

INTRODUCTION

Open your Bibles please to Philippians Chapter 1. Today I'm starting a new series, preaching from the book to Philippians. This is my favorite kind of preaching, expository Bible preaching, where you take a book of the Bible and go a verse by verse through the entire epistle that Paul wrote to the church at Philippi.

The title of today's message is "How to Keep Smiling During a Storm." I named this entire series "Seeing Stars Through Prison Bars." It's based on a little couplet I learned a number of years ago: "Two men sat behind prison bars, One saw mud, the other saw stars." sometimes we may be in a prison of some sort, in bondage to some kind of an attitude or bondage to some kind of a problem. As we look out from that bondage, we can choose to look at all the mud and all the bad things or we can so choose to look at the stars. As someone once said, you know had a bad day when you call your answering machine and it says it's none of your business what's on the answering machine. You know you've had a bad day when your horn gets stuck on the freeway and you are behind a bunch of Hell's Angels.

I'm sure many of you could stand up and say and say you've had awful days; where you felt like you couldn't make it to the end of the day. Why does that happen to Christians? There is a false conception some people hold that says once you are a Christian, everything will be smooth sailing; you won't have any more problems or difficulties. That is not true. During this entire study, remember the apostle Paul was in jail himself. Paul was never happier than when he was out preaching to the multitudes, taking the word of God around the world, but here he was chained to a Roman soldier in a prison in Rome. I'm sure Paul would have rather been doing something else than in the situation he found himself in; he still looked for ways to smile, even though he was going through a storm. Let's read about what Paul had to say about how you can keep smiling even during a storm.

Philippians 1: 1-11. "Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart; for whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me. God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus. And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.

Here is the apostle Paul. In prison, suffering, wishing he could be out preaching the gospel. But he was not moaning or complaining. No, his attitude is that of joy. We're going to see this entire epistle is an epistle of rejoicing and joy. I want to share three things with you that I think you can do to help you keep smiling during your storm.

I. REMEMBER THE POSITIVE

The first thing we learn is we should remember the positive. Look at verse three. Paul says, "I thank my God every time I remember you." If you want to know how to keep surviving and thriving and smiling during difficult storms in life, remember the positive. That means two things.

A. Minimize your failures

Number one. Learn to minimize your failures. Let's be honest, had Paul experienced some difficulties there at Philippi? Had he had failures? Had he made mistakes? Of course!

Ten years earlier when Paul was in Philippi, he had some real problems. There was a demon-possessed slave girl, but because of her demon possession, she was prophesying (like a fortune teller) and Paul cast the demon out of her. She became a Christian and her owners were incensed and stirred up a mob against him. He and Silas were arrested. He could have remembered that time he was arrested and the mob scene. The mob beat Paul and Silas severely. They removed their coats and beat them across the back. Then they were imprisoned with their feet in stocks and hands in chains. So everything that happened to him in Philippi was not pleasant. But look at what Paul said. "I thank God for every remembrance." He is choosing not to remember the bad things—he's minimizing his failures.

Have you ever noticed when you walk down memory lane, sometimes bad memories try to reach out and ambush you? The beautiful thing about memory is we can utilize selective memory to forget about all the bad things in the past and remember all the good things. I like what Billy Graham said in one of his books. "There is healing power in a selective memory. As humans, we cannot forget our sins and hurts, but through forgiveness we can choose not to remember them." Paul could have remembered getting beaten, but he chose not to. Paul could have remembered getting thrown in prison, but he chose not to. Instead he remembered the good things. The apostle Paul was what many people today would call a positive thinker, an optimist.

Later in this book, he is going to say, "Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things." (Philippians 4:8) If we learn anything from the apostle Paul, he had the ability to sort through all the negatives of life and bring out all the beautiful positives. I love to be around positive people but I don't like being around negative people. There are some people who see a half-empty glass but for positive people, the glass is half full. Some people say the day is partly cloudy, but a positive person sees a partly sunny day. Some see the problem in every opportunity, but positive people see the opportunity in every single problem. If you look through the history of the great people in life—and I believe the apostle Paul stands right there at the pinnacle of men who accomplished much—they were positive people. They said, "Paul you're going to die!" But Paul said, "Big deal. For me to live is Christ and to die is gain." Paul was so energetic and positive, it has been said you could walk into a revolving door in front of him and he'd walk out of it in front of you. He chose to remember the positive and minimize his failures. Let's face it, we've all made mistakes and blown it big. But a positive person goes through life learning from their mistakes and not living in the past.

B. Maximize your friends

The second thing Paul did as he remembered the positive was he maximized his friends. Look at verse five. He said, "I'm so grateful because of our partnership." He said, "The thing keeping me smiling during my imprisonment is I keep thinking about all my friends at Philippi." Turn to Philippians 4:16-18. I want to show you the kinds of friends these were at Philippi. "For even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid again and again when I was in need. Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account. I have received full payment and even more; I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God." What is Paul doing in chapter 1? Did you know the letter to Philippians is basically a souped-up, sanctified thank-you note? Paul was writing back to this church he and Lydia started ten years earlier. When you're going through difficult times, that's the time you need to maximize your friends.

Do you know how to tell the difference between friends and acquaintances? Simple. When everything is going well in your life, you'll have plenty of acquaintances; but when the bottom falls out and you are facing difficulty only those friends will stand by you. All those acquaintances will disappear like the early morning fog under the heat of a noonday sun. Paul said, "Of all the other churches I've ministered to, you folks are the only ones who have supported me. I'm so thankful for your friendship." Those of you suffering right now, going through a storm, as you think about the past, don't think negatively—think positively. Minimize your failures. Then think about all those friends you have out there and make the most of them.

II. REJOICE IN PRAYER

The second thing we learn from the apostle Paul is rejoice in prayer. Look at verse 4. He says, "In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy." That's rejoicing in prayer. If you feel like you're imprisoned in a problem, you can remember the past positively and you can pray. There is more than you can do after you pray, but there's absolutely nothing you can do until you have prayed. As Paul begins his letter, he lets them now he's praying for them.

A. The choice to rejoice

The first thing Paul did was make a choice to rejoice. We do not rejoice simply because we feel like it; we rejoice because God commands us to rejoice. Elsewhere in this beautiful letter, Paul said, "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!" (Philippians 4:4) Are you rejoicing in the midst of your difficulty? You may be saying, "Pastor, if you knew the problems I'm going through, you wouldn't be telling me to rejoice in the Lord." I'm not the one telling you to rejoice in the Lord—it's the apostle Paul, who is in prison, chained to a Roman soldier, waiting to have his head cut off. Is there anyone here going through a trial more difficult than that? If the apostle Paul can pray and rejoice in that, we too can make the choice to rejoice.

Did you know there's something about rejoicing that is highly contagious? Smiles are contagious. If you find someone without a smile tomorrow, why don't you give them one of yours? You'll keep yours—and they'll have one as well. The world will take note when Christians start rejoicing in

times of tribulation and adversity. One reason there are a lot of people out there who aren't interested in being a Christian is because they look at so many Christians and those Christians look like they've been vaccinated with vinegar. And the Christians are going through some of those same problems those lost people are. But when you can find a Christian who can rejoice when they're going through a struggle, the world wants to know what they know. That's exactly what Paul did ten years earlier in Acts 16:25. After Paul and Silas had been beaten, they were imprisoned and their hands bound in manacles and their feet placed in wooden stocks. At midnight, Paul and Silas began the original Jailhouse Rock. They began to sing praises unto the Lord in the middle of the night. I grant you, Paul and Silas did not feel like rejoicing: They were in prison. Their mission had failed. Their backs stung and bled from the beating. But they made the choice to rejoice. Sometimes we miss the small part of that passage that says, "The other prisoners were listening to them." I believe if you had gone back to the church at Philippi ten years after their imprisonment and you looked through the membership roll, I truly believe some of those imprisoned with Paul and Silas that night would be members of that church. We know the Roman guard Paul was chained to became a Christian and a member of that church. When people see you rejoicing, even in the midst of tribulation, they say, "There's something about him that's different." You're going to go through storms and endure problems—Jesus promised that. In John 16:33, he said, "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

B. The content of the request

Paul prayed a very specific prayer I call the content of the request. He prayed three things for the church at Philippi I believe God would have us to exhibit in our own lives. "And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight."

1. Love

The first request was love for one another. Love is the only sign of a Christian. It's not a fish, a cross or a bumper sticker. Jesus said, "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (John 13:35) They had love, but Paul prayed for their love to abound. Do you really love the believers in this church and beyond? The Bible says "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs." (1 Corinthians 13:4-5)

2. Purity

The second thing he prayed for was purity. The word purity literally means "tested by the sun." The word "sincere" is an interesting combination of two Latin words sine (without) and cera (wax). Back in Bible times, a man may be a potter and he would form a pot and in the process of forming it, it might break off. Sometimes potters would use pieces of wax to put the pot back together and then paint over it so you couldn't tell. But when the pot was exposed to heat or the sun, the wax would melt and the pot would fall apart. So when you bought pottery, you needed to know if the pot you were interested in had any wax in it. Pots with absolutely no cracks and no wax were advertised with the sign "sine cera." Those pots could endure the scrutiny of the sun. And that's what the Bible says Paul is praying for us, that we might be sincere. God doesn't want any

artificiality to your life. He wants sincerity and purity. The joy the Bible talks about is not the joy of a plastic smile, where you put on a smile when you walk in the door of your church and say, "Praise God, everything's okay." It is a joy that wells up from the inner-depths of your heart and is pure and sincere.

3. Fruit

The third thing Paul prayed for was the "fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ." Think about love and purity go together. The Bible says we're supposed to be pure, sincere, no crack, no wax, no artificiality. How can you tell whether one Christian has wax or one Christian is sincere. There is only one way and Jesus gives it in Matthew 7:16. "By their fruit you will recognize them." Two Christians may be going in two different directions and disagree, how is the best way to discern the truth? Look at their lives to examine their fruit. The fruit of the Christian life is: Love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, goodness, meekness, faith and self-control.

There is a part of the Christian I hope you understand. Jesus said, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener." (John 1) then he talks about how we are the branches and he says, "Every branch in me that doesn't bear fruit is chopped off by the Father." We understand that part, but then Jesus says something unpleasant. "Every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful." Pruning is not fun. Amen? Have you ever experienced God's pruning process? We prune fruit trees and rosebushes. You know it is a painful experience for the living organism, but the only reason God prunes us is the same reason you prune your fruit trees—so they can be more fruitful.

III. RECOGNIZE THE POTENTIAL

The third way we can keep smiling during a storm is to recognize the potential. Recognize what God is trying to do in you and through you. "He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." (Philippians 1:6)

A. See the problem from God's perspective

The first thing we learn is to see the problem from God's perspective. Paul says, "I'm in prison. I'm suffering. I'd rather be out there preaching the gospel, but I want to see my problem from God's perspective. God is looking at differently than I am." Your perspective makes all the difference in the world.

I came across this letter a college student wrote to her parents.

Dear Mom and Dad,

I'm so sorry to be so long in writing you. Unfortunately, all my stationery was destroyed the night our dormitory was set on fire by the demonstrators. I'm out of the hospital now and the doctors say my eyesight should return sooner or later. The wonderful boy, Bill, who rescued me from the fire, kindly offered to share his little apartment with me until the dorm is rebuilt. He comes from a good family, so you

won't be surprised when I tell you we're going to be married. In fact, since you've always wanted a grandchild, you'll be glad to know you'll be grandparents in several months.

Your Loving Daughter

P.S. Please disregard the above practice in English composition. There was no fire, I haven't been in the hospital; I'm not pregnant and I don't have a steady boyfriend. But I did get a D in French and an F in Chemistry and I just wanted to be sure you received the news in proper perspective.

Your perspective makes all the difference! If you're in that prison looking out and all you see is your difficulty, you're going to complain and moan. But if you have the ability as the Bible says in Ephesians 1 to recognize that we are seated with Christ in the heavenlies, you can look down from a different perspective and say, "This problem is not at all as big as I think it is." That's what Paul was doing. That's why he wrote Romans 8:28, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." He was looking at it from God's perspective.

B. See the process from God's intention

The second thing we see that we need to do is see the process from God's intention. What is this process of what God is trying to do in us and through us? It says in verse 6 that it is God who started salvation. "He who began a good work in you." God commenced it; God continues it and God will complete it. I firmly believe that as Christians, we can never lose our salvation. Our salvation is secure because God started it, God continues it and God will finish it. It is not up to me to complete it. It is up to me to allow God to do in and through me what he wants to do.

We're all under construction. A number of years ago, there was a children's song that said, "He's still working on me; To make me what I need to be. It took him just a week to make the moon and stars; The sun and the earth and Jupiter and Mars. How loving and patient He must be; 'Cause He's still workin' on me." (Joel Hemphill, 1980) I'm not perfect. Anybody here perfect? Only a perfect Savior. That's what God is trying to do in us. He's working on us—sometimes it's painful—but the finished product is going to be beautiful.

CONCLUSION

Some of you are hurting. Some of you are suffering for one reason or another. God may be doing something special in you and you don't even recognize it.

A man and a woman entered a china shop in England. The man admired a beautiful teacup on a shelf and asked to look at it. "I've never seen a teacup like it. It's beautiful!" Suddenly the teacup spoke. "You don't understand. I haven't always been a teacup. There was a time when I was nothing but red clay. My master rolled and kneaded and pounded me over and over and I yelled, 'Leave me alone!' But he only smiled and said, 'Not yet.' Then I was placed on a spinning wheel," the teacup said, "suddenly I was spun around and around and around. 'Stop it! I'm getting dizzy!' I

screamed. The master only nodded and said, 'Not yet.' Then he put me in an oven. I've never felt such heat! I wonder why he wanted to burn me. And I yelled and I knocked on the door and I could see him through the opening and read his lips as he shook his head: 'Not yet.' Finally, the door did open. He put me on the shelf and I began to cool down. 'There. That's better,' I said. Then suddenly, he took me and brushed me and painted me all over. The fumes were horrible! I thought I would gag. 'Stop it! Stop it!' I cried. He only nodded. 'Not yet.' Then suddenly, he put me back in an oven—not the first one, but one *twice* as hot! I knew I would suffocate. I begged, I pleaded, I screamed, I cried. All the time I could see him through the opening, nodding his head and saying, 'Not yet.' And I knew there would be no hope and I would never make it. I was ready to give up. But the door opened and he took me out and placed me on a shelf. An hour later, he handed me a mirror and said, 'Look at yourself.' And I did. And I said, 'That's not me! It couldn't be me! I'm beautiful.' He said, 'I want you to remember; I know it hurt to be rolled and pounded. But if I'd left you, you would have dried up. I know it made you dizzy to spin around on the wheel, but if I'd stopped, you would have crumbled. I know it hurt and it was hot and disagreeable in the oven, but if I hadn't put you there, you would have cracked. I know the fumes were bad when I brushed you and painted you all over; but if I hadn't, you would never have hardened. There would have been no color to your life. And if I hadn't put you back in the second over, you would not have survived for very long and the hardness would not have held. Now you are a finished product. You're what I had in mind when I first began with you.'"

God is conforming us to the image of Jesus Christ. Although at times the process may be painful, he says, "Be of good cheer. Keep your smile when you're going through your storm."

OUTLINE

I. REMEMBER THE POSITIVE (v. 3)

A. Minimize your failures

B. Maximize your friends

II. REJOICE IN PRAYER (v. 4)

A. The choice to rejoice

B. The content of the request

1. Love (v. 9)

2. Purity (v. 10)

3. Fruit (v. 10)

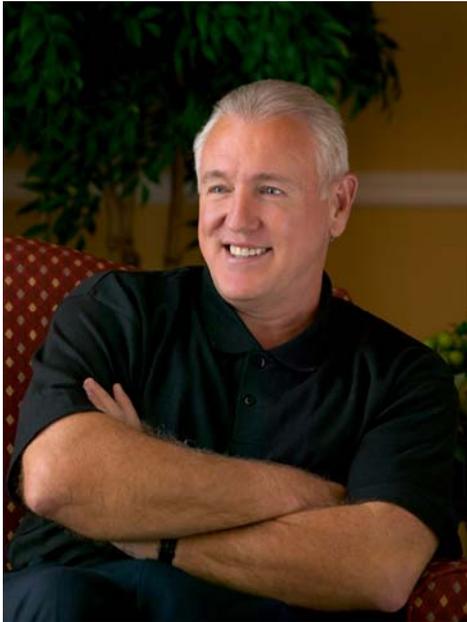
III. RECOGNIZE THE POTENTIAL (v. 6)

A. See the problem from God's perspective

B. See the process from God's intention

"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." *Romans 8:28*

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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes