

## **A Timely and Encouraging Message: How to Cope with Cabin Fever**

Without a doubt these are unprecedented days in which we are living. Keeping our spiritual equilibrium has become more and more challenging as the ravages of the virus intrude into our way of living, re-orchestrating our routines, restricting our movements, and recreating a “new normal.” Many employees are now working from home. In many cases, moms have become the primary educators, facilitating online classes, conducting field trips limited to the backyard, and trying to make sense of common core math. Homeschooling moms don’t have it easy either. They are cut off from their homeschool community and group activities. On top of that, many working moms are working from home as well as teaching their children and managing their households. Family life has been completely disrupted.

However, some benefits have manifested themselves amid the pandemic. Our maddening pace has slowed dramatically. The end result has been many more opportunities for meaningful family time together. Grab and go meals have given way to family dinners, which is a good thing. But snacking 15 times a day has become a new way of life! Going to church has become an online experience while sitting in your recliner. Daytime pajamas have become a real thing, as have cutting your people’s hair while watching a how-to video on YouTube. Don’t even get me started on coloring your own hair or at-home manicures. As one day morphs into the next and time seems to be standing still, how do we cope with cabin fever? How do we **thrive** and not merely **survive** this pandemic?

I have good news for you! God is still on the throne residing over His creation. Our study will look at Paul’s letter to the church at Philippi while under house arrest in Rome (Acts 28:30). Amazingly, we discover the apostle’s reaction to his unfortunate circumstances was joy. He did not complain about his difficult circumstances or ask his friends to procure his release. He wrote a rather upbeat message, urging his readers to celebrate with him the Lord Jesus Christ. And he spoke often of joy. Nineteen times over the course of this short letter Paul mentioned joy. Unbridled. Outlandish. Unspeakable joy.

### **I. The Benefits of Believers - Philippians 1:2; 12-18**

Paul opens with a familiar salutation, “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:2). Through a

personal relationship with Jesus Christ, we receive God's grace, His unmerited favor. Additionally, we have **peace with God**. Therefore, we can experience **the peace of God** regardless of our circumstances.

As believers, we have received untold riches in Christ Jesus. Here Paul mentions two of them: grace and peace. He opens and closes his letter with them. In between these bookends, he writes repeatedly of the joy Jesus provides!

The apostle Paul was in chains, but the gospel was not. The Roman government had seized the apostle and imprisoned him for preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. They intended to cut off the apostle's ministry and strike fear into the hearts of all who might be tempted to take his place. Despite his confinement, the apostle Paul continued to have an impactful ministry. Paul wrote, "I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel" (Philippians 1:12). In a twist of divine irony, the praetorian guards, consisting of some 9000 men, become part of his mission field. In God's sovereignty, they become Paul's captives. In 12-hour shifts, Caesar's elite military warriors are chained to the apostle, forced into his company. Many of them are captivated by Paul's unstoppable faith, unruffled peace, and unquenchable joy despite his difficult circumstances.

## II. **The Birthmark of Believers - Philippians 3:1; 7-9**

The letter to the Philippians resounds with joy. Outrageous joy is the birthright of every child of God. It is a byproduct of our salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ.

- John 15:11 says, "These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full."
- John 16:24 says, "Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be made full."
- In Jesus' high priestly prayer, He said to the Father, "But now I come to You; and these things I speak in the world so that they may have My joy made full in themselves" (John 17:13).

Joy is not something we muster up; it springs forth from an endless Source. It spills and it splashes from the overflow of our devotional life

and love for the Lord Jesus Christ. Rejoice in the Lord. It is a safeguard, a safe place, for us.

Regardless of our circumstances, Jesus is sovereignly ruling and reigning. The sooner we realize we are not in control and never have been, the sooner we will relinquish the need to be in charge and yield ourselves to Him. Paul focused his mind on who he was in Christ. This mindset allowed him to say, “Whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ” (Philippians 3:7). When we follow suit, we will begin to develop an awareness of His presence and a hunger for the restoration He provides. When we engage in the spiritual discipline of renewing our minds with the Word, combined with obedience and dependence on Him, a gradual transformation takes place. Our **practice** begins to reflect **our position** in Christ which produces outrageous **JOY!**

Nothing places us out of the grasp of the enemy’s reach quite like the joy of the Lord. When the joy bells are ringing in our soul, the heart soars to the presence of the Lord seated in the heavenlies. Joy flows out of the inner most being.

### **III. The of Blessings of Believers - Philippians 4:10-13; 19-20**

Paul had learned to be content in whatever circumstances he found himself. Contentment is learned through experience. Paul had learned to live in complete detachment from his circumstances. He reckoned the circumstances of his life to have been ordered by the Lord.

The apostle Paul was content. In poverty or in prosperity, Paul was content. In prison or in the pulpit, Paul was content. Full or famished, Paul was content. Why? Because he considered God to be in control of the circumstances of his life. Therefore, his soul was at rest regardless of the prevailing situations of life. Paul could rise above any set of circumstances and prosper spiritually. Why? Paul wrote, “I can do all things through Him who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13). Christ strengthened him. As Paul sought to live in the center of God’s will, he could rest in God’s power, provision, and providence.

Our current circumstances are dire, no doubt about it. Many have experienced devastating loss. Despair and depression are threatening to overtake even the most stalwart Christians. We have concerns regarding

our family's wellbeing, our own health, our financial stability, and on and on it goes. So much uncertainty and so many issues to consider have threatened to overwhelm us. The secret to combating cabin fever in the midst of this unique time is Jesus. Should we be able to grasp the truth of the book of Philippians, the things of this world will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace! And, oh the joy!! Irrepressible, unexplainable, uncontainable joy! May you walk with the Lord Jesus Christ as "a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God" (Philippians 4:19). May you enjoy His endless supply of joy!

*The joy of the Lord is your strength.*  
Nehemiah 8:10