

Lesson Two

We as human beings are easily entrapped by our longing for the ideal situation. We want to eliminate conflicts, suffering, and struggles. We believe that all that is needed for a happy existence is to have obstacles removed. This belief causes us to miss how God can transform us. When we admit and let God be in control, we can face daily living with joy because God is able to work in all situations while developing His character in us.

Paul's life was one of struggles. He endured floggings, beatings, numerous arrests and imprisonments, even hunger all for the sake of Christ. Yet through all these events, he chose a joyful attitude.

Paul's Roman imprisonment was far from a cushy assignment. Imagine living each day under house arrest and chained to a Roman guard. Now there's a picture of confinement and lack of privacy. Because Paul understood that joy doesn't depend on circumstances, people, or possessions, he saw his Roman imprisonment as an opportunity to proclaim Christ to a captive audience. Paul's life purpose focused on sharing Christ. Paul's epistles written during his Roman imprisonment had a great impact on those who read his words and continues to influence Christians today.

When one of my dearest friends was diagnosed with cancer, she recognized that many struggles were ahead. No mother looks forward to sharing the doctor's diagnosis with her spouse and children. Karla prayed for wisdom in how to share her illness with family and she asked for my prayer support as well. If one hundred hours of prayer could have erased the doctor's announcement, I would have immediately started to pray. Karla knew with certainty that God would be with her and her family throughout her illness and recovery – that He hadn't let her slip through a crack. This certainty allowed her to go through the experience with peace and joy.

During Karla's chemotherapy sessions, she was never alone. Several of her friends and I took turns being at her side. As the chemicals dripped into her body, we strengthened our friendship with hours of sharing and connecting. Our friendships grew deeper. Although we grieved over the sickness that ravaged her body following each chemotherapy session, Karla's peace prevailed. She was confident that her life was in God's hands and that cancer was not an accident He had failed to control. She believed each day of her life was directed by God and that He would provide her with adequate strength and endurance to make it through each day.

Chemotherapy stripped the hair from Karla's head but it never stripped her confidence in God. I will never forget the evening she bared her head and heart. Wearing a wig made from her own hair, she struggled to explain to an older woman how her hair was different even though it looked the same. Finally giving up, she yanked the wig from her head with a flourish that it surprised and made our entire women's Bible study group laugh.

Amid Karla's battle, she still experienced and demonstrated joy. And we experienced it with her. I look back on that evening and confess that what at first appeared as a scar was indeed beauty. So many friends and co-workers saw Karla's outlook as not just positive but as amazing. Karla's confidence in God allowed her to live each day with peace. She could experience joy not because of favorable circumstances, but because she knew God was in control of each day.

My prayer for you is that, like Paul, and Karla, you will see God's hand at work directing your daily life in a way that furthers God's kingdom. I pray that you will embrace God's joy each day whatever your circumstances.

Paul's Encouragement and Instruction to the Philippi Christians

1. Paul's letter to the Philippians is very personal-providing evidence of a close relationship and conveying heartfelt emotions. He thanks the Philippians for their financial support and speaks words of encouragement and exhortation. Read the following passages to identify Paul's central theme in them.

Note: Repetition is a helpful clue in identifying central ideas within a text. Consider underlining or highlighting repeated words.

1:3-6, 18-21	2:17-18 and 3:1	4:10-13
<p>³I thank my God every time I remember you. ⁴In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy ⁵because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, ⁶being confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.</p> <p>¹⁸But 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, ¹⁹for I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance. ²⁰I 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. ²¹For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.</p>	<p>¹⁷But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you. ¹⁸So you too should be glad and rejoice with me.</p> <p>¹Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you.</p>	<p>¹⁰I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you have been concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. ¹¹I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. ¹²I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. ¹³I can do everything through Him who gives me strength.</p>

1. Where did you observe repetition in the verses above? _____

2. Identify Paul's central theme and explain why you believe this is his message. _____

As you could see in these passages, many words were repeated: joy, rejoice, glad, and content. Joy is the central theme of this powerful letter written by Paul. It is critical that one understands that joy does not come from favorable circumstances and situations, but joy comes from inward strength that prevails regardless of circumstances. God is far more concerned about His children's growth than their comfort. We must fight the tendency to look for a quick fix in life and in the circumstances we face. We must never measure our happiness by externals. We need to live trusting that God is directing (Philippians 1:6) our circumstances into

opportunities for growth and for the furthering of His kingdom. Consider this statement: “Our character is determined not by our circumstances but by our reactions to those circumstances.”¹

John and Stasi Eldredge articulate a powerful truth: “God does not always rescue us out of a painful season. You know that He does not always give to us what we so desperately want when we want it. He is after something much more valuable than our happiness. Much more substantive than our health. He is restoring and growing in us an eternal weight of glory. And sometimes...it hurts.”²

3. In viewing your current life situation, how do Paul's words speak to your life and the way you view your life right now?

Before examining Paul’s theme in the following three sections of verses, look at each section separately and answer the questions.

1:15-18	2:5-11	3:7-14
<p>¹⁵It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. ¹⁶The latter do so in love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. ¹⁷The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. ¹⁸But 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.</p>	<p>⁵Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: ⁶Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, ⁷but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross! ⁹Therefore God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.</p>	<p>⁷But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ ⁹and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. ¹⁰I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death, ¹¹and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. ¹²Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. ¹³Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, ¹⁴I</p>

¹ Charles Colson, The Good Life: Seeking Purpose, Meaning, and Truth in Your Life. (Illinois, Tyndale House, 2005) 74.

² John and Stasi Eldredge, Captivating: Unveiling the Mystery of a Woman’s Soul. (Nashville, Tennessee Thomas Nelson, 2005) 143-144.

		press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.
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4. When examining the verses in the first column (1:15-18) understand that Paul's character and motives have been attacked by fellow believers. Record not only where Paul's focus remains but where he refuses to spend his time and exert his energies. His refusal to spend time defending himself displays what character?

5. In the second column (2:5-11) Christ's life is presented to us as an example of what character?

6. In the third column (3:7-14), Christ's life and Paul's example model which character trait that we are to exhibit in our own lives?

7. Now that you have observed each section separately, identify the central message conveyed in all three sections.
