

PHILIPPIANS: INVITATION TO JOY (1:1-20)

BIBLE PASSAGE REFERENCE

Philippians 1:1–20 (NIV)

Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus,
To all God's holy people in Christ Jesus at
Philippi, together with the overseers and
deacons:

² Grace and peace to you from God our
Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

³ I thank my God every time I remember
you. ⁴ In all my prayers for all of you, I always
pray with joy ⁵ because of your partnership in
the gospel from the first day until now, ⁶ 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.

⁷ 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. ⁸ God can testify how I long for
all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.

⁹ And this is my prayer: that your love may
abound more and more in knowledge and depth
of insight, ¹⁰ so that you may be able to discern
what is best and may be pure and blameless for
the day of Christ, ¹¹ filled with the fruit of
righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to
the glory and praise of God.

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.

BEFORE THE LESSON

Philippians is one of the most affectionate and joyful of Paul's many letters. What's particularly interesting about this letter is that Paul was so full of joy and affection while writing from prison. As Paul suffers during this trial in prison, he teaches us valuable lessons that were not only applicable for the Philippians when he wrote to them, but also for us today. As Christians in this troubling time of quarantine, we can embrace the lessons Paul teaches the Philippians so that we may not only experience the same joy and express the same affection that Paul did, but that we may also make the way of Jesus attractive to others.

STARTING THE LESSON

Our text for this lesson is **Philippians 1:1-20**. We're going to take a look in this study at Paul's opening remarks in his letter to the Philippian church. It's important to remember that Paul was in prison while writing this letter that is so full of joy and hope. Paul's relationship with Jesus helped him suffer well.

STARTER QUESTION

- Share with us one thing that has brought you joy or delight this week.
- An alternative question: Who is someone in your life who models joy and rejoicing? Briefly tell us about that person.

TIPS TO SHARE WITH LEADERS

Remember to thank people for sharing something personal. This is a big step for some people.

OPENING PRAYER

"Holy Spirit, come and speak to us today. Guide our reading and discussions together, and use this time we spend together so that we might learn to find joy in suffering and trials we face."

BIBLE PASSAGE REFERENCE (continued)

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.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

QUESTION 1

- In the time that Paul wrote this letter it was traditional to start the letter introducing oneself before addressing who you are writing to. Why do you think Paul emphasizes the importance of the Philippian church as "God's holy people" but refers to himself and Timothy as "servants" (v. 1-2)?

He is modeling humility to the people in Philippi. We'll see in chapter 2 that humility is something Paul asks of the Philippians.

QUESTION 2

- In verse 7, Paul says that "it is right" to feel joyful and thankful. Why would he have to defend that it's right for him to feel this way?

Most people in prison don't have this level of joy.

QUESTION 3

- Paul expresses his thankfulness for the Philippians in verses 5-11. How does he express his thankfulness to them? In what

ways can we learn from Paul to express our thankfulness?

He prays with joy for them. He is confident that their good work will continue. He says that he has them "in my heart". He talks about his affection for them. He prays a prayer of blessing over them (v. 9-11).

We could follow Paul's example by writing notes or making phone calls to those we are thankful for and express our appreciation and love to them.

QUESTION 4

- If you were in a situation like the Philippians, how would hearing Paul's positive perspective affect you?

It would bring hope and confidence. It always helps to know you're not alone. Answers will vary.

QUESTION 5

- In verse 12 Paul explains that his imprisonment has “served to advance the gospel”. In verses 12-14, what are some of the ways he mentions that the gospel has been advanced in his suffering? How can we advance the gospel in our lives?

The palace guards know about Jesus because of Paul. Other believers are made more confident and bold because of Paul's example.

QUESTION 6

- Paul says in v. 16 that he was “put here” in prison. Who put him there? What do we learn about God's priorities if he “put” Paul in this situation? Like Paul, we've been “put here” in our circumstances. Why? What could God have in mind for you?

God put Paul in prison to share the gospel with the guards and to give other believers confidence. God's priorities are for all to know him. Answers will vary.

QUESTION 7

- Paul rejoices in his suffering. American Christians often pray that our suffering would stop. How might we embrace rejoicing during this pandemic crisis?

We can pray for courage like Paul had in v. 20. Answers will vary.

QUESTION 8

- Read verses 19-20 again. There are two ways that Paul says he can be delivered from prison. What are they?

By life or by death. Either way, Paul says that Christ will be exalted.

PRAYER MINISTRY

Paul says a prayer for the church in Philippi in Phil. 1:9-11. Have someone read it aloud twice. (Reading it in The Message may be helpful.) Take a few minutes to reflect on the prayer and ask the Lord to bring to mind what he wants you to pay attention to.

- After you take time to reflect, share with one another what God may be emphasizing in your life right now. Pray for one another about what was shared.
- Is there someone in your life that you need to “learn to love appropriately” (Phil. 1:9-11, The Message)? Let's pray for one another that we might love others in a way that attracts them to Jesus.

Note: This study was written as an act of service by Denise Birkhoff.