

HOW TO HAVE JOY IN THE MIDST OF ADVERSITY: DEVELOP A BIBLICAL MINDSET.

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Philippians 1:1-18

Introduction:

There's this guy in a restaurant sitting down at his table just looking at his drink. He stays like that for a half-an-hour just staring at it. Then all of a sudden this big troublemaking truck driver walks into the restaurant, as if he owns the place, steps over to the man, grabs his glass, and immediately drinks it all down.

The poor man starts crying. The truck driver is a mean bully, but he never intended to make a grown man cry. "Come on, man," the truck driver says, "I was just funning with ya." Tell ya what, "I'll buy ya another drink. But ya gotta stop that crying."

"No, it's not the drink, the man replied. "This is the worst day of my life. Nothing has gone right. First, I accidentally sleep in and get to work, so my boss fires me. I leave the building, and someone has just stolen my car. The police say they can do nothing! I get a cab to return home, and when I leave it, I remember I left my wallet with my credit cards on the seat. When I get home my wife is driving away in our other car with all of her luggage on top. So I walk down to this restaurant to end all of this suffering. And then you show up and gulp down my entire drink. All the poison I had was in that one glass!

Adversity...sometimes it just never quits following you! Sometimes, you say, it seems the constant in the universe is Murphy's Law: "*What can go wrong will go wrong.*" Been there? Done that?

Well, how can we overcome adversity, esp. when it seems to never end, when the waves keep breaking at your shoreline, never giving you a moment's peace.

Transition:

Let's consider the Apostle Paul. As I mentioned last Sunday evening, from beatings to imprisonment, Paul experienced adversity. These trials had taught Paul to be content in all circumstances, and ability that Paul encourages the Philippians to cultivate. Even though he was in prison, facing an uncertain future, Paul writes this thank-you letter to the Philippians, a letter that expresses Paul's abundant joy in what God was doing through them.

- A. This letter is different than some of the other letters he wrote whereby He taught basic doctrines of the Christian faith and principles for living effective Christian lives. In others he dealt with specific errors, stressing the importance of knowing the truth in order to distinguish it from error.
- B. In this letter to the Philippians, Paul reveals those doctrines and principles put to the test in life and action. He emphasizes how we should respond to Christian truth. He stresses the importance of knowing Jesus Christ above all.
- C. In essence, the Christian experience is truly a matter of cultivating his or her relationship to Jesus Christ whereby you allow Jesus Christ to be reproduced in your life by means of the Holy Spirit. And in this epistle Paul reveals that the intimacy of that relationship by demonstrating that Christ is his ambition, life, strength, mind, goal, and purpose.
- D. Where did this mindset, this predisposition in the midst of suffering come from? The answer is by allowing Jesus Christ to be everything to the believer. Or said a different way: Jesus is everything

to us when we orient our lives with Him at the center. Paul put it this way: "To me, to live [is] Christ" (1:21). When we start living for something or someone else other than Christ, like finances, fame, family, fun, or whatever we put at the center of living, bitterness, an attitude of victimization, anxiety, worries, anger, insecurity, and even depression can set in. However, Paul put Christ the center of his life. Consequently Paul viewed God as Christ did. He saw people as Christ did. He viewed his purpose as Christ did. He viewed his goal as Christ did. He established his priorities as Christ did. He conducted his daily affairs as Christ did. His life was Christ.

This morning I would like to unpack the Apostle Paul's predisposition as an example of the same type of biblical mindset we are to have, and see how he is able to carry out his ministry in the midst of personal suffering in chapter 1 of Philippians:

By examining Paul's mindset we have come to see that it incorporates following proactive elements: Paul considered himself a slave unto God, who knew both the source of His salvation and the sovereignty of God, and the importance of putting others before himself.

II. Element # 1: Be a Slave unto God:

¹ *Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons.*

- A. Paul's mindset involved the recognition that He was God's servant. He describes himself in this epistle as a bondservant of Jesus Christ. "Bond-servants" translates the plural of the oft-used Greek word, *doulos*, which describes a person owned by someone else, and thus subservient to and dependent on that person.
- B. In the New Testament it is used not only of apostles but a believer's relationship to Jesus Christ as a believer who is willing, determined, and devoted. It reflects the attitude of an O.T. slave who refused the opportunity for freedom and voluntarily resubmitted himself to his master for life.
 - 1. Paul declares in Romans 7:6: "*Now we have been released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter.*"
 - 2. To the Corinthians, in 1 Cor. 7:22, he explained, "*For he who was called in the Lord while a slave, is the Lord's freedman; likewise he who was called while free, is Christ's slave.*"
- C. This term "*servant*" emphasizes dependence and submission upon the Lord and it is used not in a negative sense, but positive. Nor did they think of themselves as slaves to the church. To be sure, this is not a technical reference to a specific office, but characterizes their incredible orientation of their lives with Jesus at the center. But let me say this, being a slave unto Christ can never be disappointing or vain. Devotion and obedience to the Lord and to His Word will keep the believer on a godly, faithful, and dynamic course of life.
- D. Thus, if a believer considers himself to be a faithful servant, a slave to the Lord Jesus Christ who is our Master, then obedience, dependence, and self-surrender become paramount. But what does that look at? In order to understand and see how we can apply that same principle to our lives, let me contrast the differences between a helper and servant (offered by Tom Constable in his *Expository Notes*).

Contrasts between a Helper and a Servant

A Helper

- A helper helps others when it is convenient.
- A helper helps people that he or she likes.
- A helper helps when he or she enjoys the work.
- A helper helps when the circumstances are convenient.
- A helper helps with a view to obtaining personal satisfaction.
- A helper helps with an attitude of assisting another.

A Servant

- A servant serves others even when it is inconvenient.
- A servant serves even people that he or she dislikes.
- A servant serves even when he or she dislikes the work.
- A servant serves even when the circumstances are inconvenient.
- A servant serves even when he or she receives no personal satisfaction.
- A servant serves with an attitude of enabling another.

- E. Lastly, in case we think this is only applicable to the Apostle Paul we see that Timothy shares that same attitude. Thus, there is not a way out if we want the same mindset that the Apostle has that allows him to overcome difficulties.

Thus, a biblical mindset involves being willing, determined, and devoted to being a slave, a bond-servant to Jesus Christ. So, if we want to have biblical mindset we must recognize that we too are to be servants in the hands of God no matter the circumstance:

II. Element # 2: Never forget the Source of Your Salvation:

Verse 2 Grace and Peace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

A biblical mindset involves the knowing, never forgetting the source of salvation. Paul, in verse 2 offers a familiar blessing, “combining both “*grace and peace*” together when he states, “*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*”

- A. Paul realizes that grace is undeserved favor, bestowed without merit. Thus, he is fully aware that he could never do anything that would warrant eternal life. Rather, God did it for him through Jesus Christ.
- B. Paul then combines grace with a Greek translation of the Hebrew greeting “*Shalom*” or “*peace*.” Peace is a reference to the inner assurance and tranquility that God ministers to the hearts of believers and keeps them spiritually confident and content even in the midst of peace.
- C. Lastly, Paul gives the source of both grace and peace: “*from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*” Notice also that Paul combines both God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ together, which implies equality. Paul understands that Jesus the Messiah is the divine Lord, ascended to the Father’s right hand and equal to him in authority and honor.

- D. So, Paul didn't neglect or eventually forget the source of his salvation. He didn't turn to his awards, intellect, friends, money, merit, gifted personalities, pills, alcohol, relationships with others, or background for grace and peace.

III. VERSE 3: ELEMENT # 3: Pro-Actively Seek to Minister to Others:

Not only does a biblical mindset involve being a slave and knowing the source for salvation, but it also includes always being pro-actively involved in ministry - no matter the circumstance.

Verse ³: I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, ⁴always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, ⁵for your fellowship in the gospel from the very first day until now, ⁶being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ; ⁷just as it is right for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart, in as much as both in my chains and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers with me of grace. ⁸For God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ.

- A. Paul had a pro-active ministry mindset in the midst of very difficult circumstances. He was in a dark Roman prison, never left alone, jailed always in chains to a Roman guard.
- B. The tense of the Greek verb, "*I thank*" implies that Paul was continually thankful to God for the believers at Philippi. Every time God brought them to his mind, always in every prayer, he requests with all joy that God would complete His good work among them. I also appreciate that he was possessive of God, when he says, "I thank my God." This is a reflection, once more, of his servant-spirit.
- C. Thus, Notice that Paul's ministry to Philippi is done by praying and writing because he is in prison. He didn't give up. He didn't let his circumstance nullify his mission, his calling, his purpose, his goal, his life. Rather, he ministered in the midst of it: First, he prayed and secondly, he wrote this epistle along with Galatians, Ephesians, and Colossians. Where we would be without those marvelous books!
- D. Let's consider prayer. What did Paul pray? Let's look at verses 9-11:

1. Vs 9. And this I pray that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment,"

- A. Paul's petition to the Lord was three-fold. He prayed that his readers would be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ (v. 10b). In order for them to be that he prayed that they would approve excellent things (v. 10a). To do that he prayed that their love would abound even more (v. 9). Self-sacrificing love (Gr. *agape*) should be the motive behind partnership (Gr. *koinonia*) in the gospel. Paul illustrated the importance of this shortly with examples of preachers who demonstrated improper and proper motives (1:15-18).
- B. The Philippians had already given evidence of possessing the love that God alone can produce (1 Cor. 13:1-3; Gal. 5:22) in their dealings with the apostle. Paul asked God that that love might increase even more. He did not limit the objects of that love in this verse. It must have included God, Paul, other believer, and all people.
- C. However, he did qualify that love as resting on real knowledge and all discernment. It should arise from an intelligent appraisal of reality. It should also rest on spiritual sensitivity to truth as God has revealed it in His Word and not on mere sentimentality. God's revelation and His Spirit were to guide their loving.

D. This kind of loving becomes apparent when a Christian values highly the things that God loves and turns away from situations and influences that God hates. In the context this discernment applies primarily to what will advance the gospel best (cf. vv. 12-26)!

2. ¹⁰ **that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ,”**

A. Reflecting upon verse 11, possessing this kind of abounding love will enable you to give approval to things or circumstances of the greatest value and importance. Conversely you will disapprove things or circumstances of lesser significance. Most of the choices that you as a believer faces are not between morally good and morally evil things but between things of lesser and greater value. The things that we choose, the situations we respond to, reflect how discerning our love really is

B. The ultimate end in view emerges in the second part of this verse. We need to love in harmony with God's revelation and with His Spirit's guidance (v. 9) so we will choose the best over the good (v. 10a). This will result in our being without flaw (sincere) and without blame (blameless) when we stand before God to give an account of the stewardship of our lives at the judgment seat (v. 10b; 2 Cor. 5:10; cf. 1 John 3:3).

C. The word “*blameless*” or “*without offense*” “*Aproskopos*” has to do with being 'blameless' in the sense of 'not offending' or not causing someone else to stumble.”¹

3. ¹¹ **being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.**

A. The only way we will be able to stand before God sincere and blameless is if we allow the Holy Spirit to control us. If we do, He will fill our lives with the fruit that is the product of His righteousness (Gal. 5:22-23). This righteousness and its fruit come to us through Jesus Christ, not as a result of our own good deeds. Therefore all the glory and praise for our righteousness, our fruit, and hopefully our flawless and blameless condition at the judgment seat of Christ, goes to God. He is the ultimate source of it all (cf. Eph. 1:6, 12, 14).

E. So, having looked at the content of his very tender and endearing prayer, we need to ask ourselves why pray or what does prayer do?

1. What does prayer do? Chuck Swindoll tells the story of Late Dr. Barnhouse, greatly admired American expositor, pastor and author, once came to the pulpit and made a statement that stunned his congregation: “Prayer changes nothing!” You could have heard a needle drop in that packed Sunday worship service in Philadelphia when he made that stunning statement... His comment, of course, was designed to make Christians realize that God is sovereignly in charge of everything. Our times are literally in His hands. No puny human being by uttering a few words in prayer takes charge of events and changes them. God does the shaping, the changing; it is He who is in control. Swindoll comments, “Barnhouse was correct, except in one minor detail. Prayer changes me.

¹Fee, p. 102.

2. When you and I pray, we change, and that is one of the major reasons prayer counteracts feelings such as anxiety, gloom, and loneliness in the midst of any circumstance.

IV. Verses 3-8: ELEMENT # 4: Know Joy:

If we want to overcome our circumstances with a biblical mindset or predisposition, we are not only to commit ourselves to being a bond-servant, know that God is our source for eternal life, and have a proactive ministry no matter we are, we are also to be people who have joy.

Verse ³: I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, ⁴ always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, ⁵ for your fellowship in the gospel from the very first day until now, ⁶ being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ; ⁷ just as it is right for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart, in as much as both in my chains and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers with me of grace. ⁸ For God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ.

- A. A biblical mindset involves joy. In fact, the word “joy” filled Paul’s prayer for the Philippians as he interceded by means of prayer for their needs. Here is the first of 5 times Paul uses joy in this letter.
- B. Here’s the irony. Paul is in prison and he prays with joy for *their betterment*. Where did this come from and why? How is it that Paul has joy?
- C. There are a number of words in both Testaments express the joy that human beings experience. Joy is found in the good things of this life and in expectation of God’s work in the future. In the Old Testament the word Joy is portrayed, like every other aspect of life on earth, as dependent on God’s goodness; direct joy comes from a personal relationship with the Lord. God’s blessings, His saving acts, God’s Word, trusting in God’s promises, were sources of joy in the life of the believer. In other words, in your commitment to God do you find an inner and hidden spring of joy bubbling within the heart?
- D. In the N.T. there are three Greek words for joy:
 - 1: One word, *agalliao* is a loud, public expression of joy in worship. It focuses attention on God and his past and future work for the believer.
 2. The second word, *euphraino* emphasizes a community joy, expressed by believers as they were gathered together for a banquet or festival; it does not describe the feelings of the individual as much as the atmosphere of shared enjoyment.
 3. *Chairo* is the word for joy that is used most often in the N.T. It may be defined as an overriding confidence in the sovereignty of God. In other words, joy is something that is independent of circumstances. We know from Galatians that the believer’s joy is found not in circumstances, but in the Jesus Christ, who, through the inner work of the Holy Spirit, despite suffering trials or sufferings, is setting us apart unto Christ. Thus joy, like peace, is rooted in trusting, abiding in the Lord. As for externals, the greatest source of joy for the Christian is found in serving other believers and in seeing God work in their lives.
- E. **Joy may be defined as an overriding confidence in the sovereignty of God no matter the circumstance and it is expressed in my passion for God and in my love towards others.**
 1. We see this in Paul’s life. Paul wrote this letter while in prison. Paul, however, had this enabling ability by means of the Holy Spirit to be thankful no matter the circumstance

and he regularly prayed to God that the Philippians may be encouraged unto spiritual maturity; this contributed to his joy. In fact, he continually thanked God for them every time God brought them to his mind. He thanked God for them the Philippians had dedicated themselves to living and proclaiming the truth about Jesus Christ, and specifically to helping Paul in His ministry. As Dr. Robert Lightner says in the *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, “*Paul’s hardships made him better, not bitter. They [hardships] do one or the other to a child of God.*”

2. How can we experience “joy in the midst of adversity? The bottom line is we have to both acknowledge and rely upon God’s sovereignty-

V. VERSES 3-8. ELEMENT # 5: POUR OUR LIVES INTO OTHERS:

Not only does a biblical mindset involve being a slave, knowing the source for salvation, always being pro-active in ministry, and entrusting yourself to God’s sovereignty, but we need to also pro-actively pour our lives into others.

Verse ³: I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, ⁴always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, ⁵for your fellowship in the gospel from the very first day until now, ⁶being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ; ⁷just as it is right for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart, in as much as both in my chains and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers with me of grace. ⁸For God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ.

- A. Let’s make others your priority, not yourself. Paul’s life was not his own; he was enslaved unto Christ, not himself. He was not a person who complained about being in prison; he hoped that he would be released but he didn’t complain or become bitter because he couldn’t preach the Word and continue his ministry while confined. He didn’t become worrisome and so introspective that all he talked about was him-self; he didn’t have the “*woe-is-me*” syndrome. Rather, He praised God because he knew that God would complete his good works among the Philippians. He praised God because he realized that his life and his partnership with the Philippians are not in vain.
- B. But to what degree should we make people our priority? Verse 8 gives us the answer. **“For God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ.”** This word, affection, literally means the internal organs, which were regarded to 1st century Christians as the center of the deepest feelings. Whereas the heart is the seat of affection, Paul now speaks of his affection, his deep feelings for these believers.
- C. In modern terminology, Paul reveals that he had the heart of Jesus Christ. His feelings for the Philippians were like those of Jesus Christ, who loved them and died for them.
- D. That means then, we need to love even those we don’t like; forgive those who have wronged or taken advantage of us; let go of past hurts, anger, and bitterness, and exchange them with a willingness to press on in those relationship with a bond-servant disposition whereas we seek to consciously meet their needs with the livelihood, time, energy, and skills we have. For when we love our brother, meeting their practical needs with the God-given resources we possess, we love others with an active faith.
- E. In fact, it is a fundamental requirement of the Christian life according to 6 passages in 1 John. Further, by loving others with a self-surrendering, practical, and genuine love, we will live without stumbling (1 John 2:10).

VI. HOW SHOULD WE THEN LIVE?

By examining Paul's mindset we have come to see that it incorporates following proactive elements: Paul considered himself a slave unto God, who knew both the source of His salvation and the sovereignty of God, and the importance of putting others before himself.

How can we experience “joy” in the midst of adversity? Embrace the truth in how you live that God is sovereign. His plans are above our present perspective (verse 12-18).

- A. Let me illustrate why we need to trust ourselves unto God like the Apostle Paul has done:
1. 1988 was a very tough year for me. Unto death I lost unexpectedly in chronological order a cousin, a dear uncle, two grandfathers -three weeks apart; my father had his first heart attack; and then I had a brother who was killed at the age of seventeen, just prior to my 19th birthday. Then one month later I was off to a US Navy boot camp (Great Lakes).
 2. Losing my brother was very difficult. He was a black belt in the martial arts and an Olympic trained pistol shooter, ranked 7 in the nation with a 45 in his age group. And because of his ability to use a pistol, he was trained at the Olympic Center, was offered an opportunity to attend either the US Naval Academy and receive a full-paid scholarship to A&M. With such a potential future ahead of him, he was, ironically, killed by a gun. He was going to shooting practice and some of his friends picked him up. He was sitting in the backseat unaware that in the front seat the driver had a 7 mm. Remington Rifle loaded and ready to fire with the stock of the gun on the floor, and the barrel angled into the straight cushion seat of this Buick, aimed at his heart. The bolt slipped when they hit a bump on the road and boom, my brother bled to death, having been shot directly in the heart.
 3. Now, when I got the news and after I saw my brother's blue body at the hospital, I went home and my best friend at the time, and both of my Sunday school teachers came over and we went out to the backyard deck, and in prayer I gave all this over to the Lord. I can't really describe the peace I experienced in the wake of enormous pain and loss, at that moment and in the years that have gone by, and watching my at my parents deal with this, esp. having lost two other children before I was born; they had twins who were born full-term and unfortunately, their lungs weren't fully developed.
 4. But what has gotten me through the pain is God, taking God's Word at face-value: God will do nothing less than his infinitely perfect best; He is the sum-total of His infinite perfections. And thus, I trust in Him event though I may never know the “whys”. To be sure, I am not perfect. But I am not bitter, resentful, or plagued with the “woe-is-me” syndrome whereby I am no longer usable in ministry. And the pain and loss I continue to feel, the hole in the heart that exists in view of losing the only sibling I knew, hasn't stopped me from wanting to minister to others or routinely examining my own life in order to determine whether I am maximizing it for His greatness with what he has given me. This is what I am talking about: God's grace, His peace, His strength, His joy, even in the most difficult of circumstance is available; God is available every day, every moment, and every location.
 5. One possible and insightful reason we experience adversity is offered by Oswald Chambers, a man who experienced adversity firsthand in the Egyptian desert as a chaplain to the British military during the WW II. In his devotional to soldiers he said the following:

“If you are going to be used by God, He will take you through a multitude of experiences that are not meant for you at all; they are meant to make you useful in His Hands.”

B. FOR THE BELIEVER: CULTIVATE A MIND FOR CHRIST.

1. **Rising above our circumstances is not gained by association with godly things; only through direct contact.** Know God, know His Word. I would encourage you to study God’s word inductively and be active in the local church. You can’t be a healthy Christian and avoid actively participating in the local church because we are designed to function as the corporate body of Christ.
2. **Seek selfless Humility in your daily activities.** Our priorities need to reflect or be aligned with God’s priorities. Just as God put us first, we should put others first. And you know where you are in this...just listen to your own conversations with others. If they are always about you, or all conversations always go back to you, I would say you probably are first in your life.
3. **Seek no other substitute.** Mature faith does not produce fear but instead imparts courage. The world only entraps you then strips you down. Following the flesh only leads to gloom, despair, and misery. Don’t become a miserable person like fictional caricature, Dorian Grey.
4. **Cultivate prayer.** We always need changing. No one has arrived unto sinless maturity.
5. **Trust God even if your questions are never answered;** He will never do anything less than his infinite best; he will get you through the situation in His way, His timing, and for His own glory. Thus, wait, be patient, and be faithful.
6. Or said a different way, having a mindset like the apostle Paul is not only for apostles. Because, God made fellowship possible between your mind as a believer and the mind of God, your heart and the heart of God, and your will and the will of God. And living the Christian life is the exercise of these three capacities Godwardly. Fellowship or intimacy between God and believers consists of your mind in harmony with the mind of God, your heart in harmony with the heart of God, and your will in harmony with the will of God.²
“If Timothy can do it, so can you!”

C. For the unbeliever: Let me say to those who have chosen to purposely reject Jesus Christ and you are here for another reason. You may mock the words of Scripture, my words, or even my testimony. You may even be in full agreement with Karl Marx who says religion is opium for the masses or Frederick Nietzsche who insists that Christianity is for the weak, the feeble, and the simple-minded.

D. But if you ever, ever find yourself or a loved one in pain, such as an emergency room, in a fox-hole, or in an overwhelming situation at work or home, or experiencing what you think is an impossible marriage, please hear me well: **while you live God is always available.** I encourage you to call out to God, knowing that Jesus He is God, died on the cross for your sins and rose again. Receive the free gift of salvation; there are no conditions except to believe in who Jesus is and what He has done for you. And though God may or may not liberate you from your situation, God will become your source of strength, your peace, and your fulfiller in life by means of the Holy Spirit. And you will be able to face what seems insurmountable with an entirely new dynamic, strength, goal, and purpose because you will have a new heart, a new mind, and a new will; you will have a new capacity to see things from a God-ward perspective.

² Dwight J. Pentecost, *Designed to be Like Him*, pp. 26-27.