

Overcoming Life's Circumstances

God does not want His people to be happy. He desires them to experience joy! Happiness is based upon circumstances. Happiness is related to the old word hap or happenstance or chance. Happiness is dependent upon circumstances beyond your control. Joy is a deep down confidence that all is well. A famous song says, "Joy is the flag that flies on the castle of the heart when the King is in residence there."

God wants you to experience joy! Philippians is the great book of joy. Sixteen times in only four chapters Paul mentions joy. Fifty times in this brief book Paul mentions Jesus. Joy is a byproduct of a relationship with Jesus. How do we experience joy in these difficult times? Philippians 1:3-8 spells out five principles that produce joy in our lives.

The first principle is to focus on the positive and not the negative. In verse 3 Paul writes, "I thank my God upon every remembrance of you..." Paul founded the church in Philippi. He wrote Philippians as a thank you for a financial gift the church sent to him. It had been ten years since the church helped him! Ten years had passed since he heard from them! Paul focused on the positive in their lives and never on the negative. A joyful person is a thankful person. Every time Paul remembered the Philippian believers he thanked God for them.

The recent Amish school shooting in Pennsylvania was caused by an unthankful person. His anger at losing a daughter produced bitterness. His anger and bitterness grew and grew until he finally exploded. Tragically, five lives were lost and countless others devastated in the process.

The second principle is to focus on others and not yourself. In verse 4 Paul continued, "...always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy..." Paul prayed for them. Intercessory prayer is the highest form of prayer. It moves beyond our needs and prays for others. Paul wrote these words from a Roman prison. He was chained to a Roman soldier. He had no freedom and no privacy. Amazingly, Paul even in prison did not focus on his own needs but on the needs of others. A joyful person focuses upon others.

The third principle is to be involved with God's people. Verse 5 reads, "...for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now..." The word fellowship means "partnership, communion, participation." It means to share something in common. The apostle realized that he was part of a team or family. They worked together toward the mutual goal of building the church in Philippi. They shared the gospel together. A depressed person is an isolated person. A Christian who forsakes fellowship with other believers will inevitably be without joy.

A fourth principle is to focus on the future and not the present. Verse 6 says, "...being confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ..." The church of Philippi was not perfect. The church suffered

from disunity. A younger generation of preachers had burst upon the scene. Many viewed Paul as a relic- part of the older generation. Yet, Paul did not focus upon the failings or weaknesses of the people. He focused upon their ultimate perfection. Nothing encourages a Christian so much as the knowledge that, despite the uncertainties and difficulties, and no matter how many spiritual defeats, one day he will be made perfect.

Another principle is to love others. Paul said, “For God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ. And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment” (verses 8-9). This is the famous agape love. The supreme example of sacrificial love is Jesus. Jesus died for us. Our sins were placed upon Him. He became the Suffering Servant. We are to love as Jesus loved.

If you desire to be miserable in life dwell on the negatives in others and not the positives. Focus exclusively on your own needs. Isolate yourself. Never view the future perfection of fellow believers. Focus only on the weaknesses and failures of the present. Finally, walk in selfishness and not love.

God desires better for us! Jesus said, “My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you” (John 14:27). The world’s happiness rises or falls with circumstances. Joy is the deep confidence that all is well between the believer and the Lord despite circumstances.

Ethan Hansen
Pastor, Faith Bible Fellowship
Big Lake, AK