

# Finding Joy in Discouraging Times

Finding Joy in Hard Times - part 5

*Phil. 2:12-18; October 21, 2018*

## **DAY 1: Growing in the Lord takes discipline.**

*Philippians 2:12 Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed--not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence--continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, ...*

1. Work “**out**,” **not** work “**for**” your salvation. Salvation is a gift. It is not earned. No one is “good enough” to be saved.

2. What Paul is discussing is how do to grow as a Christian? It takes effort on your part to grow. Growth just doesn’t happen.

*2 Peter 1:5-7 For this reason, **make every effort** to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love.*

3. Here are five important tools you should be using in your growth tool box.

a. Bible—Reading and applying God’s word to your life. *2 Timothy 3:16-17*

b. Prayer—Make a list of people for whom you’d like to pray. *Phil. 4:6-7*

c. Fellowship—Join a small group. Get with someone who challenges you by their life. *Hebrews 10:24-25; Prov. 13:20*

d. Outreach—Sharing your faith story with lost people. *Matthew 4:19*

e. Serving—Get involved in a ministry. *Galatians 5:13*

4. Have you just “expected” to grow in Christ with little effort? How does the need for effort strike you?

5. What is your response to the five tools in the “growth tool box?” Is there a tool you need to use?

## **DAY 2: Growing in the Lord takes dependence.**

*Phil. 2:12-13 ...continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling **for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.***

1. As we try to grow as a Christian, we will find that becoming like Christ is a daunting task, impossible when left to ourselves.

2. This is what Paul alludes to with the phrase "... with fear and trembling." Left to our own human nature, very little will change.

3. Thankfully, Paul assures us that God's power is available to bring about Christian growth!

4. Paul highlights four insights about God's power for growth:

a. God will work **in** us!

b. God will work in us at the level of our **will**. We are naturally stubborn and obstinate.

c. God will work in us at the level of our **actions**, words, behavior, and relationships.

d. God will work in us "according to **His good purpose**." His purpose is to grow us up to more and more resemble Christ, to bring glory to Christ.

5. Which of these four observations about growth strikes you? Why?

6. There is a fifth observation embedded in these verses. It is the promise of God's power to bring about growth. Why is this promise important? There will be times when it seems to you that your growth is headed backward, not forward! That's discouraging!

7. Consider what Paul has said in today's and yesterday's verses. Growth is **not** an either/or proposition. Either I make an effort or I just let God do his work. It takes both. Growth takes personal discipline AND dependence on God.

### **DAY 3: Growth can be seen in everyday discouragements.**

*Philippians 2:14 Do everything without complaining or arguing,  
15 so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe*

1. In many churches spiritual growth is equated with bible knowledge. The more you know, the more spiritually “mature” you are.

2. While bible knowledge is obviously vital, the real measure of spiritual growth is not knowledge but Christ-like character and Christ-like values.

3. Let’s take a closer look at these verses:

a. “**Complaining**” – The Greek word means to murmur. We usually think of complaining as something very loud, obnoxious, and “something we don’t do.” But murmuring is complaining “under our breath.” Maybe no one hears our words, except God.

b. “**Arguing**” – The Greek word means “disputing.” Paul doesn’t say that different opinions are wrong. What he is putting his finger on are things like:

- “I have to be right” (in this discussion)
- “My idea needs to be recognized as valid.”
- “I want people to see I have something important to say.”
- “I need to have the last word.”

→ Self is driving our conversation. People can sense when we are being argumentative. They sense we are not humble, and that our thoughts, our ideas, are more important than theirs.

4. Do you sense complaining and arguing in you? What bothers you most about this?

*Phil. 2:14 ...so that **you** may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe...*

5. Notice that complaining significantly hampers *your* growth!

6. “**Blameless**” does not mean “perfect.” When we sin we ask forgiveness of God, and we ask forgiveness of others where we sinned against them. “Blame” is then “erased.”

7. “**Pure**” doesn’t mean “perfect.” When we confess our sins, God cleanses us! (1 John 1:9)

8. While everyone around you is complaining you can be the one who shines like a light!

## **DAY 4: The contrast between growing Christian and lost people**

*Philippians 2:16 ... as you hold out the word of life--in order that I may boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor for nothing.*

1. The “word of life” is the bible.
2. We hold “on” to the bible to give us direction.
3. Here, Paul tells the Christians to hold “out” the word of life. What do you think he means?
4. The last few verses contrasted the life of the growing Christian with the bad attitudes of those around us, particularly complaining and being argumentative.
5. We hold “out” the word of life to those around us when others begin to associate our different character, not to being “nice,” but to God’s work in our lives.
6. Peter gives us an example of this:  
*1 Peter 3:15 But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,*  
<sup>16</sup>*keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.*  
<sup>17</sup>*It is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.*
7. What strikes you from Peter’s words?
8. As you live your life in public, in the marketplace, at work, in your neighborhood, at church, people watch you. God can use your example, your character, your attitudes and actions to awaken them to their need of God!

## **DAY 5: Joy found in sacrifice!**

1. In Philippians we've already seen how joy can be found in the most unexpected places, like emptiness, loneliness, suffering, service and now in sacrifice!!!

*Phil. 2:17 But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, **I am glad** and **rejoice with all of you**.*

2. Paul uses an Old Testament practice to illustrate his sacrifice for others. The Old Testaments would "pour out" a drink offering for the people. It was a sacred and important offering.

3. Paul equates his ministry to them with pouring out his life for them! What do you think is entailed in his example and sacrifice for them?

4. Remember, Paul writes these words to be glad and rejoice from prison! How is that possible? From where does that kind of gladness come from? Certainly not his immediate circumstances.

5. He takes joy in the fruit of his service, in the benefits that others have had because of his life!

*Philippians 2:18 So you too should be glad and rejoice with me.*

6. They can be glad because he's glad! He's not having a pity party. He's reflecting back on the time he was with them, and that gave him reason to be glad. He's also reflecting "ahead" to the time this letter he's writing is read to the folks at the Phil. Church! He, and they can rejoice over what he wrote!

7. Ultimately, for Paul and for us, our joy is centered in our relationship with God. Nothing else at the center of our heart will do!

*Psalm 31:7 I will be glad and rejoice in Your love, for You saw my affliction and knew the anguish of my soul.*

*Psalm 90:14 Satisfy us in the morning with Your unfailing love, that we may **sing for joy** and **be glad** all our days.*