

When It's Hard to Be Happy

Things started going downhill for Paul in Jerusalem. An angry mob rioted and attempted to kill him. Subsequently, he endured several trials in Roman courts before the appeal process landed him in Rome. Incidentally, the sea voyage to Rome included a narrow escape from a hurricane and several months stranded on the island of Malta.

While awaiting trial in Rome Paul wrote an encouraging letter to the Christians in the city of Philippi. In this short letter Paul mentions thankfulness twice. He uses the words *rejoice* eight times, *joy* six times, *confident* two times and *love* or *lovely* six times. This is not the way a discouraged, depressed and downhearted person writes. Paul had learned how to stay happy when times are hard.

Stay Happy by Demanding Your Citizenship Rights

Joy and rejoicing were part of Paul's internal makeup. External disasters could not sap his joy. Why? Because in addition to his Roman citizenship, Paul declared that, "Our citizenship is in heaven."⁽¹⁾ This heavenly citizenship clothes us with the right to be filled with Jesus' joyful presence. In his own words Jesus pointed out, "I have told you this so that my joy may be in you."⁽²⁾ Additionally, Jesus promised to plant the full measure of his joy in his children.⁽³⁾ In spite of his plight the overflowing joy of the Spirit of Jesus bubbled up within the apostle's human spirit. No wonder he declared, "I rejoice. Yes, and I will continue to rejoice."⁽⁴⁾ Paul's joy originated in an internal, rather than an external, source.

Friends, demand your citizenship rights! The enthroned Jesus sits as ruler over you.⁽⁵⁾ When attacked by the most painful situations we call on Jesus who unleashes a special surge of heavenly joy in our hearts. Happiness wells up from within our human spirit even when our surroundings grow worse. Jesus' presence equips our spirits with divine energy to be happy when times are hard.

Talk to yourself. Say about yourself what Scripture says: "I am God's child, his treasured possession, a dwelling place for his Spirit." Then demand your mind and emotions submit to Jesus' joy, the joy that permanently resides in us!

Stay Happy by Refusing to be a Victim of Circumstances

Paul looked like a victim of circumstances beyond his control. The most powerful government of his day controlled his body and held the power to take his life. Soldiers kept Paul shackled with chains and stood guard at the door of his house. For most people such distressing circumstances make it impossible to be happy. Not for Paul! He refused to be a victim of circumstances.

In Philippians 1:16 Paul wrote, “I am put here for the defense of the Gospel.” He regarded God as Controller of his circumstances who had purposefully planted him in Rome so he could spread the Gospel of Jesus. He assured his fellow Christians, “What has happened to me has really served to advance the Gospel.”⁽⁶⁾ He saw the universal presence of God as his circumstance.

It’s easy to stay happy during hard times when you acknowledge God as Controller of your circumstances, Director of your decisions and Scheduler of your steps. Even though God does not cause everything he definitely uses everything that happens to us in our favor.

Declare with your lips that God will use hard times to bring about blessings for you. “Give thanks in all circumstances for this is God’s will for you...”⁽⁷⁾ Even if you don’t feel thankful, start praising God during your struggles. This act of faith in his commitment to you eventually creates heartfelt thanksgiving. This thanksgiving frees you from feeling like a victim of circumstances.

Stay Happy by Choosing Joy-Inspiring Occupants for Your Mind

Life’s difficulties can fill our minds with discouraging thoughts and emotions. No wonder Scripture asks, “A crushed spirit who can bear?”⁽⁸⁾ The answer is “no one”. Hard times crush the human spirit when we forecast the worst for ourselves.

But Paul’s uncrushed spirit rejoiced in the Lord *always*.⁽⁹⁾ Happiness filled his heart, joy permeated his thoughts and optimism attended his words. “In all my troubles my joy knows no bounds,” he wrote.⁽¹⁰⁾ Even though adversity swirled about him, his joy remained unsuppressed. How could this be? He chose joy inspiring occupants for his mind!

The Bible tells us how to meditate. Therefore, the apostle practiced Bible-type meditation which always leads us into victory. No one who meditates in the way Scripture prescribes can be crushed in spirit. Paul wrote, “If anything is excellent or praiseworthy *think* about such things.”⁽¹¹⁾ That’s right. We remain in charge of our thoughts. We purposefully and persistently choose joy-inspiring occupants for our minds!

The Spirit of the resurrected Jesus dwells in you. You are a temple of the Holy Spirit.⁽¹²⁾ Consequently, Jesus’ Spirit constantly generates in you a happiness that survives all hard times.

Footnotes:

1. Philippians 3:20
2. John 15:11
3. John 17:13
4. Philippians 1:18
5. Revelation 3:14
6. Philippians 1:16

7. 1 Thessalonians 5:18
8. Proverbs 18:14
9. Philippians 4:4
10. 2 Corinthians 7:4
11. Philippians 4:8
12. 1 Corinthians 3:16 & 6:19

