



BEYOND  
SUFFERING  
→ BIBLE ←

WHERE DISABILITIES AND  
POSSIBILITIES MEET.



## JONI AND FRIENDS

For 35 years, Joni and Friends has been dedicated to accelerating ministry among people who are affected by disability, meeting physical, emotional, and spiritual needs in practical ways while extending the love and message of Christ. Joni and Friends reaches thousands of families affected by disability around the globe through ministries such as inspiring radio and television programs, Wheels for the World wheelchair distributions, US and international Family Retreats that provide respite for special needs families, and JAF Field Services offering church training along with educational and inspirational resources.

## THE CHRISTIAN INSTITUTE ON DISABILITY

The Christian Institute on Disability (CID) exists to impact the Church, Christian and public institutions, and societies with a biblical worldview and life-giving truth on issues pertaining to life, dignity, justice, and equality that affect people with disabilities. As the academic arm of the Joni and Friends International Disability Center, the CID comes alongside educational institutions to assist in course development in theology, ministry, missions, and advocacy as it relates to suffering and disability. Through education, training, missions, and internships, the CID is empowering students in all disciplines to evangelize, include, and disciple people affected by disability.

## TYNDALE HOUSE PUBLISHERS, INC.

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*Dear Friends,* Since the beginning of the human race, people who are acquainted with suffering and disability have struggled with issues of justice, equality, and the right-to-life. In our search for validation, peace of mind, and a purpose for living, where can we find a firm foundation?

**The answer is the Word of God.** In the character of God, we find justice and equality, discover our purpose, and begin to understand the true value of life. If we are to fully grasp what suffering is, and what we must do with it, we must spend time digging into Scripture.

It's the journey I began after my 1967 diving accident. When I learned that my quadriplegia was permanent, I sank into a deep depression that evolved into suicidal despair. I would stay in bed, telling my sister to turn out the lights and shut my bedroom door. But I found I could not live with such hopelessness, and finally cried out, "*Oh, God, if I cannot die, then please show me how to live!*"

The next morning, I decided to get out of bed and face life. My sister pushed my wheelchair under a music stand on which she set my Bible. Clenching a mouth stick between my teeth, I began turning the pages of God's Word. Although I knew the Bible contained answers, I wasn't sure where to begin to look. Thankfully, God brought Christian friends alongside me to help me discover living Bread for my hungry soul. For years, I've longed to help people who struggle as I once did and come alongside them to provide guidance.

This is why I am so excited about the **BEYOND SUFFERING BIBLE**. It is designed to help the reader—especially those affected by disability—grasp the goodness of God amidst critical questions about suffering. Through profiles, devotionals, and connection notes, this edition of God's Word delves into doctrines of his sovereignty, our salvation, heaven, and hell. The *Beyond Suffering Bible* also explores questions about healing—why does God heal some and not others? What about sensitive ethical issues relating to disability, such as stem cell research and so-called death with dignity? How can the church learn to embrace special-needs families and equip more people with disabilities in leadership roles?

Most of all, the *Beyond Suffering Bible* exalts God as preeminent and supreme over every disease and disability. It showcases the righteousness and mercy of God on behalf of those who struggle under the weight of disability, poverty and injustice. It will help you go beyond suffering so you, too, can say, "*My suffering was good for me, for it taught me to pay attention to your decrees.*" (Psalm 119:71).

While we may wish we could simply erase "suffering" from the dictionary, God has a plan in it, for it, and through it. My prayer is that God will use this Bible to not only change a person's perspective on their disability, but change their family... their community... and finally, the culture.

JONI EARECKSON TADA



The **BEYOND SUFFERING BIBLE** is filled with features that are specifically designed to help readers engage directly with God's Word as they live lives that are touched by suffering. Each piece has been carefully created to provide readers with valuable information, meaningful encouragement, or challenging application—but always with the goal that they would come to understand themselves, others, and God more deeply as a result of their encounter with God's Word.

"Always be full of joy in the Lord.  
I say it again—rejoice!"  
PHILIPPIANS 4:4

## Breaking the Joy Barrier

"God will never give you more than you can handle." "God is working all things for the good." "If God brings you to it, he'll bring you through it." These are common clichés of the Christian faith. And while such catchphrases are rooted in Scripture, they can sound glib if not delivered with care. *Philippians 4:4* could easily fall into this category. For hurting people, a natural response to Paul's exhortation to "always be full of joy" might be, "Yeah, right!"

Always? Everyone? Rejoice about what?

*Break the Barriers* is a one-of-a-kind touring gymnastics team that exudes so much joy and excitement through their show it's easy to miss the fact that the performers all have disabilities. Young people clad in colorful leotards leap and fly through the air to a booming soundtrack. A teenager with Down syndrome pushes the wheelchair of a child with cerebral palsy. Adult spectators leap watch as the kids construct human pyramids. A couple of stronger boys even carry smiling kids in wheelchairs over their heads. The audience is both awestruck and inspired by the young people who radiate joy as they also build awareness and understanding for those impacted by disability.

Had Paul been in the audience that day, he would have had the standing ovation. Throughout his letter to the Philippians, Paul challenges fellow believers to trust in God's sovereignty and joyfully live out their faith, regardless of their circumstances. It's a message found in both the Old and New Testaments, and one Paul himself likely wrestled with as he faced suffering and persecution. Some have theorized that the apostle too may have had a disability.

There is something intriguing about an individual who can maintain joy despite arduous circumstances. Perhaps that played a part in God's decision not to remove Paul's "thorn in the flesh," despite his fervent requests (2 Cor 12:7-10).

Rejoice always? Everyone? Yes!



**DEVOTIONALS** Some verses or passages need more than just a few sentences to tease out what God wants us to learn from them about living beyond suffering. For those passages, there are full-page devotionals to help you delve a little bit deeper to be blessed or challenged by the message of the Scripture.



**BOOK INTRODUCTIONS** Each book of the Bible has an introduction, orienting readers to the vital information they need to help them understand the book more fully. But the *Beyond Suffering Bible* goes beyond a basic book introduction, focusing on key suffering and disability themes that are addressed in each book of the Bible.

**PROFILES** The truths of the Bible are never just abstract concepts; they are always related to real, embodied people. So scattered throughout the *Beyond Suffering Bible* are profiles of real people where you will learn about God and yourself through their stories. Some of these are people that are named on the pages of the Scriptures, but others are contemporary people—some famous, but others just ordinary people with extraordinary things that they can teach us all.



PROFILES

Good caregivers love people well



A WORD FROM JONI

## *I Need God in My Suffering*

When we wonder why we must suffer, we're actually asking questions of someone. That someone is God. But why he created suffering doesn't really matter. The only thing that matters is how we respond. When we can't find the answers we're looking for, we can find peace in the only true answer: We need him! Affliction is the lowest common denominator for all of us. Philippians 1:29 tells us to expect suffering: "For you have been given not only the privilege of trusting in Christ but also the privilege of suffering for him." No matter how strong our faith is, it's natural to ask why.

After many years of suffering, I've concluded that God allows one form of evil, suffering, to expose another form of evil, sin. It is as if God turns suffering on its head and helps us to feel the sting of sin when we suffer so that as we are headed for heaven, we're reminded of how poisonous sin really is. So, suffering is this jackhammer, a sandblasting machine that strips away the fear, anxiety, self-centeredness, complaining, and "I don't care" attitude toward others who hurt. God allows affliction to rip that away so that we can see the world through the eyes of Christ.

God hates evil and suffering. He tells us in his Word to relieve suffering, and he relieves it every day. We can be sure if our hearts hurt for someone, God felt that pain first. He felt my pain first. Our souls are strengthened through suffering. To know God better, we must know our suffering better. And as we do, we become less "me" focused and more God focused.



**A WORD FROM JONI:** *The Beyond Suffering Bible* was born out of the passion of the organization Joni Eareckson Tada founded, and it includes dozens of devotional articles written by Joni that reflect her heart for pursuing God in the midst of suffering and are written in her warm and inviting style. These devotionals are sure to touch your heart and draw you closer to your Creator through gaining new perspectives on the Scripture verses they are connected with.



### CONNECTION POINTS

**3:7-11 Joy in Suffering** Suffering is the great equalizer. Whether emotional, physical, social, or spiritual, suffering unites us in God's purpose. With Paul, we can affirm that nothing eradicates our sinful, selfish desires and transforms us into the image of Christ quite like pain and suffering. We may differ in the degree and duration of our suffering. Some people with disabilities may undergo deeper levels and longer periods of suffering than those without disabilities. Yet through it all, we share Paul's deepest desire—to know Jesus in his death that we might also experience the joy of his resurrection.

**CONNECTION POINTS:** *The Beyond Suffering Bible* is about helping you to connect the Bible to your everyday life—especially when it touches on issues of suffering and disability. So on almost every page there are “connection points”: brief notes that explain or expand on a verse or passage from the Bible. Think study notes, except these are laser focused on helping you connect specifically with a biblical theology of suffering.

**RESOURCES:** The front and back of the *Beyond Suffering Bible* is jam packed with helpful resources for you to take your learning further and propel you to action. Indexes help you quickly find relevant content within the Bible. Read “God’s Story of Disability: The Unfolding Plan of God from Genesis to Revelation.” Work through content that helps you think about starting an effective disability ministry at your church. And more!





# BEYOND SUFFERING BIBLE

*Philippians Excerpt*



## Philippians

Contentment. Paul had learned the secret of this attitude, and he revealed it to the Philippians. While under house arrest, Paul wrote this letter to the Philippians to thank some dear friends who had sent him money. In this letter he told them about a joy that does not depend upon external circumstances because it is rooted in Jesus Christ, who gives it freely. Paul revealed his uncertainty about his future, whether he would be executed or released. However, Paul's trust in Christ gave him confidence to face any circumstance with grace and contentment.

**AUTHOR:**  
Paul the apostle.

**DATE WRITTEN:**  
Around A.D. 61, during Paul's imprisonment in Rome.

**PURPOSE:**  
To thank the Philippians for the gift they had sent him and to encourage them by describing the contentment he had found in Jesus Christ.

### SUFFERING & DISABILITY THEMES

- ✧ **Citizenship in Heaven** People with disabilities and chronic pain are not second-class citizens. They can rest assured that their true citizenship is in heaven. Paul reminds us not to feel diminished in any way by our sufferings because we "have been given not only the privilege of trusting Christ, but also the privilege of suffering for him" (1:28-29).
- ✧ **Contentment** Our sense of physical and emotional well-being should not come from material things. While disease and disability cross all social classes, today's high medical costs can leave families struggling to make ends meet. Things that once seemed valuable become worthless compared to a healthy child or loved one. Paul urges us to embrace his secret of being content in the midst of life's difficult challenges by focusing on Christ and our mission of sharing the Good News.
- ✧ **Joy** Joy is a gift of God as well as a practice of faith for all who follow Christ. Paul repeatedly tells the Philippians to rejoice or be joyful—when life is good and when life is tough. Suffering can feel like a prison; pain can feel like it will never come to an end. Joy allows our love to flow, our attitude to be Christlike, our thoughts to be fixed on the good, and our potential to be fulfilled in whatever life circumstances we face.

**Greetings from Paul**

**1** This letter is from Paul and Timothy, slaves of Christ Jesus.

I am writing to all of God's holy people in Philippi who belong to Christ Jesus, including the elders<sup>a</sup> and deacons.

<sup>b</sup>May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace.

**Paul's Thanksgiving and Prayer**

<sup>c</sup>Every time I think of you, I give thanks to my God. <sup>d</sup>Whenever I pray, I make my requests for all of you with joy, <sup>e</sup>for you have been my partners in spreading the Good News about Christ from the time you first heard it until now. <sup>f</sup>And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns.

<sup>g</sup>So it is right that I should feel as I do about all of you, for you have a special place in my heart. You share with me the special favor of God, both in my imprisonment and in defending and confirming the truth of the Good News. <sup>h</sup>God knows how much I love you and long for you with the tender compassion of Christ Jesus.

<sup>i</sup>I pray that your love will overflow more and more, and that you will keep on growing in knowledge and understanding. <sup>j</sup>For I want you to understand what really matters, so that you may live pure and blameless lives

until the day of Christ's return. <sup>k</sup>May you always be filled with the fruit of your salvation—the righteous character produced in your life by Jesus Christ<sup>l</sup>—for this will bring much glory and praise to God.

**Paul's Joy That Christ Is Preached**

<sup>m</sup>And I want you to know, my dear brothers and sisters,<sup>n</sup> that everything that has happened to me here has helped to spread the Good News. <sup>o</sup>For everyone here, including the whole palace guard,<sup>p</sup> knows that I am in chains because of Christ. <sup>q</sup>And because of my imprisonment, most of the believers<sup>r</sup> here have gained confidence and boldly speak God's message<sup>s</sup> without fear.

<sup>t</sup>It's true that some are preaching out of jealousy and rivalry. But others preach about Christ with pure motives. <sup>u</sup>They preach because they love me, for they know I have been appointed to defend the Good News. <sup>v</sup>Those others do not have pure motives as they preach about Christ. They preach with selfish ambition, not sincerely, intending to make my chains more painful to me. <sup>w</sup>But that doesn't matter. Whether their motives are false or genuine, the message about Christ is being preached either way, so I rejoice. And I will continue to rejoice. <sup>x</sup>For I know that as you pray for me and the Spirit of Jesus Christ helps me, this will lead to my deliverance.

**Paul's Life for Christ**

<sup>y</sup>For I fully expect and hope that I will never be ashamed, but that I will continue to be bold for Christ, as I have been in the past. And I trust that my life will bring honor to Christ, whether I live or die. <sup>z</sup>For to me, living means living for Christ, and dying is even better. <sup>aa</sup>But if I live, I can do more fruitful work for Christ. So I really don't know which is better. <sup>ab</sup>I'm torn between two desires: I long to go and be with Christ, which would be far better for me. <sup>ac</sup>But for your sakes, it is better that I continue to live.

<sup>ad</sup>Knowing this, I am convinced that I will remain alive so I can continue to help all of you grow and experience the joy of your faith. <sup>ae</sup>And when I come to you again, you will have even more reason to take pride in Christ Jesus because of what he is doing through me.

<sup>a</sup>1:1 Or overseers or bishops. <sup>b</sup>1:11 Greek with the fruit of righteousness through Jesus Christ. <sup>c</sup>1:12 Greek brothers. <sup>d</sup>1:13 Greek including all the prisoners. <sup>e</sup>1:14a Greek brothers in the Lord. <sup>f</sup>1:14b Some manuscripts read speak the message.

**EPAPHRODITUS** Devoted Caregiver

**ASK FAMILIES AFFECTED** by disability about caregivers, and they might borrow from a familiar Proverb: "Who can find a virtuous and capable [caregiver]? She [or he] is more precious than rubies" (Prov 31:10). Good caregivers love people and usually become a respected part of the family and medical team. The best ones embrace their task as a calling from God, which seems to have been the case with Epaphroditus. He exemplified Paul's admonition in Philippians 2:12 to "work hard to show the results of [his] salvation."

While Scripture tells us very little about Epaphroditus, a closer examination of the details reveals an honorable man and dedicated caregiver. His church family selected him as a trustworthy person to carry their gifts and offerings to Paul. We can assume he was a man of courage because his own life was probably at risk while serving Paul—an unpopular prisoner with an uncertain future. Epaphroditus also made the sacrifice of walking away from his own family, friends, and life of comfort for an undetermined amount of time. Then, like many committed caregivers, who get burned out and exhausted, he became very ill—so ill he almost died.

As a result of his nurturing heart, a strong bond was formed between the great apostle Paul and this common man Epaphroditus. What joy and satisfaction Epaphroditus must have felt returning to Philippi with Paul's letter tucked safely in his belt. The apostle graciously acknowledged Epaphroditus's sacrifice, referring to him as a "true brother, co-worker, and fellow soldier" whom God had shown mercy through healing (Phil 2:25-27). No doubt the believers at Philippi welcomed their brother home with the honor he deserved.

Oh, that today's church would catch a vision to likewise love and support those who are willing to serve as caregivers. As we value caregivers and esteem their work done as unto the Lord, we honor our Savior who was the ultimate model of service and sacrifice for others.

*Good caregivers love people well*

**CONNECTION POINTS**

**1:4-7 Partnership** The apostle Paul relied on fellow believers to help him communicate the gospel and accomplish his mission. Ministry to and with people with disabilities is no different. For our service to be effective, it must be relational. There are no lone rangers in disability ministry, and we can learn a lot from community organizations who love and serve families affected by disabilities.

**1:21-25 Living with Suffering** Prolonged suffering has the power to bring us face-to-face with Paul's dilemma here. Is being with Christ now better than living a life of pain? It's a familiar question for people with severe disabilities. While Paul repeatedly faced death, he sought to preserve his life with the goal of using every breath to glorify God and an understanding that once his time on earth was done, he would be with Christ. In light of that hope, God preserved Paul's life time and again so that he could continue to serve and bless others.



**Live as Citizens of Heaven**

**27**Above all, you must live as citizens of heaven, conducting yourselves in a manner worthy of the Good News about Christ. Then, whether I come and see you again or only hear about you, I will know that you are standing together with one spirit and

**CONNECTION POINTS**

**1:29 Christian Life** Following Christ inevitably involves suffering. It is one of the means of grace by which we are molded into the perfect likeness of him who suffered in our place.

**2:1-2 Fellowship** Koinonia is a New Testament Greek word that means "communion" or "fellowship" among Christian believers. Paul's letters to the churches admonished them to build one another up and commune with one another and with God. Church was never meant to be merely a building where people visit for worship but rather a community of friends who share in one another's joys and burdens.

**2:3-4 Focus on Others** The problem with disabling conditions is that they naturally force people to think of their own needs first. Some people need help to get up in the morning and into bed at night. Others may need transportation and assistance with shopping or even toileting routines. But self-centeredness is a huge barrier to developing healthy relationships. It takes an exceptionally mature person to look beyond his or her own needs and willingly focus on the needs of others.

**2:5-11 Brokenness** Brokenness is a prerequisite for a follower of Christ. Jesus is the ultimate example of brokenness because he denied himself and submitted to suffering and death on a cruel cross. In Luke 9:23 Jesus says, "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross daily, and follow me." Notice that our surrender is a "daily" rather than a one-time experience.

**2:6-8 Living with Suffering** When people with disabilities trust God, he is revealed as a God of supreme worth who is deserving of our love and obedience despite the pain we face. As suffering bonds Christians to the "man of sorrows," they have something eternally precious in common with Christ—their affliction. Our scars, anguish, rejection, and pain give us a small taste of what our Savior endured to purchase our redemption.

one purpose, fighting together for the faith, which is the Good News. **28**Don't be intimidated in any way by your enemies. This will be a sign to them that they are going to be destroyed, but that you are going to be saved, even by God himself. **29**For you have been given not only the privilege of trusting in Christ but also the privilege of suffering for him. **30**We are in this struggle together. You have seen my struggle in the past, and you know that I am still in the midst of it.

**Have the Attitude of Christ**

**2** Is there any encouragement from belonging to Christ? Any comfort from his love? Any fellowship together in the Spirit? Are your hearts tender and compassionate? **3**Then make me truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, loving one another, and working together with one mind and purpose.

**4**Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. **5**Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too.

**6**You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.

- 7** Though he was God,<sup>a</sup> he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to.
- 8** Instead, he gave up his divine privileges;<sup>b</sup> he took the humble position of a slave<sup>c</sup> and was born as a human being.
- 9** When he appeared in human form,<sup>d</sup>
  - 10** he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross.
- 11** Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor and gave him the name above all other names,
- 12** that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
- 13** and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

**Shine Brightly for Christ**

**14**Dear friends, you always followed my instructions when I was with you. And now

**2:6** Or being in the form of God. **2:7a** Or he emptied himself. **2:7b** Or in the form of a slave. **2:7c** Some English translations put this phrase in verse 8.

**A WORD FROM JONI***I Need God in My Suffering*

When we wonder why we must suffer, we're actually asking questions of someone. That someone is God. But why he created suffering doesn't really matter. The only thing that matters is how we respond. When we can't find the answers we're looking for, we can find peace in the only true answer: We need him! Affliction is the lowest common denominator for all of us. Philipians 1:29 tells us to expect suffering: "For you have been given not only the privilege of trusting in Christ but also the privilege of suffering for him." No matter how strong our faith is, it's natural to ask why.

After many years of suffering, I've concluded that God allows one form of evil, suffering, to expose another form of evil, sin. It is as if God turns suffering on its head and helps us to feel the sting of sin when we suffer so that as we are headed for heaven, we're reminded of how poisonous sin really is. So, suffering is this jackhammer, a sandblasting machine that strips away the fear, anxiety, self-centeredness, complaining, and "I don't care" attitude toward others who hurt. God allows affliction to rip that away so that we can see the world through the eyes of Christ.

God hates evil and suffering. He tells us in his Word to relieve suffering, and he relieves it every day. We can be sure if our hearts hurt for someone, God felt that pain first. He felt my pain first. Our souls are strengthened through suffering. To know God better, we must know our suffering better. And as we do, we become less "me" focused and more God focused.



that I am away, it is even more important. Work hard to show the results of your salvation, obeying God with deep reverence and fear. <sup>20</sup>For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him.

<sup>21</sup>Do everything without complaining and arguing, <sup>22</sup>so that no one can criticize you. Live clean, innocent lives as children of God, shining like bright lights in a world full of crooked and perverse people. <sup>23</sup>Hold firmly to the word of life; then, on the day of Christ's return, I will be proud that I did not run the race in vain and that my work was not useless. <sup>24</sup>But I will rejoice even if I lose my life, pouring it out like a liquid offering to God,<sup>25</sup> just like your faithful service is an offering to God. And I want all of you to share that joy. <sup>26</sup>Yes, you should rejoice, and I will share your joy.

#### Paul Commends Timothy

<sup>27</sup>If the Lord Jesus is willing, I hope to send Timothy to you soon for a visit. Then he can cheer me up by telling me how you are getting along. <sup>28</sup>I have no one else like Timothy, who genuinely cares about your welfare. <sup>29</sup>All the others care only for themselves and not for what matters to Jesus Christ. <sup>30</sup>But you know how Timothy has proved himself. Like a son with his father, he has served with me in preaching the Good News. <sup>31</sup>I hope to send him to you just as soon as I find out what is going to happen to me here. <sup>32</sup>And I have confidence from the Lord that I myself will come to see you soon.

#### Paul Commends Epaphroditus

<sup>33</sup>Meanwhile, I thought I should send Epaphroditus back to you. He is a true brother,

co-worker, and fellow soldier. And he was your messenger to help me in my need. <sup>34</sup>I am sending him because he has been longing to see you, and he was very distressed that you heard he was ill. <sup>35</sup>And he certainly was ill; in fact, he almost died. But God had mercy on him—and also on me, so that I would not have one sorrow after another.

<sup>36</sup>So I am all the more anxious to send him back to you, for I know you will be glad to see him, and then I will not be so worried about you. <sup>37</sup>Welcome him in the Lord's love<sup>a</sup> and with great joy, and give him the honor that people like him deserve. <sup>38</sup>For he risked his life for the work of Christ, and he was at the point of death while doing for me what you couldn't do from far away.

#### The Priceless Value of Knowing Christ

**3** Whatever happens, my dear brothers and sisters,<sup>b</sup> rejoice in the Lord. I never get tired of telling you these things, and I do it to safeguard your faith.

<sup>4</sup>Watch out for those dogs, those people who do evil, those mutilators who say you must be circumcised to be saved. <sup>5</sup>For we who worship by the Spirit of God<sup>c</sup> are the ones who are truly circumcised. We rely on what Christ Jesus has done for us. We put no confidence in human effort, <sup>6</sup>though I could have confidence in my own effort if anyone could. Indeed, if others have reason for confidence in their own efforts, I have even more!

<sup>7</sup>I was circumcised when I was eight days old. I am a pure-blooded citizen of Israel and a member of the tribe of Benjamin—a real Hebrew if there ever was one! I was a member of the Pharisees, who demand the strictest obedience to the Jewish law. <sup>8</sup>I was so zealous that I harshly persecuted the church. And as for righteousness, I obeyed the law without fault.

<sup>9</sup>I once thought these things were valuable, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done. <sup>10</sup>Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ <sup>11</sup>and become one with him. I no longer trust in my own righteousness through obeying the law; rather, I become

<sup>2:17</sup> Check: I will rejoice even if I am to be poured out as a liquid offering. <sup>2:29</sup> Check: in the Lord. <sup>3:1</sup> Check: brotherly love. <sup>3:13, 17.</sup> <sup>3:6</sup> Some manuscripts read: worship God in spirit; one early manuscript reads: worship in spirit.

"Always be full of joy in the Lord.  
I say it again—rejoice!"

PHILIPPIANS 4:4

## Breaking the Joy Barrier

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There is something intriguing about an individual who can maintain joy despite arduous circumstances. Perhaps that played a part in God's decision not to remove Paul's "thorn in the flesh," despite his fervent requests (2 Cor 12:7-10).

Rejoice always? Everyone? Yes!



righteous through faith in Christ.<sup>8</sup> For God's way of making us right with himself depends on faith. <sup>9</sup>I want to know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead. I want to suffer with him, sharing in his death, <sup>10</sup>so that one way or another I will experience the resurrection from the dead!

#### Pressing toward the Goal

<sup>11</sup>I don't mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection. But I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me. <sup>12</sup>No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it,<sup>9</sup> but I focus on this one thing: forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, <sup>13</sup>I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us.

<sup>14</sup>Let all who are spiritually mature agree on these things. If you disagree on some point, I believe God will make it plain to you. <sup>15</sup>But we must hold on to the progress we have already made.

<sup>16</sup>Dear brothers and sisters, pattern your lives after mine, and learn from those who follow our example. <sup>17</sup>For I have told you often before, and I say it again with tears in my eyes, that there are many whose conduct shows they are really enemies of the cross of Christ. <sup>18</sup>They are headed for destruction. Their god is their appetite, they brag about shameful things, and they think only about this life here on earth. <sup>19</sup>But we are citizens of heaven, where the Lord Jesus Christ lives. And we are eagerly waiting for him to return as our Savior. <sup>20</sup>He will take our weak mortal bodies and change them into glorious bodies like his own, using the same power with which he will bring everything under his control.

#### CONNECTION POINTS

**4:4-8 Anxiety** It is natural for us to feel anxious when we are in pain or feel helpless while a loved one struggles. So what can we do about our anxiety and worry? Paul understood the human tendency to let our thoughts spiral downward as we focus on the negative. He urges us to focus our minds on things with eternal value and release our worry through prayer—prayer that leads us into deeper spiritual territory, where God can transform us.

**4** Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters,<sup>8</sup> stay true to the Lord. I love you and long to see you, dear friends, for you are my joy and the crown I receive for my work.

#### Words of Encouragement

<sup>9</sup>Now I appeal to Euodia and Syntyche. Please, because you belong to the Lord, settle your disagreement. <sup>10</sup>And I ask you, my true partner,<sup>9</sup> to help these two women, for they worked hard with me in telling others the Good News. They worked along with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are written in the book of life.

<sup>11</sup>Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again—rejoice! <sup>12</sup>Let everyone see that you are considerate in all you do. Remember, the Lord is coming soon.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>13</sup>Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. <sup>14</sup>Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.

<sup>15</sup>And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise. <sup>16</sup>Keep putting into practice all you learned and received from me—everything you heard from me and saw me doing. Then the God of peace will be with you.

#### Paul's Thanks for Their Gifts

<sup>17</sup>How I praise the Lord that you are concerned about me again. I know you have always been concerned for me, but you didn't have the chance to help me. <sup>18</sup>Not that I was ever in need, for I have learned how to be content with whatever I have. <sup>19</sup>I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little. <sup>20</sup>For I can do everything through Christ,<sup>11</sup> who gives me strength. <sup>21</sup>Even so, you have done well to share with me in my present difficulty.

<sup>22</sup>As you know, you Philippians were the only ones who gave me financial help when I first brought you the Good News and then traveled on from Macedonia. No other church did this. <sup>23</sup>Even when I was in

<sup>8,9</sup> Or *through the faithfulness of Christ*. <sup>9,13</sup> Some manuscripts read *not yet achieved it*. <sup>10</sup> Greek brothers; also in 4:6. <sup>11</sup> Or *by my strength*. <sup>12</sup> Greek *the Lord is near*. <sup>13</sup> Greek *though the one*.

Thessalonica you sent help more than once. <sup>24</sup>I don't say this because I want a gift from you. Rather, I want you to receive a reward for your kindness.

<sup>25</sup>At the moment I have all I need—and more! I am generously supplied with the gifts you sent me with Epaphroditus. They are a sweet-smelling sacrifice that is acceptable and pleasing to God. <sup>26</sup>And the same God who takes care of me will supply all your needs from his glorious riches, which have been given to us in Christ Jesus.

<sup>27</sup>Now all glory to God our Father forever and ever! Amen.

#### Paul's Final Greetings

<sup>28</sup>Give my greetings to each of God's holy people—all who belong to Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me send you their greetings. <sup>29</sup>And all the rest of God's people send you greetings, too, especially those in Caesar's household.

<sup>30</sup>May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Some manuscripts add *Amen*.

# Contributors

The team behind the *Beyond Suffering Bible* is an extraordinary group of people that are uniquely qualified to create a Bible that encourages and inspires you as you engage with God's Word.



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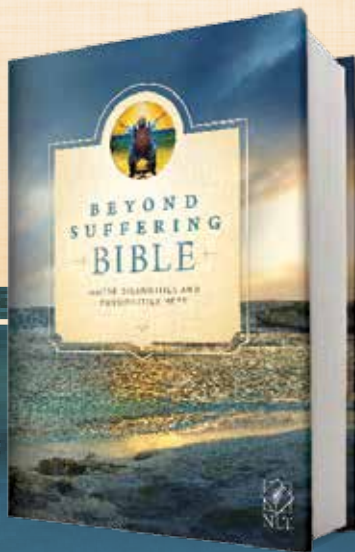
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“In the character of God, we find justice and equality, discover our purpose, and begin to understand the true value of life. If we are to fully grasp what suffering is, and what we must do with it, we must spend time digging into Scripture.”

JONI EARECKSON TADA



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