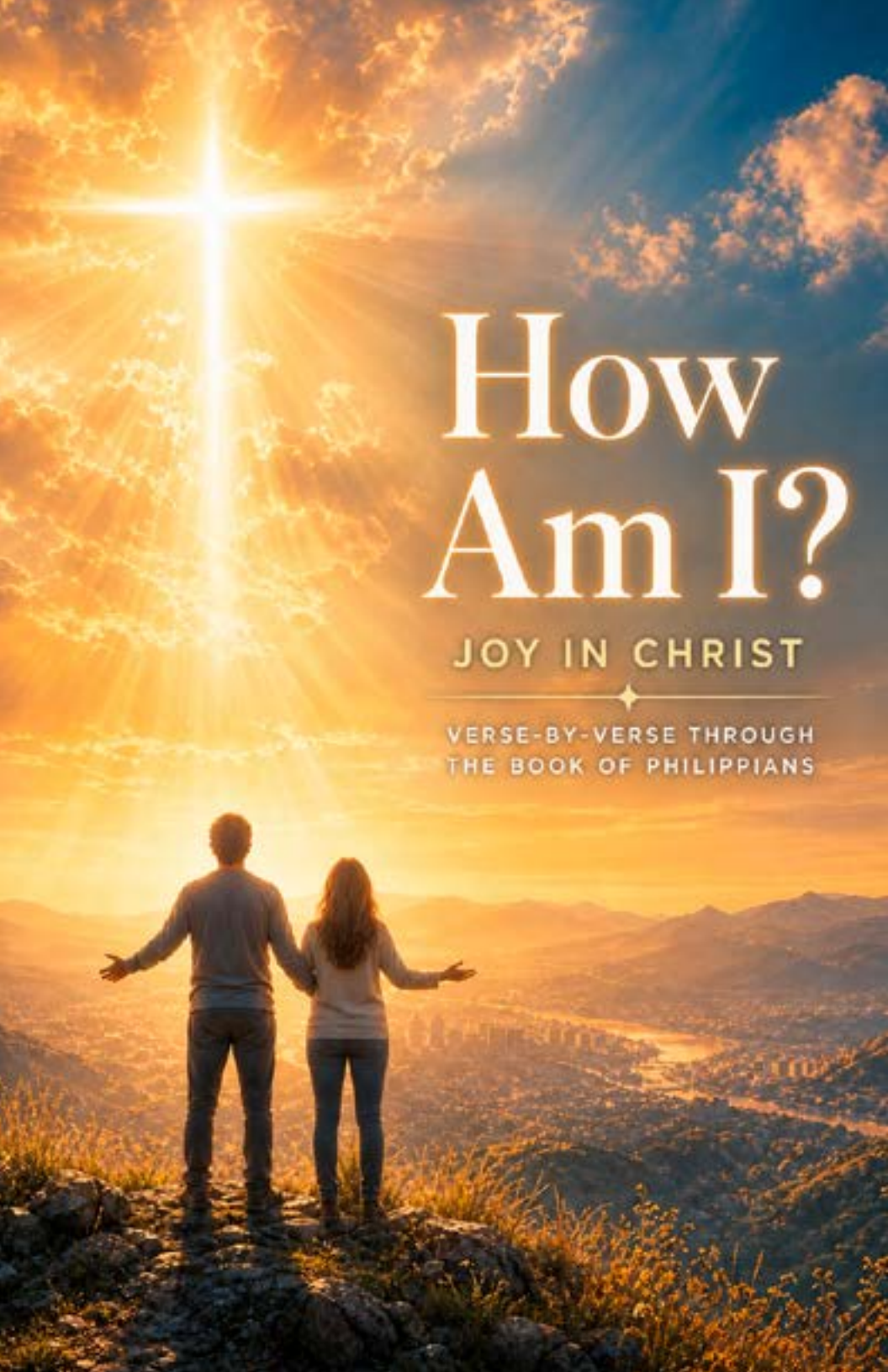


A man and a woman stand on a rocky mountain peak, their backs to the camera. They are looking up at a brilliant, glowing cross in the sky, which is set against a backdrop of a sunset or sunrise with orange and yellow clouds. The sun's rays emanate from the cross. In the background, a valley with a city and mountains is visible under the warm light of the sun.

How Am I?

JOY IN CHRIST

VERSE-BY-VERSE THROUGH
THE BOOK OF PHILIPPIANS

HOW AM I? JOY IN CHRIST

Verse-by-Verse Through the Book of Philippians



That I may publish with the voice of thanksgiving, and tell of all thy wondrous works. (Psalm 26:7)

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for to me, 
TO LIVE IS
Christ
AND
to die is GAIN
... philippians 1:21

Philippians Chapter 1

PHILIPPIANS 1:1

Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons.

Paul opens this letter differently than he does in some of his more corrective epistles. He does not begin by defending his apostleship, as in Galatians, but simply refers to himself and Timothy as servants of Jesus Christ. That alone sets the tone. Philippians is not a confrontational letter. It is warm, affectionate, and deeply personal.

Philippi was the first church Paul founded in Europe, established on his second missionary journey. What began by a riverside prayer meeting had grown into an organized local church with bishops and deacons, showing maturity, structure, and stability.

Paul addresses them first as saints in Christ Jesus. They are called saints because they are in Christ—set apart by Him, belonging to Him, and secured in Him. And just as in his letter to the Ephesians, Paul speaks of their identity before giving them any instruction. Before Paul tells believers what they should do, he reminds them of who they are. The saving work of Christ always precedes and empowers the sanctifying work of saints.

PHILIPPIANS 1:2

Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

As in Ephesians, Paul joins grace and peace together in a way that beautifully summarizes the gospel. Grace is the root of the gospel and peace is the fruit. Grace is God's unmerited favor toward undeserving sinners, and peace is what flows from those having received that grace.

Peace is not found in the degree of our faithfulness to God, but in the unshakable faithfulness of God to the promises He has made to us. That is why Paul can write a letter saturated with joy while sitting in a Roman prison, in chains. His circumstances are unstable, but the source of his peace is not.

These blessings come from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. From the opening lines, Paul anchors the believer's life in the person and provision of God. The Christian life does not begin with striving; it begins with receiving.

PHILIPPIANS 1:3–6

I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy, for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now; being confident of this very thing, that he which has begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.

These verses reveal the heart of Paul as a shepherd. Every remembrance of the Philippians stirs thanksgiving. Every prayer for them is offered with joy. This is remarkable. Paul is imprisoned, uncertain of the outcome of his trial, and cut off from normal ministry. Yet his mind is not dominated by self-pity, but by gratitude.

Paul thanks God for their fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now. This fellowship is more than friendship. It

is gospel partnership—shared participation in prayer, giving, suffering, and spiritual labor. The Philippians had stood with Paul consistently, and their faithfulness testified to the reality of Christ’s work among them.

Then comes one of the great assurance verses in Scripture: “He which has begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.” Paul’s confidence is not in the strength of the Philippians, but in the faithfulness of God. The God who begins is the God who finishes.

The “you” here is plural, referring to the church as a body, yet the truth comforts every individual believer. God saves, sanctifies, and ultimately glorifies His people. He is conforming them to the image of His Son, and He will complete that work.

This gives deep assurance. The stronger a believer grows in faith, the more he often grieves over remaining sin and failure. Yet hope is found here: what God has begun, He will complete. Confidence is not self-confidence. It is God-confidence—a resting certainty in the character of God.

PHILIPPIANS 1:7–8

Even as it is meet for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart; inasmuch as both in my bonds, and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers of my grace. For God is my record, how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ.

Paul explains why he speaks with such confidence about them: he has them in his heart. This is not sentimental language alone. Their lives had proven that they were genuine partners with him in grace. They shared in his bonds, his defense of the gospel, and his confirmation of the gospel. Though miles away, they had stood beside him in spiritual solidarity.

The terms “defense” and “confirmation” are courtroom words. Paul is likely referring to his present imprisonment and legal

witness in Rome. Even in chains, he saw himself not as a victim of Rome, but as a servant of God appointed to defend and establish the truth of the gospel.

His affection is intense: “God is my record, how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ.” The phrase speaks of deep inward affection, tender mercy, and heartfelt longing. Paul does not merely love them with natural affection; he loves them with the affection of Christ Himself at work in him.

Difficult circumstances reveal true affections. In prison, Paul is not primarily full of himself, but full of concern for others. That is one mark of spiritual maturity: suffering that does not shrink the heart inward, but rather enlarges it outward.

PHILIPPIANS 1:9–11

And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; that you may approve things that are excellent; that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ; being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God.

Paul’s prayer is not vague. He prays that their love would abound more and more, but not as mere emotion. Love must grow in knowledge and in all judgment. In other words, Christian love is not blind. It is informed by truth, shaped by discernment, and governed by the knowledge of God.

The more we truly know Christ, the more we love Him, and the more we love Him, the more our love becomes rightly ordered. Love without truth becomes sentimental and unstable. Truth without love becomes cold and harsh. Paul prays for a love that is full, wise, and spiritually perceptive.

He wants them to approve things that are excellent, to discern what truly matters. Spiritual maturity is not simply learning the difference between right and wrong, but learning the difference between what is secondary and what is best.

Paul then prays that they would be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ. The idea of sincere carries the sense of something tested in the sunlight and found genuine. God desires a people who are real and pure, not compromised.

Only Paul speaks of the “day of Christ.” In the Old Testament, the term “the day of the LORD” appears twenty times (KJV), and in the New Testament, “the day of the Lord” is mentioned five times. That phrase refers to the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, a day of judgment. “The day of Christ,” which Paul mentions in Philippians and 1 Thessalonians, refers to the Rapture. Jesus will come in the clouds to receive His bride, the Church, unto Himself. This is the day we are awaiting. In Ephesians, Paul called it the “day of redemption,” reminding us that we are sealed by the Spirit unto that day (Ephesians 4:30).

Finally, Paul prays that they would be filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ. Good fruit does not come from fleshly effort alone, but from Christ working in and through His people. Joy in Jesus is not an end in itself. It is a beginning and an ongoing joy that produces visible fruit that brings glory and praise to God.

PHILIPPIANS 1:12–14

But I would you should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel; so that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace, and in all other places; and many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

Paul now turns from prayer to his present circumstances, and his perspective is striking. He wants the Philippians to understand that the things which happened to him are not without purpose. His bonds have actually served to advance the gospel. What looked like a setback was, in God’s hands, an advancement.

This is one of the great themes of Philippians: joy is not rooted in ideal conditions or comfortable circumstances, but in Christ ruling over all. Paul does not mourn the loss of his freedom; he sees a new platform for witness. Adversity has become opportunity.

Paul's bonds in Christ had become known throughout the palace guard and beyond. Chained to Roman soldiers, Paul had a captive audience. He could not go out into the world as before, so God brought the world to him. Even in prison, the gospel was not bound, Paul was not silenced. His testimony continued to reach the ears of many.

His chains also strengthened other believers. Seeing Paul stand firm emboldened many brethren to speak the word without fear. Faithful suffering can encourage and embolden others who are watching.

PHILIPPIANS 1:15–18

Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife; and some also of good will: the one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds: but the other of love, knowing that I am set for the defense of the gospel. What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice.

Not everyone preaching Christ in Rome was doing so with pure motives. Some were motivated by envy, strife, and selfish ambition. They saw Paul's imprisonment as a chance to elevate themselves and add affliction to his chains.

Others, however, preached out of love, understanding that Paul was set for the defense of the gospel. Their motives were clean, their hearts aligned with the truth, and their ministry flowed from genuine devotion.

Paul's response is not careless indifference to doctrine. He

is not endorsing false teaching. Rather, he is saying that where Christ is truly being preached, even through mixed motives, he can still rejoice that the gospel is going forward.

This reveals remarkable spiritual maturity. Paul is not consumed with protecting his own platform. He wants Christ magnified. Personal irritation must give way to kingdom perspective. When Christ is truly proclaimed, there is reason to rejoice.

PHILIPPIANS 1:19–21

For I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, according to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

Paul is confident that all of this will turn to his deliverance through the prayers of the saints and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. He understands that intercession matters. God works through the praying church, and He supplies what His servants need in every circumstance.

Paul's deepest concern is not personal release, but that he would not be ashamed. His prayer is that Christ would be magnified in his body, whether by life or by death. That is the governing passion of his life. Not comfort. Not reputation. Not survival. Christ magnified.

Then comes the great confession: "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." This is not a slogan. It is the summary of a life fully surrendered to Jesus. Christ was the source, goal, meaning, and strength of Paul's life.

Only the person who can honestly say "to live is Christ" can also say "to die is gain." If to live is money, status, health, success, or earthly comfort, then death is loss. But if to live is Christ, then death is gain because it brings the believer into His

immediate presence.

This does not mean Paul despised life. He was not escaping hardship with a morbid desire to die. Rather, he saw both life and death through Christ. Life meant fruitful labor for the Savior. Death meant being with the Savior. Either way, Christ was the center.

PHILIPPIANS 1:22–26

But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labor: yet what I shall choose I cannot tell. For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you. And having this confidence, I know that I shall abide and continue with you all for your furtherance and joy of faith; that your rejoicing may be more abundant in Jesus Christ for me by my coming to you again.

Paul is pulled in two directions. On the one hand, he desires to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. Death for the believer is not soul sleep, an unconscious delay, or a vague spiritual experience. It is to be immediately and forever with Jesus Christ.

Notice that Paul does not say merely that he wants to go to Heaven. His longing is personal and relational: to be with Christ. Heaven is glorious because Christ is there. The best part of departure is not escape from pain, but the presence of the Savior.

Yet Paul sets aside personal preference for the sake of others. To remain in the flesh is more needful for the Philippians. He has everything he needs in Christ, and therefore he is free to pour himself out for the spiritual good of others. His desire is to serve Christ and build the Kingdom of God on earth until the Lord takes him home.

Paul is persuaded that he will remain and continue with them

for their furtherance and joy of faith. That phrase is beautiful. The Christian life is not only about growing in truth, but about growing in joy through faith. Joy is not dependent on circumstances. Happiness happens; joy abides. Happiness can be bought, though it is temporary and fleeting. Joy is received and is permanent and satisfying. Happiness is of the world; joy is of the Lord.

Paul wants their rejoicing to be more abundant in Jesus Christ. Even his potential release from his bonds is not an end in itself. It would simply become another reason for Christ to be praised.

PHILIPPIANS 1:27–30

Only let your conversation be as it becomes the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel; and in nothing terrified by your adversaries: which is to them an evident token of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that of God. For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake; having the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear to be in me.

Paul now turns from his example to their responsibility. “Let your conversation be as it becomes the gospel of Christ” means let your conduct be worthy of the gospel. The word carries the idea of living as citizens of God’s kingdom with words and actions that are God-honoring. That would have struck the Philippians deeply because they were proud of their Roman citizenship. Paul reminds them that they belong to a higher commonwealth that “is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost” (Romans 14:17).

They are to stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel. The Christian life is not lived in isolation. Believers are called to unity, steadfastness, and

shared labor. We are not merely individuals trying to survive; we are fellow citizens, fellow soldiers, and fellow laborers; and we are called to go out into the world.

Paul tells them not to be terrified by adversaries. Christians are not to be fear-driven in the face of opposition. Courage under pressure becomes visible evidence—both of the emptiness of the enemy’s cause and of the reality of God’s saving work in His people.

Then Paul says something the flesh does not naturally welcome: “Unto you it is given...not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake.” Faith is a gift, and in a real sense, suffering for Christ is also a gift. It is not meaningless, accidental, or always punitive. In God’s hands, suffering becomes a tool for sanctification, testimony, dependence, and eternal reward.

This does not mean all hardship is persecution, nor that consequences of foolish choices should be confused with suffering for Christ. But it does mean that believers should not be surprised when following Jesus brings opposition. Those who live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution, and Philipians teaches us not merely to endure that reality, but to see it through the lens of grace, knowing that God has a purpose for allowing it and will use it for His glory and our good.

The Philippians were sharing in the same conflict they had seen in Paul and now heard to be in him. The conflict had not ended, but neither had the sufficiency of Christ. The believer’s calling is to stand, strive, and suffer with eyes fixed on Jesus. Joy does not come from escaping the battle. It comes from knowing Christ in the middle of it. Joy does not come from living in worldly peace. It comes from having peace with God. His joy is being worked in us every day by the power of the Holy Spirit.

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