

Pause to pray

JOY

Lord, You are the world's JOY! Thank you, God, that while we were enemies, You reconciled us to Yourself through the death of Jesus, and we are saved by His life (Romans 5:10). We praise You that 592,408 people have heard this truth through Your IMB workers in 2021. We pray that Your joy will take root in each of these hearts and that joy will extend to hard-to-reach places, cities and displaced peoples. Amen.

JOYFUL PRAYER

“I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now.”

PHILIPPIANS 1:3-5

Earlier this year, the research team at IMB provided the following information about the work of IMB missionaries around the world:

- a.** Since 1992, IMB missionaries have planted more than 374,000 churches among the nations.
- b.** IMB missionaries have engaged more than 2,300 different people groups with the

gospel of Jesus Christ.

c. In the last two years, and during the COVID-19 pandemic, IMB missionaries have trained more than 309,000 church leaders.

Click [here](#) to see the full statistical report for 2021. Links are available to reports from previous years. Even though the world evangelization and disciple-making task remain formidably large — 4.5 billion people in more than 7,000 unreached people groups — we can and should celebrate all that God is doing! Paul has an attitude of celebration toward the church in Philippi. He is painfully aware of the staggering reality of a lost world, but his letter

to the Philippians is filled with joy because of their “participation in the gospel from the first day until now” (Philippians 1:5).

Paul’s joy in the Philippians’ faithful gospel partnership fuels his joyful praying on their behalf. A similar opportunity is available for every Southern Baptist who longs to be in touch with, pray for and joyfully celebrate all that God is doing through our missionaries across the globe. Every month, individuals and churches can receive Prayer Points by email or traditional mail.

Each month, Prayer Points focuses each of the daily prayers on a particular subject, people group, city or region of the world in short one or

two-sentence prayer requests from the field. Visit this [link](#) to explore current or previous editions of Prayer Points or to sign up for your free subscription.

Don't delay, begin today prayerfully rejoicing with your IMB leaders, missionaries and staff in the goodness and faithfulness of God and how He is blessing the work of your missionaries all around the world!



JOYFUL PROCLAMATION

“What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice.”

PHILIPPIANS 1:18

You know the story well. The story of the One, “who for the joy set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:2). The One who “emptied himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men ... humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:7–8). The One of Whom it was promised would

be "great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David; and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and his kingdom will have no end" (Luke 1:32–33).

His story. The story of the One who has set us free. The story of the One who has purchased our redemption.

Yes. That story. The story that now manifests itself through our faithful proclamation of it among the nations of the earth, confident that the One we proclaim will save some from "every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues..." (Revelation 7:9).

That's what Paul meant in his letter to the Philippians. He wasn't concerned about the motive behind people arguing about the genuine nature of

his ministry. His ambition? "Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice" (Philippians 1:18). This is the driving ambition of your 3,600+ IMB missionaries — to see Christ proclaimed, lives changed, churches planted, leaders raised up and Jesus glorified!

Open your heart and sing.

We have heard the joyful sound:

Jesus saves! Jesus saves!

Spread the tidings all around:

Jesus saves! Jesus saves!

*Bear the news to every land, climb
the steeps and cross the waves;*

Onward! 'tis our Lord's command;

Jesus saves! Jesus saves!

Give the winds a mighty voice:

Jesus saves! Jesus saves!

*Let the nations now rejoice,
Jesus saves! Jesus saves!*

*Shout salvation full and free;
highest hills and deepest caves;*

*This our song of victory: Jesus
saves! Jesus saves! (We Have
Heard the Joyful Song).*

*Joyful! Joyful! We adore Thee!
God of glory! Lord of love!*

Help us today to make a joyful proclamation to our neighbors, co-workers, family members and friends that Christ has come to set us free, to redeem, to save, to love and to embrace. He is Lord of all!



JOYFUL PROGRESS

“Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith.”

PHILIPPIANS 1:25

Paul was speaking to the Philippian church in missionary terms when he said, “I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith” (Philippians 1:25). What God had started with the Macedonian vision in Acts 16, Paul was delighted to be a part of as the Philippians progressed toward full maturity in Christ.

Missionaries go about the missionary task in the same manner Paul did. Their goal is to stay with a people until Christ fully shapes their life. The missionary

task aims to minister from the beginning of the evangelistic entry among the people until the formation of a fully functioning church with its own leaders. Then, there is an exit to partnership in the disciple-making task assigned to us by the Lord Jesus. The missionary task looks like this:

- a.** Entry into a people by whatever means is available.
- b.** Evangelism among the people and clearly sharing the gospel.
- c.** Discipleship of those who profess faith in Jesus.
- d.** Bringing new believers together to form a church family.
- e.** Developing leaders from among the new believers as God calls them forth.
- f.** Exiting to partnership once the

church is biblically established with leaders.

This strategy is on full display in the New Testament and especially in Paul's ministry. It is also a strategy spelled out in the IMB's foundational resource for the missionary enterprise called Foundations. You can access this resource on the IMB website, purchase copies for study or download the PDF file and study on your electronic device. Here's the [link](#) to the free downloadable version, and here's a [link](#) to the free downloadable companion study guide for Foundations.

The IMB is convinced that Paul presents a strong biblical model of staying engaged in the missionary task with people through to "Exit to Partnership." Paul would have been content to

“depart [this life] and be with Christ” (Philippians 1:23) once he had shared the gospel in Philippi. But Paul understood the importance of walking with new believers to maturity. What a joyful privilege it is to be a part of the progress of faith development among new followers of Jesus!

Who are you discipling to full maturity in Christ? If you have one or more such people, pray for those individuals now. If you don't have anyone, ask God to place someone on your heart this Advent season with whom you will walk until they are fully mature in Christ.



JOYFUL PURPOSE

“Make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.”

PHILIPPIANS 2:2

Purpose. Many people struggle to discover their purpose in life. Paul, however, has no qualms about pinpointing believers' unique, God-orchestrated purpose — to be like Christ. Paul exalts Christ's servant-hearted attitude in the words immediately following the phrase, “intent on one purpose” (Philippians 2:2).

- a.** “Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit” (2:3).
- b.** “Regard one another as more important than yourselves” (2:3).

c. "Look out for the interests of others" (2:4).

d. "Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus" (2:5).

The Scripture makes it clear that what we celebrate at this season of Advent (see John 1:1–4; Matthew 1:18–25; Luke 2:1–20) becomes the foundation and pattern for how believers are expected to live their lives for the glory of God. Jesus left the magnificence of heaven, stepped into human clothing, lived a sinless life, was rejected and crucified and rose victoriously from the dead! His willing sacrifice provides our salvation and peace with God and lays a foundational framework for how we live as His followers.

Striving together for the sake of

the gospel, we are called to imitate Christ's total sacrifice of self for our disciple-making assignment (Matthew 28:19-20):

- e.** "Go and make disciples" (28:19).
- f.** "Baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." (28:19)
- g.** "Teach them to obey everything I commanded you look out for the interests of others" (28:20).

Remarkably, Jesus did what He did "for the joy set before him" (Hebrews 12:2). He "endured the cross, despising the shame... and endured hostility by sinners" (Hebrews 12:2,3). This is an unachievable pattern for us to follow, yet one that we can fulfill through the power of Christ in us. After all, we have been "crucified with Christ and it is no

longer [we] who live, but Christ lives in [us]" (Galatians 2:20). The life we live as His followers is a life of faith (Galatians 2:20) immersed in the Holy Spirit's power (Acts 1:8; Ephesians 2:13–14).

If the Philippians would heed Paul's directive, not only would his joy be complete, but their joy would be deepened by living out their purpose. The same is true for us. When we embrace the journey of faith in Jesus Christ, Immanuel, God with us, we will experience joyful purpose. Jesus said, "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:10).



JOYFUL PERSPECTIVE

“Receive him then in the Lord with all joy, and hold men like him in high regard; because he came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was deficient in your service to me.”

PHILIPPIANS 2:29-30

Paul was right when he asked the Philippians to hold Epaphroditus in high regard and receive him “in the Lord with all joy... because he came close to death for the work of Christ” (Philippians 2:29-30). They needed to give honor to Epaphroditus and to others like him who risked their lives for the sake of the gospel. Epaphroditus had a

joyful perspective on his life.

The IMB takes this example very seriously. So seriously, that every five years the IMB hosts a conference and celebration to honor and hold in "high regard" those men and women who have risked their lives for the sake of the gospel over a long period. We call them emeriti. Emeriti are not just former missionaries who served a term or two with the IMB. They are men and women who have served at least 15 years among the nations, and their number of years of service plus their current age equals 80.

Earlier this year, the every-five-year celebration happened in Orlando, Florida. Nearly 800 former missionaries attended and were celebrated

and honored. You can read about the conference [here](#). These men and women share Epaphroditus's joyful perspective on life.

This amazing group has some unbelievable stories to tell regarding serving Jesus cross-culturally. The article linked above opens with...

"they speak more than 40 languages and numerous local and tribal dialects. Many endured persecution, war, tribal conflict and loss of property. Several had their homes burned. More than one was imprisoned. Grave markers overseas name friends and family, even children, lost while serving for the sake of the gospel."

Still, others that the IMB honors are those who gave their lives shar-

ing Jesus among the nations. This [video](#) captures the importance of these precious martyrs of the faith. Your missionaries take their assignment very seriously and are willing to give their lives for the advance of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Would you pause right now and ask the Lord to strengthen, empower and bless their efforts to communicate the gospel of Jesus Christ to the nations? Would you also consider whether God is calling you to international missions?



JOYFUL POSITION

“Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and my crown, in this way stand firm in the Lord, my beloved.”

PHILIPPIANS 4:1

As Paul began to close out his letter to the church in Philippi, he referred to the believers there as (1) “my beloved brethren” (Philippians 4:1), and (2) “my joy and my crown” (Philippians 4:1). Those who had come to faith in Jesus in the city of Philippi — like Lydia, a wealthy business owner, an unnamed once-demon-possessed slave girl and a Roman jailkeeper and his family — had become spiritual brothers and

sisters to Paul. They also held the distinction of being Paul's crowning gospel achievement.

Paul uses similar words when writing to yet another Macedonian church – the church in Thessalonica. "For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at his coming? For you are our glory and joy" (1 Thessalonians 2:19–20). Paul viewed those individuals who had, through his ministry, received Jesus by faith as his crown. They were the crowning achievement of his life that he would one day gladly present to Jesus in an act of adoration, worship and praise.

Paul told the believers in Corinth that he was "jealous for [them] with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin" (2 Corinthians 11:2). Like Paul, your IMB missionaries believe there is no greater joy or crown than being in the position to present to Christ those whom they have been used by Christ to lead to faith. In the first two years of the COVID-19 pandemic (2020–2021), your missionaries have seen God marvelously and miraculously save more than 300,000 individuals who have made professions of faith!

This is at the heart of what Jesus came to do. "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that

which was lost" (Luke 19:10). It is at the heart of our assignment to make disciples of all the nations (Matthew 28:18–20). Professions of faith. Disciples. Crowning gospel achievement — what a joyful position! This is why Southern Baptists pray, give, go and send. Who are the ones you are asking God to save? Let's plead with Him to save them during this season of Advent through our faithful witness.

