

## Paul's Joy in Prison

**BIBLE PASSAGE:** Philippians 1:12-30

**MAIN POINT:** While he was in prison, Paul told the Philippian church to be joyful.

**KEY PASSAGE:** Philippians 1:20-21

**BIG PICTURE QUESTION:** When should we tell others about Jesus? We should always tell others about Jesus even when it is difficult.

**INTRODUCE THE STORY**  
(10–15 MINUTES)  
**PAGE 58**



**TEACH THE STORY**  
(25–30 MINUTES)  
**PAGE 60**



**APPLY THE STORY**  
(25–30 MINUTES)  
**PAGE 66**



4

## Leader BIBLE STUDY

Paul wrote his letter to the Philippian believers when he was a prisoner at a house in Rome. Paul had planted the church in Philippi about 10 years earlier. The letter begins with thanksgiving and joy, a remarkable response in light of Paul's lengthy imprisonment. He was waiting to present his case to Caesar, the emperor of Rome.

People began to hear about Paul and why he was a prisoner. The whole imperial guard knew that Paul was in chains because he followed Jesus. Despite what seemed like a series of setbacks, the sufferings Paul faced actually advanced the gospel—and for this reason, Paul was joyful.

As you teach kids, remind them that joy is one of the qualities seen in the fruit of the Spirit. (Gal. 5:22) Explain that joy is delight that comes from knowing and serving God. Paul's joy was not self-generated. He didn't muster up joy because he was super-spiritual or naively optimistic about his circumstances. Paul had joy because he was focused on Jesus.

Think about suffering in your own life. How do you typically respond to suffering? What does your reaction to suffering reveal about what you believe about God? What does it reveal about what you most treasure in life?

No matter what chaos or suffering surrounded Paul, these realities were constant: the gospel was being spread, Jesus was Lord, and Paul knew Him. This eternal perspective was essential to Paul's peace and joy. God used Paul's difficult circumstances to spread the gospel and build the church. Paul knew that because Jesus suffered to bring salvation to the world, believers doing God's work would suffer too.

Joy in suffering does not discredit grief and pain, but it gives hope in difficult times. This joy is rooted in the faithfulness of God, who ultimately does everything for His glory and our good.



**MINISTRY GRID**  
training made simple

Additional resources for each session are available at [gospelproject.com](http://gospelproject.com). For free training and session-by-session help, visit [www.ministrygrid.com/web/thegospelproject](http://www.ministrygrid.com/web/thegospelproject).

# The BIBLE STORY

## Bible Storytelling Tips

- **Use voice cues:** Pause or allow for silence between narration and quotations to create an added emphasis.
- **Vary your posture:** Stand tall and speak with confidence when telling the words Paul wrote in his letter.

## Paul's Joy in Prison

*Philippians 1:12-30*

**Paul was living as a prisoner in Rome.** He had done nothing wrong, but the Jewish people had tried to kill him because he believed and taught that Jesus had risen from the dead. Many did not believe in the resurrection. Now Paul **was waiting to meet with the emperor of Rome.**

Believers visited Paul or sent him gifts. **While in prison, Paul wrote a letter to the Christians in Philippi to thank them for sending a gift and to tell them about his work.**

Paul wrote, **"I want you to know, brothers, that even though the Jews tried to stop me, everything that has happened has actually helped me tell more people the good news about Jesus.** Now the guards at the palace know the gospel, and other believers have been sharing the gospel without fear." This all happened because Paul was a prisoner.

"Thank you for praying for me. I know that God has given me the Holy Spirit to help me. **I hope that I will never be afraid or embarrassed about anything. I want to be bold and honor Jesus, whether I live or I die.**

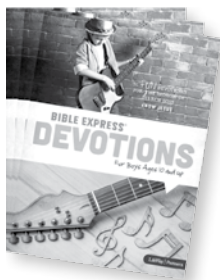
**"For me, living is Christ and dying is gain. If I live, I live for Jesus. If I die for Jesus, I will be with Him forever."** Paul said it was important to the Philippian Christians that he be alive so he could continue to help and encourage them.

**"No matter what happens, live your life in a way that brings honor to the gospel of Christ.** Then, whether I am with you or away, I will hear that you are working together to share the good news about Jesus."

**Paul also urged the believers to not let anyone scare**

them away from doing God's work. He said, "This is the work God has given you to do—not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for Him."

*Christ Connection: God used Paul's difficult circumstances to spread the gospel and build the church. Paul knew that because Jesus suffered to bring salvation to the world, believers doing God's work would suffer too.*



**WANT TO  
DISCOVER  
GOD'S WORD?  
GET  
BIBLE EXPRESS!**

Invite kids to check out this week's devotionals to discover how God's Word can help them grow in the gospel. Order in bulk, subscribe quarterly, or purchase individually. For more information, check out [www.lifeway.com/devotionals](http://www.lifeway.com/devotionals).

# Introduce the STORY

**SESSION TITLE:** Paul's Joy in Prison

**BIBLE PASSAGE:** Philippians 1:12-30

**MAIN POINT:** While he was in prison, Paul told the Philippian church to be joyful.

**KEY PASSAGE:** Philippians 1:20-21

**BIG PICTURE QUESTION:** When should we tell others about Jesus? We should always tell others about Jesus even when it is difficult.

---

## Welcome time

Greet each kid as he or she arrives. Use this time to collect the offering, fill out attendance sheets, and help new kids connect to your group. Prompt kids to share about a time they were in a difficult situation but experienced a good outcome.

**SAY** • Thank you for sharing. Life can be challenging and unfair at times. Today we are going to take a look at Paul in another difficult situation. Keep your ears open to hear how he responded.

## Activity page (5 minutes)

- “Emotions” activity page, 1 per kid
- pencils or markers

Invite kids to complete “Emotions” on the activity page. Beside each description, kids should draw a face showing how they might feel in that situation.

**SAY** • We might feel differently in different situations. We might even feel differently than someone else in the same situation! How we feel is influenced by what is important to us and what we believe. Today's Bible story is about how Paul felt joy in a situation that might make a lot of people feel angry or sad or frustrated. Let's learn more.

## Session starter (10 minutes)

### OPTION 1: Emotion ball

Draw faces on a beach ball representing different emotions (happy, sad, angry, confused, and so forth). Instruct kids to stand in a circle and toss the ball around. When you say stop, the kid with the ball should hold it with both hands.

Call for the player with the ball to look at one of the faces she is touching (closest to right thumb, for instance). Ask her how she could trust God when she is feeling that emotion. Play additional rounds as time allows.

**SAY** • In this life we will have many struggles and feel different emotions. Even Paul couldn't muster up the strength on his own to have joy. Paul knew joy is found in Jesus alone, no matter what was going on in his life.

### OPTION 2: Joy banner

Write the word *joy* on a large piece of paper. Encourage kids to find a spot on the paper to draw a picture of something that represents joy to them. When kids finish, display the banner on a wall in the room.

**SAY** • As I look over your drawings, these all look like good things. No one drew being in prison or having people try to kill you. Why not? [*Allow kids to respond.*] We will see today that, while still in prison for doing nothing wrong, Paul responded with joy. True joy comes from knowing and serving God.



- beach ball
- dry erase marker or permanent marker

- large piece of paper
- markers or crayons

## Transition to teach the story

# Teach the STORY

**SESSION TITLE:** Paul's Joy in Prison

**BIBLE PASSAGE:** Philippians 1:12-30

**MAIN POINT:** While he was in prison, Paul told the Philippian church to be joyful.

**KEY PASSAGE:** Philippians 1:20-21

**BIG PICTURE QUESTION:** When should we tell others about Jesus? We should always tell others about Jesus even when it is difficult.

---

## Countdown

• countdown video

Show the countdown video as your kids arrive, and set it to end as the session begins.

## Introduce the session (3 minutes)

• leader attire

• bandage

*[Leader enters walking slowly with his or her shoulders slumped. Leader's actions make it obvious he or she is upset. One hand is wrapped up in a bandage.]*

**LEADER** • Hey, kids. You all sure are a sight for sad eyes. I was so looking forward to seeing you today because I want to tell you all about a special fort I am building out of wood from that shipwreck I found.

But I have bad news. Nothing is working right today. A bird kept flying by and pecking my head. I banged my own hand with a hammer; and just when I got the foundation of the fort finished, a huge wave came and knocked it down.

I am really just not feeling joyful at all. I think it is time for a break. I am looking forward to catching up to Paul and seeing how he responded to difficult circumstances.

## Big picture question (1 minute)

**LEADER** • First, I am sure you all remember our big question, but let's see if you know the answer. ***When should we tell others about Jesus? We should always tell others about Jesus even when it is difficult.***

## Giant timeline (1 minute)

Show the giant timeline or big story circle. Point to previous stories as you review

• Giant Timeline or  
Big Story Circle

**LEADER** • So far, we have learned a lot about some of Paul's most difficult experiences. Paul obeyed God's call to tell people about Jesus, but the Jews made a plan to kill Paul. But when Paul was arrested, **God protected him so he could preach about Jesus.**

Then Paul stood before rulers who tried to decide if he had done anything wrong. Paul wasn't afraid of people with power; in fact, **Paul preached about Jesus to governors and kings.** This was part of God's plan for Paul's life! Paul was on his way to Rome to see Caesar when a storm caused the ship to wreck. **God protected Paul in the shipwreck so he could stand before Caesar.**

Today's Bible story picks up when Paul was in Rome. He was still in prison, but listen carefully to see how Paul handled all of this.

## Tell the Bible story (10 minutes)

Open your Bible to Philippians 1:12-30. Use the Bible storytelling tips on the Bible story page to help you tell the story, or show the Bible story video "Paul's Joy in Prison."

**LEADER** • Paul had quite the journey to Rome. He was still a prisoner. How would you feel if you were Paul?

• Bibles  
• "Paul's Joy in Prison" video  
• Big Picture Question Poster  
• Bible Story Picture Poster

Imagine trying to obey God by sharing the gospel, only to get arrested and spend so much time in prison. I think I would feel pretty discouraged.

It would be really easy for us to think of Paul as some sort of superhero in this story, but let's not get confused. Paul wasn't much different than you or me. Paul's joy during all his suffering didn't come from himself. Paul's source of joy was Jesus.

**While he was in prison, Paul told the Philippian church to be joyful.** He wrote them a letter, which we can read in the Bible.

What good things happened as a result of Paul's being in prison? Well, people in Rome heard that Paul was in prison for telling people about Jesus. Some of the guards at the palace heard the gospel, and other believers were encouraged to share the gospel without fear.

***When should we tell others about Jesus? We should always tell others about Jesus even when it is difficult.*** When life is hard, we can have joy because God is faithful.

Joy isn't the same as happiness; we can be joyful even in sad circumstances. Joy comes from a deep trust that God is in control and that He does everything for His glory and our good.

Note: You may use this opportunity to use Scripture and the guide provided to explain how to become a Christian. Make sure kids know when and where they can ask questions.

## Christ connection

**LEADER** • God used Paul's difficult circumstances to spread the gospel and build His church. God works in ways we might not understand or expect. Paul knew that because Jesus suffered to bring salvation to the world, believers doing God's work would suffer too.

## Key passage (5 minutes)

Show the key passage poster. Lead the boys and girls to read together Philippians 1:20-21. Call for the girls to say the key passage, and then call for the boys to say it.

**LEADER** • Paul knew that Jesus is better than life itself.

Knowing and serving Christ gave him great joy.

Lead boys and girls in singing “My Eager Expectation.”

- Key Passage Poster
- “My Eager Expectation” song

## Discussion starter video (4 minutes)

**LEADER** • When was the last time you felt joyful? [*Allow kids to respond.*] Being joyful is easy when you are happy and when life is easy, but do you think it’s possible to be joyful in a difficult situation? Think about that as you watch this video.

- “Unit 34, Session 4” discussion starter video

Show the “Unit 34, Session 4” discussion starter video.

Then lead kids to discuss the following questions:

- How would you feel if you were about to play soccer and it started to rain? Or if you were meeting a friend at the mall and she was late? Or if you wanted to go on a class field trip but forgot to get your permission slip signed?
- Do you think you could be joyful in these situations? Why or why not?
- Why do you think Paul was joyful even when he was in prison?

**LEADER** • **While he was in prison, Paul told the**

**Philippian church to be joyful.** God calls us to be joyful in all circumstances. [*See 1 Thess. 5:16-18.*] We can be joyful when we trust that God is good and in control. He loves us!

• “Unstoppable Victory”  
song

## **Sing (4 minutes)**

**LEADER** • Paul honored God with his life. One way we can honor God with our lives is by worshiping Him with our voices. He alone deserves our praise.

Sing together “Unstoppable Victory.”

## **Pray (2 minutes)**

Invite kids to pray before dismissing to apply the story.

**LEADER** • Lord God, true joy comes from You. No matter what we face, we know we can trust You. You are good. Grow our joy and help us treasure Jesus more. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

## **Dismiss to apply the story**

## The Gospel: God's Plan for Me

Ask kids if they have ever heard the word *gospel*. Clarify that the word *gospel* means “good news.” It is the message about Christ, the kingdom of God, and salvation. Use the following guide to share the gospel with kids.



**God rules.** Explain to kids that the Bible tells us God created everything, and He is in charge of everything. Invite a volunteer to read Genesis 1:1 from the Bible. Read Revelation 4:11 or Colossians 1:16-17 aloud and explain what these verses mean.



**We sinned.** Tell kids that since the time of Adam and Eve, everyone has chosen to disobey God. (Romans 3:23) The Bible calls this sin. Because God is holy, God cannot be around sin. Sin separates us from God and deserves God's punishment of death. (Romans 6:23)



**God provided.** Choose a child to read John 3:16 aloud. Say that God sent His Son, Jesus, the perfect solution to our sin problem, to rescue us from the punishment we deserve. It's something we, as sinners, could never earn on our own. Jesus alone saves us. Read and explain Ephesians 2:8-9.



**Jesus gives.** Share with kids that Jesus lived a perfect life, died on the cross for our sins, and rose again. Because Jesus gave up His life for us, we can be welcomed into God's family for eternity. This is the best gift ever! Read Romans 5:8; 2 Corinthians 5:21; or 1 Peter 3:18.



**We respond.** Tell kids that they can respond to Jesus. Read Romans 10:9-10,13. Review these aspects of our response: Believe in your heart that Jesus alone saves you through what He's already done on the cross. Repent, turning from self and sin to Jesus. Tell God and others that your faith is in Jesus.

Offer to talk with any child who is interested in responding to Jesus. Provide *I'm a Christian Now!* for new Christians to take home and complete with their families.

# Apply the STORY

**SESSION TITLE:** Paul's Joy in Prison

**BIBLE PASSAGE:** Philippians 1:12-30

**MAIN POINT:** While he was in prison, Paul told the Philippian church to be joyful.

**KEY PASSAGE:** Philippians 1:20-21

**BIG PICTURE QUESTION:** When should we tell others about Jesus? We should always tell others about Jesus even when it is difficult.

---

## Key passage activity (5 minutes)

- Key Passage Poster
- handkerchiefs
- chalkboard or dry erase board
- chalk or marker
- eraser
- watch or timer

Invite kids to find partners and stand side by side. Use a handkerchief to gently tie together partners' adjacent legs so they will have to walk in a three-legged-race. Explain that one pair will go to the board or sheet of paper at a time and write one word of the key passage.

As each pair returns, another pair will take a turn. While other pairs watch, they should encourage the other players. Time kids to see how quickly they can write the entire key passage.

**SAY** • You did a great job encouraging one another as you raced to complete the key passage. Paul took time to encourage others and share with them these truths we find in our key passage.

## Bible story review & Bible skills (10 minutes)

- Bibles, 1 per kid
- Main Point Poster
- chairs or rubber dots, 9
- paper
- markers

Position 9 chairs or rubber dots in a 3-by-3 grid on the floor. Provide a Bible for each kid. Instruct kids to find the Book of Philippians in the Bible. Remind them that Philippians is in the eleventh book in the New Testament. If kids need help, suggest they use the table of contents at the front of their Bibles.

**SAY** • The Book of Philippians is in the New Testament, in the division called Paul's Letters. Paul wrote this letter while he was in prison. Even in a difficult situation, Paul found joy in Jesus.

Form two teams of kids. Give each player on the first team a piece of paper labeled *X*. Give each player on the second team a piece of paper labeled *O*. Explain that kids will play a game of human tic-tac-toe.

Ask a review question to the first team. If they answer correctly, a player may sit in any chair. If they answer incorrectly, play passes to the next team. The first team to seat three of its players in a row (vertical, horizontal, or diagonal) wins.

1. Who wrote the Book of Philippians? (*Paul*)
2. Which Bible division is Philippians in? (*Paul's Letters*)
3. Which book comes before Philippians? (*Ephesians*)
4. Which book comes after Philippians? (*Colossians*)
5. How many chapters are in Philippians? (*four*)
6. Was Paul afraid or embarrassed to share the gospel?  
(*No, he shared it without fear; Phil. 1:14*)
7. What made Paul rejoice? (*that people were hearing about Jesus, Phil. 1:18*)
8. What kind of life should a believer live? (*a life worthy of the gospel of Christ, Phil. 1:27*)
9. ***When should we tell others about Jesus? We should always tell others about Jesus even when it is difficult.***

Option: Retell or review the Bible story using the bolded text of the Bible story script.

## Activity choice (10 minutes)

**OPTION 1:** Pick a side

Label one side of the room with a smiling face and one side with a frowning face. Ask the questions describing events,

LOW PREP

- paper
- marker
- tape

items, or circumstances; and ask kids to decide if those things make them smile or frown. After each question, kids should move to the side of the room that represents the emotion they feel.

1. How do you respond when it is raining outside?
2. How you do respond when someone asks you to share some of your lunch?
3. How do you respond when you are unfairly called out during a game?
4. How do you respond when school is canceled?
5. How do you respond when your brother or sister asks to play with you?
6. How do you respond when asked to read a book?
7. How do you respond when you have to share in front of the class?

**SAY** • Our circumstances in life can make us happy or sad, but joy isn't based on circumstances. **While he was in prison, Paul told the Philippian church to be joyful.** Paul knew that true joy comes from a deep trust in Jesus, and the suffering Paul faced couldn't take away that joy.

#### **OPTION 2:** Mosaic cross

Give each kid a pencil and a piece of heavyweight paper. Lead them to follow these steps to create a mosaic cross. Consider preparing a mosaic cross before the session to display as an example:

1. Draw the outline of a large cross on heavyweight paper. Leave room for kids to be able to fill in the cross with paper.
2. Tear pieces of foil and tissue paper, and then wad them up into balls.

- tissue paper in various colors
- aluminum foil
- heavyweight paper
- craft glue

3. Use glue to attach the foil and tissue paper to the heavyweight paper and fill in the outline.

**SAY** • We tore this tissue paper to create these beautiful crosses. Sometimes things happen that feel like everything is being torn apart, but God is in control—even over hard circumstances—and He is working out everything for His glory and our good.

**While he was in prison, Paul told the Philippian church to be joyful.** Joy comes from knowing and serving Jesus. When we trust in Him, we can have joy even when we are going through a hard time.

Option: Review the gospel with boys and girls. Explain that kids are welcome to speak with you or another teacher if they have questions.

## Journal and prayer (5 minutes)

Distribute journal pages and pencils. Guide kids to think about and answer the questions listed on the page:

- What does this story teach me about God or the gospel?
- What does the story teach me about myself?
- Are there any commands in this story to obey? How are they for God's glory and my good?
- Are there any promises in this story to remember? How do they help me trust and love God?
- How does this story help me to live on mission better?

As kids journal, invite them to share their ideas. Then pray, asking God to draw kids to Jesus so they seek and find true joy only in Him.

As time allows, lead kids to complete "Letters from Prison" on the activity page.

- pencils
- Journal Page
- "Letters from Prison" activity page, 1 per kid

Tip: Give parents this week's *Big Picture Cards for Families* to allow families to interact with the biblical content at home.