



Rejoicing in Christ

Study Guide: Philippians

Philippians

Study Guide

Rejoicing in Christ

5 Studies

For Individuals or Groups

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[CrossSites Bible Study](#)

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{Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture verses are taken from the English Standard Version}

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Lesson One: Paul Goes to Philippi

Biblical Passage: [Acts 16](#)

Big Idea: *In the midst of our struggles, God's interruptions can lead to miraculous deliverances that further His Kingdom.*

Introduction to Philippians

To comprehend the relationship between Paul and the Philippians, it is essential to review the beginning. In [Acts 16](#), we discover how the Philippian church was founded. In this chapter, Paul and Silas arrive in Lystra, marking the commencement of Paul's second missionary journey. They had just attended the Jerusalem Council, where the role of Gentiles in the church had been determined. Paul conveyed this significant decision to the churches as they traveled.

Following the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Paul proceeded to Macedonia to propagate the Gospel. The church in Philippi represents the first church established in Europe and holds a special significance for Paul. This congregation would become a source of great joy for him and serve as a crucial financial supporter of his ministry.

The Author

The apostle Paul, who established and maintained a close relationship with the Philippian church, authored this letter. He composed it during his imprisonment in Rome. The letter opens with Paul identifying himself as the author. Paul's authorship of the letter has never been seriously contested. Currently, the majority of scholars, regardless of their theological views, acknowledge Paul as the legitimate author of the letter to the Philippians.

The Date and Recipients

The exact date of the writing of this letter is uncertain, but it was most likely written around A.D. 60-63 while Paul was imprisoned in Rome. This letter is considered part of Paul's prison Epistles, along with Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon, all of which were written during his imprisonment in Rome.

The letter is addressed to the Philippian church, which had been founded ten years earlier during Paul's second missionary journey, following his vision to bring the gospel to Europe ([Acts 16](#)). Although Paul spent only a brief time in Philippi, the church initially consisted of Lydia and her household, a former demon-possessed girl, a Philippian jailer and his household, and a few others. Over time, this small group of believers grew into a strong, healthy, mature, and God-honoring church, providing financial and prayer support to Paul's ministry.

The City of Philippi

Philippi served as a crucial gateway to Europe, strategically situated on the prominent Roman road known as the Egnatian Way. The city was named after Philip of Macedonia, the father of Alexander the Great. Positioned on a range of hills that separated Europe from Asia, Philippi functioned as a natural fortress. Its strategic importance lay in its command over the Egnatian Way.

Philippi was also recognized as a distinguished Roman colony, often referred to as a miniature Rome. There are two primary ways through which a city could attain the status of a Roman colony. Initially, Rome established colonies across the Empire's outer territories to maintain peace and defend against invasions by barbaric tribes. Veteran soldiers, upon retirement, were typically granted citizenship if they chose to settle in these colonies. Subsequently, a city could be awarded the prestigious title of a Roman Colony in recognition of its loyalty and service to the Empire.

What set these colonies apart was their unwavering allegiance to Rome. The citizens preserved their Roman connections, including language, titles, customs, affairs, and attire. They staunchly resisted any local influence and maintained their distinct Roman identity within an unfamiliar environment.

Paul in Philippi

The Macedonian Vision

[Acts 16:1–13](#)

¹ Paul came also to Derbe and to Lystra. A disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek. ² He was well spoken of by the brothers at Lystra and Iconium. ³ Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him, and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. ⁴ As they went on their way through the cities, they delivered to them for observance the decisions that had been reached by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem. ⁵ So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and they increased in numbers daily. ⁶ And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. ⁷ And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. ⁸ So, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. ⁹ And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." ¹⁰ And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them. ¹¹ So, setting sail from Troas, we made a direct voyage to Samothrace, and the following day to Neapolis, ¹² and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city some days. ¹³ And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together.

Paul and his team visit with Timothy, a young convert who was part of Paul's first missionary journey. Timothy had parents from different cultural backgrounds; his mother was Jewish, and his father was Greek. Jewish law dictated that a child followed the religion of the mother, whereas Greek law indicated the father had authority in the home ([2 Tim 1:5](#)). Timothy was taught to believe in God and developed a devout faith, influenced by both his grandmother and mother.

Paul held a significant relationship with Timothy. During Paul's imprisonment in Rome, Timothy was frequently present with him. Paul often relied on Timothy to deliver messages on his behalf. It is plausible that Paul regarded Timothy as his potential successor, who would assume his role upon his passing.

Timothy had not undergone circumcision, likely due to societal factors related to his parents' marriage. Although his mother was Jewish and devout in her faith, marrying a Gentile would have resulted in social ostracization within the Jewish community. Strict adherents to Jewish tradition often did not recognize

such unions as valid marriages. In extreme cases, if a Jewish individual married a Gentile, the Jewish community might regard them as deceased, to the extent that a funeral could be conducted for them.

Even though Paul circumcised Timothy, circumcision has/had nothing to do with salvation. Paul circumcised Timothy to eliminate any stigma in Lystra's Jewish community, ensuring Timothy would not hinder their evangelistic efforts.

First Convert in Europe

[Acts 16:14–15](#)

¹⁴ One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. ¹⁵ And after she was baptized, and her household as well, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay." And she prevailed upon us.

Following the selection of Timothy, the team, now composed of Paul, Silas, and Timothy, continued their mission to visit and strengthen the churches. They disseminated the ordinances established by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem ([Acts 15](#)). Their efforts resulted in individuals coming to faith. They journeyed through the Phrygian and Galatian regions, adhering to the Holy Spirit's directive prohibiting them from entering Asia. While in Troas, Paul experienced a vision of a man from Macedonia fervently requesting him to come and preach the Gospel.

Paul and his team departed immediately for Macedonia and arrived at Philippi. On the Sabbath day, they went to the riverside outside the gate and began addressing the women who had assembled there. In cities where no Jewish synagogue existed, believers gathered outdoors near water so other Christians could easily locate them. According to Jewish law, a synagogue could not be established without at least ten male heads of households to form the congregation.

A merchant woman from Thyatira named Lydia, who dealt in purple fabrics and was a worshiper of God, was present. Upon hearing the gospel, she and her entire household embraced the faith and were subsequently baptized, becoming the first converts in Europe. Demonstrating immediate hospitality, she invited Paul and his associates to reside at her home.

The Demonic Slave Girl

[Acts 16:16–21](#)

¹⁶ As we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by fortune-telling. ¹⁷ She followed Paul and us, crying out, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation." ¹⁸ And this she kept doing for many days. Paul, having become greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And it came out that very hour. ¹⁹ But when her owners saw that their hope of gain was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the rulers. ²⁰ And when they had brought them to the magistrates, they said, "These men are Jews, and they are disturbing our city. ²¹ They advocate customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to accept or practice."

Paul and his team were enroute to Lydia's home when they faced an attempt by Satan to obstruct their mission. They encountered a girl who was under demonic influence.

The python, a legendary serpent in Greek mythology, was believed to guard the temple of Apollo. By A.D. 50, the term "python" was used to describe an individual who was believed to be possessed and through whom prophecies were delivered. Pagan generals often consulted individuals with a "pythian spirit" before engaging in warfare; possessing such a slave girl would be highly profitable for her owner. This slave girl was thought to be possessed by a demonic spirit, generating substantial income for her masters.

This encounter closely mirrors the narrative found in [Mark 5](#), where the demoniac acknowledges Jesus as the "Son of the Most High God." In that account, Jesus commands the demon to depart. Similarly, in this instance, the slave girl announces, "These men are bondservants of the Most High God, who are proclaiming to you a way of salvation" ([Acts 16:17](#)). After some time, Paul, becoming annoyed, instructs the demon in the name of Jesus Christ to leave the girl. Consequently, the demon departs, rendering the girl no longer possessed or capable of clairvoyance. As a result, her masters lose a significant source of income, as they can no longer exploit her abilities for financial gain.

In both instances, the demonic individuals were accurate in their statements; however, the source of the message was inappropriate. The Christian community is increasingly weakened because it often adopts worldly sources to communicate the gospel. Not all methods of disseminating the Gospel are compatible with its message. The fact that the world employs a particular method does not necessarily mean that the church should utilize it.

Do not miss the fact that his slave girl was in double bondage. She was being treated like property by her slave owners, and she was in bondage to the demon that possessed her. But through the name of Jesus Christ, she was set free. Luke does not tell us whether or not she became a believer. But you have to image that there was definitely a change in her life. She was free for the bondage of Satan.

Paul and Silas Imprisoned

[Acts 16:22–30](#)

²² The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods. ²³ And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely. ²⁴ Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks. ²⁵ About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, ²⁶ and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's bonds were unfastened. ²⁷ When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. ²⁸ But Paul cried with a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here." ²⁹ And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. ³⁰ Then he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

Paul and his team were just trying to get to Lydia's house. They were going to stay with her. The must have been a joyful celebration going. Lydia and her household had gotten saved. But as usual Satan tries to disrupt what God was doing, thus the demonic slave girl.

One can only image the uproar and commotion that is caused in the city. The owners were upset because of the wealth they would lose. No longer could they use this girl to foretell the future and give them an advantage in business. The owners immediately start complaining and accusing Paul and his team of

causing trouble. They were using the fact that they were Jews. It is a familiar claim throughout history. Many, dictators, and enemies of God have blamed the Jews.

It has to be remembered that Philippi was a Roman Colony and was immensely proud of the fact they were Roman. They did not want anything to disrupt the status quo. The magistrate did not want any trouble that would bring them trouble, especially from Rome. So, they beat and imprisoned these disruptive Jews.

We can speculate that the reason Timothy and Luke did not get placed in jail was because they were identified as Greeks. Paul and Silas were signal out because they were Jews. It must be noted that the fact that Paul and Silas were Rome citizens was not discovered until later. This would have changed things. Roman citizens were not allowed to be beaten without a trial. But we have to remember had they not gone to jail the jailer might not have heard the gospel. God will use all circumstances to see that the Gospel is preached. Even being unjustly thrown into jail.

Paul and Silas displayed an exemplary attitude by choosing to praise rather than complain. Despite having been severely beaten and placed in stocks, which would have caused them significant pain and bleeding wounds, they did not lament their situation. Considering their inability to rest or sleep comfortably, their response was to pray and sing praises to God. This behavior contrasts with the typical human reaction, which often leans towards complaining rather than praising when faced with suffering and trials.

The Jailer Converted

[Acts 16:31–40](#)

³¹ And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." ³² And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. ³³ And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family. ³⁴ Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God. ³⁵ But when it was day, the magistrates sent the police, saying, "Let those men go." ³⁶ And the jailer reported these words to Paul, saying, "The magistrates have sent to let you go. Therefore come out now and go in peace." ³⁷ But Paul said to them, "They have beaten us publicly, uncondemned, men who are Roman citizens, and have thrown us into prison; and do they now throw us out secretly? No! Let them come themselves and take us out." ³⁸ The police reported these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Roman citizens. ³⁹ So they came and apologized to them. And they took them out and asked them to leave the city. ⁴⁰ So they went out of the prison and visited Lydia. And when they had seen the brothers, they encouraged them and departed.

While they were engaged in prayer and singing, a significant earthquake occurred. The jail doors were open, and the chains were unfastened. It would have been effortless for the prisoners to escape, yet none did so. The jailer was aware that any Roman soldier who allowed a prisoner to escape, regardless of the circumstances, would be required to pay for it with his life.

The reason the other prisoners did not try to escape is unclear. They may have been stunned by the earthquake and afraid of aftershocks, concerned about the consequences if they were recaptured, or influenced by something they observed in Paul and Silas. Regardless of the reason, none of the prisoners were missing. The jailer was about to take his life when Paul intervened and stopped him.

The jailer had listened to the prayers and praises of Paul and Silas, as well as their gospel message. He felt a deep conviction and sought salvation, asking Paul, "What must I do to be saved?" Paul's response was

straightforward and easy to understand: "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved, you and your household" ([Acts 16:31](#)). Paul did not imply that the jailer's household would be saved simply by his confession; rather, they would witness the transformation in his life and come to believe. The jailer demonstrated his newfound faith through immediate action by taking Paul and Silas to his home, providing them with food and medical attention. This allowed Paul to further explain the gospel to the jailer and his family, leading to their collective acceptance of salvation. There are numerous accounts of entire families coming to faith due to the example set by one member believing in Jesus.

Following the jailer's conversion, Paul and Silas disclosed their Roman citizenship. It is important to recognize that Roman citizens possessed numerous rights and privileges, including the ability to travel without the risk of prosecution under local laws. Therefore, the local magistrate had erred by ordering the beating and imprisonment of Paul and Silas. While the magistrate sought to quietly resolve the situation, Paul insisted on a public acknowledgment and correction of the mistake. Despite this, the authorities wanted them to leave the town due to the presence of a hostile crowd. Paul and his companions departed only after meeting with and encouraging the new converts.

Application

Navigating public life can often be overwhelming, particularly when faced with the pressure to conform to societal values. Consider how Paul intentionally sought opportunities to share the gospel, even in challenging situations. In your daily routines—such as while waiting in line or during a commute—seek moments that may be divinely orchestrated to offer encouraging words or extend an invitation to church. A single conversation has the potential to significantly influence someone's life and perspective.

Discussion Questions

1. What is one thing you can do to make yourself responsive to God and His will?
2. What songs and prayers of praise can you offer God today?
3. What personal practices or disciplines can help you deepen your faith as you reflect on the faith displayed by the characters in [Acts 16](#)?
4. What key events led to Paul and Silas being imprisoned in [Acts 16](#), and how did they respond to their circumstances?
5. Although severely tested and persecuted, Paul and Silas held on to their faith and their joy; how do you think you would hold up under such extraordinary pressure? Why?

Lesson Two: Rejoicing in Christ - The Principle of Life

Biblical Passage: [Philippians 1](#)

Big Idea: *The joy of partnership in the Gospel stems from our common identity in Christ, compelling us to unite our efforts for His mission and to strengthen one another as we face the trials of life together.*

Opening Thoughts

As we begin the study of Paul's letter to the Philippians. We are going to see a theme that is prevalent through the whole letter. That theme is joy. Paul has much to rejoice concerning the church at Philippi. The church had grown from just a handful of believers ([Act 16](#)) to one that has grown both in numbers and in faith. This church has financially supported him and his ministry. In chapter one we are going to see that rejoicing in Christ needs to be a principal in the life of a believer. We need to always strive to live exemplary, Christ-like live regardless of the afflictions and trials that we face. Paul opens his letter to the Philippians by rejoicing in their faithfulness as a community of faith that stays true to the gospel regardless of circumstances.

Rejoicing in Christian Community

Salutation

[Philippians 1:1-2](#)

¹ Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons:² Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul begins this letter by referring to himself and Timothy as bondservants of Jesus Christ. This contrasts with his other letters where he asserts his apostleship, likely because there were no false teachings or doctrines to address at the Church of Philippi. He greets them with grace and peace, and the letter reflects friendship and joy, celebrating the faith of the church.

Timothy, Paul's beloved son in faith, is mentioned not as a co-author but as the individual to whom Paul dictated the letter. Timothy, a constant companion of Paul's, often served as the messenger who delivered several of Paul's letters to various churches.

The term "bondservant" signifies a willing slave happily and loyally connected to his master. Paul viewed everything through the perspective of his servitude to Christ, dedicating his life to serving the one who saved his soul. This is the stance from which Paul addresses the Philippian Church.

This attitude is one that all believers should embody. God desires for us to be happily and loyally committed to the work of the Kingdom. Unfortunately, many contemporary churches are consumer-focused, where people attend to receive something rather than being mission-oriented, where members prepare to go out and give. Our churches should serve as places to encourage and celebrate what God is accomplishing through us throughout the week.

Rejoicing in Thanksgiving

[Philippians 1:3–8](#)

³ I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, ⁴ always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, ⁵ because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. ⁶ And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. ⁷ It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. ⁸ For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus.

The church at Philippi holds a significant place in Paul's ministry. Since he first preached to them ten years earlier, they have flourished and become a key supporter of his missionary work—both financially and through their prayers. It is essential to remember those who lead us to Christ.

Paul wants the Philippians to recognize that he has not forgotten them either. He regularly prays for them and acknowledges how much their partnership has encouraged him. Paul is confident in the character of the church at Philippi. He believes that God will complete the work Christ started because of their faithfulness.

In this context, "*confident*" translates from *peithō*, which means to be persuaded and have confidence. Paul's confidence transcends human hope; it is the absolute certainty that comes from knowing and believing God's promise. Paul is assured of what God has already accomplished and knows that the God who initiated a good work will carry it to completion ([Phil 1:6](#)).

Our confidence should not be placed in earthly matters but in the promises of God found in the Bible. This is where Paul's confidence was anchored. As believers, we are called to grow in our Christian life, becoming more like Christ each day. Despite living in a world constantly moving away from God, we can remain confident that He is in control. Our hope should not rest in our circumstances but in the promise of Christ's return.

Rejoicing in Prayer

[Philippians 1:9–11](#)

⁹ And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, ¹⁰ so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, ¹¹ filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

After expressing his love and gratitude for the Philippian church, Paul articulates his prayer for their continued spiritual development. An old song once stated, "*What the world needs is love.*" For believers, love is a fundamental characteristic of Christlikeness.

Paul's concept of love was groundbreaking in his time due to the highly stratified nature of Roman society. At one end of the spectrum were the wealthy landowners, while at the other were the impoverished and enslaved, with no interaction between these groups. The love fostered within Christianity transcended these barriers, which Paul emphasizes when he urges that their love may abound more.

The Greek word illustrated by the term "*abound*" conjures an image of a bucket under a large waterfall, overflowing because it cannot contain all the water. Similarly, believers' love should be all-encompassing,

extending to everyone regardless of their social status or cultural standing. This love should be so abundant that it is uncontainable.

Paul's aspiration for the Philippians was to develop such profound love, coupled with knowledge and discernment, which are essential for adhering to the teachings of Christ. The term "knowledge," used twenty times in the New Testament, conveys understanding about God and spiritual matters. Discernment, on the other hand, extends beyond mere acquisition of knowledge to its practical application.

The purpose of love characterized by knowledge and discernment is to enable us to approve or affirm what is excellent. The term translated as "approve" (*dokimazein*) refers to the process whereby a blacksmith hammers out and tests red-hot iron implements. Significant mental and spiritual effort is necessary for critical decision-making, particularly regarding moral issues. By possessing this kind of love, an individual is better equipped to love both God and humanity. Ultimately, this type of love is meant to bring glory, honor, and praise to our God and Lord Jesus Christ, who has redeemed us. The principal aim of all Paul's prayers is to ensure that God is glorified irrespective of his circumstances.

Rejoicing in the Christian Ministry

One of the surest measures of a Christian's spiritual maturity is what it takes to rob them of their Spirit-bestowed joy. So many times, when we face adversity, we become distressed and depressed. This is not the case with Paul. He is sitting in a jail in Rome surrounded by guards with no freedom. But we do not find him complaining or being overly concerned about his situation. Instead, what we see is a man who is totally committed to proclaiming the gospel regardless of his circumstances.

Proclaiming the gospel

[Philippians 1:12–20](#)

¹² I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, ¹³ so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. ¹⁴ And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear. ¹⁵ Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. ¹⁶ The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. ¹⁷ The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. ¹⁸ What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice, ¹⁹ for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, ²⁰ as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death.

Paul informs the Church at Philippi that despite his imprisonment in a Roman jail, the gospel mission continues. He emphasizes that his personal circumstances are secondary, and he lives in a way that those around him witness the gospel through his actions.

Many individuals around Paul recognized that his imprisonment was not due to criminal activity. Even the praetorian guards observed the gospel being demonstrated through Paul's life. Paul shared the gospel with the Praetorian Guard, who were elite soldiers of the Roman army tasked with protecting the emperor and

performing significant state functions. The guard consisted of approximately 16,000 soldiers; most located in Rome. These soldiers guarded and were chained to Paul for two years. The exact number of conversions among the guards is unknown, but it is noted that the gospel spread significantly among them and possibly reached the palace of the emperor and other locations.

Paul's imprisonment was due to his commitment to the gospel. However, some preachers in Rome were envious of Paul's success and the attention he garnered. They used his imprisonment as an opportunity to speak against him. It is important to note that their preaching stemmed from envy and strife rather than heresy. They preached the true gospel, but their motivations varied, including self-ambition and causing distress for Paul. Despite this, Paul maintained that Christ being proclaimed was what mattered most ([Philippians 1:18](#)).

Paul acknowledged hardships as an inherent part of ministry. He viewed them as minor sacrifices necessary for advancing the gospel. His circumstances were challenging, yet he exhibited joy, contentment, and peace, rooted in his trust in God and dedication to spreading the gospel.

Today, freedom to share the gospel is valued, particularly in the "free" world. However, significant growth and revivals in Christianity have often occurred during times of opposition and persecution. For example, despite restrictions on public expression of Christianity in China, there is a sizable population of Bible-believing Christians. Conversely, in the Western world, the evangelical church's influence has been diminishing.

Paul aimed not only to convert non-believers but also to strengthen and encourage the existing believers. His imprisonment inspired many to proclaim the gospel with renewed confidence and boldness. He demonstrated that maintaining joy and effective ministry involves focusing on Jesus and making the gospel central to one's life and work.

Surrendering to Christ

[Philippians 1:21–26](#)

²¹ For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. ²² If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. ²³ I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. ²⁴ But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. ²⁵ Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, ²⁶ so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again.

Many believe that this passage here is the most important passage in the whole letter. Paul is laying out the Christian life in [Phil 1:21](#) when he says, “for me to live his Christ and to die is gain.” The Christian believer should be willing to do whatever it takes for the Kingdom even if it means suffering and or death.

A man who served in the Vietnam War shared an experience where reading [Phil 1:21](#) freed him from the fear of death. He realized that dying would bring him into the presence of his Lord, thus granting him peace to fulfill his mission. This understanding liberated him to live a purposeful life dedicated to the Kingdom. When we no longer fear death but merely see it as a door to eternal life with Jesus Christ. Then we are free to live a life of purpose and meaning. Thus, we can have a real commitment to the Kingdom.

This is how Paul was living his life. In this passage Paul says I am torn between two things, my desire to go on to heaven and be with my savior and my understanding that if I stay behind there is so much more to be done for the Kingdom. But either way Christ will get glory. Paul recognized that his body was not his own, his future was not his own, his reputation was not his own they all belong to Christ.

The apostle's very being was wrapped up in his Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. He trusted, loved, served, witnessed for, and in every way was devoted to and dependent on Him. His only hope, his only purpose, his only reason to live was Christ. He traveled for Christ, preached for Christ, and was persecuted and imprisoned for Christ. He would die for Christ. But even death, by God's marvelous grace, was for Paul's eternal gain. Paul was totally surrendered to the will and desires of Christ.

Paul had a purpose for living when he served the Philippians and others. We also need a purpose for living that goes beyond providing for our own physical needs. Whom can you serve or help? What is your purpose for living? What is something you would like to accomplish before you die.... what is your spiritual bucket list?

Rejoicing in Christian Living

[Philippians 1:27–30](#)

²⁷ Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, ²⁸ and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God. ²⁹ For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, ³⁰ engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

Paul is exhorting the church to live a life worthy of the gospel of Christ. This meant they had to stand firm in one spirit and one mind in unity. When Paul says to “conduct ourselves” he is literally meaning for them to “live as citizens.” Philippi was a Roman colony and was immensely proud of the privileges that came along with being Roman citizen. Most of those who belong to the church were either Roman citizens or wanting to become Roman citizens because of all the privileges that they got as a Roman citizen.

Paul was asking the church to remember that they are citizens of another Kingdom, and they should “live as citizens of heaven”, with all the responsibilities that come along with being a heavenly citizen. As citizens of heaven our responsibilities are dictated by the central truth of the gospel. As believers we must live our lives in a way that it brings honor to our King...Jesus Christ.

Paul goes on to remind us that living as citizens of heaven is going to come with a cost. As believers we must always remember we are going to experience adversity. We live in a fallen world that wants to have nothing to do with the things of God and adversity is an integral part of the Christian life. We should be willing to face adversity in a manner that is worthy of a citizen of heaven. There are many evils occurring in this fallen world, however our primary mission is not to rail against them but to present the one who has triumphed over them by his act of redemption.

We are to proclaim the good news of the Gospel. We accomplish this by living a life worthy of our heavenly citizenship. We must always remember that God is bigger than our circumstances. He sees that whole

picture of history and the knows the why of our circumstances. When we begin to understand and remember that God is in control. It will produce real joy and praise in our lives.

We must conclude Like Paul; *“For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”* ([Phil 1:21](#)). When we are prepared to die, we are best prepared to live. When we are in Christ, life or death is a win-win situation. The worst thing, which is the best thing, that could happen is that we die and go to heaven. This should cause us to rejoice and want to live a life worthy of who we are, Citizens of Heaven.

Application

Reflecting on [Philippians 1](#), think about the partnerships Paul had in spreading the gospel. Consider reaching out to someone you know who is struggling with anxiety or uncertainty. Just as Paul wrote to the Philippians to encourage them in their hardships, you can offer a listening ear and words of comfort. Take time to pray with them and remind them of God’s promises. This simple act of compassion can help them feel less isolated and more connected to their faith community, fostering an environment of support and love.

Discussion Questions

1. What was your first impression of the book of Philippians when you read it, and how do you think it connects to your life today?
2. What do you think the main message of [Philippians 1](#) is, and how does it illustrate Paul's relationship with the Philippian church?
3. How does the concept of suffering for the sake of Christ in [Philippians 1](#) challenge or encourage your understanding of your own faith journey?
4. What are some practical steps you can take to foster a spirit of partnership in the gospel with those around you?

Lesson Three: Rejoicing in Christ - The Pattern for Life

Bible Passage: [Philippians 2](#)

Big Idea: *True humility, as modeled by Christ, is essential for unity within the body of believers and for reflecting Christ's love to the world.*

Opening Thoughts

The first chapter of Philippians highlights the concept that rejoicing serves as a foundational principle in the Christian life, encapsulated by the statement, “*For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain*” ([Phil 1:21](#)). Paul positioned Christ at the center of his existence, presenting this model as essential for all believers. Subsequently, chapter two transitions to illustrate that Christ is not only the center but also the pattern for a believer’s life.

The Need of a Pattern

One of the significant challenges currently confronting the church is the questioning of its foundational authority, specifically the Word of God. There appears to be a prevailing sense of spiritual apathy and widespread indifference toward biblical principles. In certain congregations, adherence to God’s standards of righteousness has been diminished in an effort to avoid cultural criticism or rejection, which in turn has resulted in discord within numerous churches. A notable illustration of this phenomenon can be observed in the ongoing division within the United Methodist Church. Efforts to align the church more closely with cultural preferences has often precipitated conflict, disharmony, and ultimately division.

In [Phil 1:27-30](#), Paul advocates for unity within the church on the basis that external and internal conflicts necessitate a unified purpose. The Philippian church itself faced threats of discord, exemplified by the personal disagreement between Euodia and Syntyche ([Phil 4:2](#)).

When questioned about the greatest obstacle to Christian missions in India, Gandhi reportedly answered, “Christians.” Frequently, disunity acts as a barrier to the mission and ministry of the church—a risk present in every congregation. Paul addressed issues of disunity to varying degrees in each letter he wrote to the early churches.

In [Phil 2:1-4](#), Paul sets forth clear and practical guidance on fostering unity. These verses provide a framework consisting of three essential elements for achieving spiritual unity: right motives (vv. 1–2a), right marks (v. 2b), and right means (vv. 3–4). Through these instructions, Paul elucidates the rationale for unity among believers, defines what it means to be of one mind and spirit, and outlines the process by which genuine unity can be attained.

Right Motives

[Philippians 2:1](#)

¹ So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy,

To conduct themselves in a manner worthy of the gospel ([Phil 1:27](#)), the Philippians are encouraged to resolve any ongoing conflicts within their community and exemplify unity in Christ. The passage features four “if” statements in verse 1, which may be more accurately rendered as “since” or “so,” indicating Paul’s assurance that opposition will arise and that believers must accordingly live in a manner consistent with the Gospel ([Phil 1:27](#)).

Paul enumerates four essential realities that should inspire Christians to pursue unity and live lives reflective of the Gospel; these correspond to the four “if” (or “since”) statements in [Phil 2:1](#).

The first reality is “encouragement in Christ.” The term “*Paraklēsis*” denotes coming alongside someone to provide comfort, counsel, or exhortation. Jesus promised His disciples that the Father would send them a helper ([John 14:16](#)), fulfilled by the arrival of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost ([Acts 2](#)). Every believer is indwelt by the Holy Spirit, who serves as guide and encourager. The presence of the Holy Spirit mandates that believers earnestly seek unity as an expression of gratitude for their union with Christ.

Secondly, the “consolation of love,” or “*paramuthion*” refers to speaking closely to someone to offer comfort and solace. This consoling love represents the grace extended by Christ in salvation and is continuously bestowed upon believers ([Rom. 5:5](#)), enabling them to extend love to others. Christ instructed His disciples to love one another, thereby marking themselves as His followers. As stated in [John 13:34–35](#): “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another.” Therefore, unity in the church is predicated on demonstrating Christ-like love.

The third motivating reality is the “*fellowship of the Spirit*.” The Greek term “*koinonia*” highlights partnership and mutual sharing, signifying an intimate fellowship due to the Holy Spirit’s indwelling within each believer ([1 Cor. 6:19](#)). If every member permitted the Holy Spirit to direct their actions, the ensuing unity and the flow of Christ’s love would eliminate bitterness, anger, and discord. Recognizing that believers’ bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit—whose focus is on unity and the mission of Christ—serves to unify the church in purpose.

Finally, the fourth reality pertains to “*affection and compassion*.” Here, affection (“*splanchna*”) metaphorically references deep emotions, while compassion (“*oiktirmos*”) relates to the mercies of God as highlighted by Paul. When the compassion of Christ operates within and through believers, it preserves the unity of the church and continually draws its members’ focus toward ministering compassionately to a world in need.

Right Marks

[Philippians 2:2](#)

² *complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.*

The first aspect of spiritual unity is having a shared mindset. According to Paul, achieving unity requires agreement among members. Disagreements can reduce the effectiveness of churches. When unified in purpose, members work collaboratively rather than focusing on differences.

The second aspect is sharing the same love. This involves showing mutual respect and preference for one another, not just expressing love in words but also through actions, as described in [Phil. 2:3](#). Selfless humility fosters sincere and practical care for others, reflecting an inclusive approach even when individuals do not feel deserving.

The third aspect is unity in spirit. To be united in spirit means living cooperatively with others and allowing shared values to guide actions. This approach excludes personal ambition, selfishness, or negative feelings, and encourages the development of positive traits referred to as the "fruits of the Spirit" ([Gal 5:22-23](#)).

It is recognized that no two individuals will agree on every detail, regardless of their experience or knowledge. However, with humility and mutual respect, it is possible to maintain unity and avoid division over minor differences. There is an increasing expectation within society for organizations to demonstrate authenticity and cohesion.

The fourth aspect is being focused on a common goal. Unity is strengthened when there is a clear understanding of purpose. For example, in the "Star Trek" series, the Federation operates under a guiding principle called the "Prime Directive." Similarly, the concept of the "Great Commission" ([Matt 28:18-20](#)) serves as a central objective. Organizations that remain focused on their main mission foster collective intent and coordinated progress.

Right Means

[Philippians 2:3-4](#)

³ Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. ⁴ Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

In the first two verses of [Phil 2](#) Paul has given us the motives and marks of a church that is unified. One could say that this is the theory behind unity, but how does one make it happen? Paul gives us five means or principles that will answer the question "How is genuine spiritual unity achieved?"

The first means of unity is "do nothing from selfishness or selfish ambition." Selfishness is at the root of every other sin. A selfish person will seek to destroy others for their own edification and gain. Selfishness breeds anger, resentment, and jealousy. It is a consuming and destructive sin. If there is to be unity in the church every member has to set aside self and focus on others and the mission of the church.

A second means for promoting spiritual unity is forsaking "empty conceit." This refers to a highly exaggerated self-view. Whereas selfish ambition pursues personal goals, empty conceit seeks personal glory and acclaim. When the only reason that we serve in the church is to get attention then it hinders the unity of the church. All honor and glory must go to Christ.

Unfortunately, there are too many rock star preachers trying to build "their" church. Which happens when church leadership becomes focused on Building, Bodies and Budgets. This ultimately leads to disunity in the church. This will lead to a mistrust of the church by the culture.

The third means of promoting spiritual unity is “humility of mind.” It is the very opposite of selfish ambition and empty conceit. Humility of mind is the bedrock of Christian character and of spiritual unity. It is not incidental that the first and foundational Beatitude refers to being “poor in spirit” ([Matt. 5:3](#)), which is synonymous with humility of mind. Humility is the opposite of Pride. Pride has been the sin that has separated fallen man from God.

A fourth means for promoting spiritual unity is the negative admonition, “*do not merely look out for your own personal interests.*” This relates back to humility of mind. The church is a body made up of many different parts. Each party must complete its role in order for there to be unity. Paul always referred to himself as a slave to Christ. A slave never seeks their own interest. Slaves only sought the interest of their master.

Many quarrels and divisions in churches concern programs or policies that may be equally biblical and important. Problems arise when people seek to promote their own ministry priorities at the expense of others. This many times leads to disunity. This division in the church is destructive. In every instance, the best interests of the Lord and other believers will be sacrificed.

A unified church is a church where the members are more concerned with the mission than getting their way in how the mission is completed. It is more important to complete your assigned part in the mission than to always want your way. If the church is to have any influence on the culture it is going to have to be unified. This means putting aside our personal desires and interest and follow Christ.

The fifth means for promoting spiritual unity is that of looking out “also for the interests of others.” Looking out for others is indispensable for spiritual unity. The key is “*others.*” The Christian faith was the first to make the word “*others*” important. Christ left the glories of heaven to earth for “*others*”? The church was given the Great Commission to spread the Gospel to “*others.*” We can only have the mind of Christ when we are focused on “*others.*”

Unfortunately, this idea runs against what our culture teaches. We live in a culture that says, “What I think or believe is all that matters.” In our culture the supreme virtue is self-love and the supreme purpose in life is self-fulfillment. What is even sadder is that this mindset has entered the church and is hindering its mission.

If the church is going to be unified. Then every believer cannot be completely absorbed in his or her own concerns. They have to be concerned with the needs of others. looking out for the interests of others requires believers to “*rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep*” ([Rom 12:15](#)). The joyful unity of believers in Christ offers a powerful testimony to the world that the God of love they preach is real, active, and eager to bring others into His loving family. This is going to cause believers to become humble in their attitude toward one another. We have to remember that we are called to serve not be served.

I found this story several years ago that illustrates what Paul is trying to teach us in this passage. Someone has imagined the Carpenter’s tools holding a conference.

Brother Hammer presided. Several suggested he leave the meeting because he was too noisy. Replied the Hammer, "If I have to leave this shop, Brother Screw must go also. You have to turn him around again and again to get him to accomplish anything." Brother Screw then spoke up. "If you wish, I'll leave. But Brother Plane must leave too. All his work is on the surface. His efforts have no depth. "To this Brother Plane responded, "Brother Rule will also have to withdraw, for he is always measuring folks as though he were the only one who is right." Brother Rule then complained against Brother Sandpaper, "You ought to leave too because you're so rough and always rubbing people the wrong way. "In the midst of all this discussion, in walked the Carpenter of Nazareth. He had arrived to start His day's work. Putting on His apron, He went to the bench to make a pulpit from which to proclaim the Gospel. He employed the hammer, screw, plane, rule, sandpaper, and all the other tools. After the day's work when the pulpit was finished, Brother Saw arose and remarked, "Brethren, I observe that all of us are workers together with the Lord." (Author Unknown)

Christ the Pattern

[Philippians 2:5–11](#)

⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Paul proceeds to give the Philippians several examples that they should emulate when it comes to being unified and humble. The first being Christ himself. If we are going to be humble and unified, we will have to have the same attitude that Jesus did. He humbled himself and became a servant to others. The result of His humility, God highly exalted Him.

Jesus is the greatest example of humility. He has always been God. [John 1:1](#) speaks of Jesus: *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."* As God, he did not selfishly grasp hold of or tightly hold to his position as equal with God. Instead, he was willing to leave his high position in heaven temporarily and to give himself over to serving our needs.

Jesus made himself nothing or *"emptied himself."* Scholars refer to this important statement as kenosis, from the Greek word kenoo. Literally, *"he emptied himself."* Jesus emptied Himself. Of what? Of His divinity? No. When Jesus came as a Man, He was still divine. He emptied Himself of His divine powers. Charles C. Ryrie sheds light on this event: *"Christ didn't become any less God, but he chose not to use some of his divine attributes."*

Jesus' willing laid aside His divine attributes, being obedient to God the Father. Jesus took on human form and came to earth as a baby in the manger. He lived a sinless life and then willingly went to the cross for our sins. He rose from the grave and returned to heaven.

Today we do not worship a “*babe in a manger*” or a “*sacrifice on a cross*,” we worship an exalted Lord seated on a throne in heaven. [Hebrews 12:2](#) tells us that Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Father. One day every knee will bow and every tongue will confess the Jesus Christ is Lord ([Phil 2:9-10](#)).

There is no joy or peace in pride and self-seeking. When we have the submissive mind that Christ had, then we will have the joy and peace that He alone can give. This has to be the attitude and the lifestyle that we pursue.

Our mission is to tell the world that Jesus is Lord, and if they will confess and believe in Him as such, they will be saved ([Rom 10:9, 13](#)). Let us adore Him. Let our minds be on Him. Let our attitude be like His. Let our actions reflect Him—all of this is to the glory of God the Father.

Paul as an Example

[Philippians 2:12–18](#)

¹² Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³ for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. ¹⁴ Do all things without grumbling or disputing, ¹⁵ that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, ¹⁶ holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain. ¹⁷ Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. ¹⁸ Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me. .

Starting in [Phil 2:12](#) Paul begins to give us several examples of Christians that have this pattern of rejoicing in Christ. They have a submissive mind. Paul portrays them as obedient children of God, who seek to honor the Father. He compares them to shining stars and runners with the batons. He reminds us that if we are going to have submissive and humble minds, we are going to have to be willing to live a life of sacrifice and service.

The church in Philippi was a church, not unlike today’s church, facing great pressures from the culture. The culture had many gods. Christianity teaches there is only one God. On top of the fact that the culture was against them, their leader and founder, Paul, was in prison, and they were concerned for his life.

In verse [Phil 2:12](#) Paul says to “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling,” The word he uses for work out is *katergazesthai*, which always has the idea of bringing to completion. It is as if Paul is saying: “Don’t stop half-way; go on until the work of salvation is fully achieved in you.” No Christian should be satisfied with anything less than the total benefits of the gospel.

Paul is not indicating that we have to work for our salvation. He is pointing out that there is two parts to our salvation. The first part of our salvation consists of work for us, the free gift of salvation that Christ provided with His death on the cross and His resurrection from the grave. The second part of our salvation consists of the work in us—this is the operation of God the Holy Spirit. This work is called sanctification, and it will not come to completion until we arrive in heaven. The principal Paul is wanting us to see is that God must work in us before He can work through us.

How do we work out our salvation? It begins with a daily walk with God in prayer and holding fast to the Word of God. We are to do all things without grumbling and disputing. There must be a spirit of humility and unity among believers. We have to look different from the culture. We have to become more like Jesus.

We are to be like shining lights in the midst of this crooked and twisted culture. When we allow God to work in our lives, we will not be like the godless society around us. They will see the light of Christ in our lives shining so brightly that it makes them curious as to why we are not like them. Christ, himself, said that we are to be “the light of the world” ([Matt 5:14](#))

To live this kind of life is going to require sacrifice. Paul offers himself as a pattern for what it is like to rejoice in sacrifice. Paul took his body and offered it as a sacrifice and service for people. He wanted Christ to receive all the honor and the glory. Paul considered it a privilege to die for the faith, and he wanted the Philippians to take the same attitude in the case of his death. This was the mind of Paul. I can think of no higher wish for the Christian life.

Timothy as an Example

[Philippians 2:19–24](#)

¹⁹ I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be cheered by news of you. ²⁰ For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. ²¹ For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. ²² But you know Timothy's proven worth, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel. ²³ I hope therefore to send him just as soon as I see how it will go with me, ²⁴ and I trust in the Lord that shortly I myself will come also.

Paul presents Timothy as an example of how believers are to live. Timothy was a model of love and concern for others. He had been with Paul when he started the church at Philippi. He had placed himself wholly in the service of Christ and Paul. So much that he was there in Rome. Timothy was known by the church at Philippi, and he had great love and concern for the Philippian church.

Timothy was one who didn't have an agenda of his own. His attitude was “I care about the people you care about, Paul. I'm going to serve you as a son who will serve his father. And I'll go if you want me to go.” The submissive mind was not something that suddenly appeared in the life of Timothy. It was developed and cultivated over time. As he walked with the Lord and worked with Paul, he became the kind of servant that Paul could trust, and God could Bless.

Like Timothy we have to learn that serving Christ, involves serving others in the church. This will only happen when we truly learn to love others and seek to give Jesus all the glory. When we serve out of joy and not selfish agendas, we will be able to understand, like Timothy, what it means to have the mind of Christ.

Epaphroditus as an Example

[Philippians 2:25–30](#)

²⁵ I have thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, and your messenger and minister to my need, ²⁶ for he has been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill. ²⁷ Indeed he was ill, near to death. But God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me

also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow.²⁸ I am the more eager to send him, therefore, that you may rejoice at seeing him again, and that I may be less anxious.²⁹ So receive him in the Lord with all joy, and honor such men,³⁰ for he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me.

Having placed Christ, himself, and Timothy as examples of humility and having the mind of Christ. Paul now sets a member of their own church as an example. Epaphroditus had been sent by the Philippian church with a financial gift for Paul's ministry. It is most likely that the church had expected Epaphroditus to stay in Rome and minister to the needs of Paul, but Paul tells them that he is sending him back because Epaphroditus had been sick.

Paul did not send Epaphroditus back to Philippi because he was tired of serving Paul. But Epaphroditus was longing for his fellow believers in Philippi and was distressed because they had heard that he had been sick. Epaphroditus had become extremely sick, and God had healed him.

Epaphroditus' had not planned to return to Philippi when he did. Paul hoped that the return of Epaphroditus would bring joy to the Philippians. Seeing someone alive and well who almost died always brings deep satisfying joy. Paul would no longer have to worry about the health of Epaphroditus. Nor would he need to be concerned about the Philippian church. Because the Philippians would no longer worry about Epaphroditus and because Epaphroditus could minister in Paul's stead to the church's needs.

In sending Epaphroditus back Paul wanted the Philippians to give the high regard he had for Epaphroditus. Paul uses three names to characterize the ministry of Epaphroditus. (1) my brother (Greek: *adelphos*), which means he was a fellow believer; (2) fellow worker (Greek: *synergos*), which means he too was working for God's kingdom—in Philippi, in Rome, or both; and (3) fellow soldier (Greek: *systratiōtēs*), which refers to the solidarity among believers who are fighting the same battle—that of bringing the gospel to an unbelieving and increasingly hostile world.

Application

As you interact with fellow church members, consider how your words can either uplift or discourage. This week, challenge yourself to give at least three specific compliments to individuals you encounter during services. Notice the hard work of others in the church—be it in worship, children's ministry, or behind-the-scenes efforts. Acknowledge these contributions publicly or privately. This practice not only encourages them but cultivates a culture of honor and humility, as we collectively strive to reflect Christ's love.

Discussion Questions

1. What four qualities mark unity with Christ? ([2:1](#))
2. How does Paul define being "like-minded" ([Philippians 2:2](#))?
3. How did Paul describe the mindset of Jesus when He came to earth (see [Philippians 2:6–7](#))?

4. What examples of working out their salvation does Paul give the Philippians in [1:27-2:16](#)?

Lesson Four: Rejoicing in Christ - The Prize of Life

Biblical Passage: [Philippians 3](#)

Big Idea: *In Christ, we find our true identity and purpose, urging believers to abandon self-reliance and embrace a faith-driven life that ultimately leads to joy and fulfillment in Him.*

Opening Thoughts

Following his guidance for the Philippians to maintain joy in all circumstances, Paul highlights the significance of remaining steadfast and aligned with the teachings of Jesus. He underscores that a defining trait of a believer is the discernment between truth and falsehood. Mastery of the foundational tenets of the gospel is presented as essential for salvation ([Romans 6:17](#); [10:14](#), [17](#)).

In the present era, discernment is of heightened importance as the integrity of Scripture encounters diverse challenges. Upholding the truth necessitates both a profound understanding of and a connection with Jesus. Paul's message to the Philippians is clear: cultivate an intimate knowledge of Jesus and unwaveringly uphold the truth.

Warning against Confidence in the Flesh

[Philippians 3:1–9](#)

¹ Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you. ² Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. ³ For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh—⁴ though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: ⁵ circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶ as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. ⁷ But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—

As Paul begins to close the letter, he wants to remind the Philippians of some previous teachings. He does this to safeguard them against false teachings that were invading the church. Paul gives three marks that indicate a person is a true believer.

True believers' worship/serve God in the Spirit. "True worshipers (believers) will worship the Father in spirit and truth." ([John 4:23](#))

Paul pulls no punches in identifying who was bringing false teachings into the church. He calls them dogs and evil workers. Dogs during the first century roamed the streets and were wild unclean scavengers. Jews routinely called Gentiles dogs. Paul calls those Jews who were coming into the church and demanding that circumcision was necessary for salvation, dogs. They had a sinful, vicious, and uncontrollable character. These false Jewish "Christians" were genuinely like impure dogs that stood outside the covenant of God. They taught that you had to follow the Law of Moses to be a Christian.

An indicator if a person is a true believer is whether or not they have the Holy Spirit living within them. Paul wrote to the Romans “You, however, are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit since the Spirit of God live in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.” ([Rom. 8:9](#)). This means that you can do all the “religious” activities you want but if you do not have the Holy Spirit dwelling in you are not a true believer.

Believers boast solely in Christ. “The how boast must boast in the Lord” ([1 Cor. 1: 31](#)) In the church in America there is an unbalance emphasis on what Christ can do for us and not what we can do for Him. Many seem to boast in the fact that since they serve Jesus, he is obligated to give them what they want. The truth is that Jesus only promised to give them what they need.

As believers we boast and glory only in Christ. We are not to boast about how many times we read the Bible or how often we attend church. We are not to boast about our earthly status, achievements, or gifts. When we do this, we are placing our confidence of salvation in what we can do, not what Christ has already done for us. The Christian life is a life of exalting Christ and Him alone. It is what He did on the cross that gives us salvation, not the religious practices and activities that we think we have to do.

Believers do not place their confidence in the flesh “...put no confidence in the flesh.” ([Phil. 3:3](#)) Confidence is defined as “the feeling or belief that one can rely on someone or something; firm trust. Everyone places their confidence in something or someone. In our post-modern culture, we are told that the only person or thing that we should place confidence in is ourselves. We are being told that our truth is the only truth and that is where our confidence should be placed. It is about what I can do for myself.

In Philippi, the Judaizers were placing confidence in their impressive Jewish credential. They were “God’s Chosen People” thus better than the gentile believers. For this reason, they sought to add additional requirements to salvation. Circumcision being the most prominent.

This is the total opposite what Christ wants. As believers in Christ, we are to place our confidence in Him and not our works. We will never be able to do enough good and religious things to earn our way into heaven. Salvation is a free gift from God ([Rom. 6:23](#)). All a person has to do to be saved is believe in Jesus Christ and His completed work on the cross.

Paul illustrates this point by listing all his credentials ([Phil 3:5-6](#)). Paul says he was “⁵ *circumcised the eighth day of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; ⁶as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness, which is in the Law, found blameless.*” Paul is telling them that if anyone should boast or place confidence in religious activity it should be him. Paul prior to meeting Jesus on the Damascus road had a zeal for the Law. For keeping the Law is where he had placed his confidence. But to Paul this was all rubbish/trash, and it had no ability to bring salvation. The only thing that Paul would place his confidence in was knowing Christ and His work on the cross.

Can we look at Paul’s self-portrait and make some general applications to people today who are not trusting in Christ alone for their salvation. Paul gave several things we are not to place our trust in.

We are not to place our confidence in a ritual. Paul had been “*circumcised on the eighth day.*” This was a requirement of all Jewish boys. It marked him as a true Jew. Today, some people may put their confidence

in other spiritual rituals, like being baptized as an infant or church attendance. Our salvation is about becoming a new creation in Christ, not a religious ritual. Salvation happens on the inside not the outside of a believer.

We are not to place our confidence in our ethnicity or rank. Paul gave us his lineage. He was of the nation of Israel and the tribe of Benjamin. Paul was a physical descendant of Abraham and a member of the tribe of Benjamin. This gave him status as a Jew. But even his special privilege as a Jew did not give him assurance of salvation. That only comes for Christ. The sad truth is that many people today who are exalted by the world today will be humbled because they have failed to bow to Christ. Salvation does not come from who we are or our status in society, it comes by trusting in Jesus Christ.

We are not to place our confidence in traditions. “*Hebrew of Hebrews*” ([Phil. 3:5](#)). I have served in many churches that have their traditions. To many of the members these traditions were sacred and essential to being a true believer. Paul claims that he was a “*Hebrew of Hebrews*.” this meant that he had been devoted to traditions. In the Jewish faith keeping these traditions were required for eternal life. Paul is not saying that we cannot have traditions. What he is telling us is that we cannot place our confidence in traditions for salvation. The only place we are to place our confidence is Jesus.

We cannot place or have confidence in keeping the rules. “...as for the Law a Pharisee” ([Phil 3:5](#)). Early in my college experience I met believers that were legalistic. They had rules for everything. What bible to use, how long your hair could be, what music you could or could not listen to, and what you could or could not wear. These individuals had been taught that you had to follow a list of rules if you were going to be a truly saved person. In their mind if they followed all the rules and live a moral life they would go to heaven.

Paul reminds us that he was a Pharisee. The name Pharisee comes from an Aramaic term denoting “*the separated one*.” Pharisees loved their rules and believed that only by obeying them would they see heaven. Paul is telling believers that keeping a set of rules will not get you to heaven. No one can earn their way into heaven. Salvation is not by rule keeping.

We cannot place our confidence on our passion. ([Phil. 3:6](#)). When it came to being passionate for the Jewish faith, no one could out do Paul. He followed the letter of the Law to the point that he was to be found blameless. Paul was so passionate to protect the Jewish faith that you became the chief persecutor of the early church. ([Acts 9](#)). Paul had been a witness to the stoning of Stephen ([Acts 7:58](#)).

People are passionate about lots of things. Salvation does not come from passion alone. Salvation comes from knowing Jesus and having a zeal for Him. Paul told the Romans that some of them had a zeal for Jesus but did not truly know Him ([Rom 10:2](#)). True salvation comes from knowing Christ and being “*found in Him*” ([Phil 3:9](#))

Paul the Pharisee of Pharisees closes this portion of his letter by telling us that all his earthly accomplishments were as useless as trash. Our human accomplishments are as rubbish in comparison to gaining a knowledge of Christ. It no longer mattered who we are, what we do or how well we could keep rules. Our eyes are to be only on Christ and Him alone. We must have a single-minded devotion to Christ. The only humanly thing that is required is that by faith we accept what God has done through His son Jesus

Christ. The key to living the Christian life is not us living it, but Jesus living it through us. We have to know Christ and his power.

Exhortation to Know Christ

[Philippians 3:10–16](#)

¹⁰ that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. ¹² Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. ¹³ Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. ¹⁶ Only let us hold true to what we have attained.

When we are baptized it is a picture of our relationship with Christ. Buried to the old life of sin and raised to a new life of righteousness. Paul wants to know Christ in this kind of relationship. To know Christ in this way meant Paul was willing and ready to share in Christ's suffering. In [Galatians 2:20](#) Paul writes “*I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*” Our lives should reflect the difference that Christ makes as a result of His suffering on the cross.

Paul describes this wanting to know Christ like a dedicated runner who through all the pain and suffering keeps striving for the finish line. My grandson runs cross-country for his school. He does not worry about the runners that are behind him, he is always looking ahead to see who he can pass. When he runs, he is pressing forward toward the finish line. His goal is to win.

We are to forget the mistakes and victories of the past. As believers in Jesus Christ, we are to continually press forward. There is no place in the Christian life for just be walking or lying around. We are called to always be looking and reaching forward to what lies ahead. We are to press toward the goal of Christlikeness. The believer must follow, run, and press after perfection—the perfection for which Christ has saved us. We are to strive for a deeper knowledge and intimacy with Christ.

What does it mean to know Christ and be pressing on. It means that when we are asked to choose between the things of this world and Christ - We choose Christ. It means that we will always deal with the things of this world in ways that show that they are not our treasure but rather show that Christ is our treasure. It means that if we lose any or all the things this world can offer, we will not lose our joy or our treasure or our life, because Christ is all.

Warning against Living for the Flesh

[Philippians 3:17–21](#)

¹⁷ Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. ¹⁸ For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. ¹⁹ Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. ²⁰ But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

Paul has set forth Jesus Christ as the supreme example on how to live the Christian Life. Knowing and being like Jesus is the prize that every believer should strive to reach. Paul does not just say “here is the prize go get it.” He tells the church that we should follow his example ([1 Cor. 11:1](#) and [1 Thess 1:6](#)) and the example of other godly believers such as Timothy and Epaphroditus ([Phil 2:19-20](#)). It is especially important that believers today have godly people in their lives that they can imitate. Especially in a culture that has so confused and watered down the Word of God.

In our culture today there are many who want to change and corrupt the Word of God to meet their way of thinking. The church in Philippi was facing a similar problem. Paul calls them enemies of the cross of Christ. Who is an enemy of the cross? It is the person ...

- ❖ Who rejects the cross of Christ as the only way to God.
- ❖ Who claims that there are other ways to approach God—ways other than the cross of Christ.
- ❖ Who does not accept the death of Christ as payment for his sins.
- ❖ Who considers the cross of Christ to be foolishness and opposes and curses Christ and His cross.
- ❖ Who persecutes and attempts to stamp out Christ and His cross.

Paul writes the end for those who are enemies of God is destruction. This destruction is brought about because of their desire to satisfy their fleshly appetites. They care more about this life than they do about the next.

In the culture we live in it can be extremely easy to be distracted from the things of God. We have to beware of those in our culture that will try to get us to focus on this life, worry about this life and get caught up in the things of this life. Christ is calling us to forget about ourselves, look toward eternity, and live for heaven.

Paul reminds the Philippians, and us, that our citizenship is not here on earth, our citizenship is heaven. This would have struck a chord with the Philippians. Philippi was a Roman colony; those who lived in Philippi had their citizenship in far-off Rome. Roman citizenship was highly prized during Paul’s time. The Christians in Philippi, as proud as they were of their Roman citizenship ([Acts 16:20-21](#)), were called to value their heavenly citizenship because they were living on earth in a colony of believers. While their stay here on earth was only temporary. They would one day experience all the benefits that come with being a citizen of heaven,

The church can be seen as a colony of heaven. As citizens of heaven, we are called to...

- ❖ Believers are to dress as citizens of heaven and not of the earth. We are to be modest in the clothes we wear.
- ❖ Believers are to speak as citizens of heaven and not of the earth. Our language and attitude should reflect the mind of Christ when we speak.
- ❖ Believers are to engage in the pleasures of heaven and not of the earth. We cannot live like the world and expect to be seen as different.
- ❖ Believers are to worship the God of heaven and not the religions and gods of this earth. We are not to have anything in our lives that distracts us from serving and worshiping God.

Paul is saying that we are ambassadors of Christ here on this earth ([2 Cor 5:20](#)) We are called to represent heaven and heaven's message here upon earth today, because "*our citizenship is in heaven.*"

In chapter three Paul addresses two major mistakes people make about God. The first is that they can work their way into heaven. All religions of the world except for Christianity teach that if you work hard enough you will get to heaven. But listen to what the Scriptures have to say about our good works: "*All of our righteous acts are like filthy rags*" ([Isa 64:6](#)). "*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast*" ([Eph. 2:8-9](#)).

No one will get to heaven by their good works. The only way a person can get to heaven is to accept and believe in the finished work of Christ on the cross. This will require faith and trust in what Christ accomplished through His death, burial, and resurrection.

The second mistake that people make about God, it that they have time to decide about God. They think they have forever to put their faith in Christ. So, they put off coming to Christ until it is too late. The Bible tells us that "*now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation*" ([2 Cor 6:2](#)) Do not wait until it is too late.

Quit trying to earn God's favor by doing good works. Put your faith in Jesus Christ. Repent of your sins and allow Him to have control. When you do you will become a citizen of heaven. The things of this world will lose importance. As citizens of heaven keep pressing toward the goal of spiritual maturity. Keep in your view the goal of your eternal home — Heaven!

Application

In a society focused on success and accomplishment, individuals may frequently evaluate their self-worth by comparing their achievements to those of others. [Philippians 3:14](#) highlights Paul's perspective on pursuing the higher calling through Christ Jesus, serving as a reminder that one's identity should not be defined by occupation, income, or social status. This week, consider documenting three personal qualities that are valued by God and are independent of your professional or material successes.

Discussion Questions

1. What do you usually boast about?
2. Why do we tend to base our worth as Christians on our performance?
3. Whom did the Philippian believers eagerly await? ([3:20](#))
4. What characterizes citizens of heaven? ([3:21](#))

Lesson Five: Rejoicing in Christ - the Power of Life.

Biblical Passage: [Philippians 4](#)

Big Idea: Rooted in Christ, believers can access an enduring joy and strength that empowers them to navigate challenges with a resilient faith, demonstrating that joy in the Lord is truly a choice one can make regardless of circumstances.

Opening Thoughts

After Paul addressed the serious problem of false teachers, and opponents in the third chapter, He concludes the letter with a variety of exhortations, encouragements, and reminders.

Paul has conveyed to them that rejoicing serves as the principle, pattern, and reward of the Christian life. In [Philippians 4](#), he further demonstrates that rejoicing empowers believers to live out the Christian life effectively.

Joy - the Source of Power

[Philippians 4:1–4](#)

¹ Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved. ² I entreat Euodia, and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. ³ Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life. ⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.

Modern society is characterized by significant levels of stress. Similar to the early Philippians, individuals today encounter various challenges that can test their faith. Such pressures from contemporary culture have the potential to create difficulties within families and congregations. However, it is through faith in Christ that believers find their source of joy and resilience.

The directive to "stand firm" evokes the example of Roman soldiers, who were renowned for holding their ground under threat, never retreating out of fear. This steadfastness is encouraged among believers facing cultural pressures to abandon their convictions. Unity among believers is essential to maintain this resolve.

Paul addresses a specific situation involving two women in the Philippian church who were experiencing a disagreement. While the nature of their conflict is not specified, its mention suggests that it was substantial enough to disrupt unity, prompting Paul's intervention. He advises church leadership to assist in resolving the matter.

Disagreements within church communities, even among mature members, are not uncommon and are to be expected. It is generally observed that wherever individuals interact, differences may arise. When such situations occur, they should be approached with compassion and understanding. At times, resolution may require the involvement of more experienced members. Mature Christians recognize that unresolved disputes can undermine the church's unity and mission, potentially leading to disappointment and discouragement, as well as diminishing the church's effectiveness as a witness.

Paul ultimately emphasizes the pursuit of unity for the advancement of the gospel. Christian joy, he notes, does not depend on worldly circumstances but is rooted in the constant presence of Christ. This perspective is encapsulated in his exhortation: “*Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say rejoice!*” ([Phil 4:4](#)).

Prayer – the Secret of Power

[Philippians 4:4–7](#)

⁵ Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; ⁶ do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Paul demonstrated a profound understanding of the significance of prayer. He emphasized the importance of expressing gratitude in all circumstances, regardless of whether they are favorable or challenging. This perspective requires individuals to remain consistently aligned with the will of God, accepting that certain experiences may be difficult to comprehend but trusting that ultimate control rests with God. Consequently, rather than yielding to anxiety, one is encouraged to pray for God's will to prevail.

Prayer should be approached as a dialogue rather than a monologue, fostering communication with God. It is beneficial to keep three key principles in mind during prayer: the love of God, which ensures His desire for our well-being; the wisdom of God, through which He discerns what is best for us; and the power of God, which enables the realization of these outcomes. Praying with complete trust in God's love, wisdom, and power can lead to a sense of peace.

This understanding was personally reinforced in 2017 following a cancer diagnosis, when it became necessary to relinquish personal will in favor of divine guidance. During a period of reflection and prayer, the song “*Even If*” by Mercy Me played on the radio, serving as a reminder of God's sovereignty. This moment provided newfound strength and resilience to confront the challenges associated with cancer.

Contemplation of Christ – the Sanctuary of Power

[Philippians 4:8–9](#)

⁸ Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

⁹ What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

Today, many churches prioritize emotion and practicality over careful consideration of biblical truth. Often, people ask “*Does it work?*” or “*How does it make me feel?*” instead of “*Is it true?*” As a result, there is more concern about avoiding offence than upholding biblical accuracy.

Paul addresses this in his letter to the Philippians, urging believers to reflect deeply on God's teachings. The phrase “*dwell on these things*” highlights that spiritual stability depends on our thinking. The term “*logizomai*” (dwell on) means to evaluate or consider thoughtfully. As [Proverbs 23:7](#) states, “For as he thinks within himself, so he is.” Believers are therefore called to discern and contemplate God’s will and word.

Paul encourages the Philippian church to reflect on values such as truth, dignity, righteousness, purity, love, and excellence. He instructs them to focus on the principles they have learned, received, heard, and observed, urging them to align themselves with the teaching and example he provided during his time with them.

It is inherent to human nature to be oriented toward particular beliefs or worldviews. For many, this may involve adopting a secular perspective that diverges from religious teachings; however, for followers of Jesus Christ, it entails embracing a biblical worldview centered on the principles of faith. This commitment is fostered through regular engagement with Scripture.

“But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.” [2 Cor. 3:18](#)

The word of God is like a mirror and when we look into it, we see the glory of the Lord. We can find peace and joy when we have our minds and actions focused on Christ. This can only come when we spend time studying and contemplating on the Word of God and the love of Jesus.

Consistent engagement with scripture enables believers to gain a deeper understanding of the significance and attributes of Jesus Christ, as well as integrate these principles into their daily lives. Regular study of the Word of God serves to counteract exposure to potentially misleading cultural influences, maintaining focus on the teachings, love, power, and glory of Jesus Christ.

In Christ - the Satisfaction of Power

As Paul concludes his letter to the Philippians, he conveys his appreciation to God for the support provided by the church. He further notes that living in Christ fosters genuine contentment, which in turn cultivates lasting satisfaction. While satisfaction and contentment are often discussed and held in high esteem, these qualities can be difficult to attain. Paul emphasizes that true satisfaction and contentment are ultimately derived from God.

“Christian contentment is that sweet, inward, quiet, gracious frame of spirit, which freely submits to and delights in God’s wise and fatherly disposal in every condition” - Jeremiah Burroughs (The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment [Reprint; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1964, 19]

Paul gives us some principles of contentment that he has learned as he served the Lord.

Contentment places our confidence in the providence of God.

[Philippians 4:10](#)

¹⁰ I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity.

It had been a decade since Paul first visited Philippi and established the church there. After departing to continue his ministry elsewhere, the church remained a consistent and generous supporter of Paul. However, they eventually lost contact, and two years passed without communication. Upon learning of Paul's imprisonment in Rome, the congregation sent Epaphroditus to deliver a generous gift. In response, Paul expressed his gratitude and reaffirmed his belief in God's sovereignty. He found contentment through

his conviction that all events unfold according to divine providence. As he wrote in [Romans 8:28](#): “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose.” Paul recognized who held ultimate authority.

Attempts to control our own lives often lead to frustration. However, placing our trust and confidence in God's providence leads to genuine contentment and joy.

Contentment requires us to need little to be satisfied.

[Philippians 4:11](#)

¹¹ Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content.

Paul, while imprisoned in Rome and chained between two guards, demonstrated that personal circumstances need not dictate one's sense of satisfaction. His approach stands in contrast to worry and anxiety, recognizing that true contentment is derived from faith in God. This perspective allows believers to experience peace regardless of their situation.

In contemporary society, there is a prevailing notion that greater possessions lead to increased contentment. Paul's example directly challenges this idea. His life illustrates that believers can find contentment in their current circumstances, irrespective of material abundance. Genuine fulfillment stems solely from God, enabling individuals to be at ease whether they have little or much.

Believers possess the inner strength required to meet life's demands. Contentment arises from trusting in the power of the Holy Spirit rather than relying solely on personal resources. Achieving this state necessitates maintaining a consistent and personal relationship with Christ.

Contentment is Independent From Our Circumstances.

[Philippians 4:12](#)

¹² I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need.

Paul elaborates further on the previous verse, stating that he has developed an understanding through experience and maturity regarding how to manage both prosperity and hardship. He emphasizes that external circumstances should not determine one's sense of contentment. According to Paul, yielding control to the guidance of the Holy Spirit allows for a stable sense of contentment, independent of changing situations. In [Matthew 6:25-34](#) Jesus advises against anxiety about daily needs, referencing provisions such as food for birds and clothing for fields as examples of care. Paul indicates that, based on his experiences, following what he interprets as God's call enables him to maintain contentment, trusting that his needs will be met. The text suggests that contentment is derived from spiritual conviction rather than circumstances.

In contrast to a culture that continually seeks novelty and improvement for fulfillment, believers who live by faith have the capacity to find contentment regardless of their circumstances. Whether experiencing wealth or poverty, health or illness, believers who trust in the sovereignty of God recognize that their experiences are ultimately intended for their benefit and to honor God's purpose.

Contentment Is Strengthened by Divine Power

[Philippians 4:13](#)

¹³ I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

Regardless of the challenges Paul encountered, he maintained a spiritual foundation that served as an unseen support system. His sense of adequacy and sufficiency was rooted in his connection with Christ, from whom he drew strength. Paul asserted that his ability to persevere through all circumstances stemmed from this personal relationship.

Paul conveyed that when he exhausted his own resources and energy, the empowering presence of Christ enabled him to persist. He could withstand severe physical hardships due to the inner spiritual strength derived from living in Christ.

Our circumstances, irrespective of their nature, do not restrict access to this power. Being in Christ allows individuals to draw on a strength that is more than adequate to sustain them under any conditions. True contentment comes from relying on Christ's power rather than solely on personal abilities. Furthermore, the assurance of this sustaining power is linked to living in obedience to God's will, which is cultivated through consistent study of the Bible.

Contentment Brings a Preoccupation with the Well-Being of Others

[Philippians 4:14–23](#)

¹⁴ Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble. ¹⁵ And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only. ¹⁶ Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again. ¹⁷ Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit. ¹⁸ I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. ¹⁹ And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. ²⁰ To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen. ²¹ Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me greet you. ²² All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household. ²³ The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

Paul shifts his focus to the Philippian believers to express gratitude for their generous support. Their contribution brought him considerable joy, not merely due to its personal benefit, but also because of the spiritual growth and blessing it afforded to them. Scripture consistently teaches that generosity is met with blessings, and Paul was deeply moved by the Philippians' remarkable giving. He was confident that their faithfulness would be honored by God. Faithful stewardship, according to Paul, invites God's favor.

Drawing an analogy from the Old Testament, Paul likens their offering to the priest presenting incense on the altar—a fragrant sacrifice pleasing to God. Faithful giving is thus regarded as an act that delights God.

Paul further emphasizes that God will meet every need—not necessarily every want—according to His wisdom and loving kindness. Occasionally, God grants our desires, yet His promise is specifically to provide for our essential needs, reflecting His paternal care (see [Matt 6:25-34](#)).

The lessons in contentment demonstrated through Paul's life may be encapsulated in five principles: faith, humility, submission, dependence, and unselfishness. Paul exemplified these qualities, living by faith and humility, wholly submitted and reliant upon God, who appointed him as an Apostle.

Both success and contentment are found in discerning and faithfully carrying out the will of God. Placing one's life entirely in Christ, enables contentment regardless of circumstance. It requires a willingness to live by faith, fully submitted and dependent on God. A wise individual recognizes the value in being situated where God deems most fitting, saying, *"Lord, place me where I am purposed to thrive."*

As Paul concludes his letter to the Philippians, he attributes his circumstances to the glory of God. Notably, his imprisonment resulted in positive outcomes among Caesar's household (see [Eph 4:22](#)). This reference likely pertains to those employed within the imperial domain rather than the emperor's direct relatives. In any case, such individuals might never have encountered the gospel had Paul not remained faithful to his calling.

Application

As you navigate public interactions, you may often feel pressured to present a perfect image. This pressure can rob you of your joy and contentment. [Philippians 4](#) teaches us to focus on what is true and praiseworthy. Remind yourself that your worth isn't based on external validation but on your identity in Christ. Begin each day with a simple prayer asking God to help you be authentic and to find joy in who you are, not what others expect you to be. Practice gratitude by keeping a daily journal of things you appreciate about yourself and your life, refocusing your mind on God's blessings.

Discussion Questions

1. What is the biggest obstacle to joy in your life?
2. What does Paul mean when he says that God will supply the believers' every need ([4:19](#))?
3. What thoughts occupy your mind most of the time? How do these compare with the type of thoughts Paul recommended?
4. How does Paul's teaching on contentment in [Philippians 4](#) challenge our modern view of success and happiness?
5. What tangible steps can you take to let the peace of God guard your heart and mind, as encouraged in [Philippians 4](#)?

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