

# Explore the Bible: Joy of adversity

August 23, 2021

- *The Explore the Bible lesson for Sept. 12 focuses on Philippians 1:12-26.*

The serenity prayer is contributed to 20th century theologian Reinhold Neibuhr, and it is one of the most beloved prayers quoted by people worldwide, as well as popular among the group Alcoholics Anonymous. The beautiful heart-felt prayer reads, “God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference.” Although the prayer is not found in the Bible and some may point to God as a higher power, Christians quote the prayer recognizing God as Creator and Savior of the world.

In the world of confusion and chaos, Christians are petitioning God for peace and calmness. Realizing only a true and living God will grant the answers to the serenity prayer makes the heart glad. Jesus reminds his disciples in John 14:27, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”

The same peace is granted to every believer by the Holy Spirit today. Courage to change things is the opposite of fear to remain in stagnant things. Paul reminds young Timothy, “For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid but gives us power and love and discipline” (2 Timothy 1:7). King Solomon asked God for wisdom to rule the kingdom, and God granted him wisdom and riches along with it (1 Kings 3:10). The same kind of wisdom granted to King Solomon is available to the believer when asked without doubting (James 1:5). It takes wisdom from God to know the

difference between what is good and what is best for our lives.

## **Advancing the Gospel (Philippians 1:12-18)**

In Paul's letter to the Philippian church, Paul wants the church to be confident the gospel is being spread throughout the prison (v. 12). Although Paul is incarcerated, he refuses to let his imprisonment define who he is in Christ Jesus. Paul genuinely believes his imprisonment is because he is in Christ (v. 13).

Before Paul's conversion, he persecuted the church, denied his Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and thought he was doing the right things to protect the sacred word of God. After his conversion, Paul was persuaded nothing could separate him from the love of God (Romans 8:38-39).

The distress Paul expresses is that preachers are preaching Christ for the wrong reasons (v. 15). How is it possible for a believer to preach out of selfish gain? Is it possible for a preacher to stoop to the lowest methods to obtain fame and fortune? In any case, those who sought to cause problems did not deter Paul from his assignment.

Timothy was instructed by Paul to teach on issues of morality and ethics to the church, especially about false teachers and money (1 Timothy 6:3-10). Paul wanted Timothy to understand "godliness with contentment is great gain" (1 Timothy 6:6). However, God has given wealth to some believers. Lydia, (Acts 16:14-16), was a rich businesswoman who was converted by the message of Paul. Afterwards, she and her family were baptized. Let us thank God for the many believers who are wealthy and supporting the gospel with their wealth. But above all, the Christian's conduct must be worthy of the gospel of Christ (vs. 27).

# Unashamed of the Gospel (Philippians 1:19-26)

Paul's eager expectation and hope is to be unashamed. Paul loved God before his conversion. Persecuting the church and killing the Christians were examples of Paul's passion to keep the Law and standards of the Old Testament pure, so he thought. It is no surprise after his experience with the living Christ and his conversion to Christianity that he confesses, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile" (Romans 1:16). There were numerous actions of the past that caused him shame; however, the grace of God erased all shame until Paul was completely healed to the point "Christ would be highly honored in his body" (vs. 20).

How should Christians handle the shame of the past? As believers deal with the pain of shame and share stories with other believers, Jesus will heal the heart and bring freedom to the spirit.

Jesus showed compassion to those who experienced shame. One example is the woman at Bethany who oiled his head and feet while in the home of Simon the leper (Matthew 6: 6-13). Jesus told the indignant disciples what the women did forever would be included in the gospel story.

Through his death on the cross, shame was scorned. "For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrew 12:2b). Crucifixion on the cross was the most shameful way a person could die. However, Jesus endured the shame and guilt for all humanity's sin. Paul is beyond grateful to honor Christ, through life or death, because of the awful price paid for his wrongdoing.

*Margie Clayton is minister of education at Berean Tabernacle Baptist Church in Liberty, Texas.*