

Joy in the Lord

A Biblical Response to Depression



Philippians is one of Paul's prison epistles. Paul wrote this letter while in captivity in a Roman jail. At its heart, Philippians is a thank you note. Paul planted the church at Philippi ten years before his imprisonment. He had a close, warm relationship with the congregation. Upon hearing of his confinement, the Philippian brethren collected a

love offering and dispatched one of their members named Epaphroditus to deliver it. Paul's letter thanks them for their generosity. However, beyond a thank you note, Philippians is about Christian joy.

In prison, God taught the Apostle the possibility for believers to experience joy in the Lord no matter their circumstances. Philippians contains 104 verses total. Out of this short number of verses, Paul mentions joy or rejoicing no less than 16 times. Joy is the pervasive theme of the letter. Learning joy in the Lord through meditating on these memorized passages is the goal of this brief course.

This course consists of four passages. One passage from each chapter of Philippians. SMF selected these verses due to their connection to joy and issues regarding depression. Once you have memorized these passages you will have a twofold foundation. First, you will have a ready set of verses to help with joy and aid in depression. Second, you will have a foundation to build upon to memorize more of the book of Philippians. If you never memorized a whole book of the Bible, Philippians is a great place to start.



SCRIPTURE MEMORY
— FELLOWSHIP —

Passage One: Remember God's Plan

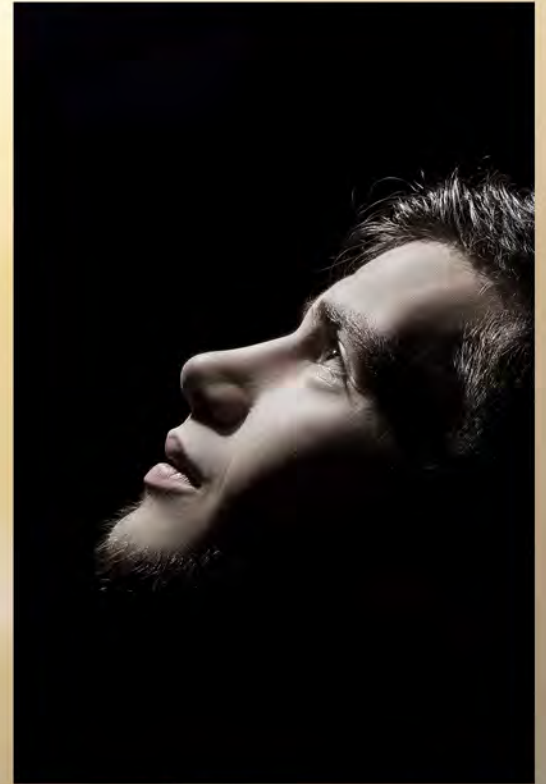
"But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel, so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ; and most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear."

-Philippians 1:12-14

Philippians 1:12-14 serves as an update about Paul's current situation. The Philippians heard merely that their founding pastor was in prison and facing possible death. From a worldly standpoint, his confinement seemed like a setback for the gospel. However, Paul wanted them to know a glorious truth. What seemed like a setback for the gospel was, due to God's providence, actually a blessing and an advancement for the kingdom.

Paul's confinement in Rome brought the gospel to the center of power. The political and military elite heard Paul's powerful gospel preaching. Not only this, but many believers in Rome were both convicted and inspired by his example of suffering for Christ. Many came forward to stand in the gap preaching Christ with a new boldness.

Paul could rejoice and overcome the depression of confinement and possible death by recognizing the providence of God. God's providence is His wise activity among His creation to accomplish His decrees. God's providence operates in our lives to turn all situations in life to His glory and our ultimate good.



Passage Two: Follow Christ's Example

"Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

-Philippians 2:5-11

The Philippian congregation was a healthy church, but not a perfect church. The little flock had issues with division based in large part on selfishness (Phil. 4:1-2). Members were promoting their rights and interests while neglecting others and the greater good. We tend to assert ourselves and strive like this because we do not trust the Lord. We do not trust God to place us where we need to be and give us what we need to have. We struggle to yield to God in surrender to His will.

Paul lovingly rebukes the Philippians but accompanies his rebuke with an exhortation to look to and follow the example of Christ. Christ humbled Himself and obeyed the Father's will. He never stopped being God, but He did divest Himself of the privileges and trappings of deity in the Incarnation. He took on flesh and came to die. His death was not any death, but one of the cruelest imaginable – "even death on a cross." Because the Son yielded, the Father exalted. Christ's surrender was rewarded with the preeminent position in the universe. According to James 4:10 and 1 Peter 5:7, humbly entrusting ourselves to God results in this type of exaltation in due season.

Passage Three: Focus on the Believer's Hope

Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

-Philippians 3:12-14

Philippians 3 begins with a warning of heresy on the horizon. The party of the circumcision or Judiazers posed a doctrinal threat to the Philippians' orthodoxy. Their beliefs were a mixture of law and gospel. At their core, they taught one must become a Jew and embrace the Mosaic law in order to be saved.



Paul instructs them by way of personal example. His Jewish pedigree was impeccable. His adherence to the law was strict. However, he realized those things could not save him. His personal righteousness was inferior. It could never match God's high standard. He needed the righteousness of another - Jesus Christ.

Now the apostle relied exclusively on the righteousness of Jesus. He did not look back at his past. He no longer focused on his militant Judaism that led him to persecute the church so as to be right with God. He focused on his present reliance and future hope in Christ.

Depression can often result from a focus on the past. We want to look back with regret and guilt on sins and bad decisions. We mustn't wallow in self-pity. Rather, we must look forward to Christ and lean heavily on His righteousness. Paul's past was enough to make anyone a basket case. Yet, depression over the past did not consume him because he was consumed by Christ.

Passage Four: Use the Believer's Access

Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.
-Philippians 4:4-7

Philippians 4:4-7 is one of the passages in the letter that explicitly mentions joy. In the previous verses, Paul mentioned a conflict between ladies that needed resolving (Phil. 4:1-3). The Philippian congregation faced many joy-robbers. Their founding pastor encouraged them not to be dismayed by the stressors confronting them. Instead, they should rejoice in the Lord always, knowing that the Lord was near (at hand) to help them.

Are you depressed because you feel your rights are being trampled? Do you find the will of God difficult at this season? Maybe you feel neglected. Intentionally entrust yourself to God and seek to humbly obey Him and He will ultimately exalt you. Memorize and meditate on the example of Christ to encourage your soul while you wait.

How were they to rejoice in the Lord with all these problems upon them or on the near horizon? The answer is found in verses 6-7. The Philippians could rejoice in spite of these storms by making use of the spiritual discipline of prayer.

Christ provides every believer with access to the Father through prayer (Heb. 4:15-16). We are exhorted to take everything to God in prayer permeated with thanksgiving. When we hurl our burden onto God's strong shoulders, He answers with peace. His peace stands as a sentinel over our hearts and minds.

Are you praying over your depression? Your lack of peace and joy in the Lord can stem directly from your lack of prayer. As you memorize this passage, use it to spur your prayer life. Actively believe what the passage pronounces. When we pray, God answers with peace!