

Happiness always depends on circumstances and is never guaranteed.

According to a recent World Happiness Report, the United States ranked as the 13th happiest country in the world.¹

7 reasons why many Americans are unhappy.

1. Money – wages often do not keep up with inflation and 60% of adults have less than \$1000 in savings.
2. Medications - Anti-depressants have surged over 400% in the past decade.
3. Technology – Americans are losing their ability to understand emotions in themselves and other people.
4. Stress
5. Lifestyles of the rich and famous – We compare our normal life to the social media “highlight reels” of everybody else’s life. Keeping up with the Joneses overwhelms many people.
6. Lack of rest. - There are no siestas in the United States.
7. Physical health. - 33% of adults in our country are obese.²

Paul could have joined the pity party of many Americans when he wrote to the Philippians. He didn’t join because he knew the difference between happiness and joy. He pursued joy in all things. About thirty years had passed between Paul’s conversion while travelling to Damascus and writing this letter to the Philippian church. He had every reason to be unhappy, but his joy did not leave him.

- In Acts 9, Paul was forced to flee Damascus in the night because a Jewish group sought to kill him.
- In Acts 14, Paul was forced to flee Iconium and later was stoned and left for dead in Lystra.
- In Acts 16, he was beaten and jailed in Philippi.
- In Acts 17, he was forced to flee from Thessalonica and later was mocked and ridiculed in Athens.
- In Acts 18, he was brought before the authorities in Corinth.
- In Acts 19 and 20, groups rioted against him in Ephesus.
- Acts 20:22-23 says, *I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me.*
- In Acts 21, he was beaten and arrested.
- In Acts 23, there was another plot to kill him and he needed to be heavily guarded.
- In Acts 25, his case was being ignored resulting in his appeal to Caesar.
- In Acts 27&28, he was shipwrecked, bitten by a poisonous snake, chained to a Roman guard and placed in another prison. When he wrote to the Philippian church, he had been in prison four years.

¹ <http://www.marketwatch.com/story/americans-less-happy-now-than-in-2007-says-latest-world-happiness-report-2016-03-17>

² <http://www.marketwatch.com/story/5-reasons-americans-are-unhappy-2015-10-12>

SCRIPTURE TEXT: PHILIPPIANS 1:1-8 (ESV)

¹ Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons: ² Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

³ I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, ⁴ always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer **with joy**, ⁵ because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. ⁶ And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. ⁷ It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. ⁸ For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus.

Happiness always depends on circumstances; joy always comes from walking closely with Jesus Christ.

5 features of biblical joy

1. Joy is a gift from God, granted to those who believe the gospel.
2. Joy is produced by the Holy Spirit.
3. Joy is experienced when Christians obey God's Word.
4. Joy is deepened through tough circumstances.
5. Joy is made complete by glorifying God.

Can you finish this verse? Rejoice in the Lord always; and again, I say rejoice.

Paul's joy was shown through memories - ³I thank my God in all my remembrance of you

The Philippian church was Paul's first church plant in Europe during the second missionary journey. Acts 16 gives several details of his visit to Philippi. He met a group of ladies gathered for prayer on the Sabbath. He drove the spirits from the demon-possessed slave girl. He was placed in prison and given an opportunity to lead the guard and his household to salvation. Paul had fond memories of his time in Philippi. It wasn't the perfect church, but Paul doesn't give any indication there were moral or spiritual fallacies like he does in other letters.

As biblical joy is produced in our lives, it should become easier to focus on the goodness, kindness and successes of kingdom building efforts while we look past the weaknesses and shortcomings of those same efforts. In other words, being negative and critical will steal our joy.

If we habitually focus on the negatives and shortcomings of other Christians, we will extinguish the biblical joy in our own lives. Kingdom building efforts in our lives will become extinct. We will retreat from being spirit-filled and turn to a critical spirit that is filled with bitterness and resentment. A lack of biblical joy in the Christian's life does great damage the kingdom of God.

If you have a circumstance in your life that is extinguishing your joy, get with God about that circumstance. **Is God trying to teach you something from the circumstance or are you supposed to run from the circumstance?**

Paul's joy was shown through prayers - ⁴*always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy,*

Prayer is a foundational part of every letter Paul wrote. Deep, authentic prayer for other Christians will deepen our biblical joy. One Christian cannot be negative and critical while praying for another Christian. Paul had some dark days, but he never stopped interceding for his brothers and sisters in Christ. He prayed affectionately and fervently.

If there is a lack of biblical joy in your life, there might also be a lack of concern and intercession for the welfare of other people.

Paul's joy was shown through partnership - ⁵*because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now*

Partnership in the gospel means a close association in evangelism efforts. In the margin of your Bible write Romans 1:16, "*For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes...*" Write these words next to them. **KINGDOM BUILDING EFFORTS** The church at Philippi funded other ministry Paul was doing. They were not wealthy, but they funded those who had less. They partnered with Paul's kingdom building efforts.

Are you ashamed of the gospel?

Stephen Covey wrote a book called, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. Habit Five is "SEEK FIRST TO UNDERSTAND, THEN TO BE UNDERSTOOD". There are times when kingdom building requires a direct approach like knocking on a door or starting a conversation and getting to Jesus as quickly as possible. There are times when kingdom building calls for writing a check. There are times when kingdom building requires handing out food. There are times when kingdom building requires a Christian's personal agenda or pride be set aside so God's receives maximum glory. One aspect of kingdom building is foundational to every other aspect – GO. Matthew 28:19 says Go, make disciples.

Are you involved in true, God-pleasing kingdom building efforts?

Paul's joy was shown through anticipation for the future - ⁶*I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.*

began a good work – the beginning of a relationship that regularly exhibits positive moral qualities. This form of began is only used twice in the NT. The other place is Galatians 3:3b, "Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?"

will bring it to completion – this phrase is one word in the original language. It means finish.

Paul was excited about what God had done and what God was doing in their lives, but Paul was excited about what God will do in their lives in the future. Some people are starters. Some people are finishers. God is a starter and a finisher. God never leaves something half completed. God always follows through. God always finishes what he starts. We never have to worry about

God abandoning what He said He would do. It's not in his character.

When we try Galatians 3:3, our biblical joy struggles. Have you ever tried to finish a job for another person without them knowing? You intended to help them out and you created a bigger mess? I'm a finisher and so I've been in trouble at least a few times for trying to finish another person's project.

It doesn't go well when we attempt to finish what God started before God is ready to finish it.

SCRIPTURE TEXT: PHILIPPIANS 1:9-11 (ESV)

⁹ And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, ¹⁰ so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, ¹¹ filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

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5 applications to grow deeper biblical joy in our lives.

1. **Grow in your practice of genuine love for others** – ⁹*it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more*
2. **Grow in your spiritual excellency** - ¹⁰*so that you may approve what is excellent*
3. **Grow in your personal integrity** - ¹⁰*so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ*
4. **Grow in your engagement with kingdom building efforts** - ¹¹*filled with the fruit of righteousness*
5. **Grow in your ability to give God glory regularly** - ¹¹*to the glory and praise of God*