PHILIPPIANS: INVITATION TO JOY (4:1-23)

## BEFORE THE LESSON

This section of Scripture is all about the generosity of the Philippian church and the joy that the Lord brings to his people. In our current time, it is hard to remember joy and even more difficult to be generous, especially considering that many have lost their lives or their livelihoods. Be sure you to enter this conversation with grace and care.

## STARTING THE LESSON

Paul closes his letter to the Philippian church by affirming their service to him and the Lord, and by confirming his affection for them. While expressing his deep gratitude to his Philippian sisters and brothers, and encouraging unity among them, he also shares about how God has taught him to be content in all circumstances. He has learned to rejoice in both scarcity and abundance, and shares some of his secret to doing so.

**TIPS TO SHARE WITH LEADERS**

Often, group discussions have a much greater impact when people are encouraged to share vulnerably and personally about their own lives, and when they actually do so. One of your primary roles as a leader is to establish an atmosphere in your group that helps people feel secure enough to share transparently. Modeling transparency yourself and thanking and encouraging others when they share will go a long way towards establishing this kind of atmosphere.

## starter question

* What is something that you have found yourself rejoicing in recently?
* What has seemingly kept you from rejoicing?

## Opening Prayer

Holy Spirit, come and speak to us today. Guide our reading and discussions together, and use this time we spend together to grow us in our lives with you. Allow us to find joy among each other and in our daily lives. We thank you, Lord for who you are. Amen.

## Discussion Questions

### Question 1

* After reading this chapter what do you think are Paul’s central priorities for the Philippian church?

He asks two women in the church to settle a dispute, he reminds them of the key to contentment and joy, and he discusses how to depend on God for everything. He also encourages the Philippian church for having been uniquely generous to him among the churches.

### Question 2

* Reread verse 2. Why do you think Paul makes such a public display of these women? Why is he so concerned for unity in the Philippian church?

**BIBLE PASSAGE REFERENCE**

**1** Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stay true to the Lord. I love you and long to see you, dear friends, for you are my joy and the crown I receive for my work.

**2** Now I appeal to Euodia and Syntyche. Please, because you belong to the Lord, settle your disagreement. **3** And I ask you, my true partner, to help these two women, for they worked hard with me in telling others the Good News. They worked along with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are written in the Book of Life.

**4** Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again—rejoice! **5** Let everyone see that you are considerate in all you do. Remember, the Lord is coming soon.

**6** Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. **7** Then you will experience God’s peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus. **8** And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise. **9** Keep putting into practice all you learned and received from me—everything you heard from me and saw me doing. Then the God of peace will be with you.

As Paul explained in chapters 1 and 2, unity is critical for the spread of the gospel. Disagreements keep us from supporting one another in the hard work of the ministry. Paul needs to be sure that this situation will be taken care of immediately and he trusts that the church is mature enough to handle it publicly.

### Question 3

* What does it mean to rejoice in the Lord? Why do you think he specifies “always”? Describe how it might be possible to do this even in hard times.

### *Rejoicing in the lord is rejoicing because in the experience of Jesus himself. The reason you can do this always is because neither Christ nor our relationship with him ever change, for those who are Christ’s. Even though circumstances change we can always rejoice in Jesus. Sometimes our circumstances are so painful it is difficult to rejoice in anything, even Jesus. Other times our circumstances are so good that it is hard to rejoice in Jesus because we are satisfied elsewhere. But it is always possible to rejoice in him.*

### Question 4

* How can we work as a community to rejoice in the Lord together? How can we encourage each other to remain joyful in the Lord?

*There can be a variety of answers to this question. On a personal level, individuals can spend quiet time or engage in worship every day. You can also think of all the different things you find delight in and thank the Lord for all of them.*

### Question 5

* What is Paul rejoicing in?

**10** How I praise the Lord that you are concerned about me again. I know you have always been concerned for me, but you didn’t have the chance to help me. **11** Not that I was ever in need, for I have learned how to be content with whatever I have. **12** I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little. **13** For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength. **14** Even so, you have done well to share with me in my present difficulty.

**15** As you know, you Philippians were the only ones who gave me financial help when I first brought you the Good News and then traveled on from Macedonia. No other church did this. **16** Even when I was in Thessalonica you sent help more than once.

*The Lord, obviously, but also that the Philippian church has remembered him and sent financial support.*

### Question 6

* Many people think of Philippians as a thank you letter. Yet Paul never thanks the Philippians for their partnership with them. Here he says he “rejoiced in the Lord” for their concern. What does that tell you about Paul’s perspective on their financial help?

### *He knows that their ability and desire to give ultimately comes from God. He probably is thankful to the Philippians, but he is more eager to express his delight that God is at work in them.*

### Question 7

* Why would it be significant for the Philippians to know that Paul is not rejoicing because they alleviated his need? (Hint: revisit the question “What is he specifically rejoicing for?”) What do you make of Paul’s words about contentment in verses 11-13? What are some practical challenges to your sense of contentment in these weeks of self-isolation? What are some simple ways that God has helped you experience greater contentment during these difficult days?

### *Paul is not rejoicing because he was in desperate need and things suddenly improved. He wants the Philippians to know that their gift is a cause for rejoicing because their gift shows that their faith is genuine and that they are trusting God. Encourage group members to share their own struggles and victories regarding contentment, whether they are small or large matters.*

### Question 8

* Paul’s experience of God strengthening him is connected with practical of everyday life. He has *learned* to be content over time – he did not simply immediately master contentment. And he experienced God’s strengthening in small and concrete ways in his everyday life. Share about some specific recent experiences of God’s strengthening in your life.

*Paul does all things through Christ who strengthens him, as should we. Encourage your group to share from their personal experiences.*

### Question 9

* How does Paul describe his relationship with the Philippians? How is his relationship with them unique among the churches he planted?

**17** I don’t say this because I want a gift from you. Rather, I want you to receive a reward for your kindness.

**18** At the moment I have all I need—and more! I am generously supplied with the gifts you sent me with Epaphroditus. They are a sweet-smelling sacrifice that is acceptable and pleasing to God. **19** And this same God who takes care of me will supply all your needs from his glorious riches, which have been given to us in Christ Jesus.

**20** Now all glory to God our Father forever and ever! Amen.

**21** Give my greetings to each of God’s holy people—all who belong to Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me send you their greetings. **22** And all the rest of God’s people send you greetings, too, especially those in Caesar’s household.

**23** May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

### *Most churches didn’t give, but the Philippians entered into a partnership with Paul to support his ministry. And throughout this letter, Paul uses regular expressions of affection, gratitude, and warmth to describe and address the Philippian church.*

### Question 10

* What is the difference between volunteering or donating and entering into partnership with someone?

### *Donating and volunteering are sometimes shorter-term or one-off acts of kindness or service. Entering into partnership with a person or organization involves buy-in on both sides, as well as a deeper, longer-term commitment – a partnership involves sustained relationship and commitment over time.*

### Question 11

* Why is it significant for the Philippians to know that God will supply their needs?

### *If they were concerned about meeting their own needs, they would not be focused on meeting the needs of others. When we know God takes care of us we are free to care for others.*

### Question 12

* How can we be generous people, outside of giving financial assistance?

*There can be a lot of answers to this. Making an international friend, volunteering in one of our food pantries, calling relatives you don’t see often, reaching out to the elderly in your area, etc. Encourage your group to respond creatively here.*

## Prayer ministry

For prayer ministry, be mindful of everyone in your group and the variety of backgrounds and current life experiences.

* Sit in silence as a group for 2 minutes and allow the Holy Spirit to speak. Open up space for people to share anything they think they received for the group and pray together afterwards.
* Have everyone share a way they would like to experience more joy or let go of some worry. Pray together doing the hands up/hands down method--hands down dropping all that is burdening, hands up receiving from the Lord.

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