

Thanksgiving and Joy in Imprisonment

May 5, 2019

To KNOW Christ and one another more deeply,
To CARE for one another in truth and in love,
To GROW as followers of Jesus,
To SERVE those God has placed in our path.
- CG Mission Statement

Worship: Romans 15:13-14

(Here is a psalm/song to help your group as you worship)

Ask group members to meditate on this passage for a minute or two, and then write their own paraphrase of it. Ask two volunteers to pray their version over the group.

Icebreaker

Tell two truths and one lie about yourself. Have group members guess which of the three is the lie.

Text for Discussion: Philippians 1:1-11

Turn in your Bibles and read this passage aloud together.

Aid for Discussion: Sermon Summary

More than any other book of the Bible, Philippians focuses on joy. Even so, Paul begins his letter addressing the hardships Christians will endure. Loss, suffering and conflict will be a normal part of our lives. This isn't meant to be discouraging. Paul is exhorting us to endure and to find joy in the midst of these challenges.

Paul is well acquainted with the realities of Christian life. He wrote the Philippians from jail, uncertain of his survival. Still, he calls us to rejoice and stand firm in our faith. Hardship will come with no guarantee of how things will turn out. We shouldn't deny this reality. Paul's hope is that we remember our unity in Christ in these times. This isn't a matter of simply agreeing with one another when the clash is between Christians; he asks us to agree in the Lord. It is a call toward humility, which is the only path to unity.

We are called to be joyful regardless of our circumstances. This is only possible because joy isn't tied to our circumstances. Nor is it the result of things going well for us. Joy is a cheerful confidence in God's presence to comfort and God's power to deliver.

Joy is only possible through God – turning toward the light when it's just as easy to lean into the darkness. That doesn't mean joy is naive or sentimental. Rather, it's a decision to see life's challenges as opportunities. Joy must be learned and cultivated. We must take to heart that the only things which can never be taken from us are God's character and His promises. We therefore possess a cheerful confidence that we are ultimately headed towards home with our loving Father.

Where can joy be found? Through thanksgiving. Few things will do more to increase our capacity for joy than cultivating a posture of gratitude. This is especially true when giving thanks is a sacrifice. The Bible tells us that by giving thanks to God when we can't see anything to be grateful for, we are teaching ourselves to trust in God's goodness, reminding ourselves that God's heart yearns for our good.

Through prayer. Joy and prayer are inseparable. It's how we call to mind God's presence to comfort and His power to deliver. These prayers may be filled with joy and gratitude or tears and lament. What's important is the posture of our prayer – that we turn toward and lean on our Father in these moments.

Confidence in God's faithfulness. Where did God's presence and power in our lives come from? Who planted the seed of our faith and cultivated it? Our faithful Father did. And God will finish what He started, redeeming and transforming us into His radiant, spotless children. This is our destiny, and who are we to think we could undo or thwart the plans of God?

Through the Gospel. Grace is dynamic. It's something we partake of. As this becomes more and more true of us, we will increasingly see others through Christ's eyes. Jesus loved us even while we were His enemies because He had a vision of us in our eventual, glorious form. Because He began a good work in each of us – and because Christ is in us – He will see it to completion. That is the wellspring of our joy and hope.

Guiding Question of the Week

(This question is intended as a target for the whole conversation. Do not ask for responses now. It will be repeated later in the study.)

If being joyful means to have a cheerful confidence in 1) God's presence to comfort and 2) God's power to deliver, explain how this confidence might increase our joy no matter our circumstances.

Questions for Discussion

(Remember it is better to wrestle deeply with two good questions than gloss over many. Sub-bullets are intended for potential follow-up.)

- Share something that stands out to you in this passage and why?
- How would you describe the relationship Paul had with the people he is writing to and praying for? See vs 3-8
 - What, if anything, would hold us back from sharing this kind of affection for one another?
 - How did Paul pray for them and why? vv 3-5, 10-11
- If being joyful means to have a cheerful confidence in 1) God's presence to comfort and 2) God's power to deliver, explain how this confidence might increase our joy no matter our circumstances.
 - How can we increase our confidence in these 2 truths?
- Re-read verse 6. What is Paul confident of and what does it mean? How does this encourage your confidence?
- Philippians is Paul's signature letter on joy written while he was in prison. Do you know anyone who has lived a life of joy in trying circumstances?
 - How does giving thanks increase our capacity for joy?
- Read Philippians 1:12. What is Paul confident of and how would this encourage (give courage to) the recipients of the letter?
 - What personal applications can you make?

Prayer

Pray Philippians 1:9-11 for leaders, pastors, and church staff this week.

Experiment of the Month

(A suggestion for engagement in following the way of Jesus this week)

Spiritual Formation Experiment of the Month:

Gratitude Journal - Take a few moments at the end of each day to recall where you saw God's gracious activity in your life and thank Him. This is an ancient and simple daily method of helping you call to mind what you have seen, heard, tasted, and touched of God in the day. A Gratitude Journal helps you express thanksgiving to God and increase your capacity for joy as you jot a few things down each day. (There are some gratitude journal apps you may wish to download if you prefer.)

Missional Experiment of the Month:

Depression, sadness, and anxiety are real parts of the Christian and human experience – and we need to make space for real struggle in our worship, in our community and in our friendships. The Bible invites us to admit that life is hard – it's not sin to be discouraged, it's not a failure of faith. It is a far greater witness to the watching world, far more glorifying to God to admit your need and brokenness than to portray a false sense of put-togetherness. Over the next month be intentional about being authentic as a witness to who Christ is, our ever-present, sympathizing, helping, and forgiving Savior. Share stories with your Community Group.