



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

The Gospel Is God's Antidote For Hardship & Suffering

Relentless Joy, Philippians, Part 3

Tim Badal | January 26, 2020



It's our privilege once again to open God's Word together. We're in a series titled "Relentless Joy," looking at the letter written by the Apostle Paul to the church at Philippi. One of his primary themes in this letter is what we're calling relentless joy, a theme that is even more powerful because of the circumstances in which Paul found himself when he wrote the letter. He was in a Roman prison, far from the people he loved. His traveling ministry had come to a screeching halt, with few opportunities to preach the gospel. Yet every verse in this letter drips with his conviction that relentless joy can be the experience of anyone regardless of their circumstance. In other words, by the power of Jesus, you and I can also find this joy in our lives, regardless of the concerns we have. We may be facing medical issues, a financial crisis, relational stresses, but whatever we're dealing with, Paul gives us hope that we can receive the joy God gives to His people.

We've looked at how God gives us an ability to choose joy in whatever life situation we find ourselves. Joy doesn't just come upon us. Rather, it takes a deliberate decision to view our situation through God's eyes and not our own. As difficult as this was for Paul, we see that he was able to model for us how to have relentless joy in a world that seemed to be falling apart.

So how are we to find this joy? We'll be looking in Philippians 1, beginning in verse 12. Here's what Paul wrote to the Philippians and what the Holy Spirit says through him to each of us:

¹² I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, ¹³ so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. ¹⁴ And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

¹⁵ Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. ¹⁶ The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. ¹⁷ The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. ¹⁸ What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice.

I want to begin today by looking at the title I've chosen for this sermon. It's a thesis I've come up with through my study of God's Word and especially in studying our passage today. What I have come to believe is that the gospel is God's joyful antidote for hardship and suffering. No doubt, all of us are dealing with some form of hardships and suffering. Maybe today you came in with some sort of trouble that seems to follow you no matter where you are. It keeps you from sleeping. It changes your eating habits. At times it can even change your personality and how you relate with others. I want you know that the gospel is God's joyful antidote to those hardships and the suffering you're experiencing.

Let me illustrate this thesis with an example that I offer with some fear and trepidation. One of the most common hardships I see that can bring someone to their limit is the journey a woman has with pregnancy. I've not experienced this; I'm only a spectator. The closest I've gotten is watching the three times my wife has carried our three sons. What I've come to realize is that pregnancy is not fun. Frankly, I stand in awe of what you women not only are willing to do, but sometimes are willing to repeat again and again. It starts with the pains and changes to your body. There's insomnia, swollen ankles, heartburn, stretch marks, back pain. The baby uses your internal organs as a punching bag. These things go on day and night for a long season.

In fact, I watched as everything in Amanda's life began to revolve around that baby growing inside her. Then as she approached the "finish line," things got exponentially harder. If you've not witnessed or felt these things, let me give you some details. The contractions begin and are monitored the same way specialists monitor tectonic movements in earthquakes. In other words, contractions can be measured on the Richter Scale.

With each delivery, my job was to tell my wife when the earthquake was about to take place—as if I needed to tell her that. I'm watching the patterns on the machine: "Oh, here comes a big one!" It's like I'm Redd Foxx on "Sanford and Son" and she'd respond, "Moron, I know it. I feel it coming." Then after hours of painful labor, a delivery takes place. What I've come to realize is that when Amanda reached the end, she's completely spent. And to be honest, all modesty has been thrown out the window. But when she holds that baby, her face is one of immense joy.

"Wait a minute. You've just gone through a war, Amanda (and you other Village Bible Church mothers). How can you find joy in the middle of such suffering?" This is what blows me away: many of you do it again. I would think husbands would hear, "Never again, Buckaroo. Never again. We're going to make some new rules here." But many of you had one, two, three, four or more children. Why? Why would you endure such hardship and suffering?

The answer is the baby is the joyful antidote to pregnancy's hardship and suffering. The culmination is worth the painful journey required to reach it. What Paul is going to tell us today is that the "baby" that is at the end of all the pain and difficulty, the "baby" that brings us great joy in the Christian life, is the gospel of Jesus Christ. When we believe the gospel with all our heart, no matter what sorrow we find ourselves in, our lives will be sweeter because it was worth the journey.

Paul told the Philippians, "I'm in prison and it's rough." He didn't give them details, but people knew what prison was like in that day. They knew what he was enduring. But notice how Paul ended this section of his letter: "...in that I rejoice." How in the world can a man who was chained to an imperial guard rejoice? He had no privacy or modesty. He was eating the worst food. He was probably being mistreated in other ways. Nevertheless, Paul found a way to rejoice. He was able to find joy precisely because he had fully grasped the gospel of Jesus Christ and it had become the antidote to everything he was enduring.

We're in the same spot. We're struggling. We may even be in some sort of prison. Maybe it's a medical prison, a financial prison or a relational prison. We might be in an emotional or spiritual prison. Maybe we're in a work prison or a school prison. But wherever we find ourselves, we can get to the point where we wonder how to find hope or joy.

Just like His Savior, Paul was known to be a man of sorrows and suffering. In 2 Corinthians 4:16-18, Paul described how we can find joy in the middle of sorrow. I like the way Eugene Peterson has paraphrased this passage in *The Message* . :

So we're not giving up. How could we! Even though on the outside it often looks like things are falling apart on us, on the inside, where God is making new life, not a day goes by without his unfolding grace. These hard times are small potatoes..."

What Peterson calls "small potatoes," Paul calls: "*this momentary affliction.*"

"Wait a minute, Tim. You're going to tell me my financial woes, my medical concerns, my relational distress are 'small potatoes'?" No, they're not. That would be like me in the delivery room telling Amanda, "It shouldn't hurt that bad. You're fine. If I was doing it, it would be easy." Guys, we should never say that.

And I would never say that to you about your troubles. Your difficulties are huge. That's why you're so anxious; why you worry so much about it. You're losing sleep because these are actually big things. Paul's imprisonment wasn't a small thing and the prison you find yourself in today is no small thing either. But that's not what Paul was saying. In Peterson's words, "*These hard times are small potatoes,*" but Paul didn't end there. He goes on: "*These hard times are small potatoes compared...*" Those big problems haven't changed themselves, but they begin to look much smaller once they're compared with something greater.

The hard times? They're "*small potatoes compared to the coming good times, the lavish celebration prepared for us. There's far more than meets the eye. The things we see now are here today, gone tomorrow.*" That includes your problems. There is a day coming when the things you can't see now will last forever.

Listen to me, brothers and sisters. There was a reason why Paul could have joy in the midst of his circumstances, and the horrific treatment he was enduring as a prisoner. He was locked up, chained, 24/7 to a guard. There were people who wanted to destroy him and his reputation. There were groups of people who wanted him dead. He had been beaten and abused over and over again. He had stood before kings and rulers, only to eventually lose his life for the gospel of Jesus Christ. But Paul considered these things "light and momentary troubles." How? He stopped looking at his problems alone. Instead, he looked at them against the backdrop of the glory to come.

In the same way, when we are dealing with massive struggles in our lives, we need to see them against the backdrop of eternity. Do you know what will be gone in heaven? All of your worries, anxieties, fears and problems. All of your difficulties, hardships and suffering will be over. All of these will be swallowed up, including our chief problem—death itself. The glory of Christ says to death, "Where is your victory? Where is your sting?" (1 Corinthians 15:50-58).

In that moment, on that great and glorious day, we will reside in the presence of our God and there will be no more tears, no more pain, no more sorrow. The old things we once knew, the things that drove us crazy, will all have passed away. On that day, we will experience for the first time life as it was supposed to be. But between these two worlds, while we're still here on earth, Paul says we can still find joy even in life's difficulties. "Paul, how do we do that?" He gives us three answers to this question.

1. Look up—God has a master plan.

First, when troubles and difficulties come into our life, we need to look up. God has a master plan. Paul was rejoicing, but not because of his problems. He wasn't excited about his situation. He wasn't saying, "Yippee, I'm in prison. Yippee, we have no money in the checking account. Yippee, I've got cancer. Yippee, my marriage is falling apart." What Paul was focused on was his opportunity to see God work. If that required him to suffer, he was okay with that. He knew that God would finish the work He'd started in him.

We need this confidence as well. We need to understand that whatever God is doing in our lives, it's to get us to the place of maturity. One day we will reside with Him and there will be no sorrow or distress or pain.

Paul was rejoicing in what he knew was coming, and for that reason he was able to view his present circumstances through the eyes of God. Twice in this passage he said, "I will rejoice." For him, this joy was an established position. He didn't waver. He even said in Philippians 1:18, "Yes, and I will rejoice." He believed in God's faithfulness, so he chose joy. If you cannot also choose joy, you will never find it. It was a deliberate decision Paul made and one we can make as well.

How did Paul do this? He determined to take his eyes off his problems, instead looking to see what God was doing. In verse 12 he wrote, "I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel,"

If Paul had been focused on his problems, he would have written, "I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me is terrible. I can't even begin to tell you how bad my life is." He could have listed in the next three and a half chapters all the horrific things he was enduring. But he wasn't writing from his perspective; he was writing from God's perspective. That's why he could say, "What has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel."

The word "advance" is important. It's the Greek word *prokope*. It's a word used by the military to describe what it took to move forward, including the idea of fighting through obstacles. Perhaps they had to tear down some trees to move their heavy equipment. Maybe they had to build bridges to get across rivers. They probably would have skirmishes along the way. But in spite of all these things, they would continue to advance. So essentially Paul was telling the church that God was using the obstacles in his life to actually accomplish His purposes.

We need to see that He may be doing this in our lives as well. When our trials come, we should see them as part of His plan for the course of our advancement toward His goals. These trials can be the very things that strengthen us.

Overcoming obstacles also communicates to the enemy that nothing is going to stop an army, bringing the enemy to a place of fear. "They cleared that forest. They endured those hardships, yet they're still coming forward." Similarly, Paul was aware that God was advancing in the midst of the troubles in his life. He saw this in two ways.

The gospel advanced through what the soldiers witnessed.

First, the gospel was advanced through what the military guards were witnessing in Paul. We read in verse 13, "It has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ." As you know, Paul was chained to a Roman soldier day and night. But instead of sitting in silence or moaning about his troubles, he realized this was actually an opportunity provided by God. Similarly, when we find ourselves facing obstacles, we can choose to see them as God's opportunities.

Commentators believe the chains between Paul and the guards were only about two to four feet long. These guards went wherever Paul went. We don't know if they had three eight-hour shifts or two twelve-hour shifts, but whatever it was, Paul saw this as a divine opportunity. "That guy can't go anywhere; he's a captive audience."

We're not told exactly what Paul did in this circumstance, but we know something about what he did other times when he was in prison. Remember from Acts 16 how he and Silas chose to sing praises to God? They prayed. These guards had been around lots of prisoners, most of whom probably spent their time complaining. But they surely weren't used to a prisoner who asked, "How can I pray to my God for you? What are your concerns? What are your life questions?"

We know that somehow Paul was able to tell these imperial guards about Jesus. We might also imagine that, like Joseph, Paul actually won the favor of the guards as a model prisoner. In any event, he was able to write, "the whole imperial guard" was made aware of the gospel.

The word here that is translated “imperial guard” is the Greek word *praetorium*, which represented the emperor’s bodyguard. They were the “secret service” of the day, the ones watching Paul. We know from Romans 16 that not only does the whole imperial guard hear what’s going on, but it was through Paul’s imprisonment that at the end of his life, even members of Caesar’s household became part of God’s family.

Do you realize there are also people who are chained to you every day? They’re the people you work with. Everyone has to be there, right? They’re the people you go to school with. Do you know you’re chained to the people in your family, your neighbors, our community? We are bound by circumstances to live life with certain people.

Paul would want us to see these, not as a prison sentence, but as an opportunity. Our job is not a prison. School is not a prison. Our family life is not a prison. I’m not saying things are always good in these places. Often school, work, our marriage or family can feel like a prison. But like Paul, we can choose to ask, “How can I bless these people I’m chained to? How can I advance the gospel in their lives? How can I make their lives in this prison a little brighter because they lived it next to me?”

If you go to school or work with that mindset, if you go into your family or neighborhood with that mindset, you’ll advance the gospel. But if you wake up tomorrow morning thinking, “I’ve got to go back to that prison,” and if you walk in like everyone else—angry, bitter or upset because the weekend was over—you won’t bring people joy. Paul tells us, “My prison is an opportunity to speak to those closest to me.”

The gospel advanced through what Paul wrote.

We should also realize that Paul’s imprisonment gave him the opportunity to write the Scriptures. Four of Paul’s letters were written from this Roman prison: Philippians, Colossians, Ephesians and the book of Philemon. What we read in these letters validates what Paul taught. It would have been easy for him to write about God and the Christian life when things were going well for him, but it’s far more significant that Paul could write the beautiful words he did while enduring very real hardships. The Spirit has been able to change countless lives through what he wrote during that time. God used that prison to give Paul the opportunity to serve Him in ways that he otherwise would not have had.

Have you ever thought that your present trial might be repositioning you to do things you otherwise could not have done? Perhaps He is creating in you compassion for others who face the same trial. God used prison in Paul’s life to accomplish important and eternal things. What is He doing in your life today?

2. Let others know—God uses it to motivate His people.

God also did not want Paul to keep to himself what he was learning through his hardships and suffering, nor does He want that for us. God wants us to look up, then He wants us to let others know. God uses these kinds of experiences to motivate His people. Philippians 1:14 says, “*And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.*”

That verse comes on the heels of verse 12 which says, “*I want you to know, brothers, what has happened to me.*” As we noted earlier, this sentence could have been the lead-in for Paul to list all his trouble and miseries, so the readers would put their hands on their faces and go, “Oh, my. That’s horrific.” Often when we tell others about our trials, we are seeking this response, but that doesn’t do any good. I understand why we do this. I’ve done it myself. Misery enjoys company. We like to draw others into our sorrow and if they aren’t responding, we keep telling them more about how bad it is. That’s how we usually talk here in 21st century America. We are so focused on ourselves that our troubles consume our thinking and our conversations. But Paul wasn’t trying to shock or grieve anyone. Instead, he had other goals in mind.

Paul wanted to encourage his readers that they weren’t alone.

Paul wanted the church to know about his life, without going into the dirty details, because his goal was their encouragement. Here was Paul, the “big hitter.” He had seen the risen Savior and Lord. He was called by God Himself to take the gospel to kings and rulers. He was considered an apostle “untimely born” (1 Corinthians 15:8). Paul was a spiritual leader.

Paul knew the Philippians would be encouraged when they realized that he was able to accept his hardships without complaining and that they could follow his example. It would help them remember that they weren’t the only ones suffering. The devil loves us to think we’re the only person going through hard times. It can make us believe our problems are hopeless. It’s why we can feel helpless and discouraged. “I am alone in this. Everybody on Facebook is like the R.E.M. song: ‘Shiny, happy people everywhere.’”

Paul came against that deception. He wanted the people to know they weren’t the only ones who were suffering. When we do tell people about what we’re going through, it should not be to draw their sympathy. Rather, it should serve to encourage them that they too are not alone in the fight, so they should take heart.

Paul wanted to encourage his readers to endure.

Second, when the Philippians heard about Paul's imprisonment and the enemies who were coming against him, they had to realize that if he could find joy in those circumstances, they could as well. "Like Paul, can I see God's hand in the trials of my life? Can I share Paul's confidence that He Who began a good work in Paul is the same God Who began a good work in me, and that He will be faithful to see it to completion?" When we speak in godly ways about our problems, we encourage people that they're not alone and that they can endure. We can model what it means to struggle with hard things and still maintain joy.

I've said this to you before, but the reason I believe with all my heart that I can endure whatever the world throws at me is I've seen how my parents endured the loss of their firstborn son. As a 14-year-old, I watched them do this well to the glory of God. I remember thinking back then, "I want that kind of faith." As I watched them bury my older brother, my thought was, "Well, they're just super Christians." But now as I'm older, I realized they weren't that different from me. Not to take anything away from Bill and Michelle Badal, but I realize now that it is our God in them Who is great.

God can say to average, broken-down, hurting people, "I've begun a good work in you, so no matter what comes your way, nothing will keep you from getting to the finish line." I've seen this not only in my parents, but in your examples as well. In the 18 years I've been leading this church, I've seen God by His grace gift you and me with the endurance to make it through whatever He brings our way.

So when the Philippians read what Paul wrote to them, they must have said, "If Paul can do this, we can do it as well." That attitude will transform your small group. You'll all walk away from gatherings with a new pep in your step—even without coffee. "If they can go through that difficulty with God, He will do the same for me with mine."

I believe the Philippians realized that Paul's problems were even greater than theirs. So when he was willing to describe his trials in a modest, God-honoring way they realized they too should not exaggerate their own situations. Often when we have something go wrong in our day—maybe a flat tire or a missed appointment or a lost customer or a bad test grade—we might tell our family that evening, "I had the worst day of my life." When we see the shocked look on our family's faces, we go into greater detail. "I was driving on Interstate 88 and wouldn't you know it? The front driver's side tire went flat!" Yeah? "It was terrible. I was late to work. I got my pants dirty." We exaggerate our difficulties, don't we? We use terms like "always" and "never" and "worst." But Paul reminds us that no matter what we're going through, other people are worse off than we are. We need to be careful not to see our problems as being more than they really are. He didn't pretend his situation wasn't bad, but he also did not let it stop him.

So while we too need to be honest about our struggles—even sharing them at times with others—we also need to focus on the follow-up. "Yes, life is hard, but God is good. He's moving in ways we never thought possible. Are our problems gone? No. But God is bringing me to greater Christ-likeness through this. We're still in the frying pan, but you should see the omelet God is making here. It smells awfully good."

How does God do all this? Through the ministry of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul knew it wasn't really about himself at all; it was about the gospel. It's actually arrogant and self-centered when you and I allow our problems to become all we can think about and when we do, we will never find joy. Instead, we become bitter and resentful and angry. We live in disappointment and despair. But when we can see how the massive difficulties in our lives are actually being used by God—when we realize they are cogs in a machine He is using to advance His Kingdom—then we will take our eyes off ourselves. Instead, we can share our issues knowing that God may be using them to advance Christ-likeness in someone else's life or to advance the gospel to someone who hasn't heard it. That allows us to approach our problems with gratitude instead of resentment.

3. Leave the "what ifs" in God's hands—the gospel should be our most important priority.

We need to look up, we need to let others know, then finally, we need to leave the "what ifs" in God's hands, knowing that the gospel is the most important priority. Paul could have written something like, "I'm rotting here in this prison..." but he knew better. He wasn't rotting; he was flourishing.

Have you realized that your problem is not intended to cause you to rot, but to bloom? That trial can be the fertile ground where you can grow in ways you've never grown before.

We need to stop seeing our "incarceration" as something negative, but rather to see it as an opportunity to impact others. Have you ever thought to view your confinement as being God's assignment? This is so important and it's helped me in so many ways. There is not a

trial or challenge or hardship that has come into our lives without the express written consent of our Heavenly Father. So whatever you're dealing with, God has at some point stamped it as "Approved." If my Heavenly Father Who loves me and has a plan for my life, Who is faithful to see me from Point A to the finish line, has approved my situation, then I can know it won't kill me—it will only make me better. When we're able to have this perspective, we can leave all the what-ifs in God's hands.

What are the what-ifs in Paul's life? "What if I never get out of here? What if nobody comes to visit me? What if the churches I've started all fall apart? What if God forsakes me? What if people who I thought were my friends turn against me?" Paul actually mentioned that last what-if as being true. In verses 15-17 he described those who were empowered by his imprisonment. *"Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry...not sincerely, but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. What then?"* Apparently these men believed that Paul was decreasing in his position, giving them an opportunity to increase theirs. Commentators tell us they were saying, "Paul messed up; that's why he's in prison. He must have sinned against God somehow and that's what landed him where he is. So people need to stop listening to Paul and listen to us instead." This could have caused Paul deep concern about his reputation.

As you know, much of our anxiety in our world has to do with the reputation we establish on social media. We're driven to wonder what people are thinking about us, what they're saying about us. Recently I was part of an event where I was in a video clip that went across social media—it even went viral. This was a new experience for me. I'm not really big on social media, but over a million people saw what I did. And the vast majority of them hated what I said.

I was lying in bed one night, looking at the thousands of Twitter responses to this video. I read, "This Tim is a fascist. He's a bigot. He's intolerant." Then it got really bad. "Tim should die." My favorite one said, "That's the ugliest woman I've ever seen." Then the next line said, "Well, it's a dude." I was scrolling through these, realizing how much hatred there is out there in the world. These people don't even know me, yet they've seen a little clip of me and now they're saying these things? This is really ugly. If you live in bondage to others' opinions, you will find yourself in prison.

Paul knew people were talking about him. He knew they were abusing his name and using him for their own gain. But he wrote, "You know what? That's okay. The only thing I care about is that Christ is proclaimed, whether in pretense or in truth."

Let me close with this. So often I'm mainly preaching you need to do this, you need to do that. I usually bring myself along, but my focus is on you. Today I want to just preach to myself for a minute and let you listen in. When I read this passage, it brings incredible conviction to my heart. You probably don't know this and it will probably sadden you, but the world of ministry is cutthroat. There's a lot of competition. "Their church is bigger than our church. They did this. They did that." The same way you compare yourself to your neighbor—the house they live in, the car they drive, what their kids are doing—pastors are tempted to do the same thing.

If you are in the pastor world in social media, you know it's as cutthroat among pastors as it is among regular people. You see one Bible teacher bad-mouthing another, or one church saying this about another church. That's why we need to listen to Paul when he says, "It's not about you. It's not about your church. It's about the gospel of Jesus Christ."

I'm thankful that God has kept us from that competitive spirit. I'm not just saying that now because I'm preaching about it. You've seen it yourself. This morning Elder Pastor McGuire prayed for the other churches in our area. Why do our leaders pray for other churches? They're not our competition; they're our friends. They're our partners. There are 64,000 people who live in our Fox Valley community, the area we're seeking to reach. But I can tell you, there aren't enough churches in this area to serve all those people. So we must high-five our brothers and sisters in Christ who are working alongside us.

So here at Village Bible Church, we praise and thank God for the churches in our community. There's Christ Community. There's Harvest Bible Chapel. There's Calvary Church. Do we agree on everything? No. We're different people in different churches. But rather than competing, we seek to complete one another. We're in this together. You won't hear us bad-mouthing other churches. "Well, they've got a fog machine." Who cares? "They do this. They do that." Who cares? Do they preach Christ? Are they winning souls? That's what we want to be about. When someone is doing that, we will not cut them down; we will compliment them. In fact, I need to humbly admit that in some ways they're doing it better than we are. God bless them for that.

I'm so thankful for a group of churches in this area that are willing to share resources. We even share buildings. Did you know that Christ Community Church has to use some of our rooms to do their ministry on Wednesday night, because God is blessing that ministry? Praise God. If they've got to park cars here, we'll be out there helping with that. We'll do whatever we need to do to help that ministry move forward. Why? Because it's not about us. It's not about me. It's about the gospel of Jesus Christ. When we understand that, whether in our times of competition or in our times of crisis, we will find joy, because Jesus will come into full view. We will see His glory.

When we get to heaven, who cares who had the biggest church? When we get to heaven, who cares who had the nicest building? When we get to heaven, who cares who has the best fog machine? We're going to be in the clouds; there will be fog all around us. And in that

moment, we will recognize what needs to be true in the here and now—it's all about Him. When we can get our eyes on Him instead of our trials, we will be able to look up, we will be able to let others know and we will be able to leave the what-ifs in God's hands. Amen?

Village Bible Church | 847 North State Route 47, Sugar Grove, IL 60554 | (630) 466-7198 | www.villagebible.org/sugar-grove

All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

Note: This transcription has been provided by Sermon Transcribers (www.sermontranscribers.com).