

Paul's Joy in Prison

BIBLE PASSAGE: Philippians 1:12-30

MAIN POINT: Paul told the Philippians to be joyful.

KEY PASSAGE: Philippians 1:21

BIG PICTURE QUESTION: When should we tell others about Jesus? We should tell about Jesus all the time.

**TEACH
THE STORY**
(15–20 MINUTES)
PAGE 40



**EXPERIENCE
THE STORY**
(25–30 MINUTES)
PAGE 42



**REVIEW
THE STORY**
(10+ MINUTES)
PAGE 44



Leader BIBLE STUDY

Paul wrote his letter to the Philippian believers when he was a prisoner at a house in Rome. Paul had planted the church in Philippi about 10 years earlier. The letter begins with thanksgiving and joy, a remarkable response in light of Paul's lengthy imprisonment. He was waiting to present his case to Caesar, the emperor of Rome.

People began to hear about Paul and why he was a prisoner. The whole imperial guard knew that Paul was in chains because he followed Jesus. Despite what seemed like a series

of setbacks, the sufferings Paul faced actually advanced the gospel—and for this reason, Paul was joyful.

As you teach preschoolers, remind them that joy is one of the qualities seen in the fruit of the Spirit. (Gal. 5:22) Explain that joy is delight that comes from knowing and serving God. Paul's joy was not self-generated. He didn't muster up joy because he was super-spiritual or naively optimistic about his circumstances. Paul had joy because he was focused on Jesus.

Think about suffering in your own life. How do you typically respond to suffering? What does your reaction to suffering reveal about what you believe about God? What does it reveal about what you most treasure in life?

No matter what chaos or suffering surrounded Paul, these realities were constant: the gospel was being spread, Jesus was Lord, and Paul knew Him. This eternal perspective was essential to Paul's peace and joy. God used Paul's difficult circumstances to spread the gospel and build the church. Paul knew that because Jesus suffered to bring salvation to the world, believers doing God's work would suffer too.

Joy in suffering does not discredit grief and pain, but it gives hope in difficult times. This joy is rooted in the faithfulness of God, who ultimately does everything for His glory and our good.



Additional resources for each session are available at gospelproject.com. For free training and session-by-session help, visit <http://www.ministrygrid.com/web/thegospelproject>.

The BIBLE STORY

Bible Storytelling Tips

- **Live-action rebus:** Before the session, draw pictures on paper plates to resemble people, places, or things mentioned frequently in today's story. Each time you mention one of the images on the plate, hold it in front of your face. Allow the boys and girls to say what it represents. Continue the story with preschoolers filling in the item represented.
- **Tie it together:** Display the Key Passage Poster on a focal wall. Briefly discuss the key passage. When you reach the key passage, pause and point to the poster to help boys and girls connect today's Bible story with it.

Paul's Joy in Prison

Philippians 1:12-30

Paul was living as a prisoner in Rome with a guard who watched him. Some Jewish people had tried to hurt him because they did not like what he believed. Paul believed and told others that Jesus had risen from the dead. Now **Paul was waiting to meet with Caesar, the emperor of Rome.**

Believers visited Paul. Some sent him gifts. **Paul wrote a letter to the Christians in Philippi. He thanked them for sending a gift and told them about his work.**

This is what Paul wrote: "I want you to know that even though the Jews tried to stop me, everything that happened has actually helped me tell more people the good news about Jesus." As a prisoner, Paul's special guards were with him all the time, so Paul had many chances to tell them about Jesus. Other believers bravely shared the good news about Jesus too.

Paul wrote, **"Thank you for praying for me. I know that God has given me the Holy Spirit to help me. I hope that I will never be afraid or embarrassed about anything. I want to be bold and honor Jesus no matter what. If I live, I live for Jesus. If I die for Jesus, I will live with Him forever."**

Paul knew that being with Jesus is far better than anything else. But while he was alive, Paul wanted to help other believers.

"No matter what happens," Paul wrote, **"live your life in a way that honors Jesus. Then, whether I am with you or away, I will hear that you are working together to share the good news about Jesus.**

“Do not let anyone scare you away from doing this work. This is the work God has given you to do—not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for Him.”

Christ Connection: Paul faced hard times, but God used him to share the good news about Jesus and to help the church. Paul knew that because Jesus suffered to rescue people from their sins, believers who do God’s work will suffer too.

Teach THE STORY

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Welcome and worship with song

- “Kingdom Kid” song
- “Don’t Stop” song

Greet preschoolers with a smile. As preschoolers arrive, sing an action song such as “Kingdom Kid” to engage them and help them feel welcomed. Begin worship by leading preschoolers in “Don’t Stop.”

Watch or tell the Bible story

- Bible
- “Paul’s Joy in Prison” video (optional)
- Bible Story Picture Poster
- Main Point Poster
- Giant Timeline or Big Story Circle

Ask preschoolers to raise their hands if they have ever received a letter in the mail. Ask them if they have ever sent a letter to someone else.

SAY • In our Bible story, Paul was in prison when he wrote a letter to say thank you to some believers who had sent him gifts. Even in prison, Paul was telling people about Jesus. Listen to our Bible story to hear what Paul wrote to in his letter.

Open your Bible to Philippians 1. Show the video or tell the Bible story using the provided storytelling tips. Use the bolded version of the Bible story for young preschoolers.

Practice the key passage and a Bible skill

- Bible
- Key Passage Poster
- Bible marker or ribbon
- “To Live Is Christ” song

Place a Bible marker or ribbon at Philippians 1:21. Invite a few volunteers to come up one at a time and open your Bible to the key passage.

SAY • Paul wrote in his letter to the believers that he wanted to be bold and honor Jesus no matter what. He told them that if he lived, he would live for Jesus. And if he died, he would live with Jesus forever.

Sing the key passage song “To Live Is Christ” together.

Learn the big picture question and answer

SAY • Our big picture question is: *When should we tell others about Jesus? We should tell about Jesus all the time.* Paul told the believers that even in hard times, God can use us to tell others the joyful news about Jesus.

• Big Picture Question Poster

Respond through song and prayer

SAY • **Paul told the Philippians to be joyful.** Paul faced hard times, but God used him to share the good news about Jesus and to help the church. Paul knew that because Jesus suffered to rescue people from their sins, believers who do God’s work will suffer too.

• Main Point Poster
• “Don’t Stop” song
• “You Will Be My Witnesses” song
• “Saved by Grace Through Faith” song
• offering basket

Sing “Don’t Stop” and “You Will Be My Witnesses” as preschoolers move with the music. Prepare for prayer by singing “Saved by Grace Through Faith.” You may also collect an offering.

SAY • God, thank You for giving Paul joy to tell others about Jesus even in hard times. Thank You for Jesus who died and rose from the dead, so we could live with You forever. Help us be joyful in telling others about You even in hard times. We love You. Amen.

Transition to experience the story

• countdown video (optional)

Experience THE STORY

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• paper

Play a “deliver a letter” relay

Give each child a sheet of paper folded like a letter. Form teams. Explain that when you say *go*, the first child in each line must walk his or her letter to a designated delivery spot across the room, then walk back and high-five the next child in line who will repeat the action. The first team to deliver all their letters is the winner. Play as time allows.

SAY • Paul wrote a letter to the Philippians believers. **Paul told the Philippians to be joyful.** Paul knew that because Jesus suffered to rescue people from their sins, believers who do God's work will suffer too.

Tell the good news

Give each preschooler a cardboard tube to decorate with markers and stickers. Guide preschoolers to use their tube as a megaphone and practice telling their friends everything they know about Jesus and the gospel.

SAY • **Paul told the Philippians to be joyful.** Paul never stopped telling people about Jesus. No matter what happened to him, Paul knew that being with Jesus was more important than anything. He trusted God to protect him and give him opportunities to tell others about God's love and His Son, Jesus.

- cardboard tubes, 1 per child
- markers
- stickers

Create JOY wrist bands

Cut a foam strip to fit a preschooler's wrist. Affix an adhesive hook-and-loop fastener to make a band. Invite preschoolers to draw smiley faces on their bands. Challenge older preschoolers write *J-O-Y* on their bands. Carefully monitor the use of permanent markers as children decorate.

SAY • These bands look like bracelets. Paul may have worn chains while he was in prison. He still found a way to write to the believers in a church to help them.

Paul told the Philippians to be joyful, even when sometimes bad things happened. He wanted them to be joyful because of Jesus, who suffered to rescue people from their sins.

- foam strips, 1 per child
- scissors
- adhesive hook-and-loop fasteners
- permanent markers
- foam shapes (optional)
- stickers (optional)

Praise God with music

Invite preschoolers to play musical instruments as the key passage or unit theme songs play.

SAY • We can have joy and praise God all the time, no matter what happens. **Paul told the Philippians to be joyful** and remember God's love for them.

- musical or rhythm instruments
- "Don't Stop" song (optional)
- "To Live Is Christ" song (optional)

Write in cornmeal

Cover a table with a tablecloth. Spread a thin layer of cornmeal onto several baking sheets. Invite preschoolers to use the eraser end of an unsharpened pencil to write in the cornmeal.

SAY • **Paul told the Philippians to be joyful**. Paul faced hard times, but God used him to share the good news about Jesus and to help the church.

- Allergy Alert download
- tablecloth
- baking sheets
- cornmeal
- unsharpened pencils

Transition to review the story

- countdown video (optional)

Review THE STORY

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Review

Point to the giant timeline or big story circle as you review today's Bible story. Ask the following review questions:

1. Where was Paul when he wrote a letter to the Philippian believers? (*living as a prisoner in Rome*)
2. How did Paul feel as he lived as a prisoner? (*He was joyful.*)
3. Because Jesus suffered to rescue people from their sin, what did Paul tell the believers they would also do? (*They would suffer too.*)
4. ***When should we tell others about Jesus? We should tell about Jesus all the time.***

SAY • Paul was living as a prisoner and faced hard times to tell others about Jesus. **Paul told the Philippians to be joyful** as they told people about Jesus. Paul reminded them that if he lived, he lived for Jesus. And if he died for Jesus, then he would live with Jesus forever.

Sing the unit theme song or key passage song.

Pray

Invite preschoolers to tell you any prayer requests they have.

SAY • God, thank You for the letter Paul wrote to the

believers reminding them to be joyful. Help us to be joyful in telling about Jesus who suffered to die for our sins. May we be bold in telling others the good news of God's great love for us. We love You. Amen.

Missions story

If your preschool ministry is planning a missions activity, discuss the activity, the reasons for it, and your group's progress. If you are not participating in a missions activity, talk about how telling the good news is not always easy. You may also show the "Casting the Dye Part 4" missions video.

SAY • The Dye family obeyed God and moved to Atlanta without jobs, but they knew God would provide, and He did through a shaved ice business. The Dyes prayed for a way to meet lots of people and that's what God did with the shaved ice truck. They are able to meet people and share how Jesus is real. Let's pray for them as they use their shaved ice business to meet new people to tell them about Jesus.

- "Casting the Dye Part 4" mission video
- "Missions Prayer Cards" printable, 1 per child

Pass a gift

Form a circle. Play music as preschoolers pass a wrapped gift around the circle. When the music stops, the preschooler holding the gift will ask the rest of the group the big picture question or he may attempt to say the key passage. Give help as needed.

SAY • Other believers visited Paul while he was a prisoner. Some sent him gifts. In Paul's letter to the Christians in Philippi, he thanked them for sending a gift and told them to be joyful. God used Paul to share the good news about Jesus and to help the church.

- wrapped gift
- "Don't Stop" song (optional)
- "To Live Is Christ" song (optional)