



# DISCIPLES & THE EARLY CHURCH

## Unit 7 • The Philippian Church

### UNIT DESCRIPTION

The church at Philippi resulted from Paul's second missionary journey in Europe. Philippi was a port city in the province of Macedonia, and the church there was probably established in the early 50s AD.

At the time this letter was written, Paul was in prison and had just received a gift of money from the Philippians by their messenger Epaphroditus. Paul's purpose for this letter was to thank them for their generosity. He also took the opportunity to encourage them and reinforce some teaching as well. Themes include the need to grow to be more like Christ Jesus, especially in humility; the need to persevere and learn to rejoice in the midst of suffering; the importance of unity; a warning against the Judaizers and their teaching of works and the encouraging hope of heaven. Undergirding it all, Paul described a life filled with a passion to let nothing stand in the way of knowing Christ Jesus personally and of reaching out to the lost so that they might know Him, too.



# SINGING IN THE SLAMMER

Disciples & Early Church • U7#1 1st-3rd Gr. • Jan.5, 2025

## Concept

Jesus is all-sufficient in every circumstance.

## Goal

Students will learn that we can rejoice because the Lord is near, He will watch over us and give us peace in all circumstances.

## Passage

Acts 16:16-34

Key Verse: "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!"

Philippians 4:4

## Planning Ahead

Lesson Supplies	Craft Supplies
<p><b>Lesson:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>"Spread of the Early Church" laminated map</i></li><li>• Bibles</li></ul> <p><b>Learning Activity #2:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>Laminated clouds &amp; stars (clouds printed on 3 different colors of cardstock, stars with "rejoices" printed on yellow cardstock), 3 sets</i></li></ul>	<p><b>Activity Stations:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>Adventure Bible Handbook</i></li><li>• "Philippians" crossword puzzle, 1/student</li><li>• Pencils</li><li>• 25 sheets of gray construction paper, cut into 8½" x 2+" strips</li><li>• Transparent tape</li></ul>

### \*TEACHERS PLEASE NOTE

For clarity, the italicized areas in the Planning Ahead section indicate supplies that are in—and should be returned to—your classroom SHARED SUPPLY bag.

# Background Information (for the teacher)

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"Once again, as so often before, the apostle stresses the duty of rejoicing. He says, Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. The exhortation is repeated, probably because on the surface it seems so unreasonable to rejoice in obedience to a command, and perhaps even more unreasonable to rejoice always, under all circumstances no matter how trying. Can one truly rejoice when the memory of past sins vexes the soul, when dear ones are suffering, when one is being persecuted, facing possible death? But there is Paul, who does, indeed, remember his past sins (Phil. 3:6; cf. Gal. 1:13; I Cor. 15:19), whose friends are really suffering (Phil. 1:29, 30), who is even now a prisoner facing possible death; yet, who rejoices and tells others to do likewise! It is evident from this that circumstances alone do not determine the condition of heart and mind. A Christian can be joyful within when without all is dark and dreary. He rejoices in the Lord, that is, because of his oneness with Christ, the fruit of whose Spirit is joy (Gal. 5:22). This is reasonable, for in and through Christ all things — also those that seem most unfavorable — work together for good (Rom. 8:28).

"It was not unreasonable for Paul to exhort the Philippians to rejoice, for the disposition of joy can be and should be cultivated. This can be done, as the apostle indicates in the context (see verse 8), by meditating on the proper subjects, that is, by taking account of the things that should stand out in our consciousness. For Paul such reasons for joy, the joy unspeakable and full of glory, were the following: that he was a saved individual whose purpose was in his entire person to magnify Christ (1:19, 20); that this Savior, in whose cross, crown, and coming again he glories (2:5-11; 3:20, 21; 4:5), was able and willing to supply his every need (4:11-13, 19, 20); that others, too, were being saved (1:6; 2:17, 18), the apostle himself being used by God for this glorious purpose; that he had many friends and helpers in the gospel-cause, who together formed a glorious fellowship in the Lord (1:5; 2:19-30; 4:1, 10); that God was causing all things, even bonds, to work together for good (1:12-18; cf. Rom. 8:28), so that even death is gain when life is Christ (1:21, 23); and that at all times he has freedom of access to the throne of grace (4:6). Let the Philippians meditate on these things and rejoice, yes rejoice always." [1]

It is our fallen tendency to focus on our circumstances rather than the God through whom NOTHING is impossible. However, as we purpose to seek God in our circumstances as Paul did, we also have the awesome privilege to see and experience God's goodness, faithfulness and sovereignty in the most amazing and miraculous ways. He indeed gives us great cause to rejoice in Him ALWAYS!

[1] William Hendriksen, *Philippians, Colossians and Philemon*, Ó1979 by Baker Book House, pp. 192-193.

## Set Up

Place laminated cloud/stars (cloud-side up) in semi-hidden areas of the room.

## Incorporation Lg. Group

### Activity Stations:

- **Craft – Paper Chains**
  - **Instructions:** Have the students make paper chains to be used in the skit—the more the merrier!
- **Drama**
  - **Instructions:** Explain to students that they will participate as prisoners in the skit. They will take their chains and sit off to the side with their hands and legs wrapped in the chains. At the cue of the earthquake sound, they will break their chains.
- **"Philippians" Crossword Puzzle**
  - **Instructions:** Give each student a copy of the "Philippians" crossword puzzle. Complete the puzzle using the clues shown. Read Acts 16:16-34 and pages 202-203 of the Adventure Bible Handbook to help with the answers.

## Introduction Lg. Group

This week we're beginning a study about the church at Philippi. Philippi was a city in the country of Greece. (Show location on the large map.) Paul and his friend Silas went to Philippi, shared God's good news and many people in Philippi came to know Jesus. Even though they were doing wonderful things for God, it didn't seem to go very smoothly for Paul and Silas. They were put into prison. Our key verse today is Philippians 4:4, "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!" We'll find out why Paul said that.

## Lesson Lg. Group

Gather around and listen as I read **Acts 16:16-34**.

- Why were Paul and Silas beaten and put in prison? Did they break the law?
- As you read this passage did you think about how you would have acted? Would you have acted the same way Paul and Silas did? (Give students some time to respond.) Most people would be mad or wonder why God would let bad things happen to them. It's possible that Paul and Silas felt that way at first, but they were able to rejoice even when they were beaten and locked in prison.

Now let's turn to **Philippians 4** and read **verses 4-9**.

So Paul obviously followed his own advice to rejoice in all circumstances, didn't he? He said to rejoice because the Lord is near, He will watch over you and give you peace in all circumstances. The key to rejoicing in all circumstances is that Paul and Silas thought about God rather than their circumstances. So, they started to sing. What do you think the jailer thought when he heard Paul and Silas singing and talking? He was probably very surprised that they weren't moaning and complaining.

## Lesson Continued

When the earthquake hit and the jail broke open, the jailer thought all of the prisoners had escaped. Since he was responsible for them, he was afraid he would be in big trouble. But what did Paul do? (He called out to him and told him they were still there.) This must really have surprised the jailer since this was their chance to escape. The jailer realized that these men were very different from him. So he asked Paul and Silas how to be saved. Do you remember what they said? (Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved.) Then he took Paul & Silas to his house, and he and his whole family came to know Jesus. So because Paul and Silas believed God, they rejoiced in a difficult situation and, as a result, the jailer wanted to know Jesus.

Do you think you would have acted the same way Paul and Silas did? (Give children some time to respond.) Most people would be mad or wonder why God would such horrible things happen to them. It's possible that Paul and Silas felt that way. But they knew Jesus and that all His plans for them were good so they were able to rejoice even when they were beaten and locked in prison. They thought about who God is, talked to each other about God's greatness, rather than complaining and thinking about their bad circumstances.

Do you know that rejoicing is a choice? It is a choice to look for the good God will do even though bad things are happening to you. Jesus wasn't happy about getting beaten and nailed to the cross. Because we all sin and are separate from God, we need His forgiveness to be His child. He wants everyone to be His child. Jesus knew if He died on the cross He would pay for all of our sins and offer us His forgiveness as a free gift. He rejoices each time someone asks for His death on the cross to pay for their sins. That was the joy that gave Him the courage to suffer and die for us.

### Transition

We're going to join the other classes for a skit. We'll go back in time and listen in on Paul and Silas's conversation as they talk in jail. Let's grab our chains and go.

### Learning Activity#1 Lg. Group

**Drama – "Singing in the Slammer" skit performed by Drama Team**

### Transition

So, like Paul and Silas, we need to remember to "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!" (Philippians 4:4). Get ready for an expedition. We're going on a search for joy.

### Learning Activity#2 Sm. Groups

**"Search for Joy"**

**Goal:** Application—to help students learn to look for what God is doing in the midst of bad times.

## Learning Activity#2 Continued

**Instructions:** Divide the students into 3 groups. Assign each group a color. Have the teams search for the 5 hidden clouds matching their color. After they find all their clouds, gather the students in their groups to discuss the situations on the clouds. The cloud side describes difficult situations and the star side reasons to rejoice. Begin by reading the first cloud. Ask the students if they can think of reasons to rejoice in that situation. Then turn the cloud over see if they came up with the printed "reason to rejoice." Continue with the rest of the clouds. Conclude with prayer.

CLOUDS	STARS
<p>Someone wants me to be their only friend.</p>	<p>Because Jesus loves everyone I can love everyone. God can help me teach this person to have more than one friend. I can rejoice that even if they reject me, God still loves me.</p>
<p>Someone called me names at school</p>	<p>Jesus reminds me that if I know Him I am His precious child. He loves me just the way I am. I can thank God that I can choose to forgive and love that person.</p>
<p>I'm not good at soccer... or reading... or writing...</p>	<p>God can help me keep trying and practicing. I can thank God that there are things I can do well because of the way He has made me. Because I have God's love I don't have to be afraid to fail.</p>
<p>My grandfather... aunt... cousin... sibling... parent... friend is sick.</p>	<p>I can pray for them. I can tell them about Jesus if they don't know Him. If they are Christians I can ask God to help me comfort and love them. I can thank God because He will comfort them.</p>
<p>I'm embarrassed that I did something foolish.</p>	<p>Jesus says that I can never be foolish enough to make Him stop loving me. I can admit that I am embarrassed and that I do foolish things. I can learn from my mistake. Because I have God's love I don't have to be afraid to fail.</p>

## Learning Activity#2 Continued

- Do you ever wonder why God allows bad things to happen to His children?
- Is it hard for you to think about God rather than to complain and think about your bad circumstances? How could the Holy Spirit help you learn to rejoice rather than complain?

**Missions Prayer:** Talk about and pray for the Oasis Giving Campaign.

Let's pray and thank God for His faithfulness and His promise to be with us always. We can ask Him for help in learning to rejoice always.

## Optional Activity

### **Game – Popcorn Tag [1]**

**Instructions:** All players hop up and down on both feet. When "it" tags a player, the two immediately join hands. The two hopping "its" set out to tag other helpless hoppers. When other players are tagged, they join the hopping chain until there is only one lonely hopper left.

[1] Bob Gregson, The Incredible Indoor Games Book, © 1982 by Fearon Teacher Aids, "Indoor Tag Games", p. 86.