



How Can I Rejoice in Trials?

Philippians 1:12-13: (NASB) ¹²Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel, ¹³so that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else.



Every Christian wants to be faithful in living their life with thankfulness. One immediate question that arises is, what causes us to be thankful? What life experiences bring us to gratitude? Most of us would answer that we feel appreciativeness when things fall into place or when a hard experience yields a righteous result. These are great times to give honor to God, but what about when the opposite happens? What kind of acknowledgment do we give to God when our opportunities are cut off for seemingly no good reason? Would we be grateful if we were singled out to have our personal freedoms to spread the gospel stripped, and we were instead literally locked in our house? The Apostle Paul was. The last several years of his life were mostly spent as a prisoner of Rome. What was his secret to rejoicing?

Paul was a prolific writer during the last years of his life. During his first imprisonment, he wrote four letters to the brotherhood that Christians refer to as the “prison letters” or “prison epistles” - Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon. He also referenced a lost letter to the Laodicians and the book of Hebrews whose authorship is disputed, although many attribute it to Paul.

Today we are going to look at lessons from four of his letters - three of the so-called “prison letters” and then the last letter he wrote before his death, the book of 2 Timothy.

To set the stage for Paul’s first imprisonment, we drop into Paul’s life after he was questioned by King Agrippa in Acts 26. From there, it took several months for him to be delivered to Rome as a prisoner. That time included being shipwrecked and wintering on the Island of Malta, all while in chains. During this time as a prisoner, he advised those around him, witnessed to the gospel, followed through on divine intervention to save the lives of others and freely healed the sick.

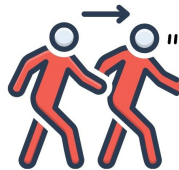


PAUL'S TRAIL
from TRIAL to GRATITUDE

Paul’s trail to the rejoicing gratitude of his prison letters began with shackles and drama, yet he never faltered in his faith.



OUR TRAIL
from TRIAL to GRATITUDE



"Follow me as I follow Christ."
1 CORINTHIANS 11:1 - MODERN ENGLISH VERSION

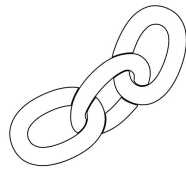
Our trail to our most transformative gratitude usually begins in an environment of deep uncertainty. Our Lesson: Uncertainty is an open door to rejoicing because it sets the stage for the power of God’s providence to prevail!



Let's set the stage for this first imprisonment:

Acts 28:30-31: (NASB) ³⁰And he stayed two full years in his own rented quarters and was welcoming all who came to him, ³¹preaching the kingdom of God and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered.

That last word - *unhindered* - is key. One would think his productivity would be limited while under arrest, but instead, there was a hub of activity. Paul would preach to visiting Jews and Gentiles. Eager students wanted to hear what he had to say. His closest friends were there - Luke, Epaphroditus and Timothy. Paul would send them on missions, and they would come back and bring him reports. A big advantage to this imprisonment was that he had the time to write letters!



He has time, but he is shackled, stuck; he cannot go out as he wishes. He is in prison! He cannot live his normal daily life of visiting the Jewish synagogues in various locations, traveling and preaching Jesus and connecting with the brethren all over the Mediterranean world. This is a lesson in using what is in front of us instead of crying over what we cannot do anymore.

While Paul was in prison he witnessed to the Roman guards. They saw something different in him. He was consistent and tireless - they took note of his beautiful example, and eventually he converted many Romans to Christianity.

He would have had to delegate. He was used to doing many things himself since he was a major leader in disseminating the gospel. We will see God's providence in all of this throughout this episode. We are going to look at how *unlimited* he was in this significant *limitation*!



Ephesus was perhaps the largest church in Asia Minor (present-day Turkey). Paul had previously visited here on his second missionary journey and spent three years here on this third missionary journey, so he knew these brethren personally and loved them. To receive a letter from Paul would have meant so much to the Ephesians.

Of course, to send a letter from house arrest in Rome to Asia Minor was a big deal, and it had to be carried by messenger. For such a major effort, it makes sense that Paul would write several letters for other churches in that area, sending them with the same messenger, Tychicus, whose name is at the end of many of the letters. In Ephesians 6:21, he calls Tychicus his *beloved brother and faithful servant in the Lord*.





The following are just a few significant spiritual teachings relayed in Paul's message to the Ephesians:

Always remember that we are privileged only by the grace of God and the sacrifice of Jesus:

Ephesians 2:8-10: (NASB) ⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; ⁹not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

We are His workmanship... we can never forget that the privilege we have in Christ is because of what God does with us through Christ.

God has called us together to be one body and has supplied us with all the tools we need:

Ephesians 4:11-13: (NASB) ¹¹And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, ¹²for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; ¹³until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.

Everything we need as tools for spiritual growth are here - but we have to use them. What will we do with everything we need in front of us? Paul cannot visit his beloved Ephesians anymore. He knows he will never see them again and pours out his love in this letter.

Because we are one body, immediately and honestly handle your issues with one another:

Ephesians 4:25-27: (NASB) ²⁵Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth each one of you with his neighbor, for we are members of one another. ²⁶Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, ²⁷and do not give the devil an opportunity.

We can all really use this lesson! We can hear the positiveness we are to have, even when dealing with difficult issues. Paul is telling them to have joy and gratitude in their fellowship with one another. They should not stay angry, but should rejoice in their brotherhood by reasoning with one another.

Imitate God's magnanimous love as He expressed it through Christ:

Ephesians 4:31-32: (NASB) ³¹Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. ³²Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.

Ephesians 5:1-2: (NASB) ¹Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; ²and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.

One interesting point that separates this letter to the Ephesians from some others Paul wrote is that he does not address any behavioral problems in the church. These are all expressions of love and of wanting to give them as much fatherly encouragement as he can.

Imagine a kitchen sink that has just had dirty dishes washed in it. It is full of dirty water. Paul is speaking as a father - he knows the Ephesians have the potential to let all these things sit in this "dirty water" without being addressed. Now he tells them to open the drain and *let all bitterness and*





wrath and anger and clamor and slander drain out of the sink, along with all malice, cleaning the sink of all that nastiness. This loving, fatherly input will help them change their lives.

Focus on making the most of every opportunity and experience and grow by them: (Remember, he is in chains yet says to make the most of every opportunity - he is showing them, not just writing them.)

Ephesians 5:15-17: (NASB) ¹⁵Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, ¹⁶making the most of your time, because the days are evil. ¹⁷So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

Paul is saying: *Your life is ordered; focus on growing. This is what I am doing from within these four walls.* He was stuck, but he was working on his growth and responsibilities as a Christian.

Making the most of your time, because the days are evil - this certainly applies to us now. How are we making the most of our time? It will not happen unless we focus on it with great intent. It just does not happen by accident.

Be strong in fulfilling your roles in your marriages, for they foreshadow Christ and the church:

Ephesians 5:22-25: (NASB) ²²Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord. ²³For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, he himself being the savior of the body. ²⁴But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything. ²⁵Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave himself up for her,



There is this incredible relationship of husband and wife. Paul urges the Ephesians to put their marriages in godly order. From the husband and wife come all other family relationships. Make sure the marriage honors God and all the rest will follow the example.

Be armed and ready to fight the overwhelming battle before each one of you:

Ephesians 6:10-13: (NASB) ¹⁰Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. ¹¹Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. ¹²For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. ¹³Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.

The Apostle Paul is telling the Ephesians that they are in a battle they will lose - unless they are fully armed! Paul knows they have been relying on him, but he is not going to be there or be available even through correspondence anymore. He tells them they can stand up for themselves in this battle IF they arm themselves with God's armor - otherwise they will be overtaken.



Check out our CQ Kids videos:

WHAT IS THE ARMOR OF GOD?

christianquestions.com/youtube



Ephesians 1:16: (NLT) *I have not stopped thanking God for you. I pray for you constantly.*

Do not let your trials overwhelm your care and concern for others.



See how Paul is working from prison to help his flock with his loving words!



PAUL'S TRAIL
from TRIAL to GRATITUDE

After his harrowing journey towards house arrest, Paul's uncertainty remained, but in a different form. It was now a "stable uncertainty." His response?

1. FEED the flock,
2. SOW the seeds of the gospel, and
3. LIVE as freely in Christ as his chains would allow him to.



"Follow me as I follow Christ."

1 CORINTHIANS 11:1 - MODERN ENGLISH VERSION



OUR TRAIL
from TRIAL to GRATITUDE

Once the initial uncertainty of our trail to gratitude is over, we too must learn to continue freely giving, even if in a new and more stable uncertainty. This will honor God as we rejoice in what we may not yet know!

Here is a practical example of how someone's situation could paralyze them spiritually or move them forward: In Episode 820: "What is the Fruit of Your Life? (Part II)," our dear friend Vicki showed us her spiritual strength and how to rise above her situation dealing with cancer. We can fold or rise above.



Examining what the "fruit of the spirit" really is

What does this trial make possible?

Answering this question will likely include new ways to witness. Consider looking outward for new opportunities rather than taking a "woe is me" attitude. We can see how beneficial Paul's ministry from prison was, not only to the early Christians, but to us now as well.

For someone whose life had been upended and was now on house arrest, Paul sure was powerful and encouraging!

**Paul wrote to the Ephesians, whom he knew well.
Did he write to any church he did not personally know?**

To answer this question, we need only look at his letter to the Colossian church. This was a group he never did get to visit, and yet we will see that their spiritual welfare weighed heavily on Paul's heart. This simple observation helps us see just how dedicated Paul was to Christ and ALL Christians as well. Paul felt that all Christians should be on the exact same foundation of Christ. We will see this in his letter to the Colossians.



Colossae was about 100 miles east of Ephesus. This church was founded by Epaphras, one of his converts from his third missionary journey.

Colossae is also in Western Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey). It was primarily a church of Gentile believers. There are striking similarities between the book of Ephesians and Colossians. If we were going to write two letters at the

same time, we would likely repeat phrases and expressions in both letters. It seems this is in the case with these two letters. They both give the analogy of the body and joints to represent our brotherhood, they both speak of putting away evil; they talk about the marriage, family and love.

But this church was in a cosmopolitan city of different cultures and religions and was facing false teaching and heresy - "a combination of Greek speculation, Oriental mysticism and Jewish legalism, all which devalued Jesus Christ as the ultimate authority in matters of faith." (Christianity.com)

Scholars call this the "Colossian Heresy." It was important enough for Paul to pay attention to this small city. Paul is going to make the case that the way of Christ alone is supreme and sufficient.



The following are some significant spiritual teachings relayed in Paul's message to the Colossians:

Always remember that you are privileged only by the grace of God and the sacrifice of Jesus - Paul always firmly established a foundation:
(He sent that same message to the Ephesians in Ephesians 2:1-5.)

Colossians 2:13-14: (NASB) ¹³When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, he made you alive together with him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, ¹⁴having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and he has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.



As a result of Adam's sin, *the certificate of debt was unpayable; there was no way out. Only because Jesus took that debt and nailed it to the cross do we have this opportunity.*

Be aware of who and what you follow. Never deviate from Jesus, as he is the head of the body:

Colossians 2:18-19: (YLT) ¹⁸*let no one beguile you of your prize, delighting in humble-mindedness and in worship of the messengers, intruding into the things he hath not seen, being vainly puffed up by the mind of his flesh, ¹⁹and not holding the head, from which all the body-through the joints and bands gathering supply, and being knit together - may increase with the increase of God.*

There is a biology lesson here - *through the joints and bands...being knit together.* This is a picture of how the interconnected church is supposed to work.



Live your Christian life as a true disciple. Let compassion, humility, love and forgiveness define you:

Colossians 3:12-14: (NASB) ¹²*So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; ¹³bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. ¹⁴Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.*

He is talking about the bonds of unity while literally sitting in bonds! Imagine the smile on his face while he is writing about *compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience;* the love and joy is pouring out of his words while he sits there as a captive contemplating his life getting closer to its end. He is pouring himself out from his limited state so that the Colossians could be unlimited in *their* opportunities.

Let the name of Jesus represent everything you do:

Colossians 3:17: (NASB) *Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through him to God the Father.*

Jesus is a big theme of this book because Paul is refuting all of those outside influences that plagued this cosmopolitan congregation by contrasting the *fullness* of Jesus Christ with the *emptiness* of the human philosophies that abounded in Colossae. Their opportunities were huge.



Be sure your family relationships are true examples of God-honoring relationships:

Colossians 3:18-21: (NASB) ¹⁸*Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. ¹⁹Husbands, love your wives and do not be embittered against them. ²⁰Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord. ²¹Fathers, do not exasperate your children, so that they will not lose heart.*

Again, like in Ephesians, the family relationship takes a central role in these powerful prison letters. Why? Because Paul knows, especially in his absence, that they need to rely on one another in the highest spiritual manner possible. Every relationship has to be focused with God and Christ coming first and as its basis. These are powerful letters from a man who cannot do what he has



always been able to do. We can see Paul's love, passion and his joy in the Lord as his strength in this experience.

Work at any and every life task as a task done to the glory of God:

Colossians 3:23-24: (NASB) ²³Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, ²⁴knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve.

2 Peter 1:5: (KJV) ...add to your faith virtue...

This includes the thought of having fortitude and valor. Doesn't this describe Paul? He instructs us to *work heartily, as for the Lord*. When we add virtue to our work, we add excellence. We *heartily* pour ourselves out into whatever we do so we can glorify God at every turn of our lives. A good synonym for "fortitude" is "strong-mindedness," which really does describe the Apostle Paul.

As it pertains to witnessing the gospel to others, there are periods when we are able to work freely and then John 9:4 says there will be a time when no man can work. We do not know how or when this will apply in our personal lives, but one day our work will be stopped or greatly limited. It may come because of age, resources, conditions or some other reason, so we need to work while we can. Would being in prison have been a good excuse for Paul to kick back and give up? No, he used every means possible, every ounce of his energy to keep working even though he was confined. This is a big lesson.



The love Paul had for those whom he had never met is overwhelmingly obvious. It is also obvious that he knew they loved him with the same kind of selfless dedication.

We look at the beginning and end of Colossians to see the love Paul had for those he never met:

Colossians 1:7-8: (NASB) ⁷just as you learned it from Epaphras, our beloved fellow bond-servant, who is a faithful servant of Christ on our behalf, ⁸and he also informed us of your love in the Spirit.

Colossians 4:7-8: (NASB) ⁷As to all my affairs, Tychicus, our beloved brother and faithful servant and fellow bond-servant in the Lord, will bring you information. ⁸For I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know about our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts;

Paul is acknowledging that he had been informed by Epaphras of their love - not just an offhand, *Oh, they send their love*, a casual greeting, but a transfer of their hearts to him. He is pouring himself into this letter to acknowledge this. There is a deep bond formed through this correspondence, as well as through the previous contacts of Epaphras.

Tychicus...will bring you information - it is obvious that we do not have this additional information sent orally through Tychicus to the Colossians.



Is there a lost letter?

Colossians 4:16: (NASB) *When this letter is read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and you, for your part read my letter that is coming from Laodicea.*

Possibly Tychicus carried another letter to the Laodiceans and they were to exchange letters with the church at Colossae. The two cities were about 10 miles from each other. Unfortunately, no part of any manuscript has been found of this lost book. Some think maybe it was the letter to the Ephesians that was circulated through the Laodiceans because Paul said it was *coming from Laodicea*.

So far we have letters to the Ephesians, Colossians, possibly the Laodiceans, and there was also a personal note written to Philemon.

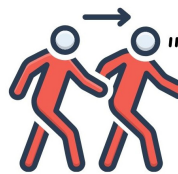


PAUL'S TRAIL from TRIAL to GRATITUDE

Because Paul embraced the privilege of his uncertain and limiting living conditions, he was able to truly impact even those he had never met. Even under house arrest, his rejoicing in Christ was limitless!



OUR TRAIL from TRIAL to GRATITUDE



"Follow me as I follow Christ."
1 CORINTHIANS 11:1 - MODERN ENGLISH VERSION

To embrace the uncertainty and limits of our life experiences means we need to grow far beyond the simple acceptance of our current state. In spite of our uncertainty, our trail to gratitude includes reaching out to our brotherhood with love, concern and encouragement.

How can we use acceptance of our current state to change others? It is the very foundation for changing ourselves and then affecting others. We have to *accept* the trial, *accept* the circumstances, *accept* the limitations. If there is nothing we can do to lift the limitation, what do we do? What are the possibilities that come out of this limitation? With this change of focus, the problem becomes a tool - albeit, an awkward tool - but how do we use it to bring God glory? That is what these prison letters are telling us - how Paul used his limited circumstance to bless everyone from his various flocks he pastored in the early churches to us down at this end of the age.



I'd like to share a practical application: Taking care of my parents in our home was our privilege and a way of honoring them. But we had to continue to do the most important thing - serving God and the brotherhood, even though we had added responsibilities. They knew we were religious but didn't understand our lifestyle until they were with us for a while. We made them a part of our lives by including them in all our activities. They often said how they appreciated the Bible studies, fellowship, prayers and hymns. That was our witness to them. To God be the glory.



Jonathan took a limiting and difficult experience, seeking the opportunities it afforded. How can we bring glory to God through this? This is the way Paul thought, and we need to think the same way. This is how we can understand Paul's rejoicing through all his prison experiences. Paul's heart was profoundly dedicated to any and all disciples of Christ. His is an example worth following!

Ephesians and Colossians are just two of Paul's prison letters. What can we learn from the rest of them?

Obviously, the lost letter to Laodicea can only be speculated on, and we covered his personal letter to Philemon in another episode.



The remarkable reconciliation of Onesimus the runaway slave

The letter to the Hebrew Christians, which some say was not written by Paul, is far too complex for us to look at here today. This leaves us with Paul's letter to the Philippians as his final correspondence of his two-year house arrest experience. This letter is magnificent!



The church at Philippi was the first congregation Paul had established in northern Greece. Like in the letter to the Ephesians, he does not address any behavioral problems. This letter is filled with encouragement, as the church was facing opposition from the outside and strife and division from within. His message to have peace and joy in all circumstances was especially poignant since, again, he was writing from prison.

Acts 16:13-15 describes how Paul met and converted Lydia in Philippi.

In Acts 16:16-31, he and Silas were beaten and jailed here for casting out a demon from a slave girl and the jailor ended up converting to Christianity.





The brethren in Philippi knew him personally and they loved him - they sent him money, gifts and clothing. We will soon look at the closing salutations in Philippians 4 where we will get insight into why Jesus directed Paul to go to Rome in the first place. That ends up being a significant lesson that helps us tie up this piece of his life.

The following are some significant spiritual teachings relayed in Paul's message to the Philippians:



Remember, if God has started a good work within you, He will complete it if you are willing:

Philippians 1:6: (NASB) *For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.*

God is waiting to complete us - are we willing to get out of His way? Paul is saying here that we just have to get out of His way and let God change, mold, direct and guide us. Let Him show us what to stand on, and then move forward.

The joy of the Lord is always available to each of us, no matter what we are experiencing:

Philippians 1:12-13,21-25: (NASB) *¹²Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel, ¹³so that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else,*

Everyone knew Paul! We can imagine people saying: *There is a man in that house who is a Christian, and he does not stop talking or preaching. He is endlessly encouraging those that constantly come to see him...he does not stop! There is something about him that is different.*

²¹For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. ²²But if I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose. ²³But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better; ²⁴yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake. ²⁵Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith,



HOUSE ARREST RELABELED

Paul took the “stable uncertainty” of his house arrest and relabeled it as “God’s positive and powerful providence for the brotherhood.” He realized his circumstance was for their sakes. Once he was sure that his situation was not going to change, he worked with everything he had to support and encourage them.

But wait a minute...it took until now before we read a scripture that mentioned joy! We have not seen “rejoicing,” “gratitude” or “thanksgiving” either. How can we talk about rejoicing in trial when it has not even been mentioned yet and we are halfway through this episode?

The answer is that the imprisonment did not stifle his joy or ability to rejoice. It turned into the driving force behind his writing. We see his joyous attitude throughout these letters.



Jesus became human so that every human will have the opportunity to honor God in the future:

Philippians 2:8-11: (NASB) ⁸Being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹For this reason also, God highly exalted him, and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, ¹⁰so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Here is a perfect example. We do not see the words “joy” or “rejoicing” in the above verses, but we see giving glory to God. How is that not rejoicing?! It is all over everything, and here he is in prison and this is what he is writing.

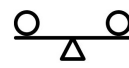
All self-serving human accomplishment is meaningless and cannot compare with our privilege in Christ:

Philippians 3:7-8: (NASB) ⁷But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ,

These texts show the opposite ends of the spectrum. On one hand, he counts as loss his previous life as a *Hebrew of Hebrews* in **Philippians 3:5** and religious pedigree as a *Pharisee, son of a Pharisee* in **Acts 23:6**. When compared to his new personal relationship with Jesus, these old things were *counted as loss* - those former things were no longer important to him.

On the other hand, he counts all of his sufferings as loss in his new life as a Christian. Nothing is valuable except that which is in the middle - Christ Jesus. He counted his

highest highs and lowest lows as nothing compared to Christ. This balance of contentment while in the Lord’s service is how we rejoice in trials! We should embrace the joy expressed in Paul’s writings. Even though he is under house arrest, we can still hear the joyful man behind all of his teachings.

 The balance of contentment while in the Lord's service.



Never let a day go by without rejoicing in the Lord. Pray with confidence and claim God’s peace:

Philippians 4:4-7: (NASB) ⁴Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! ⁵Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near. ⁶Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Rejoice in the Lord always - not some of the time and not just when things are going our way. Paul was always rejoicing in the Lord.

HOMEWORK

PHILIPPIANS 4:8

Memorize this inspirational text!

Pay close attention to what you let your mind dwell upon. Thoughts can help us, or they can hurt us:

Philippians 4:8: (NASB) Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.



The flipside is, if it is NOT honorable, right, pure and lovely, with no spiritual excellence - put it away from you. Use this text if you are scared, lonely or approaching a temptation. This scripture is well worth memorizing for our edification and fortitude in approaching difficult trials and temptations.

We have such gratitude that Paul pointed us to these truths. They teach us how to think and why we should think it. This is what that kind of thinking can do for us. And again, this is from a man who was now extremely limited. He was a force in the early church partly because he went where he wanted, when he wanted and he was always on the move. He had three extensive missionary journeys that carried him all over the northern and eastern Mediterranean areas. He was working all day and then preaching until midnight many times to anyone in sight. Now he could only preach to those who came to his door (or read his letters!). His life may be different now, but his character is not.

Realize that Christ will see you through whatever experiences are set before you; just trust him:

Philippians 4:13: (NASB) *I can do all things through him (Christ) who strengthens me.*

Paul is saying he can put aside things in the past and can accept what is happening to him now in prison.

This is contentment as he wrote two verses earlier:

Philippians 4:11-12: (NASB) *¹¹Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. ¹²I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need.*



This also reminds us of Joseph. He was content and flourished in Potiphar's house, in prison and then working under the Pharaoh. He did his best at whatever job was given him, despite being a slave. The lesson in this scripture insures us we can cope with whatever God's providence brings to us through Christ who strengthens us. Paul was living proof of this, as was Joseph.

Let's focus on this house arrest. How did he get here? What is happening as a result of him now being in Rome waiting for two years? Let's go back to the beginning of Paul's association with Christians...

Remember what Jesus told Ananias about Paul's mission:

Acts 9:15: (NASB) *But the Lord said to him, Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine, to bear my name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel;*

Ananias was told to convert this man and bring him to Jesus: *He will bring the name of Jesus before kings.*



Paul lets the Philippians know that the gospel has even reached Caesar's own house:

Philippians 4:22: (NASB) *All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household.*



Especially those of Caesar's household! Just let that sink in for a moment. Paul was in Rome, not able to leave his house, and yet he had gotten his teaching into Caesar's household! How was he able to do that? We look at these prison letters and see how *limited* he was and how *free* he was at the same time.

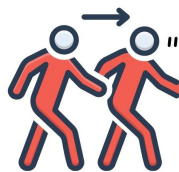


PAUL'S TRAIL from TRIAL to GRATITUDE

Paul has embraced and thoroughly rejoiced in his house arrest experience, knowing that God wanted him to be limited so that God's unlimited power and providence could spread the gospel in seemingly impossible ways. Paul's "stable uncertainty" was revealed to have clear and powerful purposes.



OUR TRAIL from TRIAL to GRATITUDE



"Follow me as I follow Christ."

1 CORINTHIANS 11:1 - MODERN ENGLISH VERSION

To step up to rejoicing - true rejoicing in our uncertain experiences - is to follow Paul's example by giving them unequivocal certainty. We *KNOW* all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28), and we therefore can genuinely rejoice in God's will being done.

Paul allowed his experience to drive where his energy would go - it never drained his energy when he could have easily given up.

We can accomplish great things in a small amount of time. Look what Paul did in just the last two or three years of his life!



What is our choice? When we are faced with the uncertainties of life, are we going to be a Paul, or are we going to be *appalled* by our experiences? We have that choice as to how to respond to what is given to us.

Paul had an uncanny ability to see through trial and find God's will. No wonder he had so much to write about!

**Paul's two-year house arrest produced great joy and growth.
What about his final imprisonment?**

Paul's final imprisonment brought him to the end of his life. Conditions in Rome had deteriorated as Christians were being executed for their beliefs, often in public and humiliating ways. Paul was in chains and had no expectation of release, and he was essentially alone as the local church was either killed or forced into hiding. His second letter to his spiritual son Timothy would be Paul's final testimony.



The first imprisonment in Rome was more of a house arrest and lasted two years, around AD60. He was able to preach and see friends and converts. He wrote Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon and maybe the lost letter to the Laodicians. Historically it was

believed Paul wrote the book of Hebrews during this time as well, but scholars are still debating its authorship.

He was released from prison for about a year and made a journey to Greece. In his freedom, he writes two out of what came to be known as the three “pastoral letters” - Titus and 1 Timothy.



However, he was sent back to Rome and imprisoned a second and final time before he died. This imprisonment was totally different with no expectation of release. Emperor Nero had increased his brutal persecutions of Christians so there was not all the activity of students and co-laborers in the gospel coming in and out to see him. The local congregation is gone and the time to write letters was

running out. His last letter, the third “pastoral letter” of 2 Timothy, was written to his spiritual son, Timothy. In it he writes how he hopes Timothy will come to see him, but it is doubtful that reunion ever took place.

The letter of 2 Timothy is the turning over of responsibilities, as Paul is no longer able to serve this way and he is turning the mission over to Timothy.

The following are some significant spiritual teachings relayed in Paul’s final message to Timothy:

You have need of great courage to stand firmly for the testimony of Jesus Christ. He is ALWAYS promoting the foundation of Christ:

2 Timothy 1:7-9: (NASB) ⁷For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline. ⁸Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of me his prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God, ⁹who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity,

Do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of me... He tells Timothy not to be embarrassed, (and it would have been easy to be embarrassed in the local culture when you were preaching the words of a man crucified and a man about to be executed) but he was to stand above that because he knew what Jesus represented and what Paul stood for. He was not to be embarrassed - he was to be courageous.

Stand firm upon that which you know to be absolute truth and guard it at all costs:

2 Timothy 1:13-14: (NASB) ¹³Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. ¹⁴Guard, through the holy spirit who dwells in us, the treasure which has been entrusted to you.

In 2 Peter 3:15-17, Peter agreed that everything Paul wrote was sanctioned by God and was the truth.



**Episode 1199:
Are My Christian Beliefs Based
on Truth or Error?**

Examining biblically questionable Christian traditions and practices

Paul was imprisoned, but aren't we all imprisoned in one way or another? How often can we really do what we want to do? We have constraints - physical, economic, social, familial and more. The example of Paul's incredible effectiveness and spirituality while he was in prison should be a lesson for us.

Guard the treasure which has been entrusted to you - WE have the treasure of the gospel that has been entrusted to us as well. We cannot use the excuse that we cannot serve God in the way we would like to. Paul did great things while he was in chains. And he is still passing on the gospel - and its responsibilities - to us through his writings!

Paul relates three specific characteristics to Timothy that we reviewed in Episode 1204:



**Episode 1204:
Am I Fighting For or Against God?**

Facing the things we do and think that put us in opposition to God



SOLDIER

Be ever willing to suffer the hardships of a soldier as you stand for the highest godly principles:

2 Timothy 2:3-6: (NASB) ³Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. ⁴No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier.

Soldier forward, soldier on - this was part of Timothy's responsibility. Some of us as Christians fit this character trait.

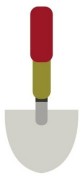


ATHLETE

Be accountable to the rules of godliness. "Success" outside of scriptural guidelines is not success at all:

⁵Also if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not win the prize unless he competes according to the rules.

Competing is not something that is easy or that we take lightly. Are we losing the joy and the gratitude? No, they are being translated through hard work, clear focus and making sure we are doing what is before us. This brings a quiet joy of spirit.



FARMER

Work the works of faith with patience and perseverance. Living a life driven by God needs to be cultivated and patiently developed over time:

⁶The hard-working farmer ought to be the first to receive his share of the crops.

This work is to develop your own life and the lives of those around you. Paul was trusting Timothy with the care of the churches.

Brace yourself and warn others of the dramatic gospel-corrupting influences that are coming:



2 Timothy 3:1-5: (NASB) ¹*But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. ²For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, ⁴treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, ⁵holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; Avoid such men as these.*

We are focusing on rejoicing in trial, but look what Paul is writing to Timothy! The joy in this scripture is in the forewarning given to protect Timothy from the possible problems that will be looming in the future. He is not only protecting Timothy, but through him he is protecting the gospel and the mission. There is a rejoicing in service we cannot underestimate, even if it includes this list of undesirable things.

Paul knows he is going to die, and these are the most important things he can tell Timothy to help him continue the work.

Take heart in the equipping power of the inspired word of God:

2 Timothy 3:16-17: (NASB) ¹⁶*All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; ¹⁷so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.*

Any other source - unless it is entirely in harmony with God's word - should be put aside. That is pretty straightforward. If it is not entirely in harmony with God's word, Timothy was to be the example of putting those things aside and staying with that which is pure. Good words for us!

Preach, correct, encourage! And do it all with godly patience:

2 Timothy 4:2: (NASB) *preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction.*



What does it mean to *be ready in season and out of season*?

We must carry the gospel with us no matter what we are doing. We may be doing a very earthly, mundane task. We have to be ready with the gospel not only in word, but also in character, thought and action. *Be ready in season and out of season* even when you think nobody is watching, and always be ready to be representing the gospel. Be patient with those you are witnessing to.

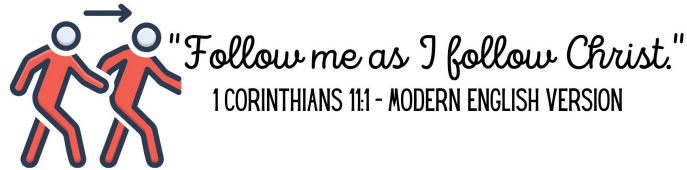
I am spent, and I now embrace the certainty of death which brings the certainty of life in Christ - there is rejoicing even in death:

2 Timothy 4:7-8: (NASB) ⁷*I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; ⁸in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved his appearing.*

This is how Paul frames death. Paul is telling us how there is rejoicing even in the process of death. It is what we live for - to be with Christ.


 PAUL'S TRAIL
from TRIAL to GRATITUDE

Paul now was in a humanly hopeless situation. All the spreading of the gospel, the teaching, the converting, the healing and encouraging experiences were behind him. Yet, he spiritually rejoiced in the face of death by passing the sacred torch of protecting this treasured gospel to his dear spiritual son, Timothy.

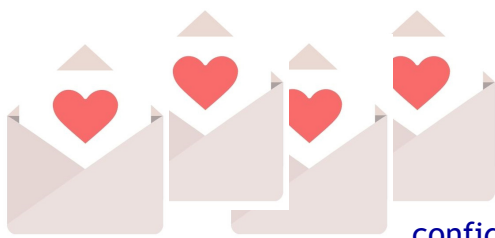


He rejoiced in the face of death because the gospel would live on in his letters, and in the work of the faithful Timothy and others he had touched and taught. If Paul could rejoice at that time, when all was hopeless from a human standpoint, then surely we can take our difficulties and rejoice in them.


 OUR TRAIL
from TRIAL to GRATITUDE

Our trail to gratitude and rejoicing will at some point lead us to the inevitable failing of our human frame. Let us stand firm in gratitude for the countless ways we have been blessed. Rejoice in God's providence. Bask in the forgiveness of Jesus' sacrifice. Recount the power of resurrection. Feel the exhilaration of His eternal plan and His kingdom. And remember, none of this could have ever happened without trials. Rejoice, and again I say, rejoice!

We see in the Apostle Paul a dramatic example to look at, to wonder at and to follow every day.



In these last letters, the theme running through them all is an exhortation to love. This is the quality that distinguishes the true Christian.

Despite all of the things Paul went through, he never lost his confidence in Jesus or the Heavenly Father.

Paul's closing words show this even though Paul was in a Roman dungeon awaiting execution:

2 Timothy 4:18,22: (NIV) ¹⁸The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom. To Him be glory for ever and ever. ²²The Lord be with you spirit, grace be with you all.

He says the Lord will rescue him, *but he died*. He was rescued because he was brought to his eternal home. This rescue is full of rejoicing. We can all, by God's grace, look forward to this rescue. Be a Paul in your trials. Rejoice as you stand, even if you are limited in what you can do.



*So, how can I rejoice in trials?
For Jonathan, Rick, Julie and Christian Questions...
Think about it...!*



Join us next week for our podcast on November 29, 2021
Ep. 1206: Is a Near Death Experience a Glimpse of Heaven?

Study Questions to follow

**Christian Questions Weekly
Newsletter**

**CQ Rewind Show Notes and
Study Questions**

Text
CQREWIND
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Study QUESTIONS

Ep. 1205: How Can I Rejoice in Trials?

See:  CQ Rewind
SHOW NOTES

<https://christianquestions.com/inspiration/1205-rejoice/>

1. How did Paul handle the limitations of being in house arrest? What is your reaction to the word unhindered in regards to his preaching from prison? How does this change our perspective of trials? (See Acts 28:30-31)
2. What lessons did Paul write to the Ephesians during his house arrest in Rome? (See Ephesians 1:16)
 - a. For what has God prepared us? (Ephesians 2:8-10)
 - b. What has God supplied to the body of Christ? (Ephesians 4:11-13)
 - c. How should we handle differences within our fellowship? (Ephesians 4:25-27)
 - d. How we should handle our bitterness towards others? (Ephesians 4:31-32, 5:1-2)
 - e. What should we do with our experiences? (Ephesians 5:15-17)
 - f. Why is it so important that the marriage relationship be godly? (Ephesians 5:22-25)
 - g. How can we stand firm against the schemes of the devil? (Ephesians 6:10-13)
3. What was Paul's relationship with the Colossians? How did Colossae differ from Ephesus?
 - a. How did Jesus cancel Adam's sin? (Colossians 2:13-14)
 - b. How is the body of Christ supposed to work? (Colossians 2:18-19)
 - c. What should define us as disciples of Christ? (Colossians 3:12-14)
 - d. Everything we do should be done through what filter? (Colossians 3:17)
 - e. How can our family relationships be God-honoring? (Colossians 3:18-21)
 - f. How should we work at all tasks in our lives? (Colossians 3:23-24)
 - g. What was clearly the relationship between Paul and the Colossians? (Colossians 1:7-8, 4:7-8)
4. Who were the Philippians? What was their history with Paul? (See Philippians 1:6, 12-13, 21-25, 2:8-11, 3:7-8, 4:4-8, 11-13)
 - a. It is essential for us to do what in order for God to complete us? (Philippians 1:6)
 - b. How did Paul evaluate his imprisonment? (Philippians 1:12-13, 21-25)
 - c. How did Jesus give glory to his Father? (Philippians 2:8-11)
 - d. What was Paul's view of his exalted status prior to becoming Christian? (Philippians 3:5-8)
 - e. When is it appropriate to rejoice in the Lord? (Philippians 4:4-7)
 - f. Why is it important to regulate our thinking? (Philippians 4:8)
 - g. How do these verses bring us contentment? (Philippians 4:11-13, Romans 8:28)
5. What were the circumstances surrounding Paul's second, and final, imprisonment? What lessons did Paul give in his final letter to Timothy? (See 2 Timothy 1:7-9, 13-14, 2:3-6, 3:1-5, 16-17, 4:2, 7-8)
6. What can we learn from the last moments of Paul's life spent in imprisonment? Do you think you will be able to rejoice in your trials after this study? (See 2 Timothy 4:18, 22)