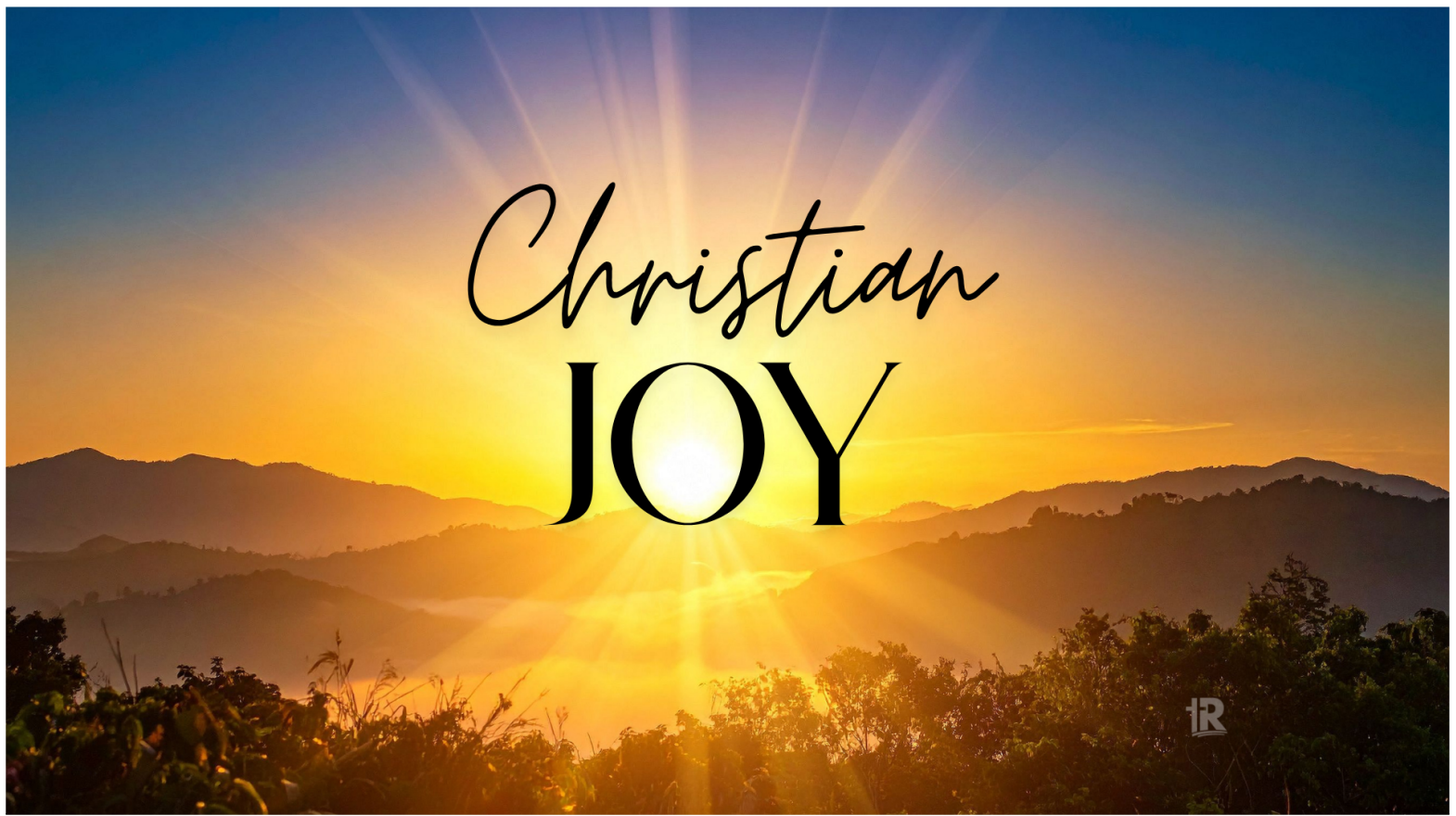




Pastor Mason Phillips| July 26, 2026

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Day 1: Joy as a Refuge, Not Just a Feeling

Devotional: The people of Israel wept when they heard the Word of God read aloud. They were overwhelmed by what they had lost, by how far they had strayed, and by the weight of returning home after captivity. Yet Nehemiah did not tell them to suppress their grief. He redirected it. He pointed them toward something stronger than sorrow. The joy of the Lord, he declared, is your strength. The Hebrew word translated "strength" also carries the meaning of refuge and stronghold. Joy is not a passing emotion that rises and falls with your circumstances. It is a place you can run to. It is a shelter that holds when everything around you shakes. Today, ask yourself honestly: are you treating joy as a feeling that depends on things going right, or are you treating it as the refuge God designed it to be? If you have been waiting for your circumstances to improve

before you allow yourself to rejoice, you have the order backward. Run to the refuge first, and let joy become the ground beneath your feet.

Reading:

Nehemiah 8:6-12 NKJV

And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God. Then all the people answered, "Amen, Amen!" While lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground. Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodijah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, and the Levites, helped the people to understand the Law; and the people stood in their place.

So they read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense, and helped them to understand the reading. And Nehemiah, who was the governor, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, "This day is holy to the Lord your God; do not mourn nor weep." For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the Law.

Then he said to them, "Go your way, eat the fat, drink the sweet, and send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared; for this day is holy to our Lord. Do not sorrow, for the joy of the Lord is your strength." So the Levites quoted all the people, saying, "Be still, for the day is holy; do not be grieved." And all the people went their way to eat and drink, to send portions and rejoice greatly, because they understood the words that were declared to them.

Reflection Question: In what area of your life have you been waiting for circumstances to change before allowing yourself to experience joy?

Practical Application: Identify one thing today that you have been withholding gratitude for and bring it before God in prayer, choosing to thank Him before the outcome is resolved.

Day 2: Joy in the Unexpected

Devotional: Paul and Silas did not end up in prison because they did something wrong. They ended up in prison because they did something right. They cast a demonic spirit out of a slave girl, setting her free, and the men who profited from her bondage had them beaten and chained for it. If you have ever done the right thing and suffered for it, you understand the confusion of that moment. You honored God and the walls closed in anyway. This is the reality Jesus promised in John 16:33, where He told His disciples plainly that in this world they would have trouble. He did not sugarcoat it. He did not promise that obedience would always produce comfort. What He did promise was that He had overcome the world. The unexpected trial is not evidence that God has abandoned you. It is an opportunity to discover that joy is not dependent on favorable outcomes. Paul and Silas had no control over their chains, their cell, or their accusers. What they did have was a God who was still sovereign over all of it.

Reading:

Acts 16:16-24 NKJV

Now it happened, as we went to prayer, that a certain slave girl possessed with a spirit of divination met us, who bought her masters much profit by fortune-telling. This girl followed Paul and us, and cried out, saying, "These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation." And this she did for many days. But Paul, greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And he came out that very hour.

But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to the authorities. And they brought them to the magistrates, and said, "These men, being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city; and they teach customs which are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or observe."

Then the multitude rose up together against them; and the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded them to be beaten with rods. And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely. Having received such a charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

Reflection Question: Can you recall a time when doing the right thing led to difficulty? How did you respond, and what did that reveal about where your joy was rooted?

Practical Application: Write down one current trial or frustration and, next to it, write one way God could be working through it for your good, drawing on the truth found in Romans 8:28.

Day 3: Seeking the Source of Joy

Devotional: At midnight, in chains, in the dark of a Roman prison, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God. They were not performing for the other prisoners. They were not trying to boost their own morale through positive thinking. They were directing their worship toward God because He was their source. Jesus, in John 15:11, tells His disciples that He spoke these things so that His joy might remain in them and their joy might be full. The word "remain" is critical. Joy that is rooted in Christ does not evaporate when the pressure increases. It abides. It stays. But remaining in that joy requires remaining in Him. The closer you are to the source, the more consistently you will experience what flows from it. Proximity to Jesus is not simply a spiritual concept. It is a daily, practical choice to turn your attention toward Him rather than toward your chains. When Paul and Silas looked up and opened their mouths in praise, they were not denying their circumstances. They were declaring that their circumstances did not have the final word.

Reading:

John 15:1-11 NKJV

"I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you."

“Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches, He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned.

“If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask me done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.”

Reflection Question: When life becomes difficult, what is your first instinct? Do you turn toward God or do you turn toward worry, distraction, or self-reliance?

Practical Application: Set aside ten minutes today to worship without making any requests. Simply direct your attention to who God is and let that be the whole of your prayer.

Day 4: Joy That Opens Doors

Devotional: The earthquake that shook the prison in Philippi did not only open doors for Paul and Silas. Every prisoner's chains were loosed. Every door swung open. And a jailer who had been ready to take his own life fell trembling before two beaten, imprisoned missionaries and asked what he had to do to be saved. The joy of Paul and Silas was not contained by their circumstances. It was contagious. It crossed the walls of their cell and reached people who had nothing to do with their mission. This is the nature of genuine Christian joy. It does not stay private. It draws people in. It raises questions that only the gospel can answer. The jailer saw something in Paul and Silas that he could not explain by any natural standard. Men who had been beaten and wrongfully imprisoned should have been bitter, broken, or silent. Instead they were praising God. That supernatural response became the open door for an entire household to enter into salvation and rejoice together. Your joy, even in suffering, is a testimony that the world cannot manufacture on its own.

Reading:

Acts 16:25-34 NKJV

But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were loosed. And the keeper of the prison, awaking from sleep and seeing the prison doors open, supposing the prisoners had fled, drew his sword and was about to kill himself.

But Paul called with a loud voice, saying, "Do yourself no harm, for we are all here." Then he called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. And he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" So they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household."

Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized. Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household.

Reflection Question: Has your response to difficulty ever drawn someone else toward God? How might a posture of joy in your current circumstances serve as a witness to those around you?

Practical Application: Think of one person in your life who is watching how you handle a current difficulty. Pray specifically for them today and look for one tangible way to demonstrate hope and joy in your interaction with them.

Day 5: The Confession of Enduring Joy

Devotional: Habakkuk's hymn is one of the most honest and courageous confessions in all of Scripture. He does not pretend that everything is fine. He names the losses plainly: no blossoms on the fig tree, no fruit on the vines, no cattle in the stalls, no harvest in the fields. He stacks failure upon failure and then, in the face of all of it, declares that he will still rejoice in the Lord. This is not denial. This is not manufactured happiness. This is a man who has found something deeper than his circumstances, a joy that is anchored in the God of his