

**Principles of Joy**  
*Philippians #1*  
*Philippians 1:3-14*

*Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith. Who for the joy set before him, endured the cross, despising its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

I've heard it said that confession is good for the soul. Well, I have a confession to make on this great day of the Lord, church: There is one spiritual battle that I face each week that is my spiritual kryptonite. It has been for years. I've been on the losing side of this battle more times in my life than I've been on the winning side. And the tragedy is, the reason I've lost is because I surrendered something that God never wanted to me surrender. It's not the battle of "taking it to the Lord in prayer." I've learned in my line of work that's pretty important. It's not the battle of absconding my responsibility to preach and teach the Word of God. I take seriously Paul's command to do that "with great patience and careful instruction." Instead, it is this battle: the battle of letting circumstances, people, issues, or a whole host of other things, influence me to surrender one of the most precious things God gives his people: the joy of the Lord. Yes, church, I confess to you this morning that surrendering joy is my spiritual kryptonite.

Well, church, from now until the end of the year, we are going to park ourselves in one book from one apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ who was the exact opposite. That apostle is Paul. And that book is Philippians. Philippians contains many verses that you know by heart. "Being confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will be faithful to complete it" (1:6). "For me to live is Christ and to die is gain" (2:21). "I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me to" (3:14). "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, let your requests be made known to God (4:6). And "I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength." But what makes the book of Philippians special isn't the quotable verses contained within its pages. What makes it special is the theme of the book itself in light of the circumstances Paul faced in his life when he chose to put the ink on the quill and write this masterpiece on the vellum.

The theme of the Book of Philippians is the Joy of the Lord. The word occurs 16 times in this short four-chapter book. So prominent is the Joy of the Lord in Philippians that the book has been called "The Epistle of Joy." And Paul wrote this Epistle of Joy from a Roman prison where he waited probable execution for being a Christian. Here's why you should listen: You are called to live a life of surrender to Jesus. But you are never called to surrender the joy of the Lord by letting the devil use your circumstances, or people, or issues to steal it from you. And in his introduction to the letter in Phil 1:3-14, Paul gives us four principles of joy that we are called to guard, protect, and never surrender. They are principles we learn about joy from Paul's joy in the catacombs of a Roman prison. Turn there with me.

*<sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart and, 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. <sup>9</sup> 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 for 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. <sup>12</sup> Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters,<sup>[b]</sup> that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel. <sup>13</sup> As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard<sup>[c]</sup> and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. <sup>14</sup> 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.*

## 1. The Completion Principle (6)

- **What a Wonderful World:** (1) If you go to Costco on this very day, the largest jigsaw puzzle in the world can be yours for 1 easy payment of 349.97. (2) It's 8 feet tall and 29 feet long and consists of 60,000 pieces. It's entitled "What a Wonderful World" and, when finished, contains a portrait of the entire world. (3) To us, it might seem like the picture will never come into view. But God always completes what he started.
- **Principle of Joy #1:** No circumstance, no issue, no person, and no stray can ever thwart the completion of God. He always brings to completion what he started and intended.
- **Proof of the Principle in the Text:** Is found in v6: "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) The word "confidence" comes from the same root as the word. It denotes full trust and assurance in the reliability of Jesus. (b) But the verse gets better. "He who began will complete." The underlined is perfect tense in the language of the NT. That means that the good work God began started in the past, then continues in the present, then continues into the future until it's brought to completion.
- **Paul's Application of the Principle in Philippians:** *"I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. <sup>12</sup> I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. <sup>13</sup> I can do all this through him who gives me strength." (Phil 4:11-13)*
- **App:** If you are here this morning and listening right now, then you are living proof that no circumstance, no ailment, no issue, and no person can thwart the completion of God. We as a church are proof of that to because many have tried. And knowing this produces joy.

## 2. The Together Principle (7)

- **The Nina, the Pinta, and the Santa Maria:** (1) On August 3, 1492, Christopher Columbus started his voyage across the Atlantic Ocean. He had a crew of 90 men and three ships: the Nina, the Pinta, and the Santa Maria. (2) When the 90 endured tempests in the sea, they sang. When they ate, they blessed the food together. When they developed scurvy, they bore one another's burdens. And when they arrived, they all kissed the ground. (3) They were fellow travelers bonded by the joy that came from the sharing of the high, lows, and the in-betweens in their journey across the Atlantic.
- **Principle of Joy #2:** There is joy in knowing we are fellow travelers bound for glory but not there yet. We all have highs, lows, and in-betweens because that's the nature of the journey. We are in this together. And one day all kiss the ground in glory.
- **Proof of the Principle in the Text:** Is found in verse 7: *"whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me."* (1) One noun and two participles are linked to the verb "share." Paul's Chains = the Philippians sharing in God's grace with Paul. The same is true of defending and confirming. (2) What does he mean? Paul means that his suffering (chains), testimony before the masses (defending) and proclamation of the Gospel (confirming) benefits the Philippians. (2) They shared in his ministry and from Paul's perspective, every circumstance in his life benefited the Philippians.
- **Proof of the Principle in Our Lives:** There is a reason you go through things in life. And it's not just so you can grow stronger and be more prepared to see Jesus either. It's so your story and your testimony can be developed by God in a way that can benefit others who are or will go through what you've gone through. When that happens, there is a sharing that takes place. Joy is the result.
- **App:** In the Book of Revelation, the word that occurs the most is "overcome." But the phrase that occurs the most is "they sang a new song." They – together – sang a new song – together – because they witnessed the Lamb "overcome" – together – and therefore they became overcomers – together. That's the joy that comes from knowing we are in this together.

## 3. The Love Principle (9-10)

- **Billy Graham's Greatest Theological Reflection:** (1) Mr. Graham, said a student, "what is the greatest theological truth that has ever crossed your minds? (2) "Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so."
- **Principle of Joy #3:** The more we love and the more we grow in what we know, the better we discern the will of God. And that most certainly produces the joy of the Lord that gives us strength.
- **Proof of the Principle in the Text:** Is found in v9-10: *"this is my prayer...that your love may abound more in knowledge and depth of insight...so that (purpose conjunction) you may be able to discern what is best.* (a) Here love abounding more and knowledge and depth of insight abounding more leads directly to being able to discern what is best. The other side is also true, without growing in love and growing in what you know, you will not be able to discern what is best.
- **Proof of this Principle in a Bible Character:** Is John. When we first meet him in the NT, he, with his brother James, is called a "Son of Thunder." But the love of God grabs hold of his heart. When it does, the word "thunder" gets replaced with "beloved" (the most used word in 1 John). As a result, he's able to see a great vision of God known as the Book of Revelation.
- **App:** "The three remain: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest is love." There is joy in growing in it because discernment comes from it.

## 4. The Circumstances Principle (12-14)

- **Church Sign I Saw This Week:** "All will be well because God is good." It implies all might not be well right now, but it will be because God is good.
- **Principle of Joy #4:** Joy comes from know that there is no such thing as a bad circumstance from God's perspective. All will be will because God is good.
- **Proof of the Principle in the Text:** (1) one phrase in v12 sets up the rest of the passage: "I want you to know that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the Gospel." (a) He's convinced that what has happened to him is something God has caused to work together for God. (2) He has two imprisonments in mind: (a) the one in Philippi where an angel set him free, and the Philippian jailer was converted. And the current one where he is awaiting trial in Rome. (b) Then he tells us why: (i) the palace guard knows he's in chains because the Philippian jailer more than likely told them and (ii) people are growing confident because of his example.
- **Proof of this Principle in the Biblical Story:** All things work together for good means exactly what it says it means all things. In Genesis, there was a famine and it worked together for good. In Exodus, there was a bondage and it worked together for good. In Leviticus, there was a sacrifice and it worked together for good. In Numbers, there was a wandering and it worked together for good. In Deuteronomy, there was a death and it worked together for good. In Joshua, there was disobedience and it worked together for good. In Judges, there was more disobedience and it worked together for good. In Matthew, there was a great King slain and it worked together for good. In Mark, there was a servant slain and it worked together for good. In Luke, there was a perfect man slain and it worked together for good. In John, there was the Word made flesh slain and it worked together for good. And in Revelation, there is a "new song they sang" because all things worked together for good just as Jesus said it would.
- **App:** Joy comes from knowing that in God's economy, there is no such thing as a bad circumstance. All will be will because God is good.