

Paul's Joy in Prison

BIBLE PASSAGE: Philippians 1:12-30

MAIN POINT: Paul told the Philippians to be joyful.

KEY PASSAGE: Philippians 1:21

BIG PICTURE QUESTION: When should we tell others about Jesus? We should tell about Jesus all the time.

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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 preschoolers, 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.



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The BIBLE STORY

Bible Storytelling Tips

• Live-action rebus:

Before the session, draw pictures on paper plates to resemble people, places, or things mentioned frequently in today's story. Begin telling the story. Each time you mention one of the images on the plate, hold the plate in front of your face and allow the boys and girls to say what it represents.

• Tie it together:

Display the key passage poster on a focal wall. Briefly discuss the key passage. As the Bible story progresses to the key passage section, pause and point to the poster.

Paul's Joy in Prison

Philippians 1:12-30

Paul was living as a prisoner in Rome with a guard who watched him. Some Jewish people had tried to hurt him because they did not like what he believed. Paul believed and told others that Jesus had risen from the dead. **Now Paul was waiting to meet with Caesar, the emperor of Rome.**

Believers visited Paul. Some sent him gifts. **Paul wrote a letter to the Christians in Philippi. He thanked them for sending a gift and told them about his work.**

This is what Paul wrote: "I want you to know that even though the Jews tried to stop me, everything that happened has actually helped me tell more people the good news about Jesus." As a prisoner, Paul's special guards were with him all the time, so Paul had many chances to tell them about Jesus. Other believers bravely shared the good news about Jesus too.

Paul wrote, "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 no matter what. If I live, I live for Jesus. If I die for Jesus, I will live with Him forever."

Paul knew that being with Jesus is far better than anything else. But while he was alive, Paul wanted to help other believers.

"No matter what happens," Paul wrote, "live your life in a way that honors Jesus. Then, whether I am with you or away, I will hear that you are working together to share the good news about Jesus.

“Do not let anyone scare you away from doing this work. This is the work God has given you to do—not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for Him.”

Christ Connection: Paul faced hard times, but God used him to share the good news about Jesus and to help the church. Paul knew that because Jesus suffered to rescue people from their sins, believers who do God’s work will suffer too.



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GOD’S WORD?
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Invite preschoolers 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.

Introduce THE STORY

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Welcome time

- "Don't Stop" song
- offering basket
- Allergy Alert download
- favorite toys related to the Bible story theme

Play the unit theme song in the background as you greet preschoolers and follow your church's security procedures. Set an offering basket near the door to collect at an appropriate time. Post an allergy alert, if necessary. Set out a few favorite theme-related toys, such as puzzles and blocks.

Activity page

- "Find the Differences" activity page, 1 per child
- pencils or crayons

Help boys and girls discover the differences in the pictures and circle them. Remind preschoolers that after the shipwreck, Paul sailed on another boat to Rome.

SAY • While Paul was living as a prisoner waiting to meet with the leader of Rome, he wrote a letter to his friends in Philippi and told them that God wanted them to be joyful.

Make paper chains

Cut paper into strips. Show a preschooler how to make a loop with the strip. Tape or staple the loop in place. Then show him how to loop another strip through the loop to make chain links. Work together to form a really long chain.

SAY • The last few weeks we have been learning about Paul. Paul was being held as a prisoner for telling people the good news about Jesus. In today's Bible story, Paul was still being held as a prisoner, but he had joy! Do you think you would be joyful if you were being held as a prisoner? Let's listen to our Bible story to hear where Paul's joy came from.



- paper
- scissors
- tape or stapler

Create a joyful self-portrait

Ask boys and girls to make a face to show they are happy. Show their face to them in a mirror. Encourage a preschooler to draw a picture of herself showing how joyful God can help her to be.

SAY • Paul had a lot of reasons to be unhappy, but he knew that God was using him to share the good news about Jesus to people, and that made Paul happy. He even wrote a letter to his friends in Philippi. **Paul told the Philippians to be joyful** in his letter to them.

- nonbreakable hand mirrors
- paper
- crayons

Transition to teach the story

To gain the attention of all the preschoolers to move them to Bible study, show the countdown video, flip off the lights, or clap a simple rhythm for the children to copy. Invite children to skip joyfully as they move to group time.

- countdown video (optional)

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Introduce the Bible story

- paper
- marker

Print the word *JOY* in large, capital letters on a sheet of paper. Demonstrate to the group how to use their arms to form the shape of each of the letters of the word *JOY*.

SAY • Paul wanted the believers in the city of Philippi to understand that they could be joyful even when life was hard.

Watch or tell the Bible story

- Bible
- bookmark
- "Paul's Joy in Prison" video (optional)
- Bible Story Picture Poster

Place a bookmark at Philippians 1 in your Bible. Invite a preschooler to open it. Reverently display the open Bible.

SAY • The Book of Philippians contains the words that Paul wrote in his letter to the believers in their city of Philippi. Listen as I tell the story to hear what Paul thought was better than living for Jesus.

Show the video or tell the Bible story using the provided storytelling tips. Use the bolded version of the Bible story for young preschoolers.

Talk about the Bible story

- Main Point Poster
- Giant Timeline or Big Story Circle

SAY • **Paul told the Philippians to be joyful.** Paul faced hard times, but God used him to share the good news about Jesus and to help the church. Paul knew

that because Jesus suffered to rescue people from their sins, believers who do God's work will suffer too.

Point to the Bible story picture on the giant timeline or big story circle as you ask the following review questions:

1. Who was able to visit Paul while he was living as a prisoner? (*other believers*)
2. Why was Paul joyful about all the troubles he had? (*Everything that happened helped him tell more people about Jesus.*)
3. Who had God given Paul and all believers to help us? (*the Holy Spirit*)
4. Whom did Paul tell the believers to honor in how they lived their lives? (*Jesus*)
5. What is the important work that God gives all believers? (*to believe in Jesus, to suffer for Jesus, to tell others about Jesus*)

Learn the big picture question

SAY • It wasn't fun to be in prison, but Paul knew that God gave him opportunities to tell people about Jesus.

When should we tell others about Jesus? We should tell about Jesus all the time.

• Big Picture Question Poster

Practice the key passage

Open your Bible to Philippians 1:21. Read the key passage aloud several times. Sing together the key passage song, "To Live Is Christ."

SAY • Paul's life was all about Jesus. No matter where he was, Paul wanted to tell people the good news.

• Key Passage Poster
• "To Live Is Christ" song

Transition to experience the story

Experience THE STORY

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LOW PREP

Play “What’s better?”

Ask preschoolers a series of questions and ask them to decide which option they would prefer. Ask boys and girls to raise their hands to show their response, and invite a child to tell the group why he made that choice. Choices might include eating only carrots or eating only apples, a pet porcupine or a pet skunk, the beach or the mountains, to be very strong or very fast, to be inside or outside all day, to tell others about Jesus or to be with Jesus forever? Place a bookmark at Philippians 1:21 in your Bible. Ask a volunteer to open it. Read the verse aloud.

SAY • When Paul was in jail, he was happy to tell people that Jesus died on the cross to rescue us from our sin. Paul also knew that when his life was over, he would be with Jesus. One of the reasons **Paul told the Philippians to be joyful** was because Jesus suffered so we could be with Him forever.



LOW PREP

Sing a song

Lead preschoolers in singing and performing the actions for “Down in My Heart (I’ve Got the Joy, Joy, Joy).” If you are unfamiliar with the song, check it out online before class. When you finish singing, invite the preschoolers to shout

the main point.

SAY • Paul told the Philippians to be joyful.

Play out getting ready for a guest

Set out toy food, toy dishes and other home-living items.

Suggest that a few children play out getting ready for guests. Other children may be guests who will arrive.

Discuss preparations that should be made, hospitality, and thankfulness. Bring pretend gifts for the host, and prepare a pretend meal to share together.

SAY • When Paul was in the house prison, the leaders allowed him to have visitors. People visited Paul, and others sent him gifts. Paul believed that God was in control of his life. God wanted Paul to tell others the good news about Jesus all the time. ***When should we tell others about Jesus? We should do like Paul did and tell about Jesus all the time.***

- toy food
- toy dishes
- home-living items

Create and work puzzles

Print the “Puzzle Template” onto heavyweight paper. Talk with a child about some things she enjoys doing with her friends. Suggest preschoolers design puzzles by drawing pictures of friends on the template. Allow a child to cut along the dotted lines to create a puzzle. Encourage a pair of preschoolers to share their puzzles with each other and work them. Store pieces in ziplock bags.

Be sensitive to a preschooler’s wishes while creating a puzzle. A child may be reluctant to cut her drawing into pieces with scissors, thinking she will be ruining it. Another child may enjoy using the scissors a little too much. Regardless, engage the children in Bible conversation as they work.

- “Puzzle Template” printables, 1 per child
- heavyweight paper
- crayons and markers
- blunt-tipped scissors
- ziplock bags

SAY • Paul had hard times, but he knew that God was teaching him to be happy. **Paul told the Philippians to be joyful**, and he helped his friends there to understand how special Jesus is. We can also tell people that good news. ***When should we tell others about Jesus? We should tell about Jesus all the time.***

- construction paper
- stickers
- markers or crayons
- large mailing envelope

Make cards for Christian prisoners

Identify an organization that ministers to persecuted Christians and distributes letters of encouragement to Christian prisoners. Read and follow the guidelines the organization lays out for sending letters to prisoners.

Set out construction paper, stickers, and markers or crayons for preschoolers to make and decorate cards. Write “I am praying for you!” on each card. Take time to pray for the prisoners who will receive preschoolers’ cards. Place all the cards in a large mailing envelope to mail to the delivering organization.

SAY • Paul was being held as a prisoner for telling the good news about Jesus. Many believers today are also in prison for living for Jesus. Because Jesus suffered to rescue people from their sins, believers who do God’s work will suffer too. But like **Paul told the Philippians to be joyful**, we can pray for these prisoners today to be joyful knowing that they are honoring Jesus with their lives.

Snack

Play the countdown video to signal the end of activities. Guide preschoolers to clean their areas. Take a restroom break and wash hands. Gather preschoolers for snack time. Thank God for the snack.

Serve peel-apart fruit strips. Suggest preschoolers bend the snack to form the letters *J-O-Y* before eating. Remind preschoolers that Paul told the Philippians to be joyful.

- countdown video (optional)
- Allergy Alert download
- snack food
- paper cups and napkins

Transition

When a child finishes her snack, guide her to throw away any trash. She may select a book or puzzle to examine, play quietly with play dough or a favorite toy, or color the Bible story coloring page.

Offer the journal page and invite preschoolers write or draw about Jesus. Ask the big picture question as a child creates. Invite children to repeat the big picture answer two or three times. Pray for the children.

SAY • God, nobody wants to have hard times, but thank You for the hard times Paul had. Paul did Your work, and because You used Paul, many people have heard that Jesus rescues people from sin. When we face hard times, help us remember that Jesus suffered too. Remind us that You are doing good things in our hard times. Amen.

If parents are picking up their children at this time, tell them something that their child enjoyed doing or did well during the session. Distribute the preschool big picture cards for families.

- books
- puzzles
- play dough
- Journal Page printable, 1 per child
- Bible Story Coloring Page
- crayons
- Big Picture Cards for Families: Babies, Toddlers, and Preschoolers