

**II. Group discussion** *Each number below includes questions that relate to the scripture. I offer a few answers, but your perspective may be better. The point is to discuss, not to get 100% agreement. Rule of thumb: the fewer questions you ask, the better. Save time for "the big question."*

Read Philippians 1:19-26 aloud.

1. What was Paul's situation as he wrote?

*1:12-17 indicates that even when he was in prison, Paul was a controversial figure. Some loved him, some opposed him.*

What images come to mind when you think of an ancient prison?

What would you guess was the mood in this prison?

2. What law had Paul broken to get himself thrown in the slammer?

*Philippians doesn't say. The book of Acts repeats a story of Christians being arrested and then released when no charges were presented.*

How would you feel if you were arrested without a reason?

3. What was Paul's attitude in this passage? Was he in despair?

According to verse 19, what result did he ultimately expect?

*"What has happened will turn out for my deliverance."*

Who or what supported Paul in this assurance?

*"Your prayers and the help given by the Spirit."*

Who prays for you? When you face a trial, who comes to mind as a prayer supporter?

4. As Paul assessed his situation, what did he see as his two options? *I'm either going to live or die.*

What were the pro's & con's of these two options? *See verses 21-22.*

When you face a life or death scenario, how does your attitude compare to Paul's?

5. Paul's confident assurance – what was his secret?

Some people have bubbly, "don't worry, be happy" temperaments. How much does Paul strike you as that kind of guy?

*He sure doesn't sound like Mr. Sunshine in Galatians 1:6-9!*

If Paul's confidence did not arise from an optimistic temperament, what was the source?

*Verse 21. Steve Flatt explained that the secret of Paul's joy was his faith perspective.*

6. What core beliefs supported Paul's "can't lose" perspective?

*God is in charge.*

*God is aware of my situation.*

*God will work through this situation to bring about his will.*

*My comfort is far less important than honoring God's will.*

*As long as I live, my mission is to serve God any way I can.*

*When my mission is done (death), life gets even better.*

Which of these foundational beliefs is hardest for you to believe?

7. When you think of a joyful person, what image comes to mind?

Do you associate joy more with wisdom or shallowness? Why?

*There is reason to equate joy with childish naïveté – life is hard so we miss the days when a cardboard box could provide hours of entertainment. But somehow, wise and faithful people like Paul discover a "second naïveté" where they are aware of the pain but live joyfully anyway.*

Who is someone you know who is both wise and joyful?

† **The big question** *If you ask only one question, let this be it. Allow at least 20 minutes. Go around the circle and give each person an opportunity to answer. It's okay if they pass, but at least they get a chance to respond.*

How would you respond to mistreatment like Paul endured? What are some ways you could increase your confidence that God is at work in and through your life?

### **III. Other resources**

**The point** – Let the Spirit of Christ fill your heart with joy, even when they throw you in prison for no good reason.

#### **Prayer ideas**

Thank God. It is impossible to be grateful and grumbly at the same time.

Ask God to increase your joy. Pray for hearts that see God's hand even in the bleakest situations.

Pray for a person who would enjoy being part of our group.

Ask God to guide our congregation through the process of discerning whom he has prepared to preach at College Hills.

**Kid-friendly activity.** *An activity designed to help kids and adults grow in faith together. Do this first, then dismiss the kids so the adults can talk.*

Ask the kids to build a prison. Use chairs or pillows or a closet – be creative & let the kids have fun with it!

Throw the kids in prison. Ask how they like it.

Read Philippians 1:19 aloud.

What was Paul's situation?

What was Paul's attitude?

How could he possibly have a good attitude in prison?

When are some times that you feel like you are in prison -- confined or limited?

How do you respond when you can't get what you want?

How effective are those approaches? Where do they get you?  
Good chance to talk about whining, arguing, complaining, etc.

What might be a better way to deal with situations that don't go your way?



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## **LIFE Group Guide**

### **Philippians 1 – Prison Joy**

By John Grant (jgrant@collegehills.org)

**The theme:** **Developing hearts full of joy in spite of troubles.**

How do you respond when things don't go your way? That may be a good indicator of what is within your heart. In Paul's epistle to Philippi, we see that his faith enabled him to remain joyful in spite of rotten circumstances. This discussion guide will give you an opportunity to reflect on how to cultivate that kind of positive spirit in your life as well.

Talk about your plan for the next two meetings, scheduled for Dec. 23 and 30. You may have several people out of town, but try to meet anyway. Even if it's just you and the host, you might be surprised how much good can result from a "micro-group." I will prepare guides for each week, and there will be a group at the building each week at 6.

**Leadership tip:** Don't forget the back page. While it is not the "meat" of this guide, it is always worth reading. Knowing the point of the lesson helps you decide which tangents are worth pursuing. The prayer ideas relate to the topic. And an occasional kid-friendly activity might help an older group break out of a rut and energize the group.

**I. Relate** *Use a few to introduce the theme, check everyone's spiritual pulse, and "break the ice." No right or wrong answers – maybe goofy but not wrong! Look for opportunities to affirm and encourage through these questions.*

❖ Can anyone tell a blonde joke? *No, I'm not being insensitive – I'm blonde. If someone might take offense, ask instead for "John Bryan" jokes or "Vols" jokes.*

Why was the blonde fired from the M&M factory?

She kept throwing away the W's.

Why was the blonde fired from the office?

She was putting White-out on the computer screen.

❖ When have you felt trapped by prison-like situations?

❖ What would be the most difficult thing about being in prison?

❖ What has brought you joy in recent weeks?