

January 20

Lesson 8 (NIV)

REJOICE IN ALL CIRCUMSTANCES

DEVOTIONAL READING: 1 Peter 4:12–19

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: [Philippians](#)

1:12–21

PHILIPPIANS 1:12–21

¹² Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel. ¹³ As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. ¹⁴ And because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear.

¹⁵ It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. ¹⁶ The latter do so out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. ¹⁷ The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. ¹⁸ 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.

Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, ¹⁹ for I know that through your prayers and God's provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance. 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. ²¹ For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.



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KEY VERSE

Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel.—[Philippians 1:12](#)

OUR LOVE FOR GOD

Unit II: Loving God by Trusting Christ

LESSONS 6–10

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Recall the difficult circumstances in which Paul expressed his joy in Christ to the Philippian church.
2. Explain how the gospel produces persistent joy even in difficult circumstances.
3. Create a plan for expressing persistent joy in Christ through one's present circumstances.

LESSON OUTLINE

Introduction

- A. Observation of Persistent Joy
 - B. Lesson Context
- I. Gospel Advanced (PHILIPPIANS 1:12–14)
 - A. Unexpected Result (v. 12)
 - B. Unexpected Places (v. 13)
 - C. Unexpected Means (v. 14)
Unexpected Joy
 - II. Christ Preached (PHILIPPIANS 1:15–18A)
 - A. Contrasted Motives (vv. 15–17)
 - B. Triumphant Gospel (v. 18a)
 - III. Results Considered (PHILIPPIANS

1:18b–21)

- A. Joy Is Experienced (v. 18b)
- B. Spirit Is Supplied (v. 19)
- C. Christ Is Glorified (vv. 20, 21)
Living in Extremity

Conclusion

- A. The Joy of Service
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

HOW TO SAY IT

Caesar	<i>See-zur.</i>
Grecian	<i>Gree-shun.</i>
Macedonia	<i>Mass-eh-doe-nee-uh.</i>
Nero	<i>Nee-row.</i>
Philippi	<i>Fih-lip-pie</i> or <i>Fil-ih-pie.</i>
Philippians	<i>Fih-lip-ee-unz.</i>
poliomyelitis	<i>poh-lee-oh-my-uh-lie-tuhs.</i>
Praetorian	<i>Pree-tohr-ee-uhn.</i>
Via Egnatia	<i>Vee-uh Egg-nay-shuh.</i>

Introduction

A. Observation of Persistent Joy

Why do some people respond to hardship differently than others? That question drove Francis Collins, former head of the Human Genome Project and later director of the National Institutes of Health, to look for an answer.

Collins was in his residency as a

physician when he realized how differently his patients responded to devastating illnesses. Some seemed more resilient under the stress of pain and with the knowledge that their illnesses were terminal. In time, Collins realized that many of the resilient patients were Christians with deep personal faith. He began investigating Christianity and eventually came to faith himself.

Our text is one of the great expressions of Christian faith that is resilient in the worst of conditions.

B. Lesson Context

Paul's letter to the Philippians was written to Christians in Philippi, a city in Macedonia (northern Greece). Paul founded the church there during his second missionary journey ([Acts 16:11-40](#)). Philippi was a well-established, prosperous city on a major Roman road, the Via Egnatia, which connected the east and west coasts of the Grecian peninsula.

Philippi had a rich history, of which its inhabitants were proud. In 42 BC, war between factions of the Roman ruling classes came to an end with a battle fought near Philippi. The victors rewarded their soldiers by granting them nearby lands, establishing Philippi as a Roman colony.

Paul wrote this letter while a prisoner ([Philippians 1:7, 12-14](#)). Though some

scholars have suggested other possible places and times in Paul's life, it remains most likely that Paul wrote Philippians while under house arrest in Rome ([Acts 28:16-31](#)), awaiting trial before Nero. This was during Paul's first Roman imprisonment of AD 61-63, with another following in AD 67.

For the Philippian Christians, those circumstances likely prompted a crisis of faith. Accustomed to taking pride in all things Roman and to looking up to Paul, God's apostle, they had to come to terms with their hero's imprisonment at the hands of Rome.

But the church had problems in addition to this crisis. Conflict and rivalry had begun to threaten the church's unity. Paul mentions by name two who were in conflict ([Philippians 4:2, 3](#)). But the letter's contents suggest this was an example of a wider problem.

I. Gospel Advanced

([PHILIPPIANS 1:12-14](#))

A. Unexpected Result (v. 12)

12. Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel.

Reports of Paul's imprisonment doubtless produce dismay among the Christians in Philippi and elsewhere who have

learned of Jesus from Paul. Has God abandoned Paul? Has Paul been unfaithful to God? Or is Paul's gospel false, his God no god at all, and Paul an imposter?

Paul's answer is more than just a face-saving strategy. It is more than just making the best of a bad circumstance or looking for the silver lining in a dark cloud. Paul interprets his circumstances according to *the gospel* of Jesus. As God brought his salvation to the world in the suffering and death of Jesus, so now he extends his salvation into the world through the suffering of Paul. The good news of God goes forward by the same means that it came into existence: by faithful, lowly, self-sacrifice for others.

What Do You Think?

What are some ways our church can better serve leaders who labor under various kinds of restrictions and hindrances?

Digging Deeper

How will it make a difference, if at all, if those restrictions and hindrances are self-inflicted?

B. Unexpected Places (v. 13)

13. As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ.

Paul could already point to tangible

expressions of the gospel's advance. As a prisoner of the Roman emperor, Paul was guarded day and night by members of the Praetorian Guard, an elite military unit entrusted with the safety of the emperor and other high imperial officials. These highly trained, loyal soldiers were a potent expression of Rome's power and prestige. This was the last place one would expect the gospel of Jesus, the story of a man whom Rome crucified as a rebel, to spread.

Yet this was the very result of Paul's imprisonment. As the Roman centurion at the cross confessed Jesus' divine supremacy ([Mark 15:39](#)), so now Rome's most celebrated soldiery hear the same declaration from a lowly prisoner in their custody. For Christians, such a circumstance should not be an occasion of despair but a reinforcement of joy.

It is interesting that Paul says his *chains* are known *throughout the whole palace guard*. He thereby emphasizes that the message of Christ is being made known through the life of the messenger. Paul's captivity reflects Jesus' own lowliness in arrest, trial, and death. For Paul, the messenger and the message are inseparable.

What Do You Think?

Under what circumstances should we draw attention to our restrictions vs. downplaying or keeping quiet

about them? Why?

Digging Deeper

How will your answer change, if at all, with the level of threat that is present?

C. Unexpected Means (v. 14)

14. And because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear.

Paul explains how his testimony has affected other believers (*brothers and sisters ... in the Lord*) in Rome. Once fearful, they are now *confident and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel* of God despite dangers and opposition. Paul's courage renews their own, as they rediscover what it means to follow the Christ who suffered on their behalf. As Paul's *chains* have been the means of spreading God's message to the imperial guards, so has the gospel been unbound among the Christians of Rome.

UNEXPECTED JOY

My late wife, Pat, contracted poliomyelitis when she was 11 years old. It happened during one of the last major epidemics before the Salk vaccine was developed. As a result of the disease, her weakened back became a source of

severe chronic pain.

She struggled for decades as doctors prescribed various therapies and medications, but no cure ever came. Then came post-polio syndrome, which never relented. However, Pat's faith in Christ proved to be her anchor, giving her a strength of spirit many people could not comprehend.

Pat eventually died of colorectal cancer. During her decline, a score of dedicated Christian "lady-sitters" (as Pat called them) stayed with her while I was at work. Perhaps the most interesting result of these saints' gift of grace was their response to their visits with Pat. I couldn't count the times they told me, with tears of joy on their faces, "I came here to bless Pat with my presence, but she blessed me with hers instead!"

God's gifts of grace sometimes come in the removal of the problem. At other times, he strengthens us to endure our trial. Others may experience blessings vicariously as they observe our response to either situation or both. And that may be the bigger picture that we dare not miss!

—C. R. B.

II. Christ Preached (PHILIPPIANS 1:15-18a)

A. Contrasted Motives (vv. 15-17)

15, 16. It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. The latter do so out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel.

Not every Christian's boldness stems from pure motives, however. Some are motivated by selfish desires. They want Paul's prominence for themselves, or they see Paul as an obstacle to their own ambitions. So with Paul in prison, they *preach* about Jesus in hope that they will become as well-known and influential as Paul, eclipsing him as a Christian leader.

Those who preach from *envy and rivalry* are acting with motives that contradict the message they preach. They preach the selfless *Christ*, but for selfish reasons. Such inconsistency cannot stand for long. Paul highlights these opponents to warn the Philippian Christians. The envy and strife in their congregation stem from similar motives of selfishness.

What Do You Think?

What steps can we take to identify and disarm threats to church unity?

Digging Deeper

What Scripture texts support your conclusions?

In contrast, many desire for Paul the best and want to follow his bold example. Their preaching of Christ reflects Paul's

sincere dedication. In them is no contradiction between motive and message. Regardless of their circumstances, the *love* they express in their preaching is the reflection of God's love. Their respect for Paul is based on Paul's own faithfulness to his message. They know that his suffering is for the sake of Christ who suffered for them, that by word and life Paul defends *the gospel*, the story of Jesus.

17. The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains.

Paul's preaching while a prisoner of the Roman Empire demonstrates in the present the power of Christ, who gave himself in death in the past. Paul's steadfast faithfulness in hardship brings a victory that reflects the victory of Christ in his death and resurrection. True faith in the true gospel creates a love that hardship can challenge but never overcome fully.

B. Triumphant Gospel (v. 18a)

18a. But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached.

Certainly Paul has every right to condemn those who oppose him, we may think. But consider Christ's response to his own enemies. Falsely accused, he

made no defense (Mark 14:60–62; 15:2–5). Subjected to torture, he prayed for his enemies (Luke 23:34). Mockingly invited to use his kingly power by which he had saved others to save himself, he stayed on the cross to the end (Mark 15:29–32). Paul’s response to his rivals reflects Jesus’ selfless sacrifice.

Paul is unconcerned to restore his reputation or maintain his standing. For him, Christ is everything. The fact that *Christ is preached*, even if it means shame for Paul, is evidence that the gospel is advancing. Those who preach with impure hearts will doubtlessly stand in judgment before the God who examines the heart. But until that day, the gospel will go forward even in cases of insincere preaching.

III. Results Considered (PHILIPPIANS 1:18b–21)

A. Joy Is Experienced (v. 18b)

18b. And because of this I rejoice. Yes, and I will continue to rejoice,

The phrase *because of this* points to the reason Paul can *rejoice*. That reason is not his circumstances as such, but the fact that Christ is preached regardless. That reality makes Paul’s situation tolerable to him, even as his ministry circumstances during his missionary journeys have caused him to vacillate from despair “of

life itself” (2 Corinthians 1:8) to being “not in despair” (4:8). Is this true of us as well?

What Do You Think?

In what ways can you be a greater source of joy to others?

Digging Deeper

Categorize your responses in terms of attitudes and actions.

B. Spirit Is Supplied (v. 19)

19. for I know that through your prayers and God’s provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance.

Paul now explains why his joy in Christ will continue even in the most extreme circumstances. This was no theoretical exercise for Paul. He is in Roman custody, awaiting trial before the emperor. The outcome of the trial may mean his death. As happened to the Lord Jesus previously, Paul is about to stand trial before the Roman imperium for his very life. His readers knew this grim reality all too well.

Yet Paul speaks with complete confidence that the outcome of his trial will be *deliverance*. Further, that deliverance will come because of the Philippian Christians’ prayers to God, and likewise through what God’s Holy Spirit, *the Spirit*

of Jesus Christ, will provide. Paul has complete confidence that the victorious power of God at work in his ministry will continue to bring victory.

For the people of Paul's world, *deliverance* is most often used in a military or economic sense. People were "delivered" when their army triumphed, protecting them from invasion, or when a benefactor gave them needed food in a famine or managed governmental affairs effectively in a crisis. Normally one thinks that deliverance for a prisoner means being found not guilty at trial and being set free without penalty.

Paul, however, is viewing deliverance at this point from the perspective of the gospel. By that he does not simply mean deliverance, or salvation, as escaping eternal punishment and experiencing life with God in Heaven at death, though that promise plays a key part in his meaning. Rather, deliverance for Paul is the entirety of life as a follower of Christ. Faith in Christ means not just life with Christ after death; it means life with Christ in the present. It means restoration to the life for which God made humans, the life that reflects the very nature of God as revealed in Jesus.

The life that Paul leads as a Christian—the life of proclamation, of fellowship, of suffering, and now of imprisonment—is the saved life, the true

life. God's people rely on God's power for this life as they pray continually for his provision. The Holy Spirit empowers this life, a life like the life of Jesus, God's true king. The saved life is the God-supplied, Spirit-empowered, Christ-honoring life.

C. Christ Is Glorified (vv. 20, 21)

20a. I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed,

Arrest is shameful. Imprisonment is shameful. Trial is shameful. Execution is the supreme shame. But Paul says he cannot be made *ashamed*, even though these were his circumstances and perhaps his prospects.

Why this indomitable confidence? Paul's view of shame and honor have been transformed by the message of Jesus. Jesus willingly accepted the very shame that Paul faces: arrest, trial, and execution. Yet God vindicated Jesus through that experience, granting him triumph by his resurrection. The same God will vindicate Paul. Nothing can take away the honor that Paul has by his identity with Jesus. In following the way of the cross of Christ, Paul has no shame.

20b. but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.

In fact, Paul is bold. Before the supreme tribunal of his world, Paul can

count on God's power to enable him to declare boldly that Jesus, not Caesar, is the world's true king. The one whom Rome crucified now rules at God's right hand and will return to judge his enemies and to share his victory with his people.

By this bold, faithful proclamation, Paul makes the name of Jesus great. Unlike those who preach for selfish motives, Paul's life and message are consistent. He proclaims the crucified and risen Christ, and he lives as one who understands that Christ's way is the way of true life, of salvation. Paul's *courage* before the tribunal, not giving in to the fear of what might happen, will reflect Jesus' own determination. Paul's confession will be faithful like Jesus' own confession (1 Timothy 6:11-16).

In this way *Christ will be exalted* by Paul, demonstrating who the world's king truly is, by shaping his life in Christ's mold. Thus he will glorify Christ whether in a *life* of continued ministry or in a *death* that reflects Christ's own selfless faithfulness. Focused on Christ, Paul can express joy in even the most extreme circumstances, and he does.

21. For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

This brief verse is certainly one of the best known, best loved, and most widely memorized verses in the Bible. It brings Paul's discussion of his circumstances to

a rousing climax. Its simplicity belies the challenging ideas it presents. To think of death as *gain* defies human experience. Death marks the failure of our bodies, the end of our activity, the end of our earthly consciousness. It would seem that death can only be gain if life has become utter loss, if life has become living death.

But the gospel transforms that understanding. Because Christ died and rose for the sake of unworthy humanity, death means something very different for Christ's followers. By raising Christ from the dead, God demonstrated his unflinching faithfulness to his people. As Christ rules at God's right hand, he administers that same faithfulness to his suffering followers. Having promised that in losing their lives they will find them (Matthew 10:39), Christ assures his people that even death cannot separate them from his love (see Romans 8:34-39).

So to die is gain, as it means experiencing the triumph that Christ brings even in death. That triumph yields what Paul discusses in the following context: to die is to be with Christ, free of the suffering of this age, sharing his triumphant rule in Heaven (Philippians 1:23). That is surely a gain greater than any loss the believer can experience.

Alongside that promise is another statement: *to live is Christ*. What Paul means by that short pronouncement he

goes on to explain in the following context. Paul's present life reflects Christ's life as a life of self-giving service for others. Jesus explained to his disciples this implication from his death: their purpose, like their master's, is to serve all ([Mark 10:41-45](#)). Paul describes his life as labor for bearing fruit ([Philippians 1:22](#)), serving the Philippian Christians and others ([1:24, 25](#)). Living, for Paul or for any follower of Jesus, is *Christ* in that it is focused on rendering to others the joyous, selfless service that Jesus rendered to us.

What Do You Think?

What more needs to happen for you to make [Philippians 1:21](#) your own conviction?

Digging Deeper

How does the fact that death is an enemy, not a friend, influence your response? (Compare [Genesis 2:17](#); [Romans 1:32](#); [5:14, 17](#); [1 Corinthians 15:25, 26](#); [Hebrews 2:14, 15](#); [9:27](#).)

LIVING IN EXTREMITY

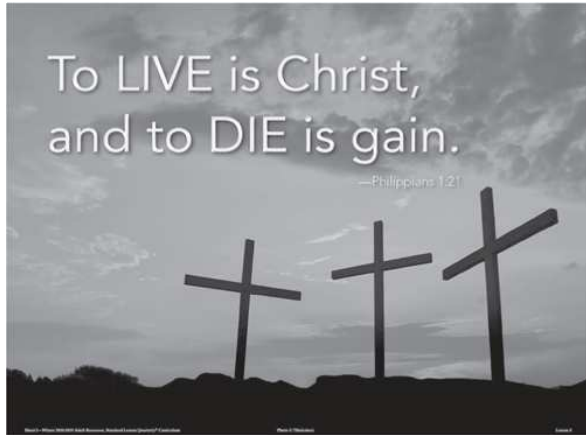
The apostle Paul knew about living under extreme conditions. So did many of his converts throughout the Roman Empire. Most of us are not likely to experience the deprivations or persecutions they did.

Of course, we all have our occasional "trying times." Our experience may be getting laid off from a job during a recession, having our house destroyed by a tornado or flood, or having to replace one of our family cars because of an accident. And most of us know of a few people who really are living in extremity. But the average American lives in a state of privilege compared with the majority of the world.

A Gallup poll a few years ago showed the United States median per-capita annual income to be \$15,480. Five countries in Europe ranked above the US, the highest being Norway at \$19,308. The contrast with the poorest area surveyed, which was sub-Saharan Africa, is striking. Tenth from last on the list was Zambia at \$287. At the very bottom was Liberia at \$118. Not many of us can imagine living in such an extremity!

In some of those countries, poverty-stricken Christians also have to deal with the reality of religious persecution by anti-Christian governments and terrorist groups. What does all of this suggest to us about our attitudes and behavior?

—C. R. B.



Visual for Lesson 8. Use this visual to introduce the question associated with *Philippians 1:21*, directly to the left.

Conclusion

A. The Joy of Service

Why are some people able to express joy in every circumstance, even the painful ones? It has to do with how God made us and with how, in Christ, he has remade us. We were made not to hold on to our lives but to give them away. When we try to hold on, we run away from our divinely created purpose. We mar our divine image. We destroy our joy. When we learn to let go, we discover again the reason we exist. We find our true selves. We reflect our true king. We find true joy.

Paul found a way to serve others even as a prisoner. He knew that even in the bleakest circumstance, God provided a means for him to glorify Christ in self-giving.

How do your circumstances present

opportunities for you to serve selflessly? How has the faithful God delivered that joy to you before? Are you ready to discover how he will do so again?

B. Prayer

Father, by your Spirit we ask that you empower us to give our lives freely for others as we rejoice in your Son who gave his life freely for us. We pray this in his name. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Real life and real joy come from freely giving life and joy to others.

INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

*Enhance your lesson with NIV Bible
Student*

Into the Lesson

Write the following phrases on the board.

*To Gain Access To Gain Approval
To Gain Money To Gain Power
To Express Love*

Ask how each might be a driving force for an individual starting a business. Jot responses on the board. When the discussion winds down, ask how those motives can be the driving force for an individual who wants to participate in church work. Again, record responses on the board.

Say, “The apostle Paul knew that some people were preaching the gospel from motives that were far less than ideal. His reaction may surprise us!”

Option. Place in chairs copies of the “God’s Redemptive Work” activity from the reproducible page, which you can download, to pique learners’ interest as they arrive. Do not refer to or otherwise discuss this until the Into Life segment.

Into the Word

Divide your class into three groups. Distribute instructions on handouts (you

create) as follows.

Paul’s Bondage Group: Read [Philippians 1:12–14](#). 1–What did Paul want the addressees to know? 2–What had happened as a result of Paul’s imprisonment? 3–How did Paul’s imprisonment affect the believers who knew what had happened to him?

Paul’s Challenge Group: Read [Philippians 1:15–18](#). 1–What wrong motives did some people have for preaching the gospel? 2–What right motives did others have for doing the same? 3–Why did Paul rejoice regardless of the motivations?

Paul’s Champion Group: Read [Philippians 1:19–21](#). 1–What two things was Paul counting on to result in his rescue? 2–For what did Paul expect and hope not to happen? 3–Why did Paul expect both possible outcomes of death or continued life to be good things?

Have groups present their conclusions in whole-class discussion. Then pose this question: How has God used Paul’s imprisonment to advance the gospel, even to the present day?

Several answers are possible. But make sure to stress this one if no one else does: Paul’s involuntary, enforced downtime from mission travels resulted in a shift to a writing ministry. The long-lasting result is that for centuries now Christians have had the magnificent letters of Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 2

Timothy, and Philemon—all written during imprisonments—as vital parts of the Word of God.

affirmations of both your students' struggles and the same source of strength that Paul had.

Into Life

After a volunteer reads [Philippians 1:12-14](#), ask, “What stories would you like to share of seeing God’s hand at work only in hindsight, after a period of difficulty was over?” After several minutes of sharing, ask, “Why is it often easier to see the hand of God at work after a trial is over than when we’re in the middle of it?” Be prepared to summarize the events leading up to Joseph’s declaration in [Genesis 50:20](#) as an example. (*Option.* If you distributed “God’s Redemptive Work” at the outset, discuss it at this point.)

Brainstorming. Ask participants to suggest ways to see God’s hand at work during difficult times. Jot ideas on the board. Evaluate ideas only after declaring brainstorming to be ended.

Option. Reopen brainstorming in a private and personal way by distributing copies of the “What’s Stopping You?” activity from the reproducible page. Allow volunteers to share responses, but don’t put anyone on the spot. If no one mentions [Romans 8:28](#), be sure to do so yourself to discuss appropriate and inappropriate ways to apply the affirmation of that passage.

Close with a prayer that includes