

# Connect360: A Choice to Rejoice

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- *Lesson 2 in the BaptistWay Press Connect360 unit “Pure Joy” focuses on Philippians 1:12-19.*

At this point in his life, the Apostle Paul had been through some significantly difficult moments. He had endured beatings, whippings, rumors, lies, jailing, ostracizing and more in order to preach the gospel. He was a stranger in a strange land, navigating an anti-Christian world that was hostile and unfriendly. Yet Paul had no fear—whatever fear he had quickly turned to joy. Paul wrote in this passage that everything that had happened to him advanced the gospel (1:12). In this statement, he turned a negative circumstance into a positive one. He re-shifted his thinking from the default setting of “Why me?” to “What can I learn?”

This was a powerful testimony for Paul and one that can serve as an inspiration for us now. When something goes wrong in our lives, can we say it is to advance the gospel? Can we say we have endured the hardships of life and come out on the other side with God? How about even when it’s not our fault? The way we respond to our circumstances, whether they are caused by our actions or not, determines where we receive our joy. If Paul blamed the Lord for every single thing he experienced, including traveling to Macedonia when he didn’t initially want to (Acts 16:6-10), he would not be the man of God he was called to be and would be stuck in a mindset that would not benefit him or the kingdom of God.

# **‘Life’s not kind, but it’s all for my good’**

One of the most prevalent pieces of advice adults give to their teenage sons and daughters is that “Life is not kind,” which serves to illuminate them to the real-world scenarios of everyday circumstances. Depending on the response, that teenager may reject that notion and try to adjust their lives to fit their benefit. But those who end up finding true happiness accept their lives for what it is and work with not against it. They find their passion and run toward it, knowing that it brings some fulfillment along the way. In the same way, God calls us to this same ideology with an addition: “Life’s not kind, but it’s all for my good” (Romans 8:28). It is a daily reminder that God is in control, a reminder that kept Paul during all the strife and struggle of his journeys and mission. God is in control, and everything he has us go through works for the good of his kingdom and his mission.

Most people in our lives would not choose pain. They would not choose to experience hurtful and harmful memories and situations if they wanted. But God takes those trials and tribulations and uses them for his good. When we experience trauma, we must be brave enough to see it as a chance to share God’s word, not retreat inside of ourselves. We must encourage ourselves, as Paul did throughout the entire letter of Philippians, and remember that though life is not kind, we serve a God who is.

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