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Keep Your Joy



In his book on *Philippians, Be Joyful*, Warren Wiersbe states that **Yeshua Messiah** was a man of sorrows, and well acquainted with grief (**Isaiah 53:3**). Yet **He** possessed a deep **joy** that was beyond anything the world could offer. As **He** faced a cruel death on the cross, our **Lord** said to **His** followers: **These things I have spoken to you, so that My joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be complete (John 14:11)**. Those who have trusted the Master have the privilege of experiencing **fullness of joy (Psalm 16:11)**. Yet few believers take advantage of this privilege. They live under a cloud of disappointment when they could be walking in the sunshine of **joy**. What has robbed them of their **joy**?

The answer to this important question is found in a letter written centuries ago. It was written by **the apostle Paul** (see the commentary on **Acts, to see link click [Bm - Paul's First Missionary Journey: Paul is Sha'ul and Sha'ul is Paul](#)**) when he was a prisoner in Rome about 62 ACE, and sent to his fellow believers in **Philippi**, a church **Paul** founded on **his** second missionary journey (see **Acts [Bu - Paul's Second Missionary Journey](#)**). One of their members, **Epaphroditus**, had been sent to Rome to bring a special offering to **the apostle** and to help **him** in **his** imprisonment (**2:25-30** and **4:10-20**). **Paul's** letter to the **Philippian** church is something of a missionary "thank you" letter, but it is much more than that. It is the sharing of **Paul's** secret of biblical **joy**! **Paul** mentions **joy, rejoicing, or gladness** at least nineteen times in the four chapters of **Philippians**.

The unusual thing about this letter is that there was apparently no reason for **Paul** to be rejoicing. **He** was a Roman prisoner and **his** case was coming up shortly. **He** might be acquitted or **he** might be beheaded! **Acts 28:30-31** indicates that **he** was a prisoner in **his** own home, but **he** was chained to a Roman soldier and not permitted to preach in public. **The apostle** had wanted to go to Rome as a preacher (**Rom 1:13-16**); instead, **he** arrived as a prisoner. And, unfortunately, the believers in Rome were divided. Some were for **him** and some were against **him**. In fact, some of the foolish believers wanted to make things more difficult for **him**.

Yet, in spite of the danger and discomfort, **Paul** overflowed with **joy**. What was the secret of **his joy**? The secret is found in another word that is often repeated in **Philippians**: It is the word "**mind**." **Paul** uses the word **mind** ten times, and also uses the word "**think**" five times. Add the time **he** uses the word "**remember**" and you have a total of sixteen references to **the mind**. In other words, the secret to your **joy** is the way you think, your attitude. After all, attitude determines outcome. As we think, so we are (**Proverbs 23:7**). **Philippians** is a believers' psychology book, based solidly on good Bible doctrine. It is not a shallow self-help book that assures us that "everything's going to turn out okay." It's a book that explains **the mind** that we must have if we are going to have **joy** in a world filled with trouble.

The best way to get the total picture of the book is to first discover **the four "thieves"** that rob us of our **joy**, then determine the kinds of attitudes that we must have in order to capture and conquer these thieves.

1. Circumstances: Most of us must confess that when things are going our way, we feel a lot happier, and are much easier to live with. But have you ever stopped to consider how few of life's circumstances are really under our control? We have no control over the weather, the traffic, or over the things people say and do. The person whose happiness depends on ideal circumstances is going to be miserable most of the time. The poet Byron (1788-1824) wrote, "Men are the sport of circumstances." And yet here is **the apostle Paul** in the worst of circumstances, writing a letter saturated with **joy**.

2. People: All of us have lost our **joy** because of people: what they are, what they say, and what they do. (And no doubt we ourselves have contributed to making someone else unhappy. It works both ways.) But we have to live and work with people; we cannot isolate ourselves and still exercise our spiritual gifts and live to the glory of **Messiah**. We are supposed to be **salt and light** in this **world** (see the

commentary on **The Life of Christ Df - You are the Salt of the Earth and the Light of the World**). But sometimes our **saltiness** becomes bitter and our **light** grows dim because of other people. Is there a way to have **joy** in spite of other people?

3. Things: What thieves they can be. Yet, **the Master** said: **Beware! Guard against every kind of greed. Life is not measured by how much you own (Lk 12:15)**. In the Sermon on the Mount, **Yeshua** warned against **laying up treasures on this earth (Mt 6:19)**. Things are not safe, they do not last, and they never satisfy. Yet most people today think that their **joy** comes from the things that they own. “Whoever dies with the most things wins,” is the philosophy of the world. In reality, things can rob us of the only kind of **joy** that really lasts.

4. Worry: This is the worst thief of all. How many people have been robbed of peace and fulfillment because of worry? In fact, worry even has physical consequences, and while medicine can remove the symptoms, it cannot remove the cause. Worry is an “inside job.” You can buy sleep at the drug store, but you can’t buy rest. If **Paul** had wanted to worry, **his** present situation would have been a good time to do it. **He** was a political prisoner. **His** friends in Rome were divided in their attitude toward **his** case. **He** had no missions board supporting **him** and no Legal Aid Society defending him. But in spite of all these difficulties, **Paul** did not worry! Instead, he writes a letter filled with **joy**, and tells us how to stop worrying.

How do we capture these thieves from stealing **the joy** that is rightfully ours in **Messiah**? The answer is that we must cultivate the right **mindset**. Since outlook determines outcome, the attitude of **mind** that we cultivate will determine our **joy** or lack of it. In **the four chapters of Philippians**, **Paul** describes **four attitudes of mind** that will produce **joy** in spite of circumstances, people, and things that will keep us from worrying.⁴