

Letters

“The Prison letters of Paul” Growth Group Study Guide Week 1: Joy in the Mission Philippians 1: 12-27

Series Overview: Philippians, Philemon, Colossians and Ephesians are collectively referred to as the "Prison Letters." The Apostle Paul wrote them while he was imprisoned in Rome. The prison was probably a house where Paul was kept under close guard at all times (probably chained to a soldier). But he was given a number of freedoms not offered to most prisoners. Among them was the freedom to write letters and receive visitors.

The letters Paul wrote were addressed to churches he had started. And even though they dealt with the kind of practical issues you might expect new churches to be dealing with, they are also bold declarations of theological truth. They are messages to the faithful about what God intended the church to be and to do. It is a clarification of the church's mission and identity. Paul is basically saying to the church, "THIS IS US. This is who we are." The church is not a perfect place and it's not always easy living out our faith. But it is possible. And when we do it, it changes the world.

Week 1: Joy In The Mission

Text: Philippians 1: 12–27

Overview:

Living out God's calling on our lives doesn't always lead us to the places or the situations we had envisioned. It certainly didn't for Paul. It led him to a prison in Rome.

Prison was not the place that Paul wanted to be, but he had confidence that God could use even this situation to accomplish the mission to which he had been called. That's why he could communicate to the church at Philippi how he could be filled with joy despite his imprisonment and upcoming trial.

Sometimes, like Paul, we find ourselves in situations where our initial response is "I don't want to be here." But God can use even our hardships for his glory and give us overwhelming joy as we live out God's mission for our life.

Discussion

Getting Warmed Up

If you had to be incarcerated, what would be the hardest part of being in prison for you? Name specific things.

Digging In

Read aloud Philippians 1:12-27

What is joy? Is it different from happiness?

If Paul's primary concern were his own comfort and happiness, how do you think he would have experienced his time in prison?



Bringing It Home

In what situations have you said, “I don’t want to be here”? Did the circumstances change and turn around to give YOU joy?

Paul’s life was always at risk. He hoped to stay alive but knew that it was possible for him to be put to death at the hands of his captors. But for Paul, the true sacrifice was not dying but staying alive to serve others. What does that mean for your walk with Christ?

In Philippians. 1:21, Paul says that experiencing joy has little to do with the circumstances of your life, it has to do with how you define your life and that you make it worth living. How might you relate to this?

This discussion can be summed up by reading ahead to Philippians 4:11-13. How can we move toward this truth?

Are you challenged by this message to the Philippians? How is this message who we are or hope to become?

CLOSING PRAYER: Help us to explore and experience true JOY!