

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.

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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 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.



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

The BIBLE STORY

Bible Storytelling Tips

Paul's Joy in Prison

Philippians 1:12-30

• **Sketch it:** As you tell the story, make doodles to help kids see the story unfold. Draw lines over a stick figure to represent Paul in prison. Draw a simple envelope to represent the letters Paul sent from prison.

• **Vary your posture:** Start the story seated in front of the kids. When you talk about living for Christ, stand up and look confident. When you talk about joining Jesus in death, lay down and remain still for a few seconds.

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
ADVENTURE!**

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.

Introduce the STORY

SESSION TITLE: Paul's Joy in Prison

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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. As kids arrive, ask them to share about a time when they felt happy. What was the situation? Who or what made them feel that way?

SAY • Did you know that happiness and joy are not exactly the same? We feel happy when we experience good things. What do you think causes us to have joy? We will learn more about having joy today.

Activity page (5 minutes)

- “Draw the Emotion” activity page, 1 per kid
- pencils or markers

Invite kids to complete the “Draw the Emotion” on the activity page. Kids will complete the face portion of a drawing to depict various emotions based on the scene.

SAY • We often feel different emotions based on our circumstances. Today we're going to hear about Paul and how he experienced joy even when he suffered.

Session starter (10 minutes)

OPTION 1: Make a JOY banner

Tape a large banner to the floor or along a wall at kid's height. Draw a line down the middle. Invite the kids to write words or draw pictures of things that make them happy on one side. On the other side, invite them to write or draw things that make them sad.

SAY • Did you know that we can have joy in times of happiness and times of sadness? [*Write JOY in block letters across the top of the banner.*] Today we're going to hear about a time when Paul was in prison, but he still had joy. We'll learn that we can choose to be joyful even when we go through hard times.

LOW PREP

- tape
- large sheet of paper
- crayons, markers, or colored pencils

OPTION 2: Emoji match

Draw various age-appropriate emojis on sticky notes or adhesive name tags, two per emoji. Stick an emoji on each kids' back. Asking only yes-or-no questions, kids will try to find their match. Once they find their match they must come up with a circumstance that best fits their emoji.

SAY • All these emojis show us different emotions: happy, sad, angry, and so forth. Usually we feel these different emotions based on our circumstances. Maybe you got a good grade on a test so you feel happy. Or maybe your older sibling refused to share a toy with you and you felt angry. Our circumstances are constantly changing and so are our emotions. But did you know that we can experience joy all the time? Unlike other emotions, joy isn't based on our circumstances. We'll hear more in our story today.

- sticky notes or adhesive name tags
- markers

Transition to teach the story

Teach the STORY

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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

[Leader enters wearing ragged clothing and a bandanna tied around his head.]

LEADER • Hey, everyone! It's so great to see you again! I've actually been feeling really discouraged this week. I feel like I'm never going to make it off this island! I miss my own bed. I miss my pet praying mantis. I even miss my little brother, and I didn't even think that was possible.

Have you ever felt really discouraged or had something bad happen to you? We have another Bible story today about our good friend Paul. Today we're going to learn that while he was in prison, Paul told the Philippian church to be joyful. It's hard to imagine being joyful when you're in prison. Let's find out what Paul's secret to joy is!

Big picture question (1 minute)

LEADER • Before we dive in to the story, does anyone remember our big picture question that we've been talking about? That's right! ***When should we tell others about Jesus? We should always tell others about Jesus even when it is difficult.*** By knowing Jesus, we can experience true joy, and that's something worth sharing with other people at any cost!

Giant timeline (1 minute)

Show the giant timeline or big story circle. You may also show the Bible story pictures to help kids remember stories.

- LEADER** • We've been hearing a lot of stories about Paul, a man who loved Jesus and wanted to share the news of the gospel with everyone he met. Let's review the stories we've discussed the last few weeks. I'll say the story, and you respond with the main point from that week. Ready?
- "The Plan to Stop Paul" — **When Paul was arrested, God protected him so he could preach about Jesus.**
 - "Paul Before Rulers" — **Paul preached about Jesus to governors and kings.**
 - "The Shipwreck" — **God protected Paul in the shipwreck so he could stand before Caesar.**

LEADER • Great job! You all remembered a lot. Let's get ready to learn about what happened next. Our story this week is called "Paul's Joy in Prison."

Tell the Bible story (10 minutes)

Open your Bible to Philippians 1:12-30. Use the Bible

- Giant Timeline or Big Story Circle
- Bible Story Pictures (optional)

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

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 • Can you imagine being in prison? Can you imagine being joyful while also being in prison? That’s exactly how Paul was! **While he was in prison, Paul told the Philippian church to be joyful.** Even though he was in chains, Paul knew that God was being glorified. He may have been suffering, but Paul still had joy.

Why do you think Paul was joyful? [*Allow responses.*] Interesting thoughts. We learned from this story that Paul saw that as long as he was alive, he could live for Jesus and teach people the gospel. Paul also understood that if he died, it meant he would be with Jesus! Paul had his mind set on Jesus, and that helped him understand the ways all of his trials and difficulties were glorifying God. As a result of Paul’s imprisonment, many people had heard about God. Governors and kings and soldiers and jailers and sailors all heard about Jesus because Paul trusted God through many trials.

Being joyful doesn’t mean you have to put on a happy face when you’re actually feeling sad. We can have joy when we look to God, even when we’re sad, and trust that He is in control. We can be joyful when we have hope that one day God will make everything right again, and we will be with Him forever. That’s the kind of hope that Paul felt, and it gave him great joy.

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 • Paul trusted that God was in complete control

over his life. 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.

This means that we should expect suffering in our lives if we live for Jesus. Thankfully, that doesn't mean we cannot have joy. We find joy in obeying God and knowing that He is being glorified. Our hope, like Paul's, is set on the future, when we will be with Jesus forever!

Key passage (5 minutes)

Show the key passage poster. Lead the boys and girls to read together Philippians 1:20-21.

LEADER • Paul wasn't worried about what happened to him. Whether he was in prison or in paradise, he trusted God above anything else. His hope was in Jesus, not in people or things. That's how Paul found such joy, even when he suffered! We can have the same kind of joy when we trust Jesus with our lives.

Lead boys and girls in singing "My Eager Expectation."

- Key Passage Poster
- "My Eager Expectation" song

Discussion starter video (4 minutes)

LEADER • Can you think of a time you felt joyful? What caused you to feel that way? Think about that as we watch this video.

Show the "Unit 34, Session 4" discussion starter video. Discuss how we react when we feel disappointed by circumstances in our lives. Ask kids how we can have joy even in frustrating situations. Discuss what the difference is between feeling happy and experiencing true joy.

LEADER • It's a little confusing to think about joy and

- "Unit 34, Session 4" discussion starter video

happiness as different things. In many ways, they are related. The difference is that joy comes from knowing who God is and what He has promised us. Joy comes from trusting Jesus. Happiness is temporary and relies on our circumstances. Happiness is a good feeling based on good things happening in your life. As Christians, we can have joy even when we are sad because we know that Jesus is King and we will live forever with Him.

• “Unstoppable Victory”
song

Sing (4 minutes)

LEADER • Our God is a God of joy! He gives us joy even when we are going through hard times. So today if you are sad, angry, or hurt, you can still worship God and rejoice in Jesus! Our joy comes from knowing that God’s victory is unstoppable.

Sing together “Unstoppable Victory.”

Pray (2 minutes)

Invite kids to pray before dismissing to apply the story.

LEADER • God, thank You for giving us joy. You are always in control, and we know that we can trust in You with our lives. Thank You for giving us life in Jesus and giving us hope for eternity with You. 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

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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
- dry erase board or chalkboard
- markers or chalk
- bandannas or scarves

Separate the children into two teams. Each team should line up at one end of the room. One at a time, players from each team will go to the board to write the words of the key passage in order. The first team to finish the whole key passage wins.

SAY • Paul had joy whether he lived or died. Paul knew that if he lived, he could continue teaching people about Jesus. If he died, he would be with Jesus face-to-face. He trusted God with his whole life, and we can do that too! God is faithful and will take care of us. That doesn't mean that we won't go through hard times. Just like Paul's, sometimes our lives will be hard; but no matter what, we can still have joy through Christ!

Bible story review & Bible skills (10 minutes)

- Bibles, 1 per kid
- Main Point Poster
- masking tape

Provide Bibles and help kids find Philippians 1:12-30. Make a masking tape line down the center of the classroom. Instruct the kids to stand on one side of the tape. Read the following questions. When kids think they know the answer, they should cross to the other side of the room. Kids will return to the first side of the room after each

question. You may also form two teams of kids and award points to each team when they answer a question correctly.

1. Who wrote a letter to the church in Philippi? (*Paul*)
2. Where was Paul when he wrote the letter to the Philippians. (*He was in prison, Phil. 1:13*)
3. Why did Paul say he had experienced difficult times? (*for God's glory, Phil. 1:12*)
4. What did Paul say about dying? (*Paul said that to die and be with Jesus face-to-face was a good thing; Phil. 1:23*)
5. What did Paul say about living? (*He said that to live for the glory of Jesus was a good thing, Phil. 1:24-25*)
6. What did Paul tell the Philippians about their mission? (*He told them to be bold and stand firm in sharing the gospel; Phil. 1:27-28*)

SAY • *When should we tell others about Jesus? We should always tell others about Jesus even when it is difficult.* From Paul's letters, we learn that his trust and hope was in Jesus. All that mattered to Paul was telling others about Jesus—how He came to rescue them from their sin. That was the most important thing in the world! Paul experienced joy even while he was in prison because he knew that God was in control.

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. Give a list of events, items, or circumstances and invite kids to show if it makes them smile or frown by crossing to that side of the room. After calling each item, ask a few volunteers to share why they

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

LOW PREP

- paper
- markers
- tape

picked that side.

Suggestions:

- going to an amusement park
- being sick
- eating food from the school cafeteria
- being picked to be on a team
- reading a book
- going to prison
- forgetting homework
- winning a game

SAY • Circumstances like these often make us happy or sad.

Paul was in prison, a situation that would make most people sad. **While he was in prison, Paul told the Philippian church to be joyful.** Joyful! Paul was joyful because he was joined to Jesus. He knew that no matter what happened to him, he could still be joyful because Jesus had rescued him from sin and death.

OPTION 2: Cross mosaic

- paper
- colorful tissue paper
- markers
- glue sticks
- scissors (optional)

Draw an outline of a cross on a sheet of paper for each kid. Provide squares of colorful tissue paper, or invite kids to tear or cut the paper into different shapes. Instruct the kids to glue the tissue paper to the cross to make a mosaic.

SAY • Sometimes our lives feel like these torn pieces of paper, especially when we are sad or angry or going through a hard time. But look at our beautiful mosaic that we have made with all that torn up paper! God can take hurting people and turn us into something beautiful when we put our hope in Jesus. Because of what Jesus has done for us, we can be joyful in any situation.

Journal and prayer (5 minutes)

Distribute each child's journal. Ask the kids to write about or draw a picture to answer the following questions:

- What does this story teach me about God or about the gospel?
- What does this story teach me about myself?
- Whom can I tell about this story?

Make sure each child secures this week's sheet in the journal, and then collect them. Keep the journals in the classroom so they will be available every week or as often as you wish to use them.

If time remains, take prayer requests or allow kids to complete the Bible story coloring page provided with this session. Pray for your group.

- pencils and crayons
- Journal Page
- Bible Story Coloring 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.