter came. Could Paul still say that the work God began in that man was completed? I have no idea how long I'm going to live as none of us do. I just know that God desires to use all people called to salvation. That just means His purpose for us is working until the day we die.
  - b) Let me explain this another way: If you've ever spent time in a cemetery, most markers at a grave site give a person's name, the date they were born and the date they died. What is important is the "dash" between the two dates. The most valuable thing we get from God is time. That time is in effect everything! Therefore, it's always a good idea every so often to pause and think, "What does God want me to do with my time right now?" Often that answer is simply what's logical. Sometimes He'll lead us down different directions. What I'm getting at is we want to make our "dash" count in life. What's right for me is not what is right for you. As I love to state, what do you enjoy doing and what gift do you have? If you can somehow combine those things for His glory, that's the most valuable use of what time God has given us.
  - c) With that lofty lecture out of my system, let's get back to Paul's letter. Of all the places we get letters written to by Paul, none of them are more fondly thought of by Paul. When we read Corinthians or Galatians, there are problems Paul has to deal with. Ephesians gives a lofty plateau for us to appreciate and use our lives for His glory. It's only Philippi that is spoken of this affectionately. Paul hasn't been there for at least a few years since he wrote this letter. Still, when he thinks of the church in Philippi, I think Paul gets a big smile, and gets joyful as he associates that church with joy. It's not that these were better Christians than other places. These were the people who went out of their way to help Paul with all of his missionary work and this letter is Paul's way of saying thanks.
  - d) That's why Paul says he "longs" for the Christians in Philippi. It's not that he wants more money from them. I'm sure that being in prison chained to guards would make one long for something better. When Paul wants a pleasant memory to think about, I suspect that he thought about this church not only for the joy he had there, but also because they cared about Paul and didn't forget him since he first visited there. Realize these verses teach us how to have joy in tough situations: By focusing on our pleasant memories!

12. Verse 9: And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight,<sup>10</sup> so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ,<sup>11</sup> filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ--to the glory and praise of God.
- a) Paul's prayer here is that the people of that church may grow in God's love. Let me pause to ask, if we have free will, how do we grow in God's love? Part of the Holy Spirit's job is to draw us closer to God. This is Paul saying in effect, "You want to have more joy in your life? Great, so do I. I'm praying that God encourages each of you to draw closer to Him as that's what God desires of each of us: A close relationship with us."
  - b) Remember that drawing close to God is not all "peaches and crème". All of us go through trials in life. God wants to be there with us as we go through trials. That's one way we do grow closer to Him. Forgiving those who hurt us is another way. Giving gratitude to God for the ways we are blessed is another way. My point is growing close to God isn't just for us to pray more and read the bible more. It's about bringing Him into every aspect of our lives. That's what Paul desires here. Let's be honest, we're less likely to sin if we're caring about pleasing Him. I'm not saying we have to be perfect, but I am positive we'll be more joyful and pleasing to God when we're focused upon Him as we go through our lives.
  - c) Let me discuss the phrase "until the day of Christ". I hold the view that once we die, then we're immediately in God's presence. If God created time, He exists outside of time! The bible speaks of dead Christians as "sleeping". It's a way of saying our dead bodies are not part of us. The point if Jesus returns before we die or if we did before then, either way we are now in Jesus' presence. Therefore, God wants us to strive to be a good witness for Him until whenever that happens.
  - d) Remember why we're to be "good people". It's not to prove our worth to Him. It's so that we don't waste the most valuable thing God gives us, our time. Jesus requires that we do use our time to make a difference for Him. That's our purpose for living.
  - e) Let me ask a different question: Suppose I'm wrong about all this Jesus stuff. Then ask if we'd rather live a life helping others and putting other's needs ahead of our own or would we rather try to get as much "stuff" for ourselves? My point is even if I'm wrong (which I don't think I am), it's still the best way to live life. Since I believe Jesus is God, then all this is worth the time and trouble to live as God desires we live.
  - f) That leads me to the "fruit of righteousness" quote in Verse 11. In effect that's what I have been talking about here: Using our lives for God's glory. God wants us to "bare fruit" for Him. That doesn't mean we get a notch in our belt for every person we lead to Jesus. It's more about using the gifts and talents God's given us (ask others what your gifts are if it's a new topic) and use them for His glory. As I like to say, I've never met a person who has the gift of taking out the trash! My point is we all have duties to do even if those things are not our particular spiritual gift. OK, then, onto Verse 12:
13. Verse 12: Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel.<sup>13</sup> As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ.<sup>14</sup> Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly.
- a) Most people would think that being in prison chained to guards (that were changed every few hours if memory is correct), is a fate worse than death. Paul looked at those guards as being a "captive audience". Woody Allen once joked that hell to him is being stuck in the elevator with an insurance salesman. My point is one man's hell, is another man's chance to make a difference. I always figured that if I'm too sick or injured to be of any good to God, then 1) I can make a difference by letting others minister to me and 2) I can always be in prayer for others around me.
  - b) The point here is Paul has a positive reputation in jail as one who's cooperative and trusts in God despite being in prison. That's an attitude to be admired and copied!

- c) Paul also realizes that even though he's in prison he's become a model for other Christians to emulate. One of the hardest traits to develop is boldness. Let's be honest, we all desire to be liked and it's always safer to keep our mouth shut than to be bold for Jesus. We must admit it's inspiring to see someone as bold as Paul preaching Jesus to the soldiers attached to him instead of complaining about his fate.
  - i) Consider Paul's role from the perspective of the guards. They were used to people complaining about being in prison. They've probably heard all the stories of how people are innocent or were complaining about their fate. Yet there was Paul who as a prisoner, told of God's love for all people and describing life's purpose to the people chained to him. I picture Paul on every shift change saying, "Hey Bob, how is life going? Let me tell you how you can have joy despite the fact you're stuck in prison chained with people like me!" My point is people want to be around others who are joyful, as it's contagious. That's an inspiration for our behavior as well.
  - d) Meanwhile Paul wants to discuss others who are preaching Jesus while he's stuck there.
- 14. Verse 15: It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill.<sup>16</sup> The latter do so in love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel.<sup>17</sup> The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains.<sup>18</sup> 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.
  - a) Let me explain these verses with a made up example: Suppose someone says, "Paul did a great job spreading the Gospel message, but now he's locked up in jail. God can't use him anymore other than convert a few prison guards. Therefore, I'd like all of you to join what I'm doing to spread the Gospel Message".
  - b) I can just hear a preacher say something like that today. Or worse, they'll accuse Christian preachers of sinning so they're no longer qualified to teach the Gospel. My specific answer to that one is 1) We're all sinners and 2) God calls who God calls, so just preach the Gospel and let God define our success. Remember that we're not rewarded based on the number of people we lead to Christ. We're rewarded based on whether or not we made time to go make a difference for Jesus.
  - c) I like the analogy of different paintbrushes. Some people like Billy Graham effectively use a big paint roller as they lead mass rallies. Some use fine paintbrushes, as God wants them to focus on one person or a few people. Most of us are called to "something in between that" which is how we make a difference for Jesus.
  - d) All of that leads back to the issue of some preaching Jesus out of envy or rivalry. Yes there are stories of crooked preachers who only care about the money and not who actually gets saved. However, in most cases, some people think, "Hey, I could do that as I see others be successful at it". That's the rivalry crowd.
  - e) Most of us like to be a good witness for Jesus, simply because that's what He desires of us in life. That's the main group who do it out of love. Many are too nervous to express their faith to others. I've also met many Christians who's really comfortable being a witness for Jesus in small settings, but can't handle the "big stage" and vice versa. One of the reasons that Christians pray for boldness is so we can use the gifts He's given us to make the type of difference that He desires we make.
  - f) Here comes the punch line: It doesn't matter. Like I said in the introduction, there's an old Hollywood expression that goes, "I don't care what you say about me, as long as you spell my name right". It's the idea that any publicity is good publicity. What Paul is effectively saying is, "I'm expendable. I don't care if I live or die. However what I really care about is the necessity of the Gospel message being spread no matter who's doing the spreading!"
  - g) Let me be careful here. I'm not saying it's ok to put down someone else's ministry work. I am saying that God's in charge of the success of any endeavor. We're to make the most of our time and be a good witness for Him. "Trial and error" is usually part of that endeavor.

- h) Punch line #2: Notice Paul says he rejoices because of this. This is not a man who worries about his own future. Remember that if Paul gets a "thumbs down" from the emperor in a trial, that's the death sentence. Paul never says, "get me out of this prison, so I could go do more street preaching". He never says, "Don't you know who I am? Go bribe someone so I could continue my work." Paul doesn't consider his life nearly as important as whether or not the Gospel Message is preached. He doesn't care who gets the credit. Therefore he can sit in a jail cell, be a witness to the guards around him, entertain a few visitors or and write a few letters, because Paul knows his time is in God's hands no matter what occurs! The thought that God's in charge makes Paul joyful despite his situation.
  - i) Speaking of rejoicing, let's look at the last part of Verse 18:
15. Verse 18: Yes, and I will continue to rejoice,<sup>19</sup> for I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance.
- a) Do you Paul ever got "bummed out"? Do you think he had moments where he thought, I already lead lots of people to God, I've done my job, it's not worth the suffering anymore. A similar type of complaint might be, "I'm stuck chained to people and there's nothing to do here except talk to the guards!" What gave Paul the strength to get through all of that? I'm positive it's the Holy Spirit working within us as well as the prayers of others.
    - i) On a related note, I strongly encourage others to pray for me. Even if you just say "Pray for the guy who writes these lessons", I'm telling you based on experience, it is not only appreciated, but it literally keeps me going along with the e-mail letters I get for doing this. Without going into a lot of detail, I'll just say I get my share of attacks and having others pray for me helps me tremendously with this writing!
    - ii) I'm positive it worked for Paul as well. That's why he's encouraging the Philippine church to keep praying for him. Paul can have joy through all his suffering as he's sure God's Spirit is guiding him and the prayers of others are making a difference.
  - b) Suppose you think, "Well, no one's praying for me". Ask people to. There are web sites as well as lots of prayer chains one can get involved with. If one is involved in a church, one can usually ask for prayer there or ask to be put on a list. There's no cost to it and I know from years of experience the benefits are well worth the trouble to get started.
  - c) I've also known people who think, "Yes I've got person A and B" praying for me, but life is not getting any better." As I learned a long time ago, "The purpose of prayer isn't to better our golf score". (I rarely play golf, but I've always loved that reference.) A favorite prayer in tough situations is to ask God what does He want me to learn from this situation? God will often allow us to go through a tough situation as to better witness to others who'll be going through the same thing down the road. I can't explain all tragedies. It has just been my experience that prayer for others and having others pray for us makes a big difference as Paul is attesting to in these verses.
16. Verse 20: I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.
- a) Coming back to Paul's problems, notice his secret to dealing with his problems: Trusting that whatever happens it'll be God's will. He's positive he'll have the courage to face the outcome of his prison situation no matter what the verdict is.
  - b) Paul at this point in his life has been in lots of prisons for preaching Jesus. He's also been stoned (attempt to kill someone by throwing stones at them), shipwrecked and beaten. I suspect that by the time he actually got his hearing in front of the emperor, Paul just said, "Let me tell you about Jesus". Whether Paul lives or dies is God's problems. If we also do develop that attitude, we have nothing to fear from death.
  - c) Personally, I have enough faith that Jesus is God, that I don't fear death. It's pain that I'm not crazy about! What I've also had to learn through my years of trusting Jesus is that He will be there with us through our pain. Do I still take medicine? Of course. Still I trust in His ability to get me through whatever pain I face. That's the secret to Christian joy!



- d) Remember my lesson title says that Christians are, "constantly in trouble, but constantly joyful?" By now you can see that fits Paul to a tee. I'm not saying all moments in life will be painful. I'm saying God promises to be there with us through our pain as He promises to complete whatever work He began in us. Speaking of which:
17. Verse 21: For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.
- a) I believe it's the shortest verse in the chapter and an excellent one to memorize. That line's a great one to keep in mind when we're going through our own difficult time. This verse is a reminder that whether God lets us live another day, or die today, either way, we won the battle of life in terms of God making a difference for us.
- b) The issue of this verse isn't how much time we've got left to live. The issue is what we do with the time God's given us. If we go around thinking Jesus is in charge of our lives, it is amazing how that simple thought changes our whole attitude about how we use that time that God's given us. We could be going through a great time, suffering greatly or nothing great or bad. No matter what, once we accept the fact that Jesus is in charge, we can make the best decisions we can given what's in front of us, knowing it is God's will assuming it is not a violation of how God desires we live.
- c) Meanwhile, I interrupted Paul as he was getting on a role!
18. Verse 22: If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! <sup>23</sup> I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; <sup>24</sup> but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. <sup>25</sup> Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, <sup>26</sup> so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me.
- a) Notice Paul isn't torn about whether he should continue preaching the Gospel because of all the problems and trials caused by that preaching. Paul got the fact that it was his life's purpose to preach the Gospel. Paul got the fact that God called him to use his life to make a difference for Jesus and nothing was going to change that.
- b) What Paul wrested with here is the question of, "is it better to die and be with Jesus or is it better to keep doing what I'm doing!" Paul realized all too well that eternity with Jesus will be a lot better than "life in a jail cell", or life on the road constantly being beaten up, sent to jail or suffer more tragedies just because Paul's an effective witness for Jesus. Therefore in spite of all the pain Paul suffered over roughly the last thirty years and despite the fact he will be a lot more joyful living forever in Jesus' presence, Paul realizes "out loud" that he'd be more effective to keep doing what he's doing until Jesus says, "That's a wrap for you."
- c) Stop and consider, was Paul saying all of this so that the Philippines would organize some plan to break him out of prison? Was Paul saying all of this for people to think, "We need to bust him loose as he's too valuable to us sitting in a Roman jail cell?" Of course not. He is telling us this to encourage us (yes, that's you and me!) It's saying despite whatever we are facing at the moment, despite whatever trials we're enduring, God's put all of us here for a purpose: That purpose is to use our lives to make a difference for Him.
- d) I can just hear a lot of you thinking, "What difference can I make? Paul will have some big mansion in heaven based on all the fame he's earned and all the people he's led to Christ. To put it simply, it doesn't work that way. Earlier I used the analogy of one painting with a big roller or with a fine "single point" brush or something in the middle. God doesn't use all people to speak to mass audiences. Others have to do the follow up work. Rewards in heaven are about being faithful to whatever God calls us to do. I suspect that in heaven, a person who was faithful in a very small project may be rewarded just as greatly as the few who worked with masses in their lifetime. It's not the size of the project that God's called us to accomplish, it's about our loyalty to that project. What if I'm not crazy about what it is God called me to do? Do you think Paul was happy about being chained to guards for 24 hours a day? My point is no one said it's going to be easy.

- e) So how do I know I'm doing what God calls me to do? My favorite answer is what do you can't stand not doing? Consider what do you love to do and find a way to combine that with your gifts for God's glory! What if you're in a situation where you're too busy with work or taking care of someone to make that difference? Start by asking God about it? He may have you in that situation for a reason! There may be something He wants to teach us by allowing us to go through that situation. I learned a long time ago, the only person that I can fix is myself. I can't change others. I can be responsible for others (e.g., children) but I also realize that the only person I can "work on" is myself. The point us to realize that He wants to be in charge of our lives. To help us accomplish what it is He wants us to do, He provides His Spirit to guide us to do His will.
- i) Suppose we know all of that, now what? If you don't know what you're gifted at, ask others what you do well. Again, ponder what do you enjoy doing? Imagine you could do whatever you want for the rest of your life. What is it you'd want to do? What would make you happy to do "all day"? Then work toward that goal. I would encourage you to take a few minutes, figure that out, figure out the talents you're born with and work to combine those for God's glory.
- f) OK John, nice speech. What does it have to do with Philippines? Glad you asked. Paul is in effect, asking the same thing. He realized he loved to travel, preach Jesus and see what happens after that. Paul enjoyed the relationships he made from that effort. I don't think he enjoyed all the shipwrecks, beatings and prison time. He just understood that the price of "admission" to being a devout Christian comes with persecution. It doesn't mean Paul went out of his way to suffer. He just got the fact that if one chooses to use their lives as a witness for Jesus, "persecution comes with the territory". It doesn't mean we should avoid making a difference for Jesus because of it, but that "stuff happens" comes with all of this!
- i) So why is persecution part of the ball game? Why did God allow Satan to do what he does in the first place? If God loves being with people so much, why does God allow free will? The answer is God wants us to freely choose to be with Him over all the other choices we can be offered in this lifetime. God allows Satan to rule as to give us the realization that living for God is the best choice we can make in life, in spite of persecution we can suffer for that choice.
- ii) So why does Satan work so hard to persecute believers? What's his motivation? It is to delay the inevitable as long as possible. Satan knows that his time on earth is limited, but he doesn't know how long that limitation is. Therefore, he works hard to delay the inevitable by working to keep people away from Jesus and working to make us ineffective witnesses for Jesus. I suppose Satan thought it was a great day when Paul got chained to Roman prison guards, as now he's not out spreading the Gospel message. Little did Satan realize the good Paul was doing even while being chained in prison. My point here is we never know how God is going to use us in whatever situation we're in. That's why it should always be our desire to do what is His will despite whatever we're going through.
- iii) That's why I spent over a page effectively discussing Paul's dilemma of whether it is better to keep living or be with Jesus? The answer is we let God be in charge of our timing as it's His business when we start and stop our lives!
- iv) Meanwhile, I still have four more verses to discuss in this chapter, and yes, like the rest of this chapter, the underlying issue is "encouragement". Stop and think what is that that Paul wants from all people reading this letter: It is not only to have joy all the time, but to understand the motivation for that joy! By realizing the purpose for living is to use our lives for God's glory gives us far more joy than anything or everything this life can possibly offer us without Him!
- v) The bottom line of this letter is to encourage us to use our life to make a difference for Jesus. Hopefully that's sunk in by now. Meanwhile, the last four verses!

19. Verse 27: Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel <sup>28</sup> without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you.
- a) One thing to grasp here, is Paul got the fact he didn't know what his future held. Nothing like facing death to realize how precious our time is! Therefore, Paul's using the time and the messenger he had to deliver this message hundreds of miles away to say in effect, I've got no idea whether or not I'll ever see you again in this lifetime! All I do know is that it's my desire that all believers continue to use their lives in a manner "worthy" of Jesus.
  - b) Let that word worthy sink in for a moment. How can we ever be worthy enough for God? How can our efforts be worthy enough for a God who created all things and doesn't need anything? How can we ever work hard enough to please Him? It's not possible, which is why Christianity isn't a "works" based religion. Jesus Himself said that what He demands of us is that we believe in Him. Then what? Then we live as God desires we live. There's no mystery to it. It's about living by His standards and making the best decisions we can under those guidelines. Does that mean I have to eat kosher and wear a yamaka? No, as the New Testament makes it clear that that living the Christian life is not about rules. As I love to say, "I can drink all the alcohol I want and do all the horrid drugs I want." The real question is, how much do I want to? If we want to be pleasing to God, then we'll desire to live as He desires. We should just want to use our lives to make a difference for Him. We should want to use our talents and our time as to make a difference for Him. That is what Paul meant in Verse 27 as he wrote, "conduct yourself in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ".
  - c) Coming back to the text, one great way to encourage someone is to give them a reputation to live up to. That's what Paul is doing here. He's essentially saying, "keep living the way God wants you to live and as I taught you to live and ignore those who insist you must do "A, B, and C" in earn one's salvation. When I say "A, B, and C", I'm referring to the idea of doing things in order to prove one's worth to God. Few things make me turn away from a person than if they say, "I'm a good Christian because I do A, B, and C". If you're living as God desires you to live, what you do for God is between God and yourself. It is not about proving one's worth to the church based on what good works you've done! Anyway I am not positive what Paul meant by "keeping it up", but the danger is always trying to prove our worth to God in order to show our "worthiness" to Him. I'm sure Paul desired they do avoid sin, as in effect that goes without saying. I'm willing to bet he was concerned about them continuing to be a good witness for Jesus based on their conduct. That's why we're reading of him giving them a "reputation to live up to" here.
    - i) As you read through the text in these verses, one can see Paul cares about all them standing firm in the Gospel message. I expanded that idea in the last paragraph. I can see the "bottom line" here is the concern that they belief the Gospel truth.
20. Verse 28: This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved--and that by God.
- a) Want a motivation to live as God desires? Verse 28 makes it pretty clear. It's not about us earning "a good spot in heaven", but realizing our salvation depends upon believing what Jesus taught about salvation. In other words, it's worth all the time, trouble and suffering involved in living the Christian life as our salvation depends upon it.
  - b) Since salvation is the issue here, why can't we leave others alone and think, "I'm in, you're not, too bad for you!" Why do we have to witness to others? Yes Jesus commanded it, but it is more than that. It's about realizing "heaven" is not designed to be an exclusive club of all of us who are already saved. God wants us to see people as He sees them, "as someone who loves them and wants to spend eternity with them". However, when we try to prove our worth to God, that's an insult to Him and the price He paid for us.

21. Verse 29: For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him,<sup>30</sup> since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.
- a) If you've ever spent time in a Christian bookstore, you can usually find a little book that'll list God's promises to the believers. It's a nice book to put all of His promises in one place. However, I suspect most of those books forget to mention the fact that the bible says we'll also suffer on His behalf. Now there's a promise to hide somewhere where it's not noticed so easily. I talked earlier in the lesson about why Christian suffering is necessary. Let me give you the highlights quickly:
    - i) Satan realizes his time on earth is limited. There is some final person who'll accept the Gospel message and that's when the "Jesus wrap up show begins". Therefore if you want to know Satan's motivation to make you a bad witness for Jesus, that is it right there. As the old saying goes, "If you don't believe Satan is real, try opposing him and watch what happens!" It's amazing the things that'll occur in life when we use some of our time to make a difference for Jesus. As I learned many years ago, when we make a difference for Jesus, "bad stuff happens". Take that as proof that all this is real when that "bad stuff" occurs.
    - ii) Also realize people don't want to hear that they must live as God tells them to. We will get opposition to the Gospel simply because people want to live however they feel like it. Jesus warns us that since the religious leaders desired to kill him, they will also oppose His followers. All I'm saying is if we commit our lives to make a difference for Jesus, we can expect suffering. Is it worth it? Of course it is. What's the alternative?
    - iii) I don't go looking for suffering, but I realize it comes with the territory. Realize it's a reminder that all of "this" is real when "bad stuff" starts occurring when we using our lives to make a difference for Jesus.
    - iv) The reality of that suffering is a key reason why I encourage prayer for myself and I pray for those who read it as well. Just as Paul relied on prayers of others to help him deal with the realities so God wants us to pray for each other to strengthen us to face what we have to face.
  - b) Finally notice that Paul is aware that the Christians in Philippi had the same struggles that he had. I don't know if that means they were also put in prison for trusting in Jesus, but I do suspect, they too, "paid the price" for believing the Gospel message. Therefore we read of Paul praying for them as he understood the "bad stuff" comes with the territory.
  - c) As my lesson title reads, a Christian is constantly in trouble and constantly joyful. After going through every verse in this chapter, I'm now positive it's the perfect title for this lesson and a perfect description for how our lives go as faithful stewards for Jesus. With that said, I'll close in prayer for all of us to experience that joy!
22. Heavenly Father, You never promised us that living the Christian life would be easy. As disciples of Jesus we're not guaranteed riches, fame and fortune in this life. What we are guaranteed is the sense of joy in spite of whatever we must face in this life. It's not that every moment of our life is going to be filled with misery. What it means is that if we're faithful witnesses for You, we could expect suffering as it comes with the territory. Help us to remember that all things that we do go through in life, are "God filtered". Provide us with Your power and give us boldness so we'll be the type of witness You desire. Fill us with Your joy as we use our lives to make a difference for You. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.