

Hello Journey Family,

Thank you for starting this journey together with us from the book of Philippians. Our series is entitled "Choose Joy," and the goal for our series is to learn that JOY is available "no matter the circumstances" we may be facing.

One of the first things you need to understand about joy in the bible is that God experiences JOY! Isaiah 62:5 tells us..."the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you." The bible teaches us that God enjoys us. HE looks down over humanity and enjoys us!

Zephaniah 3:17 says, "The LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness; He will quiet you by his love; He will rejoice over you with shouts of joy."

I don't know if you thought about that before, but GOD IS JOYFUL and He rejoices in US! **He likes us!** You may have been brought up in a church background or culture, where God is viewed as a God of judgement, stern and angry all of the time. This word is for you – God experiences Joy! And right on the heels of that – we need to understand that God wants US to experience joy- to be distinguished by, and marked by JOY. If he's a joyful God, he wants his creatures to be joyful also.

There is an abounding of JOY in Christ! In The book of Hebrews, the bible says of Jesus: God the Father has anointed him with oil of gladness above his fellows. The word gladness is another word for JOY – exceeding joy. It actually means: Joy that leaps and dances. Can you imagine that - Jesus leaping and dancing? That is the kind of joy he has. Abounding joy that He wants us to have too. Not half-hearted joy, not "maybe-so-joy," but abounding and supernatural JOY!

The Apostle Paul is writing to the Philippian church (a gathering of Christ followers in Northern Greece) to remind them how the Gospel works out in their everyday life. Specifically, how joy (which is the main theme of the book) works out in the life a believer.

The church at Philippi was probably one of Paul's most successful churches. They had been extremely generous and supportive to Paul. In fact, Paul took a good portion of this letter in Chapter 4 to thank them for their generosity.

Paul was in prison at the time of his writing (one of the Prison Epistles) and even some "brothers" had turned against him. Paul was not bothered by his imprisonment, nor was his ministry hindered. In fact, the exact opposite took place. His ministry thrived and grew. You would think that an imprisonment would shut Paul's voice up, but he was able to use his experience in prison as a springboard for his ministry. What was the reason for his positive attitude? What was the reason for his success?

JOY - the byproduct of believing the gospel! In fact, joy is the theme of the letter. Paul uses the word joy more times in Philippians than any of his other letters (second only to the Gospel of Luke).

Paul opens his letter expressing thanksgiving, joy and confidence for the Philippians. His positive perspective is so dissonant with his situation, he feels he has to justify himself: "It is right for me to feel this way about you." (Phil. 1:7)

Through these study/reflection questions, I pray you will discover what about Paul's experience enabled him to suffer so well. Please reflect on the following questions...

1. Given all that is happening in our world today, what is your "joy quotient"? On a scale of 1-10 (10 being exceedingly joyful) what number would you choose? Would others agree with you?
2. Try to define joy and happiness and discuss any similarities and differences.
3. How much of your joy is dependent on your circumstances?
4. Only believers in Christ can experience the fullness of joy. What does "fullness of joy" mean to you?
5. In what ways are you struggling to keep up your "joy quotient" and how can your community group or church family help you?
6. Philippians 1:6, tells us "God finishes what he starts." How does this comfort you when you face trials in life, or are particularly aware of your own sinfulness or weakness?

### **Digging deeper:**

Read the following verses:

John 15:11, John 10:10, John 16:24; Romans 14:17; Galatians 5:22; and James 1:2.

What can you learn about the subject of joy from these verses?

### **The following points offer further insight into joy:**

- Joy is a gift from God. (Psalm 4:7)
- Joy is a product of the Holy Spirit. (Gal. 5:22)
- Joy is a byproduct of believing the gospel. (John 15:11)
- Joy is result of obedience to God's word. (1 John 1:4)
- Joy is deepened through difficulty. (2 Corinthians 6:10; James 1:2)
- Joy grows when life is viewed through the lens of future hope. (Jude 24-25)