



Courage to Be Joyful in All Circumstances **March 2, 2025**

What do these people have in common?

Viktor Frankl: A Holocaust survivor and psychiatrist, Frankl survived the concentration camps. His book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, explores how he maintained hope and joy by focusing on his inner freedom and the meaning he found in life.

Malala Yousefsai: Despite being shot by the Taliban for advocating for girls' education, she remains resilient and joyful, continuing her activism with even more determination. She won the Nobel Peace Prize at the age of 17, the youngest recipient ever.

Nick Vujicic: Born without arms and legs, Nick has faced immense physical and emotional challenges. However, he finds joy and purpose in life, by being a motivational speaker and author, inspiring millions with his positive outlook and determination.

Helen Keller: Despite losing her eyesight and hearing at a young age, Helen Keller found joy in learning and advocating for others with disabilities.

Nelson Mandela: Imprisoned for 27 years for his fight against apartheid, Mandela maintained his hope and joy. After his release, he became South Africa's first black president and continued to work towards reconciliation and peace.

What do these people have in common? They all had the courage to be joyful in difficult circumstances.

Their stories remind us that joy can be found even in the darkest of times through resilience, purpose, and a positive mindset. As we wrap up our sermon series on being courageous, we will look at the example of one more inspirational figure...the Apostle Paul.

We have discussed having the courage to be vulnerable, gracious, last and first. And now...having the courage to be joyful in all circumstances.

I have one last Bible Trivia question. It fits perfectly here. Ready? “What is the key verse from our text for today?”

Answer: “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!” Paul was explaining how having Christ is what helps us to have the courage to be joyful no matter what.

Paul is now opening wide the possibility for all people, everyone, young and old, rich and poor, people with weak wills and less than impressive characters, ...making it possible for anyone who wants to, to actually be courageous and joyful in every circumstance in life.

As I think on the lives of those I just named, they are heroes. It gives me joy to celebrate their lives. But at the same their towering characters and vast impact on the world...pushes away the hope of ever becoming like them. Just pushes it away, out of reach, their kind of glory and achievements is for a select few.

But when Paul reveals the secret to how to have courage and being joyful no matter what, is having Christ. Well, we have Christ through faith and the Spirit of Christ inside of us through baptism! We have what we need.

And so, with Christ, with Jesus giving us strength, we can **“Rejoice in the Lord always.”** Having Christ brings this idea of having the courage to be joyful in all circumstance...near, brings it within arm’s reach, makes it a real possibility, something we can do daily even.

But is Paul a credible example? Should we listen to him? Did Paul ever experience any difficulties? Any real difficulties where he experienced Christ giving him courage to choose joy and rejoice always?

Here are just some of the challenges Paul endured:

1. Paul was imprisoned multiple times for preaching the gospel including Philippi, Caesarea, and Rome.
2. In 2 Corinthians, Paul mentions receiving "forty lashes minus one" five times and being beaten with rods three times.
3. Paul was stoned and left for dead in Lystra.
4. He experienced shipwrecks on three occasions and spent a night and a day adrift at sea.

5. Paul faced constant dangers from rivers, robbers, his own people, Gentiles, and false believers. He also endured dangers in the city and in the wilderness.
6. He often went without food, water, and sleep, often experiencing the cold and exposure.
7. Paul speaks of a "thorn in the flesh," and wasn't Sponge Bob, but an unnamed and persistent affliction or ailment that he asked God to remove, but which he ultimately accepted as a means to rely on God's grace.

Wow, I think Paul knew what he was talking about. I probably would have folded like a cheap card table with just one of those experiences. But Paul learned how, in Christ, to have the courage to be joyful in all of those different circumstances.

So, what were some of the circumstances that Paul names in our text where he chose to have the courage to be joyful? We are going to look at only two out of the possible five or six different circumstances Paul faced in our text.

Two examples where Paul chose the courage to being joyful.

First example, in the first verse, Paul is choosing to be joyful even though he was separated from his church family that he dearly loved and missed. He couldn't be with them because he was in prison, far away in Rome.

We read, **"Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends!"**

Here Paul greets them tenderly two times. Once at the beginning of this verse and then again at the end. Translation is a weak choice..."my brothers and sisters" and "dear friends" is what we read but originally in the Greek it is "beloved". Beloved is a better choice.

And Paul wrote, **"you whom I love and long for"**. Can you hear the ache in his words, yearning and craving to be with them?

But then we see he chooses joy, exerts his courage to be joyful in even this circumstance. We see that when he calls them, **"my joy and crown"**.

In those days, victors in the Roman games were given a laurel wreath of either ivy or gold in the shape of leaves, placed on their heads. Roman Caesars and rulers had their likeness stamped on the coins of the day wearing this kind of wreath.

Paul is celebrating his love for Philippi with the joy equal to having competed and won an Olympic gold medal! Courageously, poetically, choosing, disciplining

his body like an athlete to choose to have great joy in his church even though he was imprisoned and also more than likely facing a death sentence.

Paul obviously felt rejoicing in the Lord meant rejoicing in your church, reminding us that having joy in one's own church is worthwhile. If it was good enough for Paul.

And that joy is not an individual endeavor. To know the fullness of joy means being involved in a church, with others.

Being joyful then, for Paul, required living in community, being engaged and involved with his brothers and sisters in the faith. Reminding us church can and should be a place of joy. And that we choose to be joyful in church even in the middle of its difficulties.

Our next example are the next three verses, **⁶ Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.**

We shared a number of difficulties Paul faced. Paul knows what he is talking about. He knew significant and repetitious times of high anxiety. Through multiple anxious experiences, Paul is showing us a pathway to courage and joy.

And Paul is showing us our source of peace in anxiety is God, to pray, and receive God's peace. It might not be instantaneous, but our joy is in knowing peace will prevail.

I am grateful for Paul mentioning anxiety. I believe we live in anxious times with maybe more reasons to be anxious than ever before.

And our denomination, I am proud we acknowledge and affirm, that in some circumstances we need to battle anxiety with prayer AND medications. Please hear this, Paul is NOT advocating for us to over spiritualize anxiety. Rejoice that medicine and mental health has advanced as far as it has today. We can encourage one another to seek help and medication if needed. And we can encourage one another to view medication and support as part of God's answer to our prayers when we are anxious and stressed.

I am not sure we can get rid of all anxiety in our lives. Sometimes, we have to feel the anxiety and do "it" anyway...do life, get up, get dressed, and face the world.

This week I had a pastor colleague show great courage and vulnerability. She is retiring soon and shared she won't miss her battles with anxiety. She admitted she keeps Imodium AD at church to help her with her battles with anxiety on Sundays.

She is choosing courage and joy in the face of anxiety. And I admire her for that, choosing courage and joy for over 30 years and being faithful in serving God.

As we close, we are reminded of the incredible courage it takes to choose joy. Paul, writing from prison, encourages us to "**rejoice in the Lord always**" (Philippians 4:4). Always, always rejoice.

Paul's unwavering faith and joy, despite all of his difficult circumstances, serves as a powerful and encouraging example to us. We can find courage to be joyful because Christ will be faithful to help us.

And that joy is more accurately understood as a fruit or by product of the Christian life. Joy abounds through having Christ alive within us.

One last beautiful image. When we have the courage to be joyful in all circumstances, leaning on Jesus with joy overflowing in us. When we have joyful lives, joyful living is the sign that Christ resides in our hearts, proof of Christ reigning, Jesus is our source, the One empowering us with the courage to rejoice.

Well, it's just like the flag that flies over Buckingham Palace. The flag celebrates that King Charles III is in residence. The flag tells everyone the happy news our King is home!

Our joy is like that flag. Our joy, flying over our lives and relationships and in church...celebrates that Christ, the King of Kings, is at home, has taken up residence in our hearts. The joy we express in worship, is like waving a flag, a beautiful way to show the world...Jesus has risen from the grave and is alive in me.

Let's choose thru Christ to have the courage to be joyful in all circumstances; so that all may know joy! Amen!

Let's pray.

Lord, you know the only possible way we can follow's Paul example and teaching to rejoice in all our circumstances is as we lean on you moment by moment.

I ask by your Spirit, that took up residence in us through our baptisms, to right now, extend all the strength and courage we need to choose joy. No matter what we are facing, our own deaths, illness, loneliness, anxiety within or pressures from the outside. May your joy and peace reign.

And even at the receiving of the communal elements, empower our spirits.
Remind us You are within each one of us, sustaining us, growing the fruit of joy in
us. Because of your grace and mercy and deep abiding love for us. Amen.