

Philippians



eastside CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

S T U D Y G U I D E

Week #1– *Paul’s Joy In The Faithful Church* Philippians 1:1-11 // Larry Smith

BIG IDEA:

The opening paragraph is foundational to the structure of the letter where Paul expresses his joy of deep emotional attachment to this body of Christians [“saints”] and his deep desire for their spiritual welfare and growth.

COMMENTARY:

Paul’s letter to the church at Philippi is not doctrinal in content. It beautifully expresses those relationships that should define true Christian relationships at all times and in all places. Paul thinks a lot of these people. He writes in his warmest personal style to a church that is under cultural pressure from both within and outside the church. Yet the church continues to remain a strong body of faithful followers of Christ.

Paul wrote a letter that is a joyful celebration of those Christians at Philippi who were persisting in their faith and adhering to truth. No doubt the bond of friendship stemmed from the association with Lydia and the Philippian jailor as described in Acts 16. The underlying principle in their relationship was joy. Joy here is not giddiness, but genuine heartfelt gladness (expressed in various ways in this first paragraph).

First, Paul expressed joy in prayer for them. (v. 4) He prays for them out of gladness of heart. **Secondly**, this joy leads to their participation in the gospel with him (v. 5). **Thirdly**, joy comes in partnership with God’s grace in defending and confirming the gospel (v. 7). **Finally**, we see joy in their continued development in the fruit of righteousness (v. 9-11).

These kinds of actions and attitudes make for Christ-like behavior - behavior that makes the Christian experience a joy to be involved in and to display. Paul continues this admonishment throughout the remainder of the letter.

The reader should note that, Paul’s upbeat tone is not written to disregard tough circumstances. He sees the divisions that can take root and may cause the saints to veer away from the gospel, from each other...even from God Himself. In fact, he is calling them to keep growing by his encouragement in v.6 in order to deal with challenges he will warn of and detail later in the letter.

He specifically addresses the *leadership WITH the saints* [v. 1]; warning and encouraging them all to **affirm the true gospel** and to **set the example**: that “to live is Christ, to die is gain.” [v.21]

RESPONSE:

A clear parallel exists between our current cultural circumstances and those of the church at Philippi. Pressure -- from unbiblical teachings, from authorities, from worldly pulls of the internet/ television/ movies/ radio/ print media, from economic circumstances, from employers, from social connections, from huge lifestyle revisions being demanded of us -- can cause *us* to veer away from the gospel *unless* we chose in joy to set aside politics, marginal teachings and selfish demands in order to renew ourselves in love and unify *in Christ*.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

Paul calls the believers “saints” [Grk *hagios*]. Biblically, the saint is one “set apart to a different order of things.” That different order sits on the foundation of the gospel, which saints live out in our lives. So, let’s ask ourselves...

1. How am I expressing the “grace and peace” [v. 1] that I receive as one of the saints to those around me?
2. Paul writes encouragement to all the “saints,” recognizing their strong faith. So why does he speak [v.6] of a work yet to be completed in them? [see vv.3, 9,10, 11].
3. Do you believe that God has begun a good work at ECF, and if so, how will He “perfect” it? Do you think Paul would write similarly to ECF as he did to the church at Philippi? Would there be any differences?
4. What am I allowing to erode or prevent my JOY in the gospel of Christ’s salvation? (Am I letting my recognition of fearful circumstances supplant/ repress my position in Christ?)

EXTENDED QUESTIONS:

5. How am I living?
 - a) according to my culture and circumstances.
 - b) according to my condition and calling (saved and called into Christ’s “different order of things”). Explain.
6. What am I doing that is unloving to my fellow saint? To my neighbor?

Week #2– Philippians 1:12-18 // Elizabeth Crain

BIG IDEA:

The smallest seed, however scattered, can advance the Word of God.

COMMENTARY:

In our recent study on Titus, David De Jong had the job of tackling the discussion on elder qualifications (Titus 1:5-16). His conclusion was that the list is something we should all aspire to. I believe Paul would agree with him. In Philippians 1:12-13, Paul is saying that his imprisonment over Christ has served to advance the gospel through the whole imperial guard. I picture one guard talking to another, “Why is this guy Paul in prison? He’s not like any prisoner I’ve seen before. He’s kind, polite, considerate and educated.” The other responds, “Paul says that some Jew named Jesus is the Son of God and the Messiah, who came to save everyone from our sins. Supposedly this Jesus was crucified and rose from the dead 3 days later.” Thus, by Paul’s behavior, the gospel is advancing amongst the guards by their own volition. That would not have been the case if Paul had not practiced what he preached in Titus 2:7-8, having integrity that could not be condemned.

The many ways in which the gospel can and does advance is the focus of Paul’s message here. Paul mentions those who now feel bold enough to speak out after hearing of Paul’s imprisonment (v. 14). While this seems counter-intuitive we have examples of this in our own history with Rosa Parks and MLK Jr. We experience righteous anger that gives us boldness when we see injustice, particularly when the Holy Spirit is stirring in us. Some were preaching out of envy/rivalry/selfish ambition, with the intent to afflict Paul in his imprisonment (v. 15a & 17). Or perhaps, as the Message translation indicates, these people were hoping to step into the spotlight and take some of Paul’s “celebrity” status and recognition. The ESV refers to this as “preaching,” but the word can also mean “to proclaim or announce publicly.” This could look like someone trying to take Paul’s position, or these people may be sharing in conversations like the soldiers but with a scoffing/haughty attitude intending to mock Paul or make him look bad. Despite the situation, they are still spreading the gospel because they are speaking it. An important point to recognize from this passage is that Paul is NOT celebrating the spread of false doctrine. He is joyfully celebrating that the Gospel Truth is spreading, even if people have wrong motives in how they’re going about it. Lastly, there are those who are sharing the gospel from good will and out of love (v. 15b & 16), which of course is the ultimate goal when it comes to gospel proclamation.

RESPONSE:

A high school experience that has stuck with me my whole life was looking out into the courtyard at lunch one day as I walked down the breezeway and seeing a special needs kid named John standing in the midst of other kids eating lunch. At the result of some comment, which I did not hear, John reached out and touched one of my peers who then proceeded to fall on the ground and pretend to have a seizure. That kid got back up laughing and everyone else around laughed as well, but I will never forget the confused/hurt look on John’s face. At what I have determined must have been the Holy Spirit’s prompting, I walked over to John, reached out my hand to touch his shoulder and asked if I could walk him to class. It is a moment in my life forever stamped in my memory and for which I am proud of, but it was a learning experience for me too. I do not remember who the other kids in the courtyard were, by God’s grace I did not look at them, chew them out or anything, I just walked away with John who had a huge smile on his face. Even though I walked into my own class late, I did not experience punishment or “imprisonment” like Paul for my actions. I never heard anything about the incident, which I know people witnessed. I did something right and good, but did the rest of my actions every other day of the week speak the gospel so that the other high schoolers knew that my actions were a result of Christ in my life and not that I was just a “good person?”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Discuss why you might be emboldened by seeing someone else punished for something that seemed unjust. If you have an example, please share.
2. Describe a situation in which you or someone you know was mocked for your/their faith? What was your response? What was the response of others?
3. Have you trusted God’s sovereignty to use others’ attempts to humiliate us for His purposes and for the advancement of the gospel? If so, how? If not, why has this been a challenge for you?

Week #3 – *It's a Win, Win Situation!*
Philippians 1:19-26 // Tom Osborn

BIG IDEA:

Ever since Paul was apprehended by Jesus on the Damascus road, he placed Christ first in his life. He was willing to die for Jesus...and he was willing to *live* for Jesus. Paul knew that because Jesus gave His life for others, he too, had as his primary goal, to live an unselfish life.

COMMENTARY:

We find in verse 21, Paul's philosophy of victorious Christian living: *"For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain."* For the Christ-follower, all of the challenges in life can be viewed as a win-win. This was certainly true for Paul as he followed his Lord, but it seems to represent a genuine dilemma for some in the early church. It was felt by many in the first century that death, especially martyrdom, would serve a greater good for the sake of the Gospel than to go on living. That doesn't seem nearly as true today. Unfortunately, the common goals today seem strangely contrasted to this single-mindedness of the Apostle Paul. Many today struggle to achieve wealth and fame. They look for pleasure and gratification for themselves. It seems that far too many believers struggle hopelessly and with bitter hearts.

Paul couldn't be further from this type of lifestyle. For Paul, self-absorption and selfishness simply were not an option. His daily activities were not determined by his circumstances or personal goals, but by his relationship with Jesus Christ. Paul understood that real joy comes in the sharing of the Gospel of Christ. Christ must increase—no matter the personal cost! For Paul, to die would bring more of Christ and not simply an end of the suffering and hardship (v. 20). His death would move the Gospel forward in new and exciting ways...so would his life (v. 22). For Paul this represented the ultimate win-win situation. If he is to continue living, he is to continue spreading the Gospel and building Christ's Church. If he is to die, his race is over and the crown of glory waits on the other side (v. 24). Prayer is the key that unlocks the door to a life of genuine joy in Christ. The prayers of the Philippians brought a fresh supply of the Holy Spirit's power to Paul along with moral and material support. One thought we ought to meditate on as we study this lesson is: **Until we decide what we are truly living for, we cannot expect to handle the idea of dying.** When the answer is Christ and His Gospel, we can be confident that our lives will result in a true win-win!

RESPONSE

There are two primary types of magnification: a microscope makes little things seem big, and a telescope makes far away things seem really close. One of the challenges I struggle with in my life as a Pastor is to make Christ seem bigger in the lives of those around me. I believe it is the fundamental desire of every Christian that Christ be magnified and glorified in our own lives. Matthew Henry said, *"It is the undoubted character of every good Christian that to live is Christ. The glory of Christ ought to be the end of our life, the grace of Christ the principle of our life and the Word of Christ the rule of it."* Ultimately, my greatest joy has been watching others grow in their relationship with Christ and discover the joy of partnering with Him in sharing the Gospel.

The hope we have as Christ followers flows directly from the presence of Christ in our lives. Paul lived for others, and that commitment brought him peace, happiness and joy—even in unhappy circumstances like a Roman jail. The Philippians were a source of joy and hope to Paul, and he to them. It is time that all Christ followers set our hearts on partnering with Christ and His Church so the Gospel can go forward. That's a win-win proposition.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Paul faced two options: death or release. What would each mean for the ongoing work of spreading the Gospel?
2. If you have ever experienced a time of deliverance and rejoicing, share with the group what you went through and how it led to a time of rejoicing.
3. It has been said that you're not ready to live until you're ready to die. How is this thought illustrated in the life of Paul?
4. What is your purpose for living? How does it affect those around you?
5. Paul says, "For me, to live is Christ." Another way of saying this might be, "For me, there is no truth except God's truth." How can we be confident in saying that our faith is based on the only real truth?

Week #4 – *A Life Worthy of the Gospel* Philippians 1:27-2:4 // Phil Dunkerton

BIG IDEA:

Paul truly challenges the Philippian church in this section when he calls them to live a life “worthy of the gospel of Christ” (v. 27). While this feels impossible for the sinful human, Paul follows this statement with some practical responses (stand firm, of one mind, sacrifice, humility, etc.) that will help the reader understand what this means in practice.

COMMENTARY:

Paul makes a bold statement to the local church - a church that was distressed to see their leader in prison - to trust the LORD’s plan. In verse 27, Paul calls on the community to live in a Christlike manner regardless if Paul is released from prison or executed as a martyr. We find a very similar charge from Paul in Ephesians 4:1 “I, therefore, the prisoner for the Lord, urge you to live worthily of the calling with which you have been called,” (NET). Paul encourages them to live out their lives in a way that people notice. Contrast this to other letters where Paul rebukes bad behavior, see 1 Corinthians 11:17 -22. Paul continues in verses 28-30, admonishing the church not to let persecution and opposition surprise or discourage them. Rather, persecution should exemplify confidence and refinement through trials and tribulations. In 2 Thessalonians 1:4-8 we see Paul’s pride in the endurance of the church, they trust God to be the judge and consider it an honor to be rejected just as Christ was opposed and rejected by the world. Instead of being ashamed of prison, Paul rejoiced that God had considered him worthy of similar rejection. In Acts 5:40-42 the apostles received abuse for teaching Christ at the temple, yet counted it all joy.

Before starting chapter two, take a moment to read 1:27 again. In verses 1-4, Paul encourages cooperation within the church, a team united in a common goal, examples that are in contrast with a wicked world. See descriptions of Christlikeness in Colossians 3:12 and Romans 12:16. The world does not revolve around the individual. Look up to Christ and out to the church. Examples of selfish behavior are warned against in Romans 2:8 and Galatians 5:26. Contrast that to the refined behavior we can read about in Romans 12:10 and Ephesians 5:20-21. Verse four wraps up this week’s section nicely, calling us to look outward, mindful of the Kingdom that is at hand.

Paul assures the church in Philippi to have hope in the midst of His imprisonment. Paul encourages them to live joyfully mimicking Christ when it is not easy. What a powerful call to those of us that are easily discouraged when people insult our intelligence, trample our trust, and threaten our safety.

RESPONSE:

Christ was the perfect example, being fully God, somehow, He took insults from sinners with grace, was betrayed by a friend, and ultimately had life ripped from His body. But naturally, I live in the present, forgetful of God’s lessons and not being mindful of the future. I am easily lead astray from a divine purpose, turning inward, choosing to live for short-term mundane self-gratification rather than being focused on the greater picture. Christ deliberately endured strife. He took the fight to the enemy and His goal was to restore a broken world. Christ’s actions enabled a future eternity we can’t begin to grasp and often don’t think about. God’s provision is to fill the Bible with many reminders for us to consume as part of our daily bread.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How do Paul’s words parallel those of Christ in John 16:31-33 & Mathew 5:11-12, the apostle John in 1st John 4:4-6, and Peter in 1st Peter 5:6-10 & 2nd Peter 3:10-14?
2. Read through Isaiah 48:10, Psalm 12:6 & 66:10, and Hebrews 10:32-39. Imagine being a member of the church in Philippi. How might you have reflected on these words and been encouraged in times of trial? How about here in the church today?
3. As a group, create examples of being focused on short-term gain and contrast those with examples where the believer considers how actions have an eternal impact. See the following verses: 1 Timothy 6:6-12, Hebrews 12:1-2, and Romans 12:9-21.

Week #5 – Philippians 2:5-11 // Jonathon & Melissa Junker

BIG IDEA:

Jesus displayed the ultimate example of humility, one we as Christians are called to emulate.

COMMENTARY:

Earlier in verses 1-4, Paul explained how humility (putting others before yourself) is an essential part of a unified Christian community. Now, in verses 5-11, Paul calls us to have the same attitude of humility that was displayed by Jesus Christ in the most profound way.

Christ had literally the highest station of existence: equality with God. The sacrifice of going from God to Man is unimaginably great, but it didn't stop there. Jesus, who was with God, was born on Earth in the lowliest of places to common Jewish parents. Though he was not stripped of His Deity, He was restrained in living a human life. He was a servant to all, whether they loved him or hated him. And then, as a man, he also made the greatest sacrifice going as far as death on a cross. Christ's perfectly self-sacrificing attitude is what we are called to emulate.

In verses 9-11 we see a glimpse of how much God values humility. The "therefore" in verse 9 tells us that Christ's humility is the reason He is exalted to the name above all names. This exalted position is true both in the past tense (God gave Him the name above all other names) and will be proved true in the future (every knee will bow).

RESPONSE:

When we think about the attributes of God, words like "sovereignty" and "omniscience" pop to mind. It is easy to overlook humility as one of the vital aspects of God's character: as displayed in the example of Jesus - God becoming man...we serve a humble God.

In His time on Earth, Jesus was not rewarded for being humble. Instead, He was killed in the most shameful and excruciating way possible — death on a cross. So, being humble is not about being rewarded for our virtue. It is about having our hearts focused outwards instead of on ourselves. It can be tempting to proclaim our good works and do things so those around us will be impressed, but a true attitude of humility will put that energy toward prioritizing the interests and needs of others above our own. Fortunately, Jesus' death on the cross was not the end of the story. He rose again and "as a result" (verse 9) of His humility He is now exalted to be Lord of all.

"It is the paradox of the Christian Gospel that the last become first, the humble are exalted, the servant becomes Lord, the poor become rich. The Beatitudes are Jesus' catalog of the way things are turned upside-down, inside-out in the new economy of God's kingdom. So, Jesus' enunciation of the humble being exalted was gloriously fulfilled in His own case. He ascended after the Resurrection and now sits at God's right hand." -Maxie D. Dunnam

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Do you ever feel like an act of service is beneath you? How can we apply the example of Jesus to these situations?
2. Can you think of examples of when people have displayed humility by putting other people's needs above themselves? Please share to encourage the group.
3. What are some misconceptions about humility today? How do these compare to the attitude of humility that Jesus displayed?
4. What does it mean that Jesus is exalted? How is God the Father exalting Jesus different from if Jesus had exalted himself?

Week #6 – *Paul’s Impossible Imperative* Philippians 2:12-18 // Cheryl Starck

“Do everything without grumbling or arguing, so that you may be blameless and pure, children of God, without blemish though you live in a crooked and perverse society, in which you shine as lights in the world.” Philippians 2:14-15

BIG IDEA:

We need to end all complaining and arguing because both are toxic in our partnership with Christ toward advancing the gospel.

COMMENTARY:

Arguing and complaining arise from a heart of discontent. Both rob us of peace and joy, separate relationships, drain productivity, hinder resolution, destroy families and community, and hinder our faith and ministry. Discontentment in marriage can lead some to seek comfort in another. Discontentment led the prodigal son to rebel. Lack of satisfaction with what he had led Judas to steal from the disciple’s money sack. And, ultimately, dissatisfaction with Jesus and his leadership led Judas to seek a way to betray his friend.

Grumbling is the voice that challenges God’s sovereignty, character, and faithfulness. It reflects a belief that we deserve better. Complaining is never about an impossible person or situation. **It is the reflection of a heart that struggles to trust God.** God does not take our complaining passively, but personally. During the exodus from Egypt, Israel complained repeatedly about their circumstances and leadership. Moses told the people, “the LORD hears your grumbings which you grumble against *Him*... Your grumbings are not against us, but against the LORD” (Exodus 16:8).

James, the brother of Jesus, tells us that arguing is the voice of discontent when we do not get our own way and our selfish desires are not met (James 4:2-3). Arguing arises when we put our needs ahead of others. It reflects our desire to win and be right instead of loving and connecting.

It is ironic that a former lawyer, Bob Goff, tells us arguing is foolish. In his book, [Live in Grace – Walk in Love](#), Goff reminds us:

“Jesus was right 100 percent of the time, but when people walked away, they felt seen and loved even when they were flat wrong. Jesus looked past disagreements to the question behind their questions. He saw the fears and insecurities that were driving the behaviors. He saw the need behind the façade. And when faced with the choice of winning an argument or loving a friend, He led with humility and let kindness do the talking.”

RESPONSE:

Scripture points to countless ways we mess up, fail and “fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). Thankfully, there is more to the gospel of peace: an abiding, unchanging love of God for all; hope, healing and redemption through Jesus, His Son; and peace, joy and strength through connection with God and with others.

Paul encourages us to continue being obedient and “to work out your salvation... by holding onto the word of life” (v 12 & 16). Meditate on the word. Treasure it. Search for the heart of the Almighty in it. Ask questions. Discuss it. More importantly, do what it says. And when that is not enough, Paul tells us to choose to “be glad and rejoice” (v 18). Paul must not expect this to be easy, because he reminds us that “both the desire and the effort” will come from God (v 13).

This current season of life has been very painful and hard, full of loss and heartache. It is a reminder that following Jesus does not shield us from pain and trial. It does have wonderful rewards, though. Through this season, I am experiencing the promised hope and strength and an unbelievable joy and peace. I have found great comfort not only from my relationship with the LORD but in living transparently in fellowship with other believers. I am realizing anew that the decisions I made decades ago have prepared me for this season of challenge and pain. I am reaping huge benefits of previously working out my faith. And I can recognize it is just one hard chapter in a long, wonderful journey.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How have you witnessed the negative impact of discontentment, arguing or complaining in fellowship or community with others? What about the impact of intentional Joy? How do both these things relate to our mission to advance the gospel?
2. Which is personally more difficult for you to resist - complaining or arguing?
3. How do you deal with discontentment? Please give an example.
4. What do you think it means to live like children of God without blemish, shining like bright lights in our world?

Week #7 – Philippians 2:19-30 // Dave Parker

BIG IDEA:

Paul pauses to give honor and affirm two faithful servants who exemplify the character of Christ, which he has just described.

COMMENTARY:

Phil 2:19-30 is one of the more overlooked parts of the book and to many, may be one of the less memorable portions, however, if you look closely, it's as if Paul stops for a break and points out two people in his life who model the type of life and character he has been talking about. Two men who think of others more highly than themselves, have the humility of Jesus and continue to serve, shining like stars in the universe. In a few verses we have an opportunity to see deep into the heart of Paul as he expresses his affection and respect for Timothy and Epaphroditus.

Culturally, at this time most vocational instruction passed from father to son, so it is natural for the faith and life learnings to pass from a spiritual father (Paul) to his son in the faith (Timothy). Paul's eye is on Timothy as the one to take his place as an overseer of the Philippian church as expressed in Phil 2:20, "I have no one else like Timothy, who genuinely cares about your welfare." But, for now, they are partners in faith and Timothy awaits to deliver the news of Paul's fate. (2:24)

Timothy came to Christ as a young man after Paul's 1st missionary trip to Lystra (Acts 16:1-5). Raised in a racially mixed family which gave him both a Jewish and Gentile perspective, Paul saw amazing potential in Timothy and invested in him. Timothy traveled with Paul on missionary journeys and shared life together as they spread the Gospel. This spiritual father/son relationship blossomed and Paul sent Timothy to pastor the church in Ephesus. Timothy received two personal letters from Paul instructing and encouraging him. We know those letters as I & II Timothy.

Epaphroditus, also highly respected, played a key role in biblical history by being the messenger entrusted to deliver money to Paul from the Philippian church (2:25-40, 4:18) and has now been tasked by Paul to return with this letter of thanks and encouragement, which we call the book of Philippians.

One unknown writer summarized Epaphroditus this way:

"To the Philippians, Epaphroditus was a messenger who delivered a package. To Paul, however, he was so much more: a "brother" (belonging to the same family), a "co-worker" (laboring toward the same goal), and a "fellow soldier" (sharing the same trials). Epaphroditus was a man of obvious devotion, faithfulness, and self-sacrifice. He put "the interests of others" before himself and so modeled the mind of Christ (Philippians 2:4–5). He labored on Paul's behalf until his own health broke, and even when he was sick, Epaphroditus took no thought of himself; rather, he was distressed because his church had heard of his illness, and he didn't want them to worry."

RESPONSE:

As the world holds out their affirmation to those with money, power and fame, I personally will continue to admire and hold in high esteem those men and women of faith who have stood strong and faithful in the face of adversity. Who have, during the test of time, invested their lives in kingdom-minded opportunities and invested into the lives of others so that the generational transference of faith and love for the Church would endure with strength.

Do you have a son or daughter in the faith? Someone younger than you who you have invested time and energy into and has now matured in their faith? What has that been like for you to experience that? Who has mentored you? The Bible is full of models of passing the torch of faith. Live it!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What do you enjoy most and least about serving others?
2. How do you see the attitude of Christ being displayed in the relationship between Paul, Timothy and Epaphroditus?
3. When you read about the character of these men, what do you see in them that you would hope and pray God would grow in you?
4. What kind of spiritual mentoring have you given or received and explain the significance of that relationship in your group?
5. In what ways can you become an encourager like Paul in your relationships?

Week #8 – *Knowing Christ Is What It's All About* Philippians 3:1-11 // Sarah Lee & Hailey Rahm

BIG IDEA:

Paul yearned to know Christ more deeply and knew that this meant he would have to sacrifice and suffer the loss of the things he once had confidence in.

COMMENTARY:

The Jews were proud of their heritage, lineage, and rituals. They believed that these helped them to stand righteous before God. Therefore, it makes sense that they would be insisting that the new Gentile converts at Philippi would follow their lead and be circumcised as well. But Paul warns the church in Philippi to watch out for these Judaizers and any other people who falsely teach that outward rituals or human credentials are requirements for salvation. When Paul refers to the Judaizers as dogs he is calling out the vicious and defiling nature of their teaching. Paul reminds the church that, in fact, those who are *only* circumcised outwardly and not by the Spirit are far from righteous. It's those who worship in Truth and Spirit, and who boast in Christ alone that are the true people of God (See Romans 2:28-29).

Paul lays out an impeccable religious resume' that highlights his human credentials, just to describe them as "dung" compared to knowing Jesus Christ. Though he fervently gripped his own religious resume, even as a persecutor of the church, his accomplishments failed to earn him a right standing before God. He now knows full well that his salvation comes only through faith in Jesus Christ and that his human credentials serve only as "liabilities" now.

In Philippians 2, we are reminded that Jesus gave up his status and privilege as royalty and took the form of a servant. Paul identified with Christ, giving up his status and privilege as a revered religious leader. Like Paul, we can't identify with Christ apart from suffering. This is what it means to be a Christian – to *follow* Christ, to suffer for His sake (Phil. 1:29). Paul was jailed, persecuted, shipwrecked, and lost his former identity. However, Paul experienced the power of the resurrection *in* and *through* these very sufferings. Paul's priority was to know Christ and to experience His saving power. If that meant suffering, Paul did so with joy, fully confident in Christ's faithfulness to bring him to salvation.

RESPONSE:

How do we truly *know* someone? (Sarah) When Cameron and I met, we spent a lot of time together, had deep conversations, and ultimately decided that we were meant to be together. After getting married, the sacrifice really

began. In order to deepen our relationship, we both sacrificed our will and independence. Cameron lived and studied his profession in another state while I worked to support us. Through sacrifice, we began to know each other's resolve and build trust and intimacy. After a while, spending time with someone is a no-brainer. You like them and want to be with them. My relationship with my husband draws many parallels to my relationship with Christ. The sacrifice is really where the deep connection begins. Because of Christ's sacrifice for me, I understand His love and want to be with Him; I want to be more like him and sacrifice for His sake. The things that used to give me confidence, I can leave in my past and cling to the hope of Christ's faithfulness.

Don't believe the lie that we are made righteous by our outward acts (see Romans 2:28-29). If you are like me (Hailey), it's very tempting to want to "do more" in order to feel valuable and more righteous in God's eyes. I can list a number of things to fill my religious resume: raising children, serving in ministry, being hospitable and generous. But, as Paul so vividly depicts, such a list doesn't compare to the value of knowing Christ. None of the things that I do amount to anything compared to the value of *knowing* Christ. Throughout my (Hailey's) walk with Christ, I can say without a doubt, that knowing Christ and relying on his righteousness has been the source of my deepest joys, lasting peace, and everlasting hope. Nothing I have done has ever given me any of that. In fact, when I try to rely on my achievements, I always end up feeling hopeless, empty, and anxious.

When we think of Christ's righteousness covering our sins, a powerful visual comes to mind. We imagine that if we feel shame as we come before the Father it is because we are coming without Christ, relying on our own righteousness. But, when we go with Christ trusting in His righteousness alone, He is literally covering us – standing before us so that God sees His perfect Son, not our filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6). We can stand confidently before God, justified by our faith in Jesus' righteousness (Romans 3:23-26) and filled with hope for eternity with Him.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What does it mean to know Christ? How has your intimacy with Christ grown over time?
2. What human credentials do *you* need to surrender in order to gain Christ?
3. Read Phil. 1:29-30 and 1 Peter 4:12-19. How do we share in Christ's sufferings? What does it mean to suffer "for him" (Phil. 1:29)?
4. What does it look like in your life to experience the power of Christ's resurrection?

Week #9 – *Keep Moving Forward*
Philippians 3:12-16 // Seth & Annaleah Riley

BIG IDEA:

Our pursuit of God is like a journey in which we need to **start where we are**, move past mistakes and keep pressing onward.

COMMENTARY:

It can be so easy to get discouraged in our Christian walk. It often feels like we're just standing still and not really moving. Days get busy, we get tired, and it can be difficult to put in the extra effort to "strain" toward God. Philippians 3:12-16 can be an incredible source of hope for us as we continue forward. Paul admits it can be easy to feel overwhelmed by what we don't know and encourages the Philippians to press onward in their knowledge of Christ. In following this example, we can take comfort in the fact that life is meant to be a journey of faith.

In Philippians 3:12, Paul talks about how he does not yet know Christ in the way he would like, but it is this very knowledge of the continuing gap that urges him forward. Paul senses his listeners feel that, given who Paul is, he must have *arrived* in some sense. Yet, he levels the playing field, equating himself with his listeners in their shared lack of knowledge. An expert mentor, he then uses this common ground to urge them toward better versions of themselves and encourages them to move past this worry of ignorance and turn their energy toward pursuing Christ.

As in many of his other letters, Paul portrays this effort as a race that will only be completed when we are in the presence of God (see also 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 and 2 Timothy 4:7-8). **This race is not a competition. Rather, it is a proving ground of our own faithfulness.** Paul tells us that only in "forgetting what lies behind and straining forward" (Philippians 3:13, ESV) can we successfully complete our race. Paul knew that mistakes were an inevitable part of our existence here on earth. When we make mistakes, we have to learn from them and then be able to move on. Hanging onto our failures and dragging them behind us will only hinder us as we run the race. Also, just as an Olympian grows tired and has to reach deep inside to find the energy to complete an event, so also Paul urges us to "strain" after God and put in the extra effort it takes to pursue Him.

Paul concludes the passage by encouraging his readers to not worry about everything they don't know about God. We are responsible for the truth we already possess, so we can take what we *do* know and start living by that. We can avoid analysis paralysis on the more confusing aspects as we instead live by the simple truth of God's love. God will continue to reveal things to us as we move forward on our journey toward Him.

RESPONSE:

We can hold onto the hope that, no matter what, God continues to work in us and teach us when we are earnestly seeking Him. On any long journey it is natural to get tired, to stumble, and fall. Yet, Paul encourages us to continue on. We won't complete the journey until the day we reach heaven, so we don't have to worry about falling behind the others or living in regret of the mistakes we have made. Instead, we just look toward God and continue on, knowing that He will meet us where we are in order to lead us forward.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. In what ways do you worry about your ignorance of God? Are there ways in which you are letting difficult passages in Scripture get in the way of your pursuit of God?
2. What are some of your mistakes that you have a hard time forgetting and moving past?
3. Paul tells us to "strain forward." "Strain" is a very specific word and implies concentrated effort. What is a way that you can "strain" after God?

Week #10 – Philippians 3:17-4:1 // James Kirk

BIG IDEA:

Attention Citizens of Heaven: Do not lose track, PRESS ON!

COMMENTARY:

According to Paul, followers of Jesus can identify themselves as “citizens of Heaven”. So, we should act like it. Pastor Charles Spurgeon said, *“The worst enemies that the cross of Christ has are the enemies inside the professing church of Christ. They call themselves spiritual, yet they live for earthly things; indulging their appetites, living for self, yet pretending to be Christians, whereas selfishness is the very reverse of Christianity.”* The contrast is convicting. **I cannot just hope to display behavior that is rooted in my connection to Christ; I must pursue it.** I love how The Message puts it: *“If any of you have something else in mind, less than total commitment, God will clear your blurred vision.”*

Paul reminds us that the people of this world are caught up in the stuff of the world and that leads to a dead end. Their hostility to God is born out of this depravity that is all too familiar. But we, the citizens of Heaven, are on a different path. As we wait for the return of Christ, we have work to do. Though we get distracted and become weary, we can follow Paul’s example of pressing on. If he can rise above his circumstances for the sake of Christ, so should we.

We can also find encouragement with the reminder that our current weakness will give way to the transforming power of Jesus and He will make everything right in the end. A look heavenward encourages us to stay true. Paul counts those in Philippi who keep this perspective to be his crowning reward.

RESPONSE:

The struggle of being in, not of, this world is real. As a follower of Jesus, I face this tug-of-war all the time. Sometimes I find it difficult to fathom how vast the universe is and how small I am in comparison. All I know, outside of Christ, is this little space I call mine. I know the people, places and my experiences here quite well—familiarity gives rise to comfort. From this place of comfort, I can lose sight of the things of God. If I am not careful, my weary heart is easily pulled like a magnet to my old comfortable ways.

But WAIT! I have been set free from that stuff.

I have a choice and I choose Christ. Paul is reminding us that we must strive, continually choosing to pursue God. In Christ, the things of this world fade. We know we have been set free. Our future is secure. God is going to work everything out.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What characteristics define a “Citizen of Heaven?”
2. How can you tell the difference between a true citizen of heaven and those who pose to be? In the Church? Outside of the Church?
3. Why do you think Paul makes this contrast between mature believers and enemies of the cross of Christ?
4. What specific encouragement can you find in being a citizen of Heaven today?

Week #11– *What Christians Are To Do*
Philippians 4:2-9 // Gary Eklund & Ruth Quist Eklund

BIG IDEA:

Paul explains and lays out God’s calling for his redeemed people to live in unity and display his character in every word and action.

COMMENTARY:

Philippi was a Roman colony, and as such, its citizens would enjoy all the benefits of living in Rome; serving as an exemplary model of Roman culture and influence in Macedonia. Roman colonies were established, in a sense, to be a beachhead for extending the culture and control of Rome into a larger area. A colony was a kind of advertising campaign that demonstrated what it meant to be a Roman—a loyal and privileged subject of the divine Caesar. Most of the people living in Philippi were Roman citizens and obsessed with living as if they were in Rome.

But Philippi was home to another colony, a colony of the citizens of heaven. These citizens believed Paul’s message, the Good News (as opposed to the Roman Good News of peace) that Jesus—Messiah, son of God, anointed king (not Caesar), and savior of the world—had come to restore them to God’s kingdom.

It was Paul’s hope that the Jesus followers would establish a beachhead as a colony of heaven in Philippi. Paul knew a well-placed ministry center when he saw one. The Romans had turned the Greek theaters in Philippi into arenas, where gladiators often fought. Paul knew this was a big part of the local culture in Philippi. Therefore, these believers understood that when gladiators “contended” in the arena they would lock arms, back-to-back and protect each other. If they turned and fought with each other they would be laughed at and ridiculed.

Paul uses this metaphor to encourage Euodia and Syntche to resolve their differences, agree in the Lord, and “contend” for the gospel—as a message to all the believers in Philippi. **Paul was aware that nonbelievers would be watching and influenced by what they did, not just by what they said.** By being full of joy, not worrying, praying to God, giving thanks, thinking of things that are good, worthy of praise, true, honorable, right and respected, and by practicing what Paul had taught them, they would be to heaven what Philippi was to Rome.

RESPONSE:

I (Gary) have spent my whole life as a citizen contending for my country. I have served my country in the military and, in fact, devoted my whole career to preserving and building a strong submarine force. I continue to serve my community in every way that I can. Like the believers in Philippi, I am also a member of the colony of the citizens of heaven here on earth. As Paul is trying to explain to the believers in Philippi, my “contending for the gospel” does not come close to measuring up or to balancing with my contending for my country—in fact, it falls way short. Yet, I am encouraged by Paul’s words.

There is much I can do to commit to live each day as a citizen of heaven and to become the “word in the flesh” in the hope of making a powerful impact in a broken world. It would seem to be easier for me in my community to accomplish this than for those believers in Philippi, and yet it seems like a great challenge.

QUESTIONS:

1. In Philippians 4:2-9 Euodia and Syntche are not getting along. Have you ever been in conflict with a fellow believer? How did you resolve the problem?
2. In Philippians 4:8 Paul asks us to think on or meditate on things that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent and praiseworthy. Have you ever tried that when you were stressed or worried? What were the results?
3. What do you think it looks like to be a citizen of heaven in your community among your family, friends, and neighbors? What have you done in that regard? What would it look like if you did more?
4. How might we be a colony of heaven, distinguish ourselves, and be a light of God’s love where we live?

Week #12– *The Secret To Living Through Trials*
Philippians 4:10-13 // Steve Starck

*Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
Look full in his wonderful face,
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim
In the light of his glory and grace.*
– Helen H. Lemmel

BIG IDEA:

The secret to living through trials is not in having everything we think we want, it's in knowing that we already have everything we really need.

COMMENTARY:

Paul begins to close his letter by expressing his joy that the Philippians have renewed their concern for him (by their gifts) (v10), and goes on to talk about how he's doing just fine regardless. He is content no matter what is going on (v11-12), and is able to do all things through the one who strengthens him (v13).

When Paul wrote this letter he was unjustly under house arrest in Rome, yet he is so positive – how could that be?

It seems that Paul had learned the secret to living in difficult situations. Perhaps he learned this through the times that he had asked the Lord to help him overcome his thorn in the flesh in (2 Corinthians 12:9), however there are several trials in Paul's life that are recorded where he saw his needs provided (2 Corinthians 11, especially v23-27).

Paul didn't focus on his *circumstances*, he focused on his God and because he did he was content in every circumstance. He knew his God would supply all he needed in each and every situation (see v19, next week), could do immeasurably more than he could ever ask or dream (Ephesians 3:20), and would work all things for his good (Romans 8:28), so he didn't need to worry or fret over what he did or did not have – if he didn't have it, he didn't need it. He was confident God would provide whatever he needed to get through any situation. Paul models Jesus' commands in Matthew 6:25-34 to not worry or fret over our needs because God will supply them, just focus on His kingdom and His righteousness.

The beauty of this attitude is expressed by the writer of Hebrews:

⁵ Your conduct must be free from the love of money and you must be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you and I will never abandon you."⁶ So we can say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper, and I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?"

– Hebrews 13:5-6 NET

What can man do to me, indeed!

RESPONSE:

Like perhaps many of you, our family has had to endure some very hard things during this season of COVID. Cheryl and I have pulled together and have sought the Lord and His wisdom perhaps more than at any other time in our marriage. Still, it is really hard to see parents with thriving children or people experiencing satisfaction and success in their jobs. I sometimes think about what could have been or what I could have done differently and find myself wishing for different circumstances than the ones that I currently have.

But when I spend my time thinking of what I do or do not have, I'm looking in the wrong place and at the wrong things – I'm focusing on my circumstances, not on my God.

Through it all, it has given me hope knowing that our God is right there with us in the midst of all of the struggles and trials and that He has a purpose for them even though I cannot see one right at the moment. **Knowing He will provide whatever I need to get through any situation and work them out for good is a powerful encouragement.**

As a child of God, I know I have all I need because I have the power, the love and the strength of God with me, and that makes all the difference.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Share about a time when God provided in an unexpected way. How did that strengthen your faith that he could do it again?
2. Share about a time when you went through a trial and things didn't end the way you had hoped. Describe any spiritual growth that you might have gone through as a result.
3. Paul says he has learned to be content both in times of plenty and in times of want. We've focused primarily the times of want, so far. How do you suppose we should react in times of plenty?
4. What hard things are you going through right now? How much have you been grumbling or complaining about them? How do you think you should respond?

Week #13– *Generosity, It's All In Your Mind!*
Philippians 4:14-23 // Gary Eklund & Ruth Quist Eklund

BIG IDEA:

Paul closes his letter by thanking the Philippian believers for their gifts and reminds them to be generous with the resources God has given them.

COMMENTARY:

Paul starts the closing of his letter by rejoicing greatly in the support that was sent to him through Epaphroditus, recognizing their sacrifice. He realizes that it was an expression of love and support for his ministry. He knew that he was in their hearts, but that they lacked the opportunity to support him for a while. In being sensitive to the Philippians' feelings, he tries not to belittle their gift or to encourage them to give any more.

When Paul originally left Macedonia, they had sent support to him a few times when he was in Thessalonica, and it was a pattern where they always came through for him. He was not saying that he was desiring the gift, but he was desiring that fruit might abound to their account. This was like a credit/deposit to their spiritual account, and this thank you was their receipt. "God shall supply all of your needs according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:19)

In Paul's closing salutation he gives glory to our God and Father forever and ever. He greets each of God's people in Christ. All the saints (believers) that are here in Rome greet you. These are the slaves, servants, and guards of Caesar's household/palace who came to know Jesus because Paul ministered to them while he was a prisoner in Caesar's house. He ends in 4:23 with a typical Pauline blessing – "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all."

RESPONSE:

I (Gary) think it is easy to make generosity overly complicated. Generosity is really not about things—it's about thoughts or attitudes. When I was a young engineer, a group of us would go out for lunch on Fridays. One of the unwritten rules was that each person needed to leave a tip for the waitperson. For some engineers this is hard and it must be learned, as was the case for me. Engineers usually had to scrimp and save in their college years and for them tipping/giving was not an option. Back to our group—one individual refused to tip. So, we all banded together and said to him, "If you don't tip, you can't come to lunch with us." Well, this person chose not to be with us over a simple act of tipping/giving. The main point is that some of us

need to learn to give. For some very young engineers like me, giving did not come naturally—I needed to learn it. This experience helped to do that. This lesson I never forgot, and it has guided me to this day.

There are two big issues to overcome in giving. The first issue to overcome is greed—where people want to possess instead of share. The second issue in giving is overcoming the fear that you can't give now because you might need it later. This can be overcome by trusting God. By putting God first, we can trust him to provide for all of our needs. (See Luke 6:38, Proverbs 3:9-10, 19:17, and 2 Corinthians 9:6-8.)

God blesses us so that we can give to others. Generosity is more than just things and money. It is wanting to make a difference with each day that the Lord gives us by being happy, hopeful, and using our gifts and talents (physical and/or monetary) to bless others and help them draw closer to the Lord. I need to make a difference with my time and use it for loving and giving. And make a difference by not letting past failures define or deter me. No failure is fatal—get up again.

Today, I need to make a difference by spending at least five quality, undiluted minutes talking, hugging, thanking, listening and giving to the significant people in my world. In short, be generous with your possessions, yourself and your time. (*The ideas above on giving include thoughts from Max Lucado's book, "Shaped By God."*)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. God says, "Every animal of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills." (Psalm 50:10) He doesn't need our money, so why does the Bible say so much about giving?
2. In what ways can even small gifts and offerings make a difference in others' lives?
3. Many people feel that churches overly emphasize giving. Do you feel this is a fair assessment? Why or why not?
4. Are there specific events from your past, like Gary's engineer story, that have shaped your thoughts on generosity?

Philippians

STUDY GUIDE

RESOURCES

To Live is Christ, To Die is Gain

By Matt Chandler

Paul's Letter to the Philippians

NIV Commentary

By Gordon Fee

Philippians—Everyone Bible Study Guides

By N.T. Wright



BibleProject

bibleproject.com/explore/philippians/



ECF meets every **Sunday @ 10 AM** online (YouTube) and at
*Rose Hill Middle School in Redmond WA. Visit ecfconnect.org
for more details about who we are and what we do!

*Pending COVID Restrictions



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