

Joy in Jail

Small Group Leader Notes

We emphasized last week that people are either optimists or pessimists. A pessimist would say, “this is the most joyous day of my life!” You might be thinking that sounds rather optimistic. However, an optimist would say, “this is the most joyous day of my life *so far!*” As the Apostle Paul sits in prison, we see him conclude that his current situation is clearly building up to more. He is confident in that, and he rejoices knowing that God is at work.

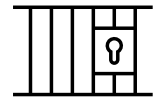


Read Philippians 1:19-30. For what reasons did Paul express joy in these verses? What did he know?

Paul understood how this thing ends. Sometimes, when circumstances are especially difficult, we understand what Paul wrote in verse 23. But that’s usually a tired, “I’m done,” kind of attitude. Paul’s choice of joy in his circumstances wasn’t like that, because of verse 24. It is a joy for God to use us to equip and encourage the church, and to evangelize to the lost.



Paul undoubtedly knows that he will be delivered from his current situation (v 19). As a Roman citizen, he could have been confident in the legal system. However, it is evident Paul’s confidence is in the Philippian believers’ prayers and in God’s provision. In what areas of life do you find yourself putting hope in things outside of Christ?



There is a practical reason behind Paul’s confidence. As a Roman citizen, he had rights and privileges that could have guaranteed his deliverance. However, Paul’s statement in verse 19 indicates that his trust was in nothing but God and the power of prayer. Our hope is that your group will spend time discussing prayer. For instance, we might find ourselves fervently praying for a loved one’s health at the news of a scary diagnosis. But when we truly examine our hearts, we realize that our hope is in the treatment to heal, rather than on God working through the treatment.

This is a personal question that might be uncomfortable for some of your group members to answer. We encourage you to have something planned to say about a time where you put more trust in something rather than the Lord. Being transparent about something in your life might break the ice and encourage other group members to open up.



It is safe to say that most of us believe in the power of prayer. It is also safe to say that our prayer life doesn't always reflect that high value we have of prayer. What prevents you from regularly praying to God for those in your Oikos?

This is not meant to be a judgmental question. We have all struggled at times to develop a regular and meaningful prayer life, even though we recognize the power and importance of prayer. Opening up and sharing our shortcomings helps us overcome our complacency. Use this as a time to encourage each other as we strive to live for Christ together.



Read Philippians 1:21-24.



As a group, process what Paul is saying here. How does his own desire conflict with what the Philippian church needs? Ultimately, what is the outcome Paul hopes for?

There is a lot to process in these few verses. "Living is Christ," restates the theme of verse 20. If he carried on living, every aspect of Paul's life would continue to reveal Christ, which would make his life fruitful and worthwhile. Likewise, his death would be gain since it would usher him into Christ's presence. Paul felt as though he was in a dilemma, acknowledging the benefits of both outcomes. The phrase, "is more necessary for you," expresses Paul's servant heart. A selfish outlook would make Paul prefer glorification and reward (via his death) over continued life and ministry. However, his priority, was that Christ be honored and glorified.



How does Paul's definition of life differ from how many people today view the purpose of life? Where do you see this tension most clearly lived out in our community?

Paul's definition of life is clear- to glorify God through the transforming work of the gospel. The Westminster Shorter Catechism states that the chief purpose of mankind is, "to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever." As we look at our community, it is evident that most people have a different definition for the purpose of life. The point of this question is to solidify our purpose in life, and to highlight the fact that our community is in need of an eternal joy that we, as believers, can point them towards.