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FOCUSED ON THE WORD

An Upward Countenance in a Downward Culture [Philippians]



For many years now, Barna Research has accurately documented the ongoing secular shift in American culture. When we first published this study in 2012, one party had just been reelected to the White House. Four years later, the other major party surprised a vast majority of American voters by gaining the White House, only to be knocked out in 2020 by the Vice President of the party in power in 2012. In 2024 “Number 45” became “Number 47.”

As a believer, how do you navigate these societal swings? Where do you find your motivation, your contentment,

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The views expressed in each Bible Study are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of any individual Bible Study sponsor.

WEEKLY BIBLE STUDIES

White House Cabinet and Governors: Wednesdays 8am (EST), light breakfast served

Senate Members: Tuesdays 8am, rotating offices, hot breakfast served

House Members: Thursdays 8am, Natural Resources, Longworth 1334, hot breakfast served



MINISTRY UPDATE

New CapMin Bible Teacher Pastor Aaron Clark Determined to Grow Ministry in Vermont's Rocky Soil



The newly named ministry leader for members of the Vermont Legislature says the Bible tells us where God wants His Word to be shared: everywhere!

“God’s purpose is to fill all things with Christ, Ephesians 1:22–23,” said Pastor Aaron Clark. “He wants to fill every space of the universe with the glory of Christ, so that means every corner of our community, every part of our lives, our families, our neighborhoods, our co-workers, and that includes those in government!”

Pastor Clark assumed the CapMin Bible-study based discipleship legislative ministry that retiring Pastor Rosaire Bisson began in the Vermont State House in 2019.

Like his predecessor, one challenge for Pastor Clark will

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An Upward Countenance in a Downward Culture [Philippians]

your *joy*? In the book of Philippians the Apostle Paul finds it in those around him, not in the society that confounds him. Like Paul, we too can find sustaining *joy*!

Let’s examine Paul’s prescription for *joy* in persecution as we survey Philippians in this regard. Read on.

Ralph Drollinger

I. INTRODUCTION

While imprisoned for his faith in Rome (A.D. 60–62), Paul wrote this letter to the church he had founded in Philippi, Macedonia (upper Greece today). Even though he was being persecuted for his faith, having been imprisoned for several years, he was nonetheless afforded the opportunity to preach the Gospel (cf. 1:12–14; 4:22; Eph. 6:18–20; Col. 4:2–4).

This combination of persecution (to the point of imprisonment by the State) and freedom of speech to proclaim the Gospel both near and abroad (this is one of his four prison epistles that would be circulated throughout the Empire) was sufficient for his never-ending *joy*.

As we trace that theme throughout this prison epistle, you should simultaneously read through the whole of the

four-chapters. Otherwise, the highlighted passages will not make much sense. By doing such a study you will garner greater interaction with and leading by the Holy Spirit.

II. CHAPTER ONE

A. THE SOCIETY OF JOY 1:3–5

I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all, in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now.

As telegraphed in the introduction, Paul was *joyous* about other believers—the society of believers, if you will—in light of their participation in the gospel. Participation could also be translated as “partnership” and is a reference to the believers who had assisted Paul in evangelizing the city of Philippi. Even though the laws and



policies of that city were undoubtedly not to the liking of the Apostle, his basis for *joy* centered on the priority of having evangelized the city. This solace of mind is underscored by verse 7:

For it is only right for me to feel this way about you all, because I have you in my heart, since both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers of grace with me.

Notice this basic precept of his *joy*: the society of believers surrounds him, while simultaneously laboring together for the sake of the Gospel (cf. 4:1). You, too, will gain much *joy* in the Capitol via fellowshiping with other believers on a regular basis with the common mission of evangelizing.

B. THE STAPLE OF JOY 1:12–14

Paul's *joy* was also based on his theology. As we will continually see, theology was his staple ingredient for ceaseless *joy*. As one called out by Christ himself (Acts 9), perhaps it was a bit easier for him to trust in the sovereignty of God in whatever *circumstances* he found himself. Notice and learn this way of thinking from the following:

Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel, so that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else, and that most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear.

Paul's trust in God's sovereignty was the staple ingredient of his *joy*. That's to say theology is important! He had the ability to see past his own plight and what God was doing in and through his *circumstances*, specifically in the lives of others who caught his infectious spirit of *joy*. Even though he is in the capital city of the world, his central focus, his priority for living, was not on changing the government, but the greater progress of the gospel. Take this to heart in the aftermath of every election.

**As a public servant who
names the name of Christ,
are these priorities
clear in your heart?**

Scripture is clear that if we “*seek first the Kingdom of God*” the other things, like changing the Government for good “*shall be added to you*” (Matthew 6:33).

C. THE STANDARD BEARER OF JOY 1:25–26

Later in chapter one, as Paul reasons aloud to himself about staying on in this life, or moving onto the next, he concludes that the former is more important, due in part to the need for other believers to catch his *joyous* spirit in light of their surrounding *circumstances*:

Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith, so that your proud confidence in me

VERSE OF THE WEEK



Philippians 4:4

*Rejoice in the Lord always;
again I will say, rejoice!*



Paul's continued physical presence, being a standard bearer of *joy*, was a source of encouragement to those around him. Do you model *joy* to those around you?





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be teaching the Bible in rocky soil. Vermont is the fourth least religious state in the nation, according to a recent study. It is a challenge he is excited to accept.

To this end, Pastor Clark will make evangelism a priority and will lead studies that focus on the basics of the faith including sin, salvation, grace, and faith.

One of his objectives is to increase participation in the study by evangelizing lawmakers as well as encouraging the legislators who participate to invite their colleagues.

“For this coming year, we really need to focus on the representatives the Lord has given us and disciple them, steward them well, pour into them, and, Lord willing, seek opportunities through them to build connections naturally with other representatives and senators,” he said.

Among Pastor Clark’s other objectives are moving the Bible Study from an off-site location into the State House and adding an additional local ministry leader to co-lead the studies. At this time, the study meets on Wednesdays for prayer in the morning and Bible study over the lunch hour.

Former Rep. Vicky Strong, who sponsored Pastor Bisson’s Bible study, has left office. The new sponsor is Rep. Terri Williams of Granby.

Pastor Clark has experience with starting small. He was involved with church plantings in Elizabethtown (Life Church) and Port Henry, NY, (Lake Champlain Bible Fellowship) during 2013 and 2014, as well as Burlington New King Church from 2017 to 2022.

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may abound in Christ Jesus through my coming to you again.

Paul’s desire is that other believers would learn to live *joyously* in persecution like him. We hope that his ambition to be a standard-bearer of *joy* will resonate even today with us.

Paul concludes the chapter by highlighting the previously mentioned idea of conflict between *joy* and persecution that is ever present in the life of the mature believer:

For to you it has been granted for Christ’s sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear to be in me (vv. 29–30).

Living in this world for the sake of Christ, and all the *joy* that brings will always be in conflict with suffering. Paul says that such is normal for those heralding Christ. His continued physical presence, being a standard bearer of *joy*, was a source of encouragement to those around him. Do you model *joy* to those around you?

III. CHAPTER TWO

A. THE SENSE OF JOY 2:2–3

Make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves.

In this passage Paul provides insights into how believers can *make* other’s

joy complete. By being *intent on one purpose* (the ministry of the Gospel) and by *considering others as more important than yourself*, the body of Christ will count you as a blessing! The combined sense of being both unselfish and all about the Gospel provide the most *joy* to others as well as self.

B. THE SECRET OF JOY 2:19

But I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, so that I also may be encouraged when I learn of your condition.

Paul did certain things in order to receive encouragement from others; he was proactive in keeping himself pumped up and *joy*-filled! Here Paul is saying he anticipates a positive report from those whom he had invested in spiritually for the sake of his own well-being. Accordingly, both you and I should make a practice of this.

Do my Bible studies minister to you? I need to know for the sake of my own encouragement.

Such asking is not selfish; it is biblical. Does your ministry in the lives of others encourage them? Then don’t think it’s selfish to ask them to let you know for the sake of your own *joy* and encouragement! If Paul was not above asking others for encouragement, then why shouldn’t you do the same? In order to maintain *joy* in times of persecution, there are moments when you



need to ask your supporters to bolster you. Don't think you're so spiritual that you don't need this from time to time; you and I aren't! Be proactive about receiving encouragement versus spending the same amount of energy stewing—falsely imagining no one appreciates you.

One little phrase I try
to live by is this:

Don't pout—
immediately reach out!

This is a great secret insight into the mind of Paul that we should emulate: Seek *joy* from others!

IV. CHAPTER THREE

A. THE SOURCE OF JOY 3:8

More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ.

Paul had vertical vision. Ultimately he lived to please the one who saved him (cf. Gal. 1:10) versus others around him. That idea is strongly communicated in this passage. The Greek word for *knowing* has more to it than a sense of knowledge; it means, “to experience personally.” Paul’s *joy* stemmed not from a cold religious orthodoxy, i.e. keeping a bunch of rules; rather it came from a personal relationship with the living God! Such an insight

into this passage provides a deeper understanding as to what (or Who) catalyzed, his *joy*. The source of his *joy* and our *joy* is a Person, the Lord Jesus Christ, not a religious system.

B. THE “SET FREE” OF JOY 3:13–14

Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Paul states yet another key to *joyous* living: *forgetting what lies behind*. This includes both virtuous achievements and sinful failures. If the self-described “chief of sinners” believed that the power of Christ enabled total forgiveness, then it stands to reason that the “chief” too should be able to forgive and forget in regards to himself. Based on his Christology, Paul, rightly so, did not allow his past (remember he murdered believers prior to his conversion) to affect his present state of being, his *joy* in the present and future. Such a practice of “flushing the toilet” should be normative for every believer today: if Christ forgives and forgets should not you also? Both arrogance and self-deprecation serve to defeat the presence of *joy*.

I should add that this principle is violated in marriage, where one partner continually brings up the past in ways that are unbiblical to the detriment of the marriage. Christ doesn’t hold your past against you today (cf. Rom. 8:1)!

In 2021, he moved his family to Montpelier to start Imago Christi Church where he serves as lead pastor. He and his wife Jenna Rose have two young daughters.

Pastor Clark attended Word of Life Bible Institute in both Florida and New York and received a bachelor’s degree in religion with a focus on biblical theological studies from Liberty University in 2015.

While ministering to legislators may be a new mission field, what hasn’t changed is Pastor Clark’s devotion to reaching those who do not know God. And he believes in-depth Bible studies, written specifically for political leaders, help get to the root of what is most important in their lives.

“All of the policies, all of the governments of the earth and all of the things we are doing as nations will fade away, but the Word of God will last forever. This eternal Word should inform how we interact with these temporal things, like policy, government, and nations,” he said.

With a heart for reaching the world’s lost souls, Pastor Clark is enthusiastic about the new corner where he feels God has placed him. “I long to reach legislators and see them move from darkness to light, to love the Lord and love His law,” Pastor Clark said.

CapMin ministry leaders are self-supporting missionaries. To support Pastor Clark’s ministry, use the QR code below.





MINISTRY LEADER PROFILE

Joseph Green

State Ministry Leader
Pennsylvania



Helping believers understand what a Christian worldview is and why it's important for all who profess Christ to have one is a high priority for Dr. Joseph Green in his discipleship ministry to Pennsylvania legislators.

In teaching biblical foundations classes over the years, Dr. Green has discovered that many Christians do not fully understand the concepts of “apologetics” or a “Christian worldview.” What results is a disconnect between who they profess to be and how they behave. His mission is to help believers “connect the dots” by teaching them that Christian apologetics is to “contend for the faith” and holding a biblical

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An Upward Countenance in a Downward Culture [Philippians]

V. CHAPTER FOUR

A. THE STANDARD OF JOY 4:4–7

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

As Paul begins his concluding remarks in his “Epistle of Joy,” he states the inviolate attitudes an individual needs to possess and practice in order to live *joyously*. Those include *rejoicing always* (based on the believer’s election in combination with the sovereignty of God) in contradistinction to being *anxious*. He must also possess a *gentle spirit* (versus combative) that stems from the *peace of God*, one of the characteristic attributes of the Trinity. Learning to stand on and attitudinally manifest these theological truths in a believer’s daily life enables continuous *joyous* living! A sign of maturity is when a believer chooses to manifest his theology over and above his aberrant, often wayward emotions. In 4:9 Paul underscores this idea when he says, *Practice these things and the God of peace will be with you*. These are the minimal standards for consistent *joyousness*.

B. THE SATISFACTION OF JOY 4:11–12

Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am.

I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need.

Material possessions and concern for social standing have the potential to obliterate *joy*. Paul states here that contentment should eclipse prosperity or poverty or societal position or political disdain; *joy* should be unrelated to these types of concerns; they should be of little matter.

This is an especially profound insight in our culture where the idols of materialism and social standing are usually more important than holding to godly principles and serving Him in whatever *circumstances* we might find ourselves. Satisfaction in Christ should make “the things of this world [like prestige and popularity] grow strangely dim.” Paul’s attitude is summarized in 4:18, *But I have received everything in full and have an abundance*. That is a refreshing perspective on life; it spells *joyous* satisfaction and contentment.

VI. APPLICATION TO PUBLIC SERVANTS

As we have combed over Philippians, we have gleaned nine keen insights into how we can best possess *joy*. We hope this biblical understanding of *joy* will provide you with the grit to withstand the most severe forms of persecution that may lie ahead as you lovingly stand for God’s ways. Here in summary are those nine inviolate principles:



A Summary Of Paul's Nine Criteria For Joy

1. The **Society** of Joy is fellow believers.
2. The **Staple** of Joy is the sovereignty of God.
3. The **Standard-bearer** of Joy is the model of Paul.
4. The **Sense** of Joy is greatest when evangelizing.
5. The **Secret** of Joy is gaining it from others.
6. The **Source** of Joy is the Lord Jesus Christ.
7. The **"Set Free"** of Joy is forgetting the past.
8. The **Standard** of Joy is theology, not emotions.
9. The **Satisfaction** of Joy is continual inner peace.

My prayer is that these insights into how we best possess *joy* will help enable you to hold on to it at all times. May we, like Paul, *get along with*

humble means and *know how to live in prosperity* and whatever else our political or personal *circumstances* deliver! May we always Rejoice!

worldview means that the faith that we confess as believers should shape how we perceive the world.

"My prayer is that Christian legislators on both sides of the aisle will unite under a biblical worldview because I strongly believe that the foundational principles of the Bible represent humanity's only hope for success. We see the tenets of biblical Christianity under attack in the public sector and in the political realm. We are called to be ambassadors of the faith and ministers of reconciliation. We are obligated to fellow believers and to the world at large to be the mouthpiece for the kingdom of God. My desire is to give Christian legislators the opportunity to help them fulfill their God-given mandate as ministers of Christ."



*Making Disciples
of Jesus Christ
in the Political Arena
Throughout the World*



Capitol Ministries® provides Bible studies, evangelism, and discipleship to political leaders.

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