



Last term we were being encouraged to take small steps towards doing more towards sharing our Christian faith with others. This term's series is more about 'being'. The book of Philippians was written c. AD 60 by the apostle Paul during his imprisonment in Rome against the backdrop of increasing persecution for Christians. It speaks to the soul about the core blessings of a life in Christ and remarkably, the overriding theme is of JOY. **Read Philippians Ch. 1.**

### **1. Joy runs deeper than Pleasure.** Verses 1 - 11

- It is deeply relational.
  - Joy partners with love between Christian friends in emotional and unbreakable bonds of affection forged through serving God together (vv. 4-5) and supporting each other (Philippians 4:14-16.) Christian friendship is a gift of God and it comes with a purpose:
    - a) 'Partnership in the gospel' i.e. serving together to know Christ and to make Him known.
    - b) Working together to bring the Kingdom of Heaven to earth; transforming lives & communities
  - There is deep fellowship between Christian friends (vv.7-8) because we all share in God's grace.
- Joy partners with personal fulfilment. Joy in our soul confirms that we are fulfilling God's purpose for our lives and it is not the same as happiness with our careers or even our Christian ministry. Happiness is temporary and elusive, joy is permanent because it comes from Jesus Himself, so:
- (vv. 9-11) Paul prays for the Philippians' love for Christ to be enriched as they grow more like Him in moral discernment, in sincerity of character and in leading an upright life. The 1647 Westminster Catechism begins '*What is the chief end of man? To glorify God and to enjoy Him for ever.*'

### **2. Joy runs deeper than pain.** Verses 12 – 26

- Joy is not based on life's events going well for us; it cannot be derailed by circumstances going badly
- Christian Joy is a gift from God which can be experienced in very difficult circumstances, because it is accompanied by a conviction that in the end, all will be well. It partners Hope in God's promises.
- (vv. 12-18a) Paul rejoices that in spite of being under house arrest, chained to a Roman guard 24 hrs a day, he can still preach the Gospel to them all – turning a seeming catastrophe into an opportunity
- (vv. 18b-26) Paul is in limbo – he doesn't know whether he'll be executed, imprisoned for life or set free; he sees possibilities whatever the outcome: 'to live is Christ and to die is gain' (v. 21).
- His 'win-win' mind-set comes from his Saviour Jesus ... 'the author and perfecter of our faith, who, for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God ...' *Hebrews 12:1-3.* Jesus voluntarily endured the agonies of crucifixion because of His deep-seated Joy and Hope in God the Father, whom he trusted would make all things new.
- Richard Wurmbrand, a Romanian Jew who became a Christian in 1938 was imprisoned and tortured by the Communist authorities for his faith for 14 years, 3 of them in solitary confinement. He tells us '...alone in my cell I danced for joy every night ..... I felt I would burst if I did not give joy expression'

### **3. Final Encouragements.** Verses 27 – 30

- Philippians is Paul's letter of Joy and his letter of suffering, hardship and struggle. He ends it by encouraging the Christians, who are facing all manner of difficulties, to stand firm in their faith, not to be frightened by their enemies and to recognise that they suffer together with Paul & with Christ.
- Let us also commit to growing in JOY this New Year. **Romans 15: 13.**

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**Question for Discussion:**

- 1. Is there a difference in the quality of our friendships with Christians? If so can we pinpoint what it is?**
- 2. Do we understand what is meant by 'friendship with a purpose?' What does it say about friendship with non-believers? How can we balance our friendships so we don't find ourselves in a Christian clique?**
- 3. Can we describe the difference between happiness and joy? Can we share a time of pure joy?**
- 4. Can we perhaps share a time when we were in the middle of disaster, but found ourselves full of joy?**
- 5. Paul was in a completely uncertain situation. Can we learn from him how to relax about the uncertainties we face in our world, our country and in our lives and instead look forward with Joy?**
- 6. Perhaps have a time of prayer giving thanks for the Christian friends we love and pray for.**