

When Bad Things Happen to God's People

Connect

1. Describe a circumstance in your life today in which you struggle to find joy.

Dig

We often see suffering as God's neglect or negligence, but the Bible offers a different perspective. Rather than doubt God's plan and His character when we suffer, we can experience joy by knowing and trusting God's purpose revealed in the Bible.

Paul, the author of Philippians, was no stranger to suffering. His passionate pursuit of God was rewarded by imprisonment, beatings, false accusations, and poverty. Yet he invited the Philippians to rejoice with him in the consequences of his suffering; Christ was proclaimed!

Sometimes God allows what He hates to accomplish what He loves.

Philippians 1:12-30 (ESV)

"¹² I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, ¹³ so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. ¹⁴ And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

¹⁵ Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. ¹⁶ The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. ¹⁷ The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. ¹⁸ What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice.

Yes, and I will rejoice, ¹⁹ for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, ²⁰ as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. ²¹ For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. ²² If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. ²³ I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. ²⁴ But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. ²⁵ Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, ²⁶ so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again.

²⁷ Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, ²⁸ and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God. ²⁹ For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, ³⁰ engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have."

Additional Scripture

Romans 5:3-5; 2 Corinthians 4:7-12; Hebrews 12:7-11; James 1:2-4; 1 Peter 1:3-9.

Dig Deeper

1. Describe Paul's circumstances in Philippians 1:12-30. List the various words and phrases that reveal Paul's perspective regarding his circumstances.
2. According to Romans 5:3-5, 2 Corinthians 4:7-12, Hebrews 12:7-11, James 1:2-4, and 1 Peter 1:3-9, what are the benefits of suffering?
3. Confidence in God's character is vital to experiencing joy through painful circumstances. What aspects of God's character might enable you to more fully experience joy?
4. How might we conduct ourselves in a manner "worthy of the gospel of Christ" in the midst of suffering—individually and as a Life Group?

Next Steps

1. What does it mean for you to be able to say, with all genuineness, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain"?
2. Think of someone in your sphere of influence who is going through a hard time and maybe has lost his or her joy. How can you encourage that person this week?

Memory Verse

Philippians 1:21 - "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."

New Testament Bible Reading Plan

Monday	Matthew 7
Tuesday	Matthew 8
Wednesday	Matthew 9
Thursday	Matthew 10
Friday	Matthew 11