

BIBLE
STUDIES
FOR LIFE

SMALL GROUPS

THRIVE

LIVING IN REAL JOY



TONY MERIDA

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Thrive: Living in Real Joy
Bible Studies for Life: Small Group Member Book

© 2016 LifeWay Press®

ISBN: 9781430054948
Item: 006103914

Dewey Decimal Classification Number: 227.6
Subject Heading: JOY AND SORROW \ BIBLE. N.T. PHILIPPIANS \ CHRISTIAN LIFE

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Printed in the United States of America.

For ordering or inquiries, visit lifeway.com; write LifeWay Small Groups; One LifeWay Plaza; Nashville, TN 37234-0152; or call toll free (800) 458-2772.

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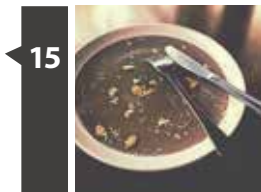
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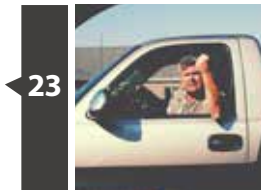
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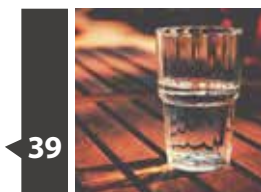
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ABOUT THIS STUDY

Don't just survive. Thrive!

The Book of Philippians addresses many of our deepest questions.

- ▶ *Where can we find full and lasting joy?* Look and listen to Paul. He radiated a contagious joy throughout his letter. Indeed, the happiest man in Rome was the apostle in prison! Paul reminds us that we don't derive ultimate joy from comfortable circumstances, but from a living, vibrant communion with Christ. Joy isn't about attaining more stuff; it's about treasuring Christ more.
- ▶ *Where can we find meaning and purpose in life?* Paul teaches us about a life worth living—and a death worth dying. He shows us the path to living this life by pointing us to Jesus, who provides the power and the example we need.

The Christian life isn't an easy life, but it's full. It's joyful. It's the kind of life you've always been looking for and always wanted to lead.

Of course, Jesus never promised us that life would be easy. But He did promise He would always be with us. And if He is with us, we have everything we need for joy and peace.

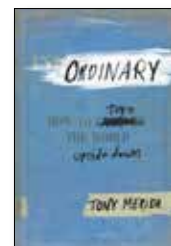
We can do more than just live as we follow Christ. We can thrive!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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PRAYING WITH JOY



When has a personal letter or note meant a lot to you?

QUESTION #1

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Prayer is an opportunity to experience joy.



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

A few years back, Pharrell Williams launched the song “Happy” as a global sensation. But I wonder if the people singing it then have remained happy over the years. These days, perhaps many of them would prefer U2’s “I Still Haven’t Found What I’m Looking For.”

Such people wouldn’t be alone in history.

- ▶ King Solomon, who had an abundance of wealth and women, confessed: “Absolute futility. Everything is futile” (Eccl. 1:2).
- ▶ Alexander the Great is reported to have wept in his tent saying, “There are no more worlds to conquer.”
- ▶ Tom Brady, after his third NFL championship, remarked, “There’s got to be more than this.”

Where can we go to find full and lasting joy?

If you’re interested in finding the answer to this question, welcome to the Book of Philippians! This is a letter full of joy—interestingly, one written by a man in prison.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Philippians 1:3-6

³ I give thanks to my God for every remembrance of you, ⁴ always praying with joy for all of you in my every prayer, ⁵ because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. ⁶ I am sure of this, that He who started a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

Paul began his Letter to the Philippians—his beloved partners in the gospel—with expressions of thanksgiving, joy, and affection. Joy runs throughout Paul’s letter, and the first time he used the term, he spoke of “praying with joy.”

Since it’s such an important concept in Philippians, let’s ponder “joy” for a moment. Joy goes deeper than happiness. Our happiness is typically based on external things; it’s tied to our circumstances. Joy remains with us regardless of what we have or are experiencing. We can be having a bad day, but still have joy.

We find joy in knowing Christ deeply. This may sound cheesy or elementary, but the secret to joy is in keeping our priorities arranged in this order: **J**esus, **O**thers, and **Y**ourself.

Paul exemplified a life of joy. He rejoiced in Christ despite hardship (see Rom. 5:3-5), and he lived to serve others before thinking about himself (see Phil. 2:3-4). At the core of Paul’s joy was a deep love for the Savior that spilled out into love for people. Christian joy is Christ-centered and others-oriented.

Notice that we don’t find Paul giving God thanks for *things*; Paul gave thanks for *people*. Paul could see evidence of God’s grace in others and praised God for His work in them. In these verses, specifically, Paul was filled with joy over what God had done for the Philippians.

How would you describe the difference between happiness and joy?

QUESTION #2

As part of his prayer, Paul expressed gratitude for the believers in Philippi whom he considered his partners in the gospel. This church had supported Paul and served as co-workers in the mission from the beginning of his time in Philippi. They were friends, united in Jesus and on mission together.

In verse 6, Paul gave another reason for his gratitude to God: confidence in God's nature and purposes. He was sure that God would continue—and complete—the work He had started in the Philippian believers. He based this upon his knowledge of God and his awareness of the Philippians' faith.

Don't miss the fact that God is the One who starts His work in our lives—in His grace, He initiates our salvation. But that's not the end. God always finishes what He starts in the lives of His people.

Philippians 1:7-8

⁷ It is right for me to think this way about all of you, because I have you in my heart, and you are all partners with me in grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and establishment of the gospel. ⁸ For God is my witness, how deeply I miss all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.

Here we see the great emotion and warmth Paul had for the church. It's not enough to learn Paul's theology and disciplines; we also need to see how the truths he taught were evident in his life. He obviously felt and demonstrated passion in what he believed.

In verse 7, Paul said he held the Philippians in his heart. A heart-deep relationship existed between Paul and these believers (see also 2 Cor. 7:3). In Philippians 2:17, Paul said he had poured out his life for the Philippians. In this way, Paul and the Philippian believers modeled for us what it means to have Christian friendships that are centered on the gospel.

What are some obstacles that hinder us from building deeper relationships?

QUESTION #3

GIVE THANKS

Giving thanks to God is a great way to experience joy in your prayers. Use the space below to record five blessings that have brightened your life this year.

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____
- 4 _____
- 5 _____

What steps can you take to make giving thanks a more prominent part of your prayer life?

"A stranger to prayer is equally a stranger to God and to happiness."

—JOHN NEWTON

THE POINT

Paul said, “It is right for me to think this way about all of you.” It was right because the Philippian believers were “all partners with me in grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and establishment of the gospel.” Being a partner in grace meant more than just receiving saving grace; the Philippians also had suffered for Christ and were sharing in the struggle for making the gospel known (see 1:29-30).

Paul rejoiced because the Philippians displayed their partnership in loyalty to Paul and the mission. They not only supported Paul as he shared the gospel, but they also supported him in prayer and with financial support during his imprisonment. They didn’t turn their back on Paul. They weren’t ashamed of him, even though imprisonment brought great shame in that time. The Philippians’ loyalty to Paul even while he was in prison made this relationship especially sweet.

As Paul pondered his relationship with the Philippians, he made a remarkable statement: “I miss all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.” He reminded them of Christ’s affection for them and how God was at work in him to love them in that same way. The Greek word translated as “affection” refers to the inward parts of the body; it conveys the idea of deep compassion.

Paul was united to Christ, and because of this unity, he shared Christ’s love for the church. This is a deep love that goes far beyond sentiment. It’s a love we can experience, as well.



How can our group life help us build the kind of relationships Paul described in these verses?

QUESTION #4

Philippians 1:9-11

¹⁹ And I pray this: that your love will keep on growing in knowledge and every kind of discernment, ¹⁰ so that you can approve the things that are superior and can be pure and blameless in the day of Christ, ¹¹ filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God.

A Christ-centered love grows in “knowledge and every kind of discernment.” *Knowledge* asks the question, “What is right?” *Discernment* asks the question, “What is best?” Love leads us to live out what is both right and best. In short, a mature Christian is both biblically informed and deeply affectionate.

Why did Paul desire for the Philippians to grow in this kind of love?

- ▶ He desired for them to “approve the things that are superior.” Paul prayed for the Philippians to choose the things that are best in this life and in their relationships. He prayed for them to have discernment in order to properly distinguish between right and wrong, between better and best, and between things that matter and things that don’t.
- ▶ He desired for them to “be pure and blameless in the day of Christ.” Jesus is coming, and we should live and pray in light of this fact.

Paul expressed this life of purity in another way: “filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ.” The righteousness of God is given to the believer by faith alone (see Phil. 3:9). We are declared righteous and made acceptable to God through Christ—a righteousness that comes from outside ourselves. Just as important, out of this *position* of righteousness through Jesus, we are called to *live* righteously.

Prayer is a key element of this righteous life. Paul experienced joy as he prayed for himself and for the people he loved. May the same be true of us.

Why are both knowledge and discernment necessary ingredients for loving others?

QUESTION #5

LIVE IT OUT

How will you incorporate joy into your life and prayers this week? Consider the following suggestions:

- ▶ **Cultivate gratefulness.** Take time each day to count your blessings. As you pray and thank God for all He's done for you, let His joy fill your heart and be seen as you serve others.
- ▶ **Memorize Philippians 1:6.** It's hard to be joyful when praying about a difficult matter, but Philippians 1:6 is a reminder that God is at work even when we don't yet see the result.
- ▶ **Partner with others.** Join with others to pray about your lives and your opportunities to serve God and others. Emphasize the importance of joy each time you pray together.

Don't buy into the lie that joy depends on your present circumstances. Paul wrote his joyful letter to the Philippians (and prayed his joyful prayers) while being persecuted in a Roman prison. Choose today to seek the unshakable joy that is only available through Christ.

My thoughts



Share with others how you will live out this study: **#BSFLthrive**