

LETTERS TO PHIL: MOVING FROM ANXIETY TO JOY

JOY IN THE FACE OF HARDSHIP – DEVOTIONAL

SUNDAY

Thought – Growing into a joy-filled life with God requires that we spend time contemplating scripture, praying, listening, and discerning God’s purpose in our lives.

Prayer – *Oh Heavenly Father, we come to you this day, longing to know more of your will and the ways you are leading us to serve and love Your world. Amen*

NOTES:

MONDAY – Read Acts 16: 22-29

Thought – The Living Word

Scripture is more than filling-in-blanks or words to be memorized. Use this passage, describing Paul and Silas’ prison experience with a Philippian jailer, in your time with God. Imagine that you’re the jailer in this passage. What comes to mind when you see them beaten and in chains, and yet still singing and praying at midnight? How did this affect the jailer? What does it say to you in your current situation?

Prayer – *This is a hard perspective for me to see clearly, God. Please open my eyes. Amen.*

NOTES:

TUESDAY – Read Philippians 1: 6

Thought – Some Digging Required

The presence of joy is not always easily recognizable. Close your eyes and think of a pile of debris that is lurking in your backyard. Every day you look at it and think, “Today’s the day.” Finally, you put on your work clothes, grab your rake and wheelbarrow and get to work. It’s not a fun job. Although you become covered with bits of mud mixed with sweat, the result is worth the effort. Uncovering a sense of joy requires effort on our part. Be confident. God outfits us with work clothes, rakes and shovels to open up new places for joy to sprout. Where do you need to begin today?

Prayer – *Lord God, often I feel covered up by the cares of this world. Encourage me. Lead me. Transform my darkness with Your light. In Your name I pray. Amen.*

NOTES:

WEDNESDAY – Read James 1: 2-3

Thought – Pause the Pain

Sometimes in the middle of loss and turmoil, we are called to examine our larger purpose. This verse in James mirrors Paul’s encouragement to the Philippians, “*When troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow*” (NLT)

Prayer – *God, the last thing on my mind today is my larger purpose. Are you kidding me? I can barely call on Your name! Help me, oh loving Savior! Amen.*

NOTES:

THURSDAY – Read Psalm 30: 5

Thought – Consolation Precedes Joy

There are those times when joy is definitely not present. We hold the hand of a loved one as they die, or even worse, watch through a window. We feel like hollow shells going through the motions of life. And yet, God is still present and his comforting hand will uphold us until we can again feel glimpses of joy and hope.

Prayer – *Oh Lord my God, you are faithful and merciful. I pray you would hold me close. In your holiest of names. Amen.*

NOTES:

FRIDAY – Read Philippians 1: 27b

Thought – Look Outside Yourself

Paul encouraged the Philippians to carry on in service to their community. “*I will know that you are standing together with one spirit and one purpose, fighting together for the faith, which is the Good News.*” (NLT) There is this strange truth, that when we look for ways to love others, our own problems seem to become less painful. Who is God calling you to love today? Be creative.

Prayer – *Lord, in your mercy, bring someone to my mind that needs your loving touch today. In your precious name I pray. Amen.*

NOTES:

SATURDAY – Read 1 Peter 1: 8

Thought – Joy Unspeakable

In the words of a hundred-year-old hymn: “It is joy unspeakable and full of glory, full of glory, full of glory. It is joy unspeakable and full of glory, and the half has not yet been told.” (*I Have Found His Grace is all Complete*, B. Warren, 1900) It is with God’s grace that we are covered and held this day. Offer a prayer of gratitude for this gift.

Prayer – God, there are days when I come to your cross of grace and mercy completely exhausted. Renew me, and show me new places of joy. Thank you for your never-ending love. *Amen.*

NOTES:

JOY IN THE FACE OF HARDSHIP– GROUP GUIDE

PRAYER – *God, we acknowledge that you are already here. May our hearts be open to your presence and to your direction. Amen.*

BIG IDEA – In times of turmoil and anxiety, we are called to remember that the source of our joy is the resurrected Christ. It's our responsibility to share that joy with others.

Scripture – **Philippians 1: 12-14, 20-24, 27, 30; 1 Peter 1: 6-9**

Discussion Questions:

- **Allow hardships to serve God's purpose.** *“And I want you to know, my dear brothers and sisters, that everything that has happened to me here has helped to spread the Good News.” (Phil 1: 12 NLT)* In the middle of bad news about health concerns, job losses and racial disparity, we are called to connect with God. Ask the hard questions. God may not give you complete answers, but peace and direction is always available. What hardships do you bring to God today? How might they be used for God's purpose?
- **Hold fast to resurrection faith.** *“For I fully expect and hope that I will never be ashamed, but that I will continue to be bold for Christ, as I have been in the past. And I trust that my life will bring honor to Christ, whether I live or die.” (Phil 1: 20 NLT)* One way of deepening your faith is to remember the times when God held you, even when you weren't aware of His presence or power. Share an experience, as you are able, and then notice how it is impacting your current situation.
- **Cultivate fellowship of believers.** *“Above all, you must live as citizens of heaven, conducting yourselves in a manner worthy of the Good News about Christ.” “We are in this struggle together.” (Phil 1: 27, 30a NLT)* Obviously, a pandemic makes fellowship a bit more difficult. How are some ways you have stayed connected with your soul-friends? Maybe you realized that your superficial friendships have not provided support or chances to serve in these hard times. What will you do differently?
- **Connect to authentic joy.** *“So be truly glad. There is wonderful joy ahead, even though you must endure many trials for a little while. These trials will show that your faith is genuine.” (1 Peter 1: 6-7 NLT)* So here's the hard part. How would you describe “true joy”? What are some ways you've discovered to help you develop an attitude of joyfulness? How can joy be contagious and why does that matter?

TAKE AWAY – The examples of Christ and holy living teach us ways to live joyously in times of turmoil and hardship. In this way, we fulfill our larger purpose of sharing the Good News and glorifying God.

Pray the Lord's Prayer.