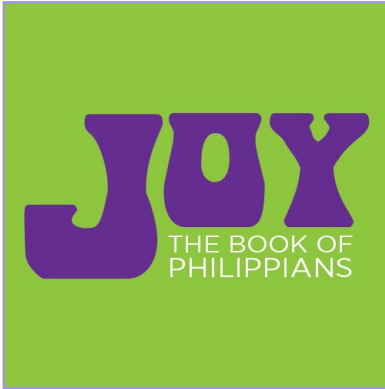


# Small Group Questions

*Small groups and individuals can use these questions to engage the content of Sunday sermons.*



**January 9 – February 6, 2022**

## **Joy: The Book of Philippians**

Joy is that deep sense of contentment and a sense of well-being that transcends our circumstances. Joy helps us perceive the world differently and enables us to take delight in the blessings around us. Moreover, joy is supposed to be one of the fruits of the Christian faith. So why do we find it challenging to cultivate?

*The joy of the Lord is your strength. – Nehemiah 8:10*

**Week 1: January 9, 2022**

**Choose Joy**

**Philippians 1:1-11**

### **Connect:**

What would you prefer: to be happy or filled with joy? How are they related to one another? How are they different?

### **Engage:**

The Philippians are a congregation that Paul founded early in his ministry ([Acts 16:11-40](#)). While there, local authorities imprisoned Paul and Silas for disrupting the civil order. When an earthquake broke open the prison doors, the jailer converted when his prisoners did not escape. Paul writes this letter from another prison. His affection for the Philippians shines through every chapter, as does his joyful heart, despite his circumstances.

Read [Philippians 1:1-11](#)

1. χαρά (chara) is translated "joy" in the New Testament. It also means gladness, happiness, and bliss. In John 3:29, John the Baptist describes himself as the bridegroom's friend on his wedding day who rejoices with joy. Why do you think Paul characterizes his love for the Philippians with such exuberance? What clues do you see in the text?
2. What do you think it means that "(God) who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion?" (1:6) What does that tell you about the nature of the Christian life?
3. In 1:9-11, Paul provides a fairly complete portrait of a mature Christian. How would you distill his thoughts into a few sentences of your own?

### **Apply**

Joy is rooted in a grateful heart that sees blessings and abundance instead of bad fortune and scarcity. Joy is not dependent on circumstances. Instead, it is rooted in growing faith and trust in God.

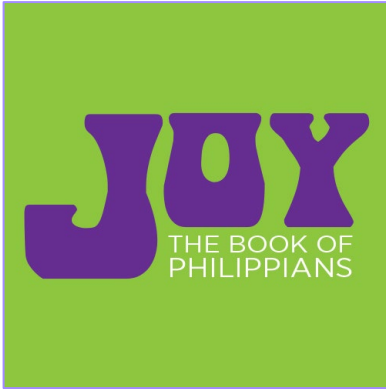
How could you benefit from seeing life through the lens of God's blessings and abundance? How might such a perspective catalyze a growing faith?

### **Pray**

Share joys and concerns and pray for one another, the church, and the world.

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**Week 2: January 16, 2022**  
**Living Inside Out**  
**Philippians 1:12-30**

### **Connect:**

When you are discouraged or facing challenges, what helps lift your mood or gives your courage?

### **Engage:**

Roman prisons were filthy, poorly ventilated, underground, and crowded. Prisoners were often chained together and housed in one large area instead of individual cells. Men and women were housed together, often leading to sexual assault. The Romans designed prisons to strip prisoners of their dignity through physical and psychological torture. Prisoners had to rely on friends and family for provisions as the Romans provided few rations. The deplorable conditions were meant to discourage people from committing crimes. They were truly a fate worse than death.

Read [Philippians 1:12-30](#)

1. How do you think Paul's imprisonment advanced the spread of the gospel? Why do you think this encouraged other Christians to speak more courageously for Christ?
2. Paul suggests some people were preaching about the faith for selfish ambition and to stir up more trouble for him. What guiding principles of faith do you think enabled Paul to embrace these Paul-haters?
3. Paul encourages the Philippians to conduct themselves in a manner worthy of the gospel - even in the face of fear, opposition, and suffering? What is your standard for conducting yourself "worthy of the gospel?"

### **Apply**

The commitment to follow Jesus is not always easy. One can be easily discouraged and disheartened when faith is tested. Paul reminds us that it is possible to rejoice when we see the bigger picture of what God is doing.

This week, what step can you take to "conduct yourself worthy of the gospel?"

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**Week 3: January 23, 2022**

**Loving like Christ**

**Philippians 2:1-18**

### **Connect:**

What or who are the joy crushers in your life?

### **Engage:**

Scholars assert that the poem in 5:6-11 is an ancient hymn or creed used in worship by early Christian communities. Likely memorized and recited by Christian converts, Paul utilizes this Christological affirmation to encourage the Philippians to resolve whatever disputes they were experiencing (2:3-4, 14). Christians used Jesus' life as a blueprint for their own. When one became a "disciple" of a rabbi, they were supposed to reflect that leader's character and follow their teaching.

Read [Philippians 2:1-18](#)

1. What are the primary motivations for living in unity? How do these lead to like-mindedness, unity of love, spirit, and purpose?
2. Take a moment to think about some stories about Jesus that mean the most to you. How does Jesus display the qualities you captured in question 1? Give examples.
3. How would being like Jesus in character lead Christians to "shine like the stars? For Paul, what made Christians distinct from the non-Christians around them? What do you think makes Christians distinct today?

### **Apply**

All sorts of things crush joy: holding a grudge, responding without empathy, never apologizing, thinking you are better than others. The way to increase joy is to follow Christ's example of humility and let go of self-justification, self-righteousness, and self-promoting power. Loving others and seeking their best will increase joy.

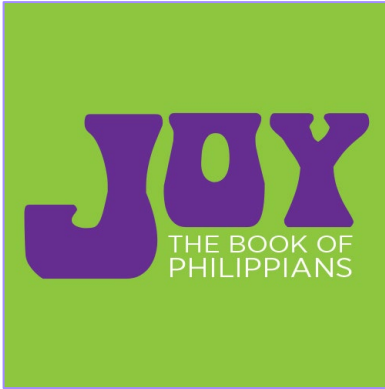
Who is someone you struggle with? How can you take one more step to love this person and seek their best?

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**Week 4: January 30, 2022**

**Pressing Forward**

**Philippians 3:1-16**

### **Connect:**

Imagine your funeral. What would you hope your friends and family would say about your most significant accomplishments or character strengths?

### **Engage:**

Paul was a former member of the Pharisees, a "back to basics" group that ardently believed that following the Old Testament Law would bring about God's kingdom. One's life was ruled by strict rituals around eating, working, studying, and sabbath rest. These laws governed who and how you related to others. Of particular concern were Gentiles, who were not circumcised and considered ritually unclean. Jesus criticized the Pharisees for caring more about the outward compliance to the law than a grace-filled relationship with God.

Read [Philippians 3:1-16](#)

1. Why is Paul so upset with those who advocate circumcision for Gentile converts? Why would complete conversion to Judaism by Gentiles be an improper or dangerous thing in Paul's eyes?
2. What did Paul give up and what did he gain in knowing Christ? How is righteousness gained by faith (not by the law) a benefit to Paul? To the Gentiles?
3. Paul speaks of forgetting the past and instead straining for the prize found in Christ. What do you think he means? Is this just "pie in the sky" or something more?

### **Apply**

Life is often measured by the signposts in our lives, be it tragedy, celebrations, or life milestones. Paul looks back and sees his most significant turning point when he came to know and follow Jesus. Living a Christ-centered life does not keep us from harm, but it helps us cope with whatever stress we face.

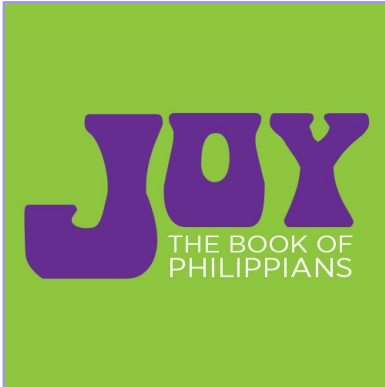
What is holding you back from following Jesus wholeheartedly? How can previous milestones of faith encourage you to press on toward knowing and trusting Christ more deeply?

### **Pray**

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**Week 5: February 6, 2022**

**Increasing Joy**

**Philippians 4:4-9**

### **Connect:**

What causes you the most anxiety? What are your coping strategies?

### **Engage:**

μεριμνάω (*merimnao*) is the Greek word for anxiety or worry. Paul contrasts this with having the peace of God. While we may think of this as peace of mind as a type of serenity or the absence of inner conflict, the biblical meaning of peace is rooted in *Shalom*, the Hebrew word that means completeness, well-being, thriving, and setting things right. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus teaches us not to be anxious about material needs or the future (Matthew 6:26-34) but instead, he calls on us to trust God and pursue God's kingdom.

Read [Philippians 4:4-9](#)

1. What do you think it means to "rejoice always?" Earlier in the book, Paul seems to rejoice in his sufferings. What does Paul do when he is struggling and suffering?
2. Paul submits that anxiety cannot lead to peace. What steps does he suggest to irradicate anxiety? Do you find this approach effective? How so?
3. Paul describes a peace that surpasses understanding. Have you ever experienced a sense of peace like that? What was that like?
4. In verse 8, Paul suggests the discipline of focusing on what is excellent in the world. How does this discipline lead to rejoicing, more gratefulness, less anxiety, and a more profound peace?

### **Apply**

Paul ends his letter with practical advice about increasing joy. Joy comes from the discipline of focusing on what is going right rather than focusing on what is wrong. A strong faith perspective and prayer are key!

If growing in Christ requires the disciplines of gratefulness and a mind attentive to what is good, what concrete steps can you take this week to reset your heart and mind?

### **Pray**

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