

DISCOVERING JOY IN PHILIPPIANS



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Discovering Joy in Philippians

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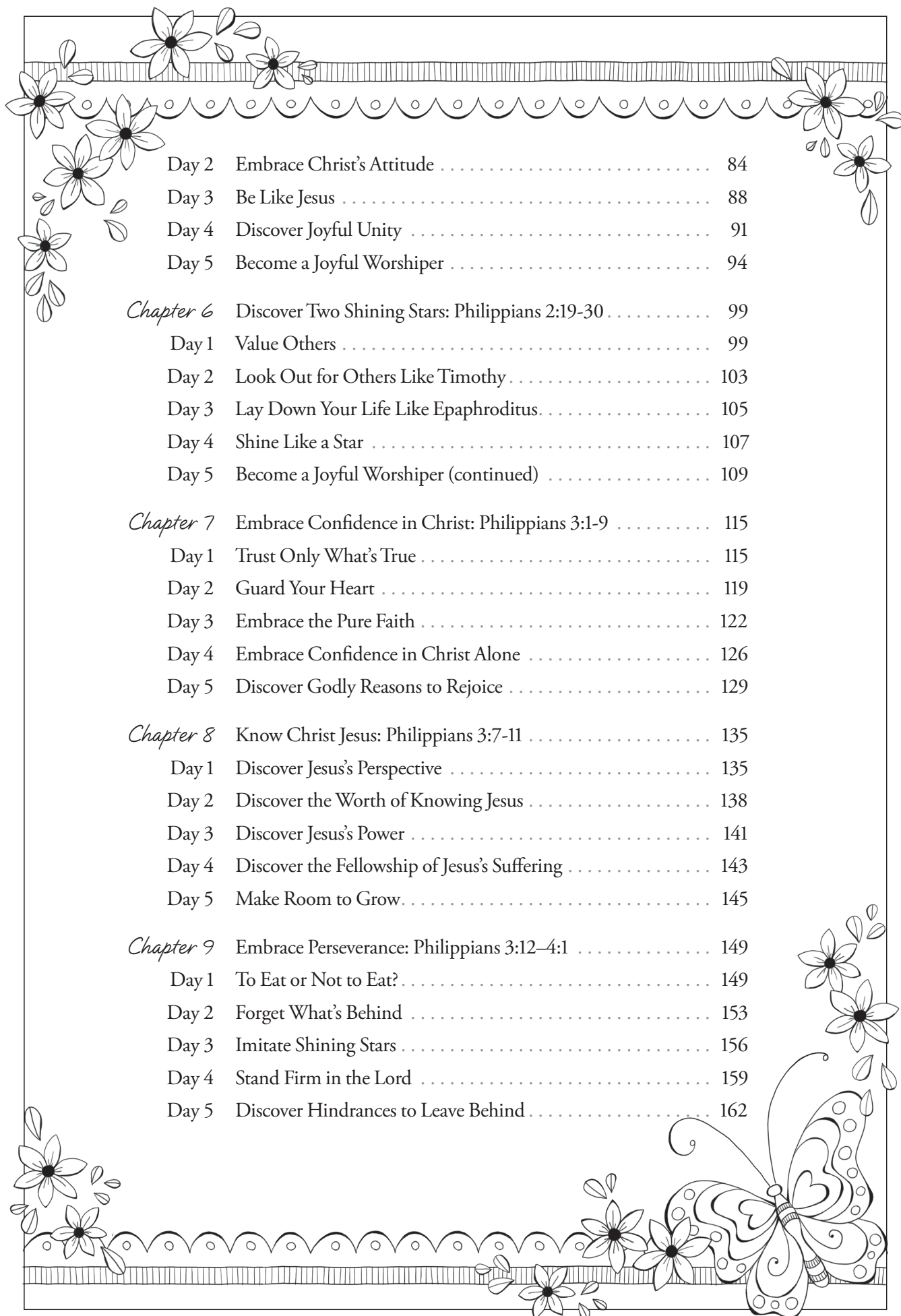
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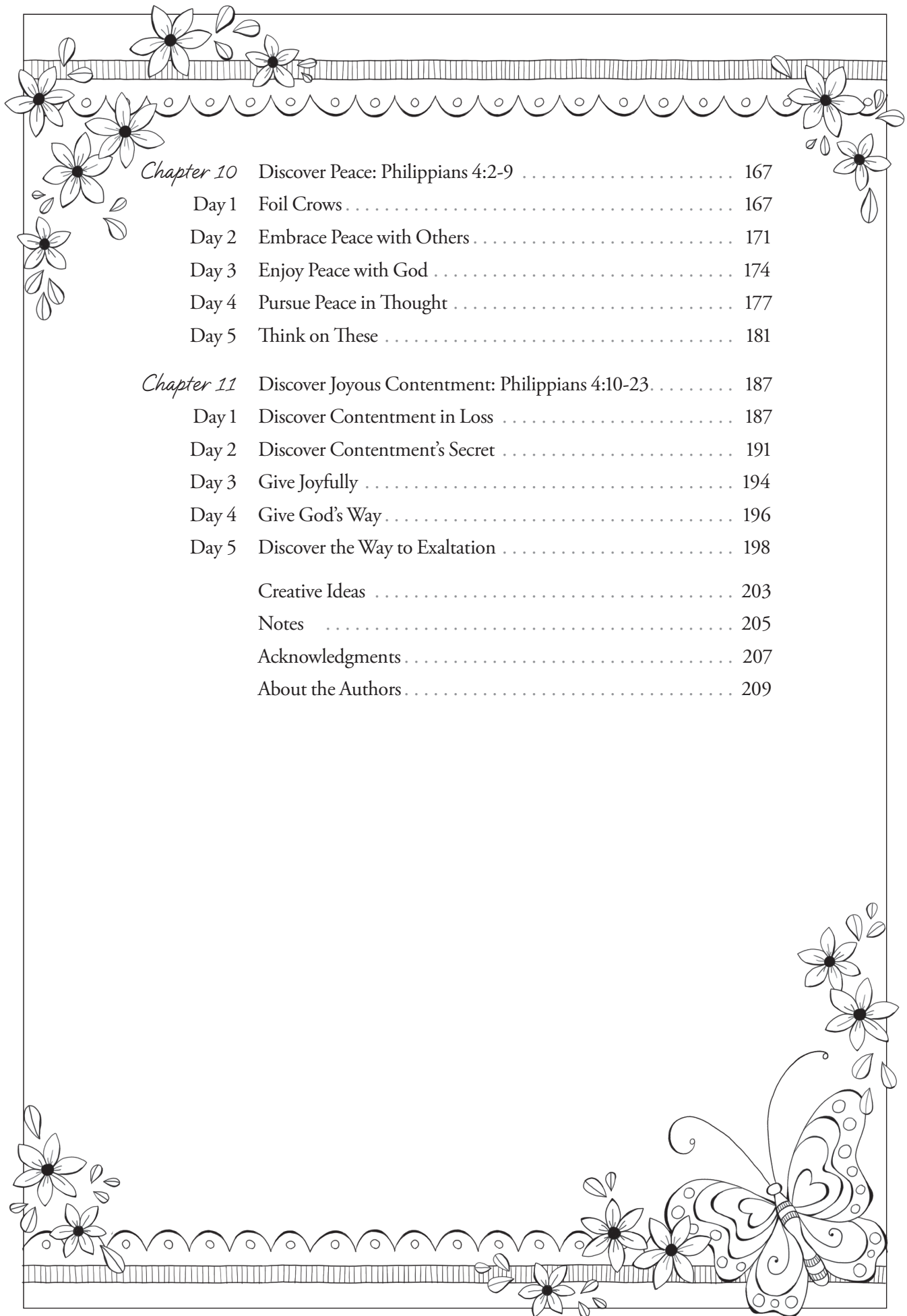
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Chapter 1

Philippians 1:1

Discover This Letter of Joy

What makes Paul an authority on joy?

Day 1

Imagine Philippians in Today's World

This week is all about introductions. We'll read Philippians to get the big picture. Then we'll hop over to the book of Acts to meet the people Philippians 1:1 mentions.

Imagine your beloved pastor was arrested while on a missionary trip to a foreign country and now awaits trial and possible execution. This country's prison system does not provide for inmates' needs, so your church raised money to send an elder to encourage your pastor and bring him food, money, and books. Upon arrival, though, the elder acquired dysentery and, because of the country's poor health care, nearly died. Your church prayed for the elder, and all are thankful he recovered.

The elder met with your pastor and brought him up to date on the church. Some in the church question how God could have allowed the pastor's arrest: Was he out of God's will? But the pastor was more concerned with problems involving your church's longer-standing members. They bicker over who's in charge. Some complain about the way things are being handled because they didn't get positions they wanted. Two women leaders are so embroiled in disagreement that the whole church begins taking sides. Several grumble over recent financial decisions, and others criticize the preaching. All the complaints and conflicts are dampening the joy the congregation used to have when they gathered. Worship seems stifled.

Now imagine the elder has just returned and is standing before you and the congregation at the Sunday service. He's about to read aloud a letter from your pastor.

 Pray for God's Word to speak to you.

1. ♥ Read all of Philippians, imagining the scenario above. Read as quickly as you like—we'll get into the details later. For now, just get a feel for the letter. Then describe one thing that stands out to you from the letter.





It's an amazing letter, isn't it? Tomorrow we'll learn more about Paul, and I think you'll see why he's the perfect mentor for teaching us about joy.

Experiencing Philippians Creatively

Psalm 1:2 tells us that the person who meditates on and delights in God's instructions is blessed. Blessings bring joy! The Hebrew word translated *meditate* means to think deeply about something, to ponder, to devise ways to act on, and to read aloud quietly.

Creatively interacting with Scripture is a fun way to meditate on it. Many of the women who chose to softly repeat the verse as they colored the full-page scripture illustrations in *Discovering Hope in the Psalms*, reported they had memorized the verse by the time they finished.

Here are some creative ideas to help you meditate on Philippians:

- A bookmark at the back of the book illustrates Philippians 4:4. Color it, cut it out, and post it. When you see it, say it and offer a prayer rejoicing in something.
- The verse is in a full-page illustration at the end of the chapter. Color a bit daily while saying the verse and thanking God for whatever makes you glad.
- See Creative Ideas at the back of the book for more ways to interact creatively with Philippians 4:4.

Rejoice!

Philippians 4:4 reads, "Rejoice in the Lord always." To rejoice is to actively take joy in something. So if I hear a mockingbird sing, I might pray, "Thank you, God, for bird songs because they cheer my heart." Let's try that right now.



Thank God for what makes you glad, telling him why it makes you happy.

That's it for this lesson. In the next, we'll introduce the people you read about today.

Psalm 1:2 tells us that the person who meditates on and delights in God's instructions is blessed.



Choosing Joy

One of my joys is watching the Winter Olympics ice-skating events. I love the beauty, creativity, and those thrilling leaps. I'm particularly inspired by the falls. Wait? Let me explain. In an interview, gold-medal-winning Scott Hamilton estimated that he fell more than 41,000 times in his career, which means he got back up again that many times *and* did so with joy! That's worth rejoicing about and modeling in our lives.

We're given the ultimate example of perseverance and joy in Philippians. The moments of pain are never the emphasis because Paul knows and trusts that God has great purpose for him and for all God's people. Notice what the apostle is SURE of: "And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6 *ESV*). We can get back up because God gives us the strength and the motivation.

Growing up in the home of an abusive father, I learned early the need to emotionally get back up again. Choosing joy in spite of my circumstances became a way of life. Philippians 4:4 has reminded me countless times to get back up with joy: "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice" (Philippians 4:4 *ESV*). *Rejoice* is a verb, an action. We need to CHOOSE joy even when our life routine isn't going as planned. But how? Here are simple ways to keep our spiritual core strong and ready:

Look UP: Believe the power of Nehemiah 8:10, "The joy of the LORD is your strength." I gather lists of verses on joy to print, draw or color, study, and sometimes memorize. I post them everywhere so I can focus my gaze and heart upward on God's Word. One of my favorites is, "You will show me the way of life, granting me the joy of your presence and the pleasures of living with you forever" (Psalm 16:11 *NLT*).

Look BACK: Retrace God's faithfulness in your life. I suggest keeping a joy journal—a scrapbook of prayer requests, praises, and God's answers. List favorite verses and quotes. Use it like a scrapbook to hold images and words attesting to God's love and presence in good times and bad.

Look OUT: Don't go through tough times alone. I find it helpful to prayer walk with friends often. As we walk and PRAY Scripture and PRAISE God for his faithful character, the spiritual boost and the happy endorphins leave me with more hope and joy (and a few less calories)!

Look AHEAD: On her seventieth birthday, I asked a cheery mentor how she had held on to joy after the loss of a loved one. She replied, "Always plan something to look forward to. Life is too short to live looking in the rearview mirror." She is so right. When my calendar has a mix of replenishment for me *and* activities to restore joy in others, I'm happier. And when I look toward all God has for me, I experience the joyful wisdom of Philippians 3:13-14: "Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus."

When we focus on Jesus, we can keep "Choosin' joy!" as God completes his good work in us! And like that of a great skater, our routine of spiritual leaps and landings can be inspired by music! Turn on some praise music, and let God's power infuse you with hope and joy. Psalm 9:11 says, "Sing praises to the LORD, who dwells in Zion! Declare His deeds among the people" (*NKJV*). Praise the Lord. Let the world know who gives you the strength to get back up again.

On Day 5 of this chapter, we ask you to sing to the Lord as Paul and Silas did. Consider creating your own praise playlist.


■ For more inspiring verses and songs that reflect the principles and verses of Philippians, go to www.DiscoveringTheBibleSeries.com.

Pam 



Meet Our Joy Givers

Yesterday we read Philippians and saw that it was a letter to a church. Today we'll discover more about the people involved.

 Pray for God to teach you what he most wants you to know.

2. (a) According to Philippians 1:1, from whom did this letter come? (b) To whom did he send it?

Meet Paul

Paul was an apostle who preached the gospel of Jesus Christ. Before he began following Christ, he carried letters from the Jewish high priest allowing him to arrest any Jews who had become Christians. He threatened to have them put to death. But the resurrected Jesus Christ appeared to him one day, calling Paul to preach the gospel despite the great hardship and suffering it would bring him. Paul obeyed and began carrying the gospel to regions where it was unknown.

Meet Timothy

Jump over to Acts 16 to discover who Timothy is.

3. Read Acts 16:1-5. (a) How does verse 1 describe Timothy's parents? (b) What was his reputation (verse 2)? (c) What did Paul do to Timothy (verse 3)? (d) What happened because of visits by Paul and Timothy (verse 5)?

Here's what Paul writes about Timothy in Philippians 2:22: "But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel."

Meet the Philippians

Let's discover how Paul and Timothy met the Philippians.

4. Why did Paul go to Philippi, a city in Macedonia north of Greece (Acts 16:9-12)?

The Little Details

What's an Apostle?

The word *apostle* means "messenger" or "one sent forth." Jesus called 12 of his followers apostles (Luke 6:13). He gave them power to heal the sick and cast out demons. He sent them out to preach the message they'd heard him preach. After his resurrection, he sent them out to tell people they had seen him raised from the dead.

Later, the resurrected Jesus appeared to Paul and gave him the power to heal the sick and cast out demons too. The twelve apostles recognized Paul as an apostle.

The signs of apostleship were having seen the resurrected Jesus (1 Corinthians 9:1), having a life dedicated to successful missionary work (1 Corinthians 9:2), and having the power to heal the sick and cast out demons (2 Corinthians 12:12).



The Little Details

Synagogue and Sabbath

In 586 BC, the Babylonians burned down the temple Solomon built and exiled the Israelites. The exiles built *synagogues* (“gathering places”) to teach people about God.

After the exile ended and the Jews built a new temple in Jerusalem, they continued making synagogues. In fact, in Paul’s day, Jerusalem had many synagogues. Non-Jews couldn’t enter the temple, but they could come to the synagogues to learn about God.

Before Christ, worshipers met for teaching and prayer on the Sabbath, which lasted from Friday sundown until Saturday sundown.

Philippi was a Roman colony named after Philip II (the father of Alexander the Great). It had many Roman soldiers, but not enough Jewish men to support a synagogue. When Paul came to a city, he always looked for the place Jews and God-fearing Gentiles met for teaching and prayer on the Sabbath (Saturday). That was usually at a synagogue. But Philippi had no synagogue, so he had to look elsewhere.

5. Read Acts 16:13-14. (a) Where did Paul go on the Sabbath (verse 13)? (b) Who was Lydia (verse 14)? (c) What did the Lord do for her (verse 14)?

The author of Acts mentions Paul’s message but doesn’t go into details because he had explained Paul’s message earlier in the book (Acts 13:16-41). Paul knew his hearers already worshiped God and believed that disobeying God’s commands was sin and separated them from God. So, Paul began his message by summarizing Jewish history. He reminded them about God’s promise that a descendant of David would be a Savior. He told them this Savior was Jesus (Acts 13:23).

Paul reminded them about a prophet they all knew who had been beheaded not long before Jesus’s crucifixion: John the Baptist. John the Baptist was a well-known and highly respected prophet who called people to confess their sins and receive baptism. John the Baptist had proclaimed Jesus was the promised Savior, the Son of God, and the “Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29-34; Matthew 3:17).

But the Jewish rulers didn’t believe John the Baptist, and they envied Jesus’s popularity.

6. Read Acts 13:27-31. (a) What did the Jewish rulers fulfill when they condemned Jesus (verse 27)? (b) Could they justify condemning him by any proper law (verse 28)? (c) What happened to his body after he died on the cross (verse 29)? (d) What did God do (verse 30)? (e) What was the proof that God did this (verse 31)?

The Jewish leaders insisted Pilate execute Jesus. Paul said that, in doing so, they fulfilled Jewish scriptures that foretold what would happen to Jesus. But, Paul said, on the third day, God raised Jesus from the dead, fulfilling more prophecies from Scripture. The proof of this was that over a period of 40 days, Jesus appeared to the 11 disciples, his brother James, and over 500 people; later, he appeared to Paul (1 Corinthians 15:3-8).

Paul explained that people couldn’t be freed from sin by following the law or by sacrificing animals, but that Jesus died to pay the penalty for their sins once and for all (Acts 13:39). If they believed in Jesus as the promised Savior, God would forgive their sins through Jesus’s death, and then they too could have eternal life.

God raised Jesus from the dead, fulfilling more prophecies from Scripture.

Lydia and her household believed Paul's message.



7. Read Acts 16:15. (a) What did Paul and his team do for Lydia and her household? (b) What did Lydia do for Paul and his ministry team? (c) What did Lydia call Jesus?

Paul and Silas baptized Lydia and her household as a sign that their sins were washed away and as a public statement that they had made Jesus their Lord. Just like that, Philippi had its first Christian church.

Lydia took in the traveling missionaries. She likely owned a villa, and the new church began in her home. Her name is Greek, as are the names of the two women Paul mentions in his letter as leaders, Euodia and Syntyche. Clement, another church leader, had a Roman name. Thus, the new church had many Gentiles (non-Jews).

8. In Acts 17:30-31 below, Paul's audience is Gentiles who do not worship God. (a) Circle what God commands all people to do. (b) Underline what God has set a day to do. (c) Draw a box around the proof God offers.

God...commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead.

Repent means to turn away from our past sins and turn toward obeying God's commands.

9. ♥ (a) Have you ever compared your actions with God's commands to see if you're living the way God wants you to? (b) Have you ever confessed your sins to God and turned from them? (c) Do you believe in Jesus as the Savior who died to pay for your sins? Why or why not? (d) Is Jesus Lord of your life?

🗨️ Do one of the following:

- *If you've previously confessed your sins and committed to making Jesus Lord of your life:* Give thanks for Jesus having died to pay for your sins.
- *If you'd like to confess your sins and commit to making Jesus Lord of your life:* Read Psalm 51:1-4 to God. Prayerfully confess your sins to God. Tell him you want Jesus to be Lord of your life. Thank him for dying to pay for your sins.
- *If you're not ready to make Jesus Lord of your life:* Tell God what's holding you back. Ask God to open your eyes to see the truth about him.

The Little Details

Paul's Message

When Paul spoke to Gentiles (non-Jews), he told them to stop worshiping worthless idols made of gold, silver, or stone, and to stop coveting, which was a type of idolatry (Ephesians 5:5). He told them to instead turn to the living God, who made the heavens and the earth (Acts 14:15; 19:24-29).

When he spoke at synagogues, he skipped all that because his hearers already believed only one God existed and that God gave commands through Moses. These commands included "Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength," "Love your neighbor as yourself," and the Ten Commandments. Today we call these commands the Mosaic law.

Sin is disobeying God's commands. It separates people from God. Under the Mosaic law, people could go to a priest at the temple, sacrifice animals to pay for their sins, and pray for forgiveness.



Day 3

The Little Details

Inner Prison Cells

Professor Brian Rapske paints a dismal picture of Paul's prison experiences. He says that when guards fastened prisoners in stocks, they sometimes spread their legs until it caused severe pain.¹

Inner cells might have a small window up very high that let in little daylight. Nights were completely dark, with no artificial light provided.²

Rapske quotes the Greek historian Diodorus Siculus: "With so many shut up in such close quarters, the poor wretches were reduced to the physical appearance of brutes, and since their food and everything pertaining to their other needs was all foully commingled, a stench so terrible assailed anyone who drew near that it could scarcely be endured."³

Rapske says, "Ancient prison systems were known for their neglect and abuse of prisoners in the matter of diet and hygiene."⁴

Rejoice in Hardship

Today, we'll look at why Paul and Silas met persecution at Philippi and three ways they responded to it.

As Paul and the others continued to preach, they met heavy resistance.



Pray for God to teach you what he most wants you to know.

10. Read Acts 16:16-21. (a) What did the female slave do to earn money for her owners (verse 16)? (b) What happened when Paul commanded the spirit to come out of her (verse 18)? (c) Why were her owners angry (verse 19)? (d) What did they say Paul and Silas were advocating (verse 21)?

Rome had to approve all religions. Judaism was legal, so if Rome considered Christianity to be a sect of Judaism, it was legal too. If Rome decided it was a new religion, however, it would be unlawful.

11. Read Acts 16:22-24. (a) What two things did the magistrates order done to Paul and Silas (verse 22)? (b) What happened to them next (verses 23-24)?

The soldiers publicly stripped Paul and Silas and beat them with rods. The jailer put them in unlit inner cells usually reserved for the lowest class. There they sat in filth and stench, their feet securely fastened in stocks to secure, humiliate, and perhaps torture them. Sleep had to happen sitting up or lying on wounded backs in muck. The jailer gave them no food. Paul later wrote that they had "suffered and been treated outrageously in Philippi" (1 Thessalonians 2:2). In Philippians 1:29, he wrote about suffering: "For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him."

Sing to God

12. Read Acts 16:25. (a) How did Paul and Silas respond to the suffering and shame? (b) Who listened to them?

This response to hardship is one of the major themes in Philippians, as seen in 4:4: “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!”

13. ♥ Do you ever respond to suffering with prayer and singing hymns? If so, how has that affected your joy and peace?

Look Out for Others

14. Read Acts 16:26-28. (a) What did the earthquake do to the prison doors and the prisoners’ chains (verse 26)? (b) What was the jailer going to do (verse 27)? (c) What did Paul say (verse 28)?

If the prisoners escaped, the jailer would be executed.

15. Whose needs was Paul considering when he refused to escape?

This Christlike attitude is another theme in Philippians, as seen here in 2:4: “...not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.”

16. Read Acts 16:29-32. (a) What did the jailer ask (verse 30)? (b) How did Paul and Silas reply (verse 31)? (c) What else did they say (verse 32)?

The “word of the Lord” is probably the message Paul preached to Gentiles: Turn away from sin, give up idolatry (including coveting what others had), and turn to the one living God who created heaven and earth.



We also see from our Master Teacher that praise is a natural response to joy.

~ Janet McHenry



Spread the Joy of Salvation

17. Read Acts 16:33-34. (a) What did the jailer do for Paul and Silas (verse 33)?
(b) What did Paul and Silas then do for the jailer and his household (verse 33)?
(c) Why was the jailer filled with joy (verse 34)?

Knowing Jesus has saved you from your sins is indeed a great reason for joy.



Personalize Acts 16:34 as a prayer (see the example below).

I am filled with joy because I've come to believe in God—I and my loved ones.

Knowing Jesus has
saved you from your sins
is indeed a great reason
for joy.

Spread the Good News

Yesterday in our reading, Paul and Silas were in prison. They responded to persecution by singing to God, looking out for others, and spreading the joy of salvation. Joy filled their jailer because he had come to believe in Jesus as Savior. Let's pick up at daybreak.



Before you dive in, take a moment to pray for God to teach you what he most wants you to know today.

18. Read Acts 16:35-40. (a) What did the magistrates want done with Paul and Silas (verses 35-36)? (b) What did Paul demand (verse 37)? (c) What was the magistrates' reaction (verse 38)? (d) Did they do as Paul demanded (verse 39)? (e) After they came out of prison, what did Paul and Silas do at Lydia's house (verse 40)?

The magistrates were alarmed because it was illegal to beat a Roman citizen publicly. Paul's demand that they escort Silas and him from jail was to demonstrate the two men's innocence. This would help the new Philippian church survive, for the persecution begun against Paul and Silas would continue against the rest of the church members. Paul wrote about persecution in Philippians 1:27-28 (see sidebar).

Paul Spreads Good News in Macedonia and Greece

Expelled from Philippi, Paul continued to preach the gospel in Macedonia and Greece. Although many of the Philippian church members were poor, they insisted on financially supporting Paul. Paul commends them for this in Philippians 4:15-16 (see sidebar).

Over the next eight years, Paul apparently visited Philippi at least twice to encourage and strengthen the church. After his last visit, he sailed from Philippi to Jerusalem carrying gifts for the poor in Jerusalem. But plots against his life made it increasingly difficult for him to preach the gospel.

19. Read Acts 20:22-24, which records what happened shortly after Paul left Philippi on his second missionary journey through Macedonia. (a) Why was Paul going to Jerusalem (verse 22)? (b) What did Paul say the Holy Spirit was warning him would happen in Jerusalem (verse 23)? (c) What was Paul's only aim (verse 24)?



The Little Details

Connecting Acts to Philippians

Philippians 1:27-28

Whatever happens...stand firm in the one Spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved—and that by God.

Philippians 4:15-16

Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid more than once when I was in need.

Joy filled their jailer
because he had come to
believe in Jesus as Savior.



J.O.Y.= Jesus Only You.
~Terrie Bearden

20. Summarize Paul's reaction to the Holy Spirit's warnings about upcoming hardships (Acts 20:24).

- ☐ He took them as a sign to stop preaching; his work was done.
- ☐ He took them as a sign to stop preaching even though his work wasn't done.
- ☐ He took them as a sign that God was with him no matter what happened, and his work wasn't done.

Here's what Paul wrote to the Philippians about his goals: "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain" (1:21); and "I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus" (3:14).

Paul Spreads Good News in Jerusalem

When Paul reached Jerusalem, some Jews falsely accused him of bringing Greeks into the temple, which was unlawful (Acts 21:27-29). They dragged him out of the temple to kill him, starting a riot. Roman soldiers attempting to quell the riot arrested Paul and bound him with chains (Acts 21:33).

The Roman commander wanted to know why the Jews were so angry with Paul, so he let Paul speak to the crowds. Paul shared how the resurrected Jesus had appeared to him. They listened until he said Jesus told him to share the gospel with Gentiles. At that, the crowd erupted. The commander took Paul to the barracks to flog him (Acts 22:24). Paul revealed he was a Roman citizen and got out of the flogging.

The next day the commander brought Paul unbound before the Jewish leaders. Paul said he was on trial because of the hope of the resurrection of the dead. The Jewish leaders started arguing and became so violent, the commander sent troops to get Paul safely away.

The next night, Jesus appeared to Paul and said, "Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome" (Acts 23:11).

Paul Spreads Good News in Caesarea

Because Paul was a Roman citizen, when a plot to kill him was uncovered, the Roman commander gathered 200 soldiers, 70 horsemen, and 200 spearmen to escort Paul safely to Caesarea so he could stand trial before Governor Felix (Acts 23:23).

Paul testified about Jesus at his trial and talked privately with Felix. Although no charges deserving death or imprisonment could be proved, Felix left Paul in prison for two years to keep from angering the Jews (Acts 24:27).

When Felix was replaced as governor (partly for the way he was handling riots), Paul stood trial before the new governor, Festus. Wanting to appease the Jews, Festus asked Paul to return to Jerusalem to stand trial in a religious court. Paul appealed to Caesar so he could stand trial in Rome, as was the right of Roman citizens (it is similar to our appealing to the Supreme Court).

King Agrippa and his sister were paying a visit to the new governor, and Festus asked the king's advice. King Agrippa wanted to hear Paul personally, and Paul then gave his entire testimony as part of his hearing before the king's court. King Agrippa told Festus that

The next night, Jesus appeared to Paul and said, "Take courage!"

Paul should have been set free, but since he had already appealed to Caesar, to Caesar he must go.

Paul Spreads Good News on the Way to Rome

Paul's captors saw miraculous signs during Paul's journey to Rome. While he was sailing, a terrible storm nearly destroyed his ship, but Paul told the soldiers an angel had appeared to him and told him not to be afraid, for he must stand trial before Caesar. As a favor to Paul, every person would survive even though the ship would sink. It happened as Paul foretold. On the island where they were shipwrecked, a poisonous viper bit Paul, but he was miraculously unharmed, causing the inhabitants to think he was a god. Paul prayed for the sick on the island, and God cured all of them.

21. What do you think the guards likely did as soon as they reached Rome?

Paul wrote that because of his chains, "It has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ" (Philippians 1:13).

Paul Spreads Good News in Rome

When Paul arrived in Rome, he was allowed to rent quarters while remaining bound in chains. Heavy, rough chains often rendered limbs useless and inhibited sleep. Rome did not take care of her prisoners; instead, prisoners had to rely on friends and family to meet their needs. The Philippians learned of Paul's imprisonment and sent Epaphroditus to care for Paul and bring him gifts, as Philippians 4:18 shows: "I have received full payment and have more than enough. I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God."

Paul waited for his trial two more years.

22. While awaiting trial, what did Paul do with his time (Acts 28:30-31)?

And watched by guards who heard every word, he dictated letters to the churches...including a letter of thanks to the church at Philippi for their generous gifts.

23. ♥ Describe what you currently do with your time that you consider ministry.

💡 Think of a gift you've received from God or a person. Thank God for the giver and the gift.



The Little Details

Prison in Rome

Paul's imprisonment in Rome was not nearly as deplorable as his imprisonment in Philippi. According to Brian Rapske, he rented what was possibly a tiny room in an overcrowded and overpriced tenement built for prisoners.⁵

Most prisons provided food only to those who could not otherwise obtain it: tiny portions of bread, water, and sometimes wine. Often prisoners were allowed just one set of clothing. Since Paul rented quarters, he may have had access to public baths (many prisons did not allow bathing). Haircuts were probably forbidden.⁶

Jesus means for us to have joy, and we will, if we remain in him.



Meditating on the law of the Lord, the Scripture, moves us through duty toward joy.

~Timothy Keller

Build Joy

In John 15:1-8, Jesus taught that he is the vine and we are his branches. As long as we remain in him, we will bear fruit, for we have a heavenly Father as vinedresser, pruning and caring for us. It may take time for a branch to bear fruit, but our Father knows what he's doing, and as long as we remain in Jesus, we will bear fruit—fruit that will show we are Jesus's disciples: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23 ESV). We remain in Jesus by obeying him (John 15:10). Jesus said all this so that his joy may be in us and that our joy may be complete (John 15:11).

There we have it. Jesus means for us to have joy, and we will, if we remain in him.

In this journey through Philippians, we will study God's Word and practice joy builders. Why practice? Because that's how we make new habits: "Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into *practice*" (Philippians 4:9); "If you *practice* these qualities you will never fall" (2 Peter 1:10 ESV); and "*Practice* these things, immerse yourself in them" (1 Timothy 4:15 ESV).

We'll also practice praying as Paul prayed because he knew how to pray in a way that builds trust, joy, and peace.

The joy builders you'll find in these pages have all helped bring me joy. Some are simply attentively carrying out what Paul says to do. Joy builders help us practice obedience in small things with the aim of becoming obedient in big things. Others are practices that godly people throughout the centuries have found useful for growing spiritually. Some take a little getting used to, but the rewards are great.

Joy Builders

Here are two joy builders based on this week's lesson.

Discover the Good News

If you're not sure how to be saved, this joy builder is for you.

When an earthquake opened the prison doors, the jailer guarding Paul and Silas drew his sword to kill himself because he faced the death penalty if any prisoners escaped. Paul stopped him and assured him that no prisoners had escaped. The earthquake and Paul's undeserved compassion for him convinced the jailer that the God whom Paul worshiped existed. Trembling, he fell at Paul's feet and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

Paul told the jailer and his household, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved." He went from fear and no hope to being "filled with joy because he had come to believe in God" (Acts 16:34). I came to believe in the Lord Jesus while reading the Gospel of John. If you'd like to know more about salvation, that's a great place to start.



If you want to know more about what a true follower of Christ believes and how to come to God to be saved from your sins, read John 1–8.

Joy builders help us practice obedience in small things with the aim of becoming obedient in big things.

Sing Praises to the Lord

One joy-building habit my husband and I started years ago is playing worship music all night, starting about a half hour before bedtime. If we awaken at night, we can go downstairs to listen to and sing with the music. We also play worship music in the car.

In the Bible, song teaches God's ways, soothes emotions, and expresses worship. Scientific studies show that music "makes people happy, calms them down, maybe even makes them feel close to each other."⁷ Songs make up an entire book of the Bible: Psalms. Psalm 96 beckons us to sing to the Lord. So let's give it a try this week.

In the Philippian prison, Paul and Silas prayed and sang hymns to God. I'm convinced their reaction was no accident but sprang from habit, especially since they could sing only songs they knew by heart.

Colossians 3:16 reads, "Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts." I like what it says about psalms since so many of them are prayers about trusting God through injustice (for example, Psalm 12). Singing psalms reminds us that we're not alone in hardship and that God hears and answers our prayers.

Singing can spread the gospel. When my husband and I sang hymns to my grandmother in a nursing home, the other patients gathered to listen. In time, the hymns opened her heart to receive Christ after years of rejecting him.

Singing soothes. My mind easily fixates on problems, but music—especially worship music—gently shifts my focus, filling me with peace and joy.



Between now and next week, sing at least one hymn to the Lord. Choose any hymn you know, or sing Psalm 100 to any melody you like, or find Christian music on the Internet and sing with it. If you'd like, set aside time to sing to the Lord with family or friends.



Find inspiring songs at www.DiscoveringTheBibleSeries.com.

Joy-Building Prayer

Prayer makes us more aware of God's presence and helps us draw near to God. That increases joy.

This week, we began each lesson by praying that God would teach us whatever he most wanted us to know. That's one way to make reading God's words a two-way conversation. Another way is through meditative prayer. Meditative prayer is talking to God about a Bible passage we've just read. Let's try it.



Open your Bible and read Acts 16:25-34. **Praise** God for something you see of his character in this passage. **Confess** anything that convicts you. **Ask** for help to do something you see in this passage. **Thank** God for something in this passage.

We've started a new study, so let's pray about your hopes.



The Little Details

Why Sing to the Lord?

1) To imitate godly people

like Paul, Silas, Moses, David, Miriam, Deborah, and Mary, who sang to the Lord.

2) To put God's words in our hearts. Singing the Bible's psalms and words helps us memorize them.

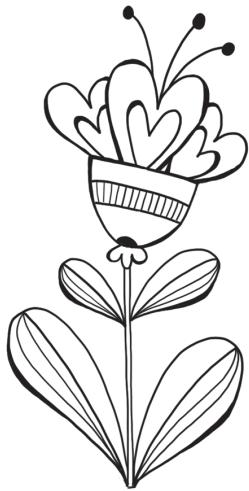
3) To minister to others. The prisoners learned about God as they listened to Paul and Silas.

4) To do what's fitting. "Sing joyfully to the LORD, you righteous; it is fitting for the upright to praise him" (Psalm 33:1).

5) To please God. "I will praise God's name in song... This will please the LORD" (Psalm 69:30-31).

6) To minister to ourselves. Song can settle anxious thoughts even as it reminds us of God's faithfulness (1 Samuel 16:16).

Prayer makes us more aware of God's presence and helps us draw near to God. That increases joy.



- 💡 (a) Talk to God about how much joy and peace you feel most days. (b) Boldly ask God for more.

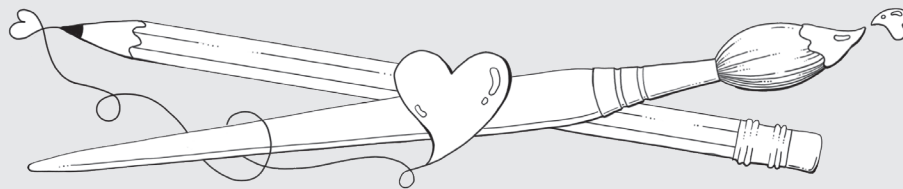
Paul's letter tells us to rejoice four times. To rejoice is to actively take joy in something. Let's rejoice over the week. Think about what God has done for you this week. Did you receive an answer to prayer, an insight, or strength? Did something in God's creation delight you? Did you resist temptation better? Did you receive forgiveness for anything?

- 💡 Thank God for something you are glad he did for you this week, explaining why it made you glad.

Psalms can lift our spirits when we pray or sing them. Psalm 96 exuberantly calls us to sing to the Lord, so it's a fitting close to this chapter.

- 💡 Turn to Psalm 96 and pray or sing it aloud to God.

To rejoice is to actively
take joy in something.



Creative Connection

“In the beginning God created...” Those are the very first words of the Bible. God could have started his Story very differently, but he didn’t. He chose to introduce himself to us, not as Lord God Almighty or as God our Provider, but as the Divine Creator. He wanted us to know him as the One who is able to create something from nothing. The One who can create something bright and beautiful from darkness and chaos. The One who can create joy where there appears to be only pain or sorrow.

In the beginning, I was not creative. I inherited the ability to draw from my mother and was known in high school for drawing realistic portraits. Given a photo, I could replicate it with a certain level of amateur skill...but I lacked creativity. As a young adult I became bored with drawing for the sake of drawing and put away all my art supplies, at least for that season.

It wasn’t until I came to know Jesus Christ as my personal Savior that I discovered my ability to draw was more than an inherited ability...it was a gift from God. I can still remember the day I surrendered my talents to him and asked if he would allow me to use my ability in some way to bring him glory and bless others. I wanted to share my love for him and my newfound faith creatively but didn’t know how. I would love to tell you that I was filled with creativity overnight, but I wasn’t.

The truth is, I had to allow God to do his creative work in me first. As I began to study the Scriptures...meditating on them and memorizing them...God was able to create in me a clean heart...transforming my mind with the truth of his Word...turning a life imprisoned by childhood pain into a life overflowing with the joy of being set free. I truly became a new creation in Christ and am now humbled and grateful for the creativity God has given me to express my faith in ways that encourage and bless others.

As I worked on the art for this week’s lesson, I found myself truly rejoicing in the Lord and creatively connecting with his heart and desire for my life...and yours. Knowing the Lord as the Divine Creator and becoming a cocreator with him in what he wants to do in you and through you is important to living a life of joy and rejoicing. By allowing him the freedom to do his creative work in you...healing your past, being your strength for today, and giving you faith for the future...you will discover more joy in your life and also open the door for his creativity to flow more freely through you in ways that will bring him greater glory and bless others.

Karla