

PHILIPPIANS 1:1-2
INTRODUCTION TO JOY!

Please turn in your Bibles this morning to Philippians chapter 1 as we begin our study of Paul's letter to the church in Philippi. And on Sunday mornings we are focused in digging into the book we are studying, or we will do an in-depth study of Paul's letter to the church in Philippi!

Over the past several months we have studied the letters of 1st and 2nd Timothy as well as Jude. And they were heavy letters dealing with apostasy, contending for the faith, standing strong in the midst of persecution and so on.

And maybe some are on edge about all that is going on. Maybe some are angry at what they see happening in this country and the world. Some of you may be angry at what is going on in churches today. Some of you may just be angry. And what is seen in your life is a lot of murmuring and complaining!

Well, I pray that our study will turn that anger, that unhappiness, all that murmuring and complaining around because this morning, we are going to begin a journey of – **JOY!**

Now you may be thinking, ***“What is the big deal about joy. Why is this so important that we are going to focus on joy here in the letter that Paul wrote to the church in Philippi?”***

I did touch on this but before I dig into that a little more, let me share with you a little about Philippi and the church that Paul was writing to.

Keep in mind that Philippi was not a big city, it probably had around 10,000 people who lived there.

But like the cities, big and small around them, they needed the light of the Gospel to shine upon them so that they could come to saving faith!

Remember that Paul visited Philippi on his second missionary journey and during that time we know for certain that a woman named Lydia and her family were saved as well as the Philippian jailer and his family, besides others of course.

You can read of this first visit to Philippi by Paul in Acts 16:14-34.

The timeframe for this first visit was around 51 A. D.

Also, Philippi was a Roman colony and enjoyed all the benefits of that relationship.

It also was an important city in eastern Macedonia. (Northern Greece)

The area was important for its gold mines and its soil that was very rich, it was very fertile.

Philippi was also located on the main road from Rome to Asia, the Via Egnatia, which made it a strategically important city.

So there were a lot of people that traveled through Philippi.

I am not sure why there is a dispute about who wrote this letter, but I guess people love to challenge the Word of God and they like to find things that are not there.

I think it is very clear that Paul is the author of this letter to the Philippians. In fact, the letter opens up with "**Paul and Timothy . . .**" I wonder who that can be? Okay, a little sarcasm. It is very easy to see who wrote this letter, it was Paul!

The timeframe of this letter is as follows. It was written when Paul was in prison in Rome, probably around 61 A. D., some 10 years or so after his first visit to Philippi and the establishment of the church there.

Also, Philippians is one of the four prison epistles that Paul wrote, along with Ephesians, Colossians and Philemon.

Remember that Paul spent two years in prison in Rome waiting to stand before Caesar to present his case.

Yes, Paul was under house arrest, and he was able to see friends, but I don't think this was easy for him.

Paul was not in a prison there in Rome, but he was chained to a Roman soldier twenty-four hours a day seven days a week for two years!

Imagine that. No freedom for yourself. Everything you do they are watching you. Everything you say that are listening to.

I don't think we think much about that but that would be horrible to live like that. Imagine. You ate with them, slept with them. Used the bathroom with them by your side. Everywhere you went they went.

And as Paul writes this letter you may be thinking he is going to be complaining about all that he has to endure there in Rome. It is taking way to long for him to have Nero hear his case so he can be released. The food is not good. These guards are not nice. And of course the list can go on because we are very good at complaining.

For Paul, he could have been thinking, ***"I can't take it any longer!"***

But that is not what Paul writes about. In fact, what I find amazing is that this letter has been called - ***THE EPISTLE OF JOY!***

Again, Paul is waiting to stand trial and he did not know the outcome of the trial that was before him. He could have been put to death for his faith in Christ.

And yet, he is filled with ***JOY!***

How was it that Paul could have so much joy while in such a terrible place with his very life on the line?

I don't think the answer is earth shattering, but if we truly kept this focus, we too would be filled with **JOY!**

What was his secret?

Paul filled his mind, filled his life with **JESUS!**

In other words, his joy was in the Lord and not the outward circumstances of life. It is not that he did not feel the pain of what he was going through, but that pain was overshadowed by the joy that he had in Jesus!

Now you may be thinking that I am exaggerating about the joy that Paul had in the midst of his imprisonment. I am not!

And the reason I can say that with such conviction is that in the first chapter alone Paul uses "**Christ**" or "**Jesus Christ**" 17 times.

That means he speaks of Jesus more than once every two verses!

So I think I can safely say that Paul's mind was focused upon Jesus!

People today are focused; their lives are consumed with trying to be happy. They are putting the cart in front of the horse you might say.

You see, they are trying to fill that void and find happiness by buying the latest gadget, the newest car, they might party hearty, look for that perfect job and still not be happy.

Thus, we have books, seminars, counseling and yet, for most people they cannot attain happiness because of the situations that come their way.

And in the end, they come to the conclusion of Solomon, the preacher, who said, "**'Vanity of vanities,' says the Preacher; 'Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.'**" Ecclesiastes 1:2.

Let me share this with you and you will clearly see how Americans feel, and the results are very sad. This report looks back to some four years ago, but I don't think things have gotten any better.

We are told,

Spoiler alert: 2020 has been rough on the American psyche. Folks in the U.S. are more unhappy today than they've been in nearly 50 years.

This bold - yet unsurprising - conclusion comes from the COVID Response Tracking Study, conducted by NORC at the University of Chicago. It finds that ***just 14% of American adults say they're very happy***, down from 31% who said the same in 2018. That year, 23% said they'd often or sometimes felt isolated in recent weeks. ***Now, 50% say that. . . .***

Lexi Walker, a 47-year-old professional fiduciary who lives near Greenville, South Carolina, has felt anxious and depressed for long stretches of this year. She moved back to South Carolina late in 2019, then her cat died. Her father passed away in February. Just when she thought she'd get out and socialize in an attempt to heal from her grief, the pandemic hit.

"It's been one thing after another," Walker said. "This is very hard. The worst thing about this for me, after so much, I don't know what's going to happen."

- <https://bit.ly/3QAY9C7>

Please understand that I am not downplaying what people are going through. It can be very difficult. But only 14% of Americans are very happy and that is very sad when you think about it.

We are one of the wealthiest countries in the world. We have freedom to do so much. We have so much. And yet, with all that we have, we are not happy!

One writer put it like this. He wrote,

People today are consumed by the passionate pursuit of happiness.

Self-help books, motivational speakers, and advice columnists claim to offer the key to happiness, but for many people the door remains locked.

Unable to control their circumstances, they find themselves instead controlled by their circumstances.

When their job, relationship, or house (or, in the case of Christians, church) fails to make them happy, they dump it and look for a new one.

But on the merry-go-round of life, they can never quite seem to reach the brass ring.

Having fruitlessly pursued happiness through pleasure and self-gratification, they arrive at the jaded view of life . . .

- John MacArthur – Introduction to Philippians

And, like I have said, the statistics show how true that is. People are not happy!

But what has happened in the church?

What has happened to Christians?

Many have lost their joy, and they go around complaining about this and complaining about that. There is no joy seen in their lives because they have filled their minds with the things of this world and thus, they look like and sound like the world in their behavior.

I hate to tell you this, but I will anyway, Christians should be the most joyous people around!

“Pastor Joe, you don’t know what I am going through. If you did you would never say that!”

It is true, I don't know what everyone is going through, but that is not the issue.

Then what is the issue?

One writer summed it up like this for us. He wrote,

“How much Christians need to learn this. There is so much bickering in Christian circles, so much complaining, so much unhappiness. This was never meant to be. Christians were meant to be filled with love and joy and peace - in short, with all the virtues that are the result of the life of Christ within the Christian. . . . To be filled with Christ is the secret of real Christian living. It is the secret of true joy.”

Remember what Paul said in Colossians 3:1-4, **“If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.”**

It is as simple as this and as hard as this. If you are down, discouraged, lost that joy then your focus is wrong! Sorry, that is just the reality.

And having joy is not some secret that only a select group of people know about. The secret of joyful living in the Christian life is where your mind is focused on!

That is what Paul is saying here. Set your mind upon the Lord, focus on Jesus and you will have a correct perspective of things and that joy will be full in your life!

It doesn't mean that the problem, the difficulty goes away, but you are placing your life, the situation you are facing in the hands of God, and you are resting in Him. And in doing that it brings great peace, great hope, great comfort, it brings us – ***JOY IN THE LORD!***

We do need to think about this so we can have a correct perspective. Imagine if you filled your life with the things of the world day in and day out, would that make you joyful?

Of course not!

But, if you filled your mind with the Lord, spend time in His Word, it would change your perspective of things and you would have great joy in your life.

Imagine the fact that God loves you and died for you so you can live for Him! That should be the greatest joy we have and yet, so many miss that joy because the things of this world have captivated their mind and their lives.

In fact, when you fill your mind with the things of this world then that will be manifested in your life! And if the world is not joyful, only 14% say they are here in America, then chances are you are not going to be joyful because your focus is wrong!

Think about this. How was Paul so joyful in the situation he was in?

Or was Paul joyful in the situation he was in?

I think you know the answer to that question.

You see, there is something very different about Paul.

He had joy in the midst of very difficult circumstances. He set his mind upon the Lord and not the outward circumstances that he was facing.

And remember that happiness is based on outward circumstances, and those circumstances keep changing.

You buy new car, and no one can bring food into that car. No one can have dirty shoes and enter your new car. And there is definitely no drinking anything but water in that new car!

You are so happy, so proud to have a car that is brand new. It is beautiful. It is clean. You have even named it! You are so happy!

Then you go to the supermarket and park. You go in and buy something and come back and there is a big scratch on your new car. Someone, with a shopping cart has scratched your new car!

You are no longer happy, but you are mad. How could they do that to your new car!

Do you see how happiness changes with situations.

Joy is different. Joy is based in the Lord and that again is why we need to set our minds upon Jesus, because He never changes.

That means whatever we are going through will not change our joy because our joy is not based upon outward circumstances but in the Lord, and again, He never changes!

And we will see that in this letter!

Think about this for a minute. In this little 4-chapter letter, some 104 verses, Paul uses the word “**joy**” four times, (1:4, 1:25, 2:2, 4:1).

He uses the word “**rejoice**” eight times, (1:8, 2:16, 2:17, 2:18, 2:28, 3:1, 3:3, 4:4).

And he uses the word “**glad**” two times, (2:17, 2:18).

And, like I have said, this letter has been called, “*The Epistle of joy!*”

Now some of you may be thinking, “*That’s great for Paul, but he doesn’t know what I am going through now! No one knows the trouble I’m in!*”

Let’s turn that around for a minute. You don’t know the trouble Paul was in. Like I have said, he was in prison, chained to soldiers twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week! It was not ideal circumstances at all!

Then how could Paul speak of joy, how could he rejoice in the situation and situations that he was in?

Because, like I have said, his mind was focused upon Jesus and that is where joy is found.

You see, like I have said, biblical joy is not based upon outward circumstances but an inward reality that God is in control, and He will use the situations in our life for His glory and our growth.

Thus, divine joy is available to every believer if they would only receive it into their lives.

David Hocking put it this way. He said, ***“There is ‘joy’ in the midst of trial when we understand God’s purposes and realize what He is accomplishing in our lives.”***

If you are struggling in this area, always down in the dumps, I pray that you would be encouraged by this letter and focus back on Jesus and have that joy that only comes from Him.

And may we all take that to heart and learn that lesson so that joy will fill our lives.

Now, one more point before we get to our text.

As you read Paul’s letters to the Corinthians and the churches in Galatia, you find all kinds of corrections for them because of the errors that had come into the church.

But Paul’s letter to the Philippians is not like that. It is filled with much warmth and love for the people, for this church in Philippi.

Not that there they had no problems, they did. And Paul deals with it but it is more of a relationship issue and not a doctrine issue, as we will see.

So Paul had this close relationship with the believers in Philippi and it shows in this letter he wrote to them.

With that as our introduction, let’s begin reading in Philippians chapter 1, beginning in verse 1 and let’s see what the Lord has for us as we study His Word.

I have called this study – ***INTRODUCTION TO JOY!***

And we will be looking at the first two verses and then looking at other verses in the Bible that deal with joy and what that looks like in our life. I think this is so important for us to understand and so did the Holy Spirit as He has given to us this letter.

Again, that is our focus as we go through this letter – ***THE JOY OF THE LORD!***

And my prayer as we go through this letter is that the joy of the Lord would be seen in our lives, and it would cause people to stop and look at our lives so that we can share with them why we have this joy in the midst of a nation and a world that is a mess!

PHILIPPIANS 1

VERSES 1-2

Keep in mind that the town of Philippi was in the region of Macedonia. And we see here that Paul wrote this letter to his close friends, the Christians in Philippi, from his Roman house arrest described at the end of Acts as he waited for his court appearance before Caesar. (Acts 28:30-31)

And both Paul and Timothy are greeting them and notice what they are, ***“SERVANTS OF JESUS CHRIST!”***

The Greek word speaks of being a bondservant or ***DOULOS***, (doo'-los).

Yes, we are free in Christ, but we freely submit our lives to His authority, He is our master, and we are bondslaves of Christ!

You see, if you do not submit to the authority and control of Jesus in your life, joy will elude you!

Paul, and his son in the faith, Timothy, freely surrendered their lives unto the Lord, then served others and then they were last on the list.

And it really boils down to this. ***JOY IS: JESUS, OTHER'S, YOU!***

And Paul is writing to the saints in Philippi or those who had been set-apart by God, those who are saved and not some bogus concept of what some say that saints are.

In the Roman Catholic Church, they say that you have to be dead to be a saint and in your life minister to people and in your death, as they examine your life, you did some miracles, and then the church can vote on making you into a saint.

No, Paul is writing to living people, those whose lives were touched by God! They were not voted into sainthood, they were brought into sainthood by the sacrifice of Christ on the cross of Calvary!

What we also see here is Paul is speaking to the leadership in the church.

Paul speaks of “**bishops**” or *EPISKOPOS* (ep-is’-kop-os) in the Greek and it means, “*to look over or upon*” an overseer.

This word is synonymous with the term “*elder*” and “*pastor*” or “*shepherd*.”

We see this in Acts 20:28 where Paul tells us, “**Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.**”

I believe he is speaking to pastors here.

Paul doesn’t speak of “*elders*” using the Greek word *PRESBUTEROS*, (pres-boo’-ter-os) here. The elders dealt with the spiritual matters of the church; they assisted the pastor.

In Acts 20:17 we are told, “**From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church.**”

Thus, all bishops or pastors are elders but not all elders are pastors or shepherds of a flock.

Paul then speaks of “**deacons**” or *DIAKONOS*, (dee-ak’-on-os) in the Greek and deacons tend to deal with the physical matters of the church.

You can see this in Acts chapter 6 as men were raised up to wait on tables and minister to widows in the church.

You see, God does things decently and in order!

And again, we see Paul mention in his introduction the Siamese Twins of the New Testament, “*grace and peace.*”

Folks, you can never experience the peace of God in your life until you first make peace with God through Jesus Christ. It is a gift of grace or unmerited favor! You cannot have peace until you first receive His grace!

Before we start looking at Scriptures that speak of the joy we are to have, let me share this with you. It will help put things into perspective for us as we embark on this journey of having joy in the Lord.

We are told,

We live in a generally sad world, a fallen world well acquainted with despair, depression, disappointment, dissatisfaction, and a longing for lasting happiness that often never comes to pass.

Moments of pleasure and satisfaction are scattered through the general pain and sorrow of life. Many people have little hope that their situation in life will ever change much, if any, for the better.

Hopelessness tends to increase with age. Long years of life often become long years of sorrow, unfulfillment, loss of loved ones and friends, and often physical limitations and pain.

Such decreasing times of happiness tend to produce a morbid sadness and lessening satisfaction with life.

Most people define happiness as an attitude of satisfaction or delight based on positive circumstances largely beyond their control.

Happiness, therefore, cannot be planned or programmed, much less guaranteed. It is experienced only if and when circumstances are favorable. It is therefore elusive and uncertain.

Spiritual joy, on the other hand, is not an attitude dependent on chance or circumstances. It is the deep and abiding confidence that, regardless of one's circumstances in life, all is well between the believer and the Lord.

No matter what difficulty, pain, disappointment, failure, rejection, or other challenge one is facing, genuine joy remains because of that eternal well-being established by God's grace in salvation.

Thus, Scripture makes it clear that the fullest, most lasting and satisfying joy is derived from a true relationship with God.

It is not based on circumstances or chance, but is the gracious and permanent possession of every child of God.

- John MacArthur, Philippians 1

Let me explain joy like this and it is very simple. Joy is the flag that is flown high from the castle of our heart when the King, Jesus Christ, is in residence there!

Keep that in mind as we go through these Scriptures on – **JOY!**

Also keep in mind that we will not cover every Scripture that deals with joy! The Bible has at least 158 references for just the word “**joy**”, and I think the Lord wants us to understand this so we can live it, so that the joy of the Lord will be manifested in our lives.

The first one we will be looking at is found in Psalm 4:7-8 where David tells us, “**You have put gladness in my heart, More than in the season that their grain and wine increased. I will both lie down in peace, and sleep; For You alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety.**”

David is saying that God has put this joy into our lives, into our heart and it is out of that we can be at peace, we can rest, we can sleep in the midst of the greatest troubles.

You see, as David said in Psalm 16:11, “**You will show me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.**”

Maybe Christians are struggling here because they don’t spend time with the Lord. And when they don’t, that joy dries up. It is in the Lord’s presence that we have that “**fullness of joy**” and not just fullness of joy, but “**pleasures forevermore.**”

You see, no matter what happens, in prosperity and in poverty, in good times and in bad, God still puts that joy in our hearts.

It is as Paul said in Philippians 4:11-13, “**Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.**”

May we learn to live like that, to trust and rest in the Lord and enjoy that joy of the Lord that He gives to us!

Let me ask you this, **“What is the path of life?”**

That is an important question because David said that is where we will find that joy, that peace in our lives.

Let me be clear on this. It is not works that we walk in but a person we trust in. Jesus is the path to eternal life where true joy is found in. Spend time in His presence and you will be full of joy in your heart that will overflow in your life.

Also, in Psalm 100:1-2 we are told, **“Make a joyful shout to the Lord, all you lands! Serve the Lord with gladness; Come before His presence with singing.”**

Notice what the Psalmist is saying.

“Serve the Lord with gloominess!”

No, he did not say that! We are to serve the Lord with gladness.

Now here’s the thing. If you can’t serve the Lord with gladness, then don’t serve Him.

Think about it. How would your spouse feel if they asked you to do something and you did it, but you were mumbling and grumbling all the way through? They wouldn’t feel too good about asking you to do this.

If we are serving the LORD mumbling and grumbling as we do, it does not bring glory to Him, and as people look at us they won’t want anything to do with the God we serve!

If anyone that is involved in a ministry here that is not joyful in serving God in that capacity, see me and step down. You are not doing yourself any good. You are not helping those you are ministering to. And God is not pleased.

We are to serve Him with gladness or don’t serve Him at all.

Paul makes that very point in Colossians 3:23 as he said, **“And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men.”**

We should shout for joy as we serve the Lord because the Creator of heaven and earth is willing to use someone like me, someone like you to bring glory to Him!

In fact, listen to what we are told in Deuteronomy 28:47-48, **“Because you did not serve the Lord your God with joy and gladness of heart, for the abundance of everything, therefore you shall serve your enemies, whom the Lord will send against you, in hunger, in thirst, in nakedness, and in need of everything; and He will put a yoke of iron on your neck until He has destroyed you.”**

What was the reason that the Lord was going to judge them?

Because they **“did not serve the Lord your God with joy and gladness of heart.”**

God had given them so much, but they did not see it that way and it was more of a work relationship with God than a love relationship and thus, they did not serve the Lord with gladness!

We serve the Lord with joy in our hearts, being excited about what He will do in us and through us!

Here is one to think about. In Psalm 68:3 we are told, **“But let the righteous be glad; Let them rejoice before God; Yes, let them rejoice exceedingly.”**

If we can't be joyful in the Lord, then there is nothing that will make us joyful. We were dead in our trespasses and sins and the Lord gave to us life, eternal life with Him. We did not deserve it. We will never deserve it and yet, He saved us because He loves us, and we should rejoice in that every single day!

In Isaiah 12:3 we are told, **“Therefore with joy you will draw water From the wells of salvation.”**

In a world that is dry, it is barren, and people are thirsty, God wants to refresh us with His water of life that He gives to us freely.

Remember what Jesus said to the woman at the well in Samaria back in John 4:13-14, **“... ‘Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.’”**

What the world has to offer will never satisfy, it is not refreshing, and you will thirst again.

But what God gives to us is refreshing; it is satisfying as we draw our strength from Him!

Leon Morris put it like this,

When a believer comes to Christ and drinks he not only slakes [satisfies] his thirst but receives such an abundant supply that veritable rivers flow from him. This stresses the outgoing nature of the Spirit-filled life. . . . There is nothing of the piety of the pond in Christianity.

- Leon Morris, The Gospel According to John, p. 425-426

We are not told to drink of the stagnate and polluted waters of this world but of the refreshing and life-giving waters that are found in Christ! And we are to do so with joy!

In Psalm 5:1 David wrote, **“But let all those rejoice who put their trust in You; Let them ever shout for joy, because You defend them; Let those also who love Your name Be joyful in You.”**

Let’s think about this one for a minute.

When you look at people at sporting events. When you look at people at concerts. When you look at people that are going to parties. When you look at people and they are doing something they enjoy, how do they look!

They look joyful. They may jump up and down. They may shout as loud as they can. They may dance and sing. They do all kinds of things.

And then it comes to our relationship with the Lord. We see His love for us as God became flesh and dwelt among us to pay the penalty for our sins. He hung on the cross of Calvary, a brutal, painful way to die. And on the third day He rose from grave.

And here we are, singing to the Lord barely making a sound, ***“I love you Lord, and I lift my voice, to worship You oh my soul, rejoice!”***

Are you kidding me? It seems like some are at a funeral instead of a time to shout unto the Lord songs of praise!

God not only saved us, but He is our defender and if we can’t shout for joy something is wrong!

In Psalm 144:15 we are told, **“Happy are the people who are in such a state; Happy are the people whose God is the Lord!”**

I guess the question is, ***“What state are you in?”***

You see, if you are in the Lord, if He is your Savior, you are in the right state of mind and you will be joyful, not might or could be or we will see how things go! No, you **WILL** be joyful because there is nothing greater!

As we move into the New Testament, listen to what Peter tells us in I Peter 1:6-9. He wrote, **“In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith - the salvation of your souls.”**

You mean I am to **“greatly rejoice”** when I am going through difficult trials, difficult situations in my life?

I don't know how to tell you this, but yes, we are to rejoice!

You see, we are to rejoice in all that God has given to us in Christ Jesus and yes, we are going to go through trials and difficult times, but compared to what we have in Christ, it is minor!

And like with James, we see Peter speaking of joy and trials, various trials, all kinds of difficulties mixed together.

How can that be when they seem to oppose each other, joy and trials?

Because of all that God has done for us, because our salvation is secure, because our inheritance is incorruptible, undefiled, it does not fade away and it is not only reserved for us in heaven, but our salvation is kept by the power of God.

You see, in that we rejoice in our incredible inheritance we have in Christ!

Make no mistake about it, Christian joy is independent of the circumstances we face because our joy is based in the Lord.

But what about trials in our lives?

Remember what James told us, **“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.”** James 1:2-4.

Again, are you kidding me? We are to **“count it all joy”**!

That is what James is saying, and as we saw in our study in James, God brings trials into our lives to test our faith, to see if our faith is real and to help us to grow as we look to Him to be the strength of our life.

We also need to keep in mind that these difficult times that come upon our lives are only temporary and as we endure through them, as we grow, we will bring glory to God, and when we are called home to be with Him, God will receive the glory for the work He has done in us and through us.

And again, Peter says that love, that knowledge of God and what He has done in our lives gives us joy that is inexpressible.

It doesn't get any better than that!

It is as Jesus said in John 15:11, **“These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full.”**

God wants our joy to be full and that only comes as we spend time with Him, as we keep our eyes upon Him!

And notice the end result of what Peter wrote – *the salvation of our souls!*

Praise the Lord and a big *AMEN* to that!

Peter also tells us in I Peter 4:12-13, **“Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ’s sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.”**

Peter is telling us that it is a strange thing if you think you are not going to be persecuted for your faith!

Keep in mind that Nero’s persecution against Christians was growing and he was burning Christians alive at the stake and Peter is warning them not to be surprised because what is happening in Rome is spreading throughout the Roman Empire!

Thus, instead of sorrow, rejoice in these things knowing that you are suffering for your faith just as the Lord did.

And don’t think your witness goes unnoticed. People are watching us live out our faith and they are more interested in how you respond when things are difficult, when things get messy, when it isn’t easy rather than when everything is going well.

Listen carefully how our witness impacts people’s lives. We are told,

As a third-century man was anticipating death, he penned these last words to a friend:

“It’s a bad world, an incredibly bad world. But I have discovered in the midst of it a quiet and holy people who have learned a great secret. They have found a joy which is a thousand times better than any pleasure of our sinful life. They are despised and persecuted, but they care not. They are masters of their souls. They have overcome the world. These people are the Christians - and I am one of them.”

- Today in The Word, June 1988, p. 18

When people look at our lives, what are they seeing?

They should see the joy of the Lord come flowing from our lives.

I am not saying we will not have difficult times. I am not saying we will not face hard situations that overwhelm us. What I am saying is that in the midst of these difficult times the joy of the Lord is seen.

We can't ignore what is happening in our lives. That would be foolish. God never asks us to be stoics and just ignore our feelings. But we need to understand that He is in control and the things that happen in our lives He is aware of.

In knowing that, we can rest in Him, we can trust what He is doing, and we can walk by faith or live out our faith in a world that is in darkness, and we will shine brightly!

And yet, as I look around at Christians today, I see more and more Christians that need to be encouraged. They need to be reminded that they are children of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords! They are depressed! They lost that joy!

Why are we depressed?

Why have we lost that joy?

Because we have lost perspective of the situations we have faced. Think about that before you get mad at me.

Where does hopelessness and depression come from?

Do they come from God?

Absolutely not.

So where do they come from?

There is only one other place. They come from the devil!

What we receive from the Lord is hope and joy because we know our Savior Jesus Christ.

Now I am not saying that Christians can't be depressed, they can. But understand that is not from God.

And we can have a long list of things that can cause us to be hopeless and depressed. But here are just a few and you will see that they are legitimate issues that we face and many times multiple issues we face every day!

Life challenges: Sometimes, our problems can cast a long shadow over our optimism, leading to feelings of hopelessness.

Setbacks: Not all our plans turn out how we want. Setbacks can make our outlook feel bleak.

Chronic stress: Stress, especially when persistent, can make it hard to envision a clear, positive future.

Money problems: Finances are a common trigger for feelings of hopelessness.

Depression: Depression and hopelessness often go hand in hand. Depression can significantly lower our ability to feel hopeful about the future.

Loss: Losing a loved one, a job, or a cherished relationship can send shockwaves through our lives, with sadness and grief leading to hopelessness.

Health issues: Facing health challenges, especially chronic or severe conditions, can cause feelings of hopelessness, especially if the path to recovery is long and difficult.

These are all real and they affect our lives. We can't just ignore them.

Then what can we do about this problem of hopelessness and depression?

First of all, don't listen to the lies of the Devil!

What do I mean by that?

He loves to tell you that you are worthless, no one loves you, God doesn't love you and the list goes on.

And what ends up happening is that we keep listening to the Devil instead of listening to what God is telling us.

You need to remember that you have a purpose in life because God is your creator, He is the one who formed you in the womb, which tells me that He loves you! In fact, God knows you so well that He knows the number of hairs upon your head! God loves us more than we will ever know. In fact, He died for us so we can live with Him!

Make no mistake about it. The hope that you need to have is found in Jesus, you have Him in your life and that should give you great hope!

Your life has meaning because the Holy Spirit has been poured out into your hearts and it is a downpayment, you might say, of one day going to meet your bridegroom, Jesus Christ!

It is as Paul said in Romans 15:13, **“Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”**

Listen to how The Amplified Bible puts this verse. We are told, **“May the God of your hope so fill you with all joy and peace in believing [through the experience of your faith] that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound and be overflowing (bubbling over) with hope.”**

Our hope is in God and as Paul prayed for the church in Rome, I pray for everyone of us, that God would fill us with *ALL JOY* and *PEACE* as we rest in Him.

Not only that, but by the power of God's Spirit working in us, we would overflow with *HOPE*, not hope in what this world has for us, but hope in what the Lord has for us.

You see, perspective is everything and the Devil wants us to lose that perspective that God has for us so we can be filled with hopelessness and despair!

Don't listen to him, listen to the Lord and then walk accordingly.

I am not downplaying depression. There are some that have these chemical imbalances that do need to be treated. Please understand that.

In saying that, let me share with you the perspective that one writer gives us.

He wrote,

Depression is a widespread condition, affecting millions of people, Christians and non-Christians alike.

Those suffering from depression can experience intense feelings of sadness, anger, hopelessness, fatigue, and a variety of other symptoms. They may begin to feel useless and even suicidal, losing interest in things and people that they once enjoyed.

Depression is often triggered by life circumstances, such as a loss of job, death of a loved one, divorce, or psychological problems such as abuse . . .

The Bible tells us to be filled with joy and praise (Philippians 4:4; Romans 15:11), so God apparently intends for us all to live joyful lives.

This is not easy for someone suffering from situational depression, but it can be remedied through God's gifts of prayer, Bible study and application, Scripture memorization, support groups, fellowship among believers, confession, forgiveness, intentional gratitude, and counseling.

Things like exercise, time outdoors, good sleep habits, and healthy nutrition are also very important in battling against feelings of depression.

Too, serving others can help us turn our attention to Christ and the good things God is doing in the world.

We must make the conscious effort to not be absorbed in ourselves, but to turn our efforts outward. Feelings of depression can often be solved when those suffering with depression move the focus from themselves to Christ and others.

Clinical depression is a physical condition that must be diagnosed by a physician. It may not be caused by unfortunate life circumstances, nor can the symptoms be alleviated by one's own will.

Contrary to what some in the Christian community believe, clinical depression is not always caused by sin. Depression can sometimes be caused by a physical disorder that needs to be treated with medication and/or counseling.

Of course, God is able to cure any disease or disorder. However, in some cases, seeing a doctor for depression is no different than seeing a doctor for an injury.

There are some things that those who suffer from depression can do to alleviate their anxiety.

They should make sure that they are staying in the Word, even when they do not feel like it. Emotions can lead us astray, but God's Word stands firm and unchanging.

We must maintain strong faith in God and hold even more tightly to Him when we undergo trials and temptations. The Bible tells us that God will never allow temptations into our lives that are too much for us to handle (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Although being depressed is not a sin, one is still accountable for the response to the affliction, including getting the professional help that is needed. ***“Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name”*** (Hebrews 13:15).

- <https://bit.ly/4d6mGIH>

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.

And as we rest in the Lord our lives will overflow with joy in the Lord and people will see that.

I truly believe that God has led us to the book of Philippians as our in-depth study because it is easy to lose that joy and begin to complain and murmur and in that there is no real joy.

Remember, the focus of this letter is – ***JOY!***

And, as I have said. ***Joy is the flag flown high from the castle of our heart when the King, King Jesus is in residence there!***

May we not forget that!