

The Book of Philippians

“Jesus Our Joy”

Introduction

Some of the most powerful writings in history have been penned by leaders imprisoned for political reasons. Something about the confinement, uncertainty, and mistreatment these prisoners have suffered seems to have helped them focus their minds on their primary convictions. But while many imprisoned authors take a martyr’s position against whatever system is oppressing them, Paul sounded a radically different note in his “prison epistle” to the Philippians. He focused on the Christ-centered life, a remarkable theme considering that he may have been facing execution (Phil. 1:23).

Can Paul’s message have any importance to believers today who live in a free society without threat of imprisonment or death for practicing their religion? Yes, by showing what ultimately matters. In the midst of freedom, affluence, and opportunity, it’s easy to lose perspective, to pay more attention to unimportant things that, while attractive, really have little value, rather than substantial things that have great value. **The ultimate value is Christ.** Whether elevated to heights of glory or, like Paul, reduced to prisoner status, we need to center our lives on Christ. Whatever happens, we need to hold on to Him. He alone must be our ultimate source of contentment, joy, and life.

One of the key themes in Philippians is joy. "Joy" is mentioned in one way or another nineteen times in these four chapters. Another emphasis is the mind. As we read Philippians, note how many times Paul talks about remembering and thinking. We can summarize the theme of the book as "the Christ like mind that brings Christian joy." In each chapter, Paul describes the kind of mind Christians must have if they are to enjoy Christ's peace and joy. Certainly our thoughts have a great influence on our lives, and wrong thinking leads to wrong living. Of course, we should not conclude that this is the only lesson to be gained from this wonderful letter. Paul goes on teaching us so much about Christ: Christ being our life (Chap. 1), our example (Chap. 2), our goal (Chap. 3), and our strength (Chap. 4).

Author

Paul, the Apostle. Clement of Rome, who lived in the first century, wrote a letter to the Corinthians and referred to Paul's letter to the Philippians. Polycarp, who lived in the second century, wrote the Philippians and mentioned Paul's letter. Ignatius, another early church leader, alluded to it.

Date

Probably somewhere around A.D. 60-63 while Paul was in prison at Rome. The letter has been listed among Paul's Prison Epistles along with Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon. Paul says, “*so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ;* (Phil. 1:13), and he conveys a greeting from, “*All*

the saints greet you, but especially those who are of Caesar's household." (Phil. 4:22). The Praetorian Guard seems to be the Praetorian Guard of Rome, the elite soldiers who were hand-chosen to guard and serve the emperor.

To Whom Written

"To all the saints in Jesus Christ which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons" (Phil. 1:1). The message is certainly applicable to all the saints of every church.

Purpose

Paul wrote Philippians for several reasons:

1. He wished to prevent any criticism against a very dear friend and servant of Christ, Epaphroditus. Epaphroditus had been sent by the Philippian church to deliver a gift and to encourage Paul while he was a prisoner in Rome. But Epaphroditus became extremely sick, almost to the point of death, while with Paul. His return to Philippi was delayed, apparently for a long time. Because of this, Paul feared criticism of Epaphroditus by the church. They might think he was a weakling or a quitter. So Paul wrote to ease the path for Epaphroditus and to prevent any criticism of him (Phil. 2:25-30).
2. Paul wished to thank the Philippian church for its help throughout his ministry. They had sent him a gift right after he had founded the church and moved on (Phil. 1:5; Phil. 4:15; (2 Cor. 8:1). They had also sent gifts to him at Thessalonica (Phil. 4:16) and at Corinth (2 Cor. 11:9). And now they sent him not only a gift, but even more, a dear saint to minister to his needs while he was in prison (Phil. 2:25-30; Phil. 4:18).
3. Paul wished to call the church to unity and harmony. There were two ladies who quarreled and were causing a disturbance (Phil. 4:2). It is this disturbance that calls forward one of the greatest pictures of Christ in the Holy Scriptures (Phil. 2:5-11).
4. Paul wished to deal with some false teachers who were just beginning to arise in the church (Phil. 3:2).

Special Features

The City of Philippi was the gateway to Europe. It lay on the great Roman road known as the Egnatian Way. The city was named after Philip of Macedonia, the father of Alexander the Great. The site was a natural fortress, sitting on a range of hills that separated Europe from Asia, the East from the West. The city was a strategic center commanding the great Egnatian Way.

Philippi was also a proud Roman colony. In fact, it was famous as a miniature Rome. A city became a Roman colony in one of two ways. At first Rome founded colonies throughout the outer reaches of the Empire to keep the peace and to guard against invasion. Veteran soldiers, ready for retirement, were usually granted citizenship if they

would go out and settle these colonies. Later on, however, a city was granted the distinctive title of a Roman Colony for loyalty and service to the Empire. The distinctive thing about these colonies was their loyalty to Rome. The citizens kept all their Roman ties, the Roman language, titles, customs, affairs, and dress. They refused to allow any infiltration of local influence whatsoever. They totally rejected the influence of the world around them. They were Roman colonists within an alien environment.

A picture of the loyalty of the Philippian Colony to its Roman citizenship is seen in Acts 16:20-21. Paul draws an illustration from the loyalty of these colonies and says to the Philippian church, *"Our citizenship is in heaven"* (Phil. 3:20).

The city of Philippi fit right into Paul's master plan. Its strategic location on the Egnatian Way assured the spread of the gospel throughout the Roman Empire. As Paul carried on his ministry, he was moving toward Rome and the regions beyond into Spain. He knew that the converts from Philippi, whose employment took them from Philippi throughout the Empire, could move on out ahead of him. Some time could be gained and some ground could be laid to assure spreading the Word world wide sooner.

"The whole heart of Paul is that life is "in Christ" and that Christ is to be "in life"

Some Well Known Scriptures From Philippians

Phil 1:6 *"being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ"*

Phil 1:21 *"For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain."*

Phil 2:5 *"Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus"*

Phil 2:10 *"that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth"*

Phil 2:11 *"and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."*

Phil 3:7 *"But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ."*

Phil 3:14 *"I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."*

Phil 4:6-7 *"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."*

Phil 4:8 *"Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever*

things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy — meditate on these things.”

Phil 4:19 *“And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.”*

Structure of the Lesson

The emphasis of this lesson is not only on studying the passage, but also on how to practically apply these principles in our lives today. If your desire is to get the most out of this study, it is important to complete the entire lesson each week. These lessons will then be discussed in your group. It is important for you to participate in sharing your answers, but the leader will not require you to share if you don't want to.

If you are a believer who wants to live a radically transformed life, you have come to the right place! Strap on your safety belts and prepare for a great time together in God's Word!

Our prayer is that these lessons will be a blessing to you, and that they will stimulate you to further growth as you build, guard and live for the Lord. Invest your life in those things that count for eternity, not for the things that will pass away.

Home Group Study
The Book of Philippians
“Jesus Our Joy”
Lesson One - Phil. 1:1-11
“An Encouraging Example”
The Fellowship of the Gospel

That word fellowship seems to mean many things to many different people. Perhaps, like a worn coin, it may be losing its true impression. If so, we had better take some steps to rescue it. After all, a good Bible word like fellowship needs to stay in circulation as long as possible.

In spite of his difficult circumstances as a prisoner in Rome, Paul is rejoicing. The secret of his joy is the single mind; he lives for Christ and the Gospel. *“For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain”* Phil 1:21. But what really is “the single mind”? It is the attitude that says, “It makes no difference what happens to me, just as long as Christ is glorified and the Gospel shared with others.” Paul rejoiced in spite of his circumstances, because his circumstances strengthened the fellowship of the Gospel.

The word fellowship simply means “to have in common.” But true Christian fellowship is really much deeper than sharing coffee and pie, or even enjoying a golf game together. Too often what we think is “fellowship” is really only companionship or friendship. You cannot have fellowship with someone unless you have something in common; and for Christian fellowship, this means the possessing of eternal life within the heart. Unless a person has trusted Christ as his Savior, he knows nothing of “the fellowship of the Gospel.”

So, true Christian fellowship is much more than having a name in a church directory or being present at a meeting, It is possible to be close to people physically and miles away from them spiritually. One of the sources of Christian joy is this fellowship that believers have in Jesus Christ. Paul was in Rome, his friends were miles away in Philippi, but their spiritual fellowship was real and satisfying. When you have the single mind, you will not complain about circumstances because you know that difficult circumstances will result in the strengthening of the fellowship of the Gospel. To be “in Christ” and a part of the Christian fellowship is a source of joy when things become difficult.

Read Phil. 1:1-2. Pray and answer the following questions:

Paul began many of his letters with a prayer of thanksgiving, but this letter begins with a prayer of unusually great warmth and affirmation. As you read this section, imagine yourself sitting with Lydia, the slave girl and the jailer as this letter is opened and read for the first time.

1. Read Phil. 1:1. How did Paul describe himself and Timothy?
2. The Greek word that is translated bondservant can also be translated as slave. What picture comes to mind when you think of a bondservant or a slave?
3. To whom does a slave belong? What does a slave do?

Read Phil 1:3-6. Pray and answer the following questions:

Partnership summarizes an important facet of Paul's view of the church. Paul was filled with joy as he thought about those who prayed for, encouraged, and supported him in Philippi. He had helped them just a few days earlier, and now they were helping him. It was a two way relationship. There was mutual love and support. Partnership should characterize the church today. In fact, this is what it means to function as the body of Christ, helping and supporting your church and other believers you know.

4. What is the heart of Paul's prayer for the Christians at the church in Philippi?
5. What are some of the specific thanks and petitions Paul lifts up in prayer for the Philippian Christians?
6. What is the "good work" that was begun in these believers?

Read Phil. 1:7-8. Pray and answer the following questions:

In this section we see Paul's thankfulness for his Philippian friends. They had been a great support to him, just as he had been to them, and he delighted in that shared friendship. He prayed for their spiritual development, for their love, their discernment, and their productivity.

7. In your own words, how would you describe Paul's feeling for the Christians in the church of Philippi?

8. Write down your own definition of grace?

9. What kind of influence is God's grace having in your life?

10. What happens to a person that does not respond to God's grace?

Read Phil 1:9-11. Pray and answer the following questions:

Moving from the thoughts about the love that Christians share for each other, Paul concludes the opening section of his letter by telling the Philippians how he prays for them. This is another way in which Paul displays his intense love for them. His strongest desire is that they mature in their relationship with God. A quick and easy paraphrase would be, "Love God More". But many people confuse love with an emotion. Paul gets more specific as he describes what loving God means practically. In this section Paul prays that they will: Grow in their knowledge of God, Grow in their understanding of God, Discern what is pure and blameless, and Honor God by the way they live.

11. Note at least four requests Paul made for the Philippians in verses 9-11?

12. What are the “*fruits of righteousness*”, and how does this come to us through Christ?

13. According to verse 11, what was the ultimate purpose in the Philippians’ spiritual growth?

Why Pray For Each Other?

Prayer has as much power today, when men and women are themselves on praying ground and meeting the conditions of prevailing prayer, as it has ever had. God has not changed, and His ear is just as quick to hear the voice of real prayer, and His hand is just as long and strong to save, as it ever was. Prayer is the key that unlocks all the storehouses of God’s infinite grace and power. All that God is, and all that He has, is at the disposal of prayer. But we must use the key. Prayer can do any thing that God can do, and as God can do anything, prayer is omnipotent (all-powerful).

R.A. Torrey, *The Power of Prayer*

Journaling

Compare your notes and daily Scripture references. Take some time to pray and meditate on what God showed you in a practical way this week and how you can apply it to your Christian walk. (If you are married, pray together with your spouse, and share your thoughts). Write your insights down for review and group discussion.

Home Group Study
The Book of Philippians
"Jesus Our Joy"
Lesson Two – Phil. 1:12-30
"Joy in the Worst of Times"

Notice how Paul describes all the suffering he had been through; he calls these trying events "*the things that have happened unto me*" (1:12). The record of these things is given in Acts 21:17-28, and it begins with Paul's illegal arrest in the temple in Jerusalem. The Jews thought he had desecrated their temple by bringing in Gentiles, and the Romans thought he was an Egyptian renegade who was on their "most wanted" list. Paul became the focal point of both political and religious plotting and remained a prisoner in Caesarea for two years. When he finally appealed to Caesar (which was the privilege of every Roman citizen), he was sent to Rome. During this journey the ship was wrecked! The account of that storm and Paul's courage and faith is one of the most dramatic in the Bible (Acts 27). After three months of waiting on the Island of Malta, Paul finally left for Rome and the trial he had requested before Caesar. All of this would have looked like failure, but not to this man with a "single mind," concerned with sharing Christ and the Gospel. Paul did not find his joy in ideal circumstances; he found his joy in winning others to Christ. And if his circumstances promoted the furtherance of the Gospel, that was all that mattered. Instead of finding himself confined as a prisoner, Paul discovered that his circumstances really opened up new areas of ministry.

When we take Christ into every circumstance, we will have joy. Paul was not the prisoner of Rome; he was the "prisoner of Jesus Christ." The soldiers chained to his wrist were not guards; they were souls for whom Christ died. Paul had a "captive audience," and from the text we conclude that he won some of them to Christ. The single-minded Christian does not allow circumstances to overcome him; he turns those circumstances into opportunities to magnify Christ and win souls.

Selfishness always breeds unhappiness. Paul had joy because he loved others. He prayed for others, encouraged others, and sought to bring joy to others. Paul's "heaven on earth" was helping others! While he longed to be with Christ, he eagerly longed to remain and help these believers grow in Christ. Whenever difficulties affect our lives, we should always be sure that

we have the single mind that says: “Lord whatever comes, I want Christ to be glorified.” This is the secret of Christian joy.

Read Phil. 1:12-18. Pray and answer the following questions:

In this section we discover that Paul is writing to the Philippians from Prison. This puts a whole new perspective on the joyful mood of the letter. While Paul is writing, he is experiencing what most of us would describe as awful circumstances. Yet even at a time like this, Paul’s first concern is that Christ is praised. This section can teach us how to honor Christ in difficult situations.

1. What was Paul’s attitude toward being in prison? How did God use Paul’s imprisonment to spread the gospel message?
2. How can Paul’s example of facing painful and turbulent times influence you in a tough situation you are facing right now?
3. Paul rejoiced that the message of Jesus was being communicated, even by those whose motives were questionable. What can you do to support churches or ministries that are bringing the message of Christ to your community?

Read Phil. 1:19-26. Pray and answer the following questions:

Paul had plenty of reasons for becoming discouraged; he faced imprisonment, bitter rivalries, and personal setbacks. Yet he could face the future with confidence because he was not living for himself. Instead of trying to feel good and be successful, Paul lived to serve the Lord and to help others. Because Paul’s life centered around his walk with God, circumstances became irrelevant, others motives and actions couldn’t discourage him, and personal uncertainty could not render him powerless. We can have the same peace and confidence by putting Christ at the center of all that we do. He will lift us above our circumstances and enable us to face our challenges, knowing that everything is in His hands.

4. In light of Paul's words in this section, how do you think he would finish these two statements?

a. My life is about _____

b. I don't fear death because _____

5. Paul said, "*For to me, to live is Christ*" stating the commitment of his life. At this point in your life, how would you honestly complete the statement, "For to me, to live is _____? Describe some changes that would have to take place for you to truthfully say, "For me to live is Christ"?"

6. What are Paul's considerations in choosing between life and death?
(See vs. 20-26)

Read Phil. 1:27-30. Pray and answer the following questions:

Paul challenges the church of Philippi to be unified for the cause of Christ, refusing to act out of self-centeredness or pride. This unity would come if each believer followed the example of Christ. Christ like humility is the key to unity. The more we are committed to Christ and to live like Him, the more we will be committed to each other. As a result, we will be able to face opposition and hardship, and we will be able to advance the cause of Christ in the world.

7. Why should unity be an important goal for any church?

8. Paul called the first-century Christians to contend for the gospel and not to be frightened by those who were opposing them. What are some of the battles raging against the truth of the gospel in our world today?

9. What double privilege did Paul mention for Christians in verse 29? Why would suffering be a privilege?

10. How do you explain the apparent lack of sacrifice, suffering, and service in many churches today? What can believers do to change this situation?

Journaling

Compare your notes and daily Scripture references. Take some time to pray and meditate on what God showed you in a practical way this week and how you can apply it to your Christian walk. (If you are married, pray together with your spouse, and share your thoughts) Write your insights down for review and group discussion.

Strength in Weakness

Historians tell us that Paul was most likely chained to a soldier twenty-four hours a day. He sees this as a chance to tell each guard about Jesus. They thought they held Paul captive, but he saw them as a captive audience for the gospel. He realized they could not get away! He was ready to pray with them, tell them about Jesus, sing songs of praise, and to write to his friends and let them read his letters. He was ready to lead each of the guards to Christ one by one. Paul was glad that the cause of Christ was marching on. It's as if Paul is saying, "Don't you love it! They're chaining people to me. What better opportunity to tell others about Jesus!" Paul realized he could accomplish his life goal anywhere, at any time. Set him free, he would preach Jesus. Put him in jail, he would talk to prisoners and guards and write letters to encourage the church. May this be our hearts today.

Home Group Study
The Book of Philippians
“Jesus Our Joy”
Lesson Three Phil. 2:1-18
“The Path of Humility”

There is the suggestion in this section of division in the Philippian church. Paul appeals to them on the basis of their Christian experience to have unity of mind and heart and to put others ahead of themselves. What motives are there for unity in the church? Christ is the greatest incentive; if we are in Christ, we ought to be able to live with one another! Other incentives include love, fellowship of the Spirit, the desires we have in Christ, and the joy we can bring to others. Paul saw conflict and selfish desires among the Roman believers, and he warns that it must not be present at Philippi. *“Lowliness of mind”* is the submissive mind that thinks not of itself but of Christ and others. *“Humility is not thinking meanly of ourselves; it is just not thinking of ourselves at all.”*

Christ's experience proves that exaltation always follows humiliation. *“Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time,”* promises 1 Peter 5:6. The person who exalts himself will be humbled. Remember what happened to Pharaoh, King Saul, Nebuchadnezzar, and Herod? We do not worship a “babe in a manger” we worship an exalted Lord seated on the throne of the universe. Christ's life, death, and resurrection proved eternally that the way to be exalted is to be humbled before God. 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.

Wherever there is the submissive mind, there will be sacrifice and service. This was true of Christ, Paul, Timothy, and Epaphroditus. The single mind leads to the submissive mind: as we seek to live for Christ, we live for others. How true this was in Paul's life! The secret? Christians allow God to work in them. The flesh cannot “work up” humility or dedication; this must come from within by the power of the Spirit. God works in us before He works through us, and He uses the Word, the Spirit, and prayer.

Here in this section, Paul gives us several pictures of Christians who have the submissive mind. He portrays them as obedient children of God, seeking to honor the Father; as stars shining in a dark world; and as athletes who

hold out their batons to the next runner. In vs.17-18, Paul describes himself as a drink-offering being poured out on the altar.

Read Phil. 2:1-4. Pray and answer the following questions:

Teamwork. It is an essential ingredient in any human organization. Whether the group is a sports team, a business, or a church, it won't function well if every person is pursuing self-goals. A united purpose is essential. All members must be working in unity toward a common goal. In this section, Paul has unity on his mind. You will read how he suggests that humility is the best foundation for unity. And perhaps just to be on the safe side, so that no member of the Philippian church could brag about being the most humble, Paul uses Jesus Christ as the ultimate example of humility.

1. Paul lists the four "ifs" in verse one of this passage. Each of them reflects something every Christian has experienced. How have you personally experienced one of the "ifs" Paul lists in this section?

2. What does Paul say will mark the attitudes and life styles of those who understand all they receive through their relationship with Christ? Describe how one of these attitudes or actions has been growing in your life.

3. If you took Paul's challenge in verse three seriously and tried to follow it every day of your life, how would it influence one of the following areas?

a. Your marriage relationship _____

b. Your role as a parent _____

c. Your impact as a friend _____

d. Your witness in the workplace _____

e. Your service at church _____

Read Phil.2: 5-11. Pray and answer the following questions:

Paul challenges the church at Philippi to be united for the cause of Christ, refusing to act out of self-centeredness or pride. This unity would come if each believer followed the example of Christ, who gave up everything to die for them. Christ-like humility is the key to unity. The more we are committed to Christ and living for Him, the more we will be committed to each other. As a result, we will be able to share the love of Christ to a lost world.

4. Paul holds up Jesus as the perfect example of humble servanthood. What steps of deliberate demotion did Jesus take so that He could love and serve us?

5. Phil. 2:6-8 tells what Jesus chose to do in obedience to His Father's will. What did the Father do in response? (See vs.9-11) What does this teach about their relationship?

6. What motivation does Paul give you in this passage for living a life of service?

Read Phil. 2:12-18. Pray and answer the following questions:

Paul encourages the Philippian believers to let their "lives shine brightly" in a dark world. Then he mentions Timothy and Epaphroditus as outstanding examples. When people give themselves fully to the Lord's service, there is something unavoidably attractive about them. They stand out like beacons of light in a dark sky. Jesus said we are "*the light of the world*" (Matt. 5:14). How brightly do you shine?

7. What does it mean to "*work out your own salvation,*" and why must this be done "*with fear and trembling*"?

Home Group Study
The Book of Philippians
“Jesus Our Joy”
Lesson Four Phil. 2:19-30
“Servants of Christ”

A reporter in San Bernardino, California arranged for a man to be in the gutter on a busy street. Hundreds of people passed the man but not one stopped to help him or even show sympathy!

Newspapers across the country a few years ago told how thirty-eight people watched a man stalk a young lady and finally attack her and none of the spectators even picked up a phone to call the police!

A couple of teenagers in Detroit discovered a woman in a telephone booth who had suffered a heart attack. They carried her to a nearby house and rang the bell, asking for help. The only reply they received was, "Get off my porch and take her with you!"

A Kentucky doctor was driving down the highway to visit a patient when he saw an accident take place. He stopped and gave aid to the injured and then made his visit. One of the drivers he helped sued him!

Is it possible to be a "Good Samaritan" today? Must everybody harden his heart in order to protect himself? Perhaps "sacrifice and service" are ancient virtues that somehow do not fit into our so-called modern civilization. It is worth noting that even in Paul's day having concern for others was not a popular virtue. The Christians at Rome were not too interested in the problems at Philippi; Paul could not find one person among them willing to go to Philippi. Times have not changed too much.

In this section, Paul is still discussing the submissive mind. He has given us a description of the submissive mind in the example of Jesus Christ. He continues on to explain the dynamics of the submissive mind by the example of his own life. Now he introduces us to two of his helpers in the ministry, Timothy and Epaphroditus, and he does this for a reason. He knows that his readers will be prone to say, "it's impossible for us to follow such examples as Christ and Paul! After all, Jesus is the very Son of God, and Paul is a chosen apostle who has had great spiritual experiences!" For this reason, Paul introduces us to two "ordinary saints," men who were not apostles or spectacular miracle workers. He wants us to know that the submissive mind

c. Verse 22

4. What attitude must a person have if he is to put up with the kind of proving Paul describes in 2:22?
5. Why is this kind of preparation so often needed for those in leadership?

Note the following godly traits of Epaphroditus:

- a. He was a man of humility. He was willing to put his life in Philippi on hold in order to visit Paul. He was willing to serve in whatever way would be helpful.
- b. His church family was very important to him. While he might have preferred to stay with Paul, he was returning to Philippi because he knew his friends were worried about his health.
- c. Epaphroditus must have had a personality that reflected Christ. Paul knew that the Christians of Philippi would be anxious for Epaphroditus to return home.

Read Phil. 2:25-30. Pray and answer the following questions:

Probably a leader in the Philippian church, Epaphroditus was well known to the members of the church in Philippi. As with Timothy, the circumstances of Paul's relationship with Epaphroditus speaks highly of his Christian character, and models a great example of Christian humility in action.

6. What do "fellow worker" and "fellow soldier" mean in verse 25?

Home Group Study
The Book of Philippians
“Jesus Our Joy”
Lesson Five - Phil. 3:1-11
“Rejoice in the Lord”

Many people have a hard time accepting God’s grace. To be sure, they appreciate God’s gift of salvation, but they want to earn it through some sort of effort on their part. Why? Well, maybe our efforts make us feel superior to those who haven’t done the work. If God’s salvation is a gift and available to everyone, than we don’t have anything over anyone else. But if we have to do something for salvation, than we’re ahead of those who haven’t done it. Paul warns the Philippians against this type of thinking. Basically, he says: “Don’t get caught up in the false teaching that you have to do certain things for salvation. Joy comes from realizing that Christ has done it all.”

Paul was religious before he was saved, but his religion could not save him. He had to lose his religion in order to find eternal life! He begins this chapter by warning the believers against religion apart from Christ. The Jews called the Gentiles "dogs," but here Paul uses the term "dogs" to describe the Jewish teachers who emphasized circumcision and keeping the Law. In fact, he does not even call the rite "circumcision"; he calls it "concision," which means "a cutting, a mutilation of the flesh." True worship is in the Spirit and not in the flesh; it honors Jesus Christ, not religious leaders; it depends on God's grace, not on fleshly strength. How much of what passes for the Christian faith in this world is really only fleshly religion.

Paul had the best possible reputation as a Jewish rabbi. In birth and training, he far surpassed all of his friends (See Gal. 1:11-24). He was sincere too; his Jewish religion meant life and death to him. So sincere was he that he even persecuted those who differed with him. If any man could get to heaven on the basis of character and religion, it was Paul, and yet he was a lost sinner apart from Jesus Christ! When he met Christ, he considered all of his earthly and fleshly accomplishments as rubbish! "I counted" is the way he puts it. He measured carefully, took stock of himself, and decided that all of his religion and worldly honors were not worth it. He wanted Christ!

What did Paul obtain through faith in Christ? Righteousness, for one thing. Paul had plenty of legal righteousness, but he lacked that true righteousness that God demands and that He alone can give. It is one thing to be religious

enough to get into the synagogue, and quite another to be righteous enough to get into heaven. Paul also obtained a personal knowledge of Christ. Salvation is **not knowing about Christ**; it is **knowing Him!** *“And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.” John 17:3 NKJV*

Read Phil. 3:1-3. Pray and answer the following questions:

We live in a credential conscious society. Those with the right credentials can get into certain places, and those without the right credentials can't. Try to gain entrance into the Pentagon without the proper military credentials and see how quickly you are escorted off the premises. Try to get on the sideline of the NFL Monday night football game without the proper team or media credentials and see how far you get. Credentials keep the wrong people out and the right people in.

No one would want to go to the doctor's office and notice that they don't have any credentials posted on the wall. What if you asked the doctor, “May I see your credentials?” only to get the response, “Well, honestly, I never went to medical school. I didn't want to waste my time and money. I don't actually have a license to practice medicine.” There is no way you or I would let this guy cut into us with a scalpel! Like it or not, credentials are essential.

The apostle Paul realized this and wanted every person to know exactly what credentials were needed to get into heaven. He did not want anyone to walk up to the gates of heaven carrying the wrong credentials only to discover they were not on the guest list. He felt called to be clear about what credentials were required for entry to eternal life.

1. Paul uses the words “joy” and “rejoice” many times in Philippians. Read Philippians 1:4,18. 2:2,17. 3:1. 4:1,4,10 looking for Paul's reasons for joy. What additional reasons can you find to rejoice?

2. Why is Paul so severe in his warning against the kind of person he used to be?

3. In verse 3, Paul states four traits of a true Christian. Note the following two traits and explain what they mean: a: “*we are the circumcision*” (See Rom. 2:28-29, Gal. 3:7, Col. 2:11-14) b: “*worship God in the Spirit*” (Rom. 8:26-27, 12:1, Phil. 2:17, Heb. 13:15-16, 1 Peter 2:9)

Read Phil. 3:4-8. Pray and answer the following questions:

Like a father who protects his children from evil influences, Paul criticizes the Judaizers and destroys their arguments. Beginning at 3:4 Paul sets out his profile of life prior to becoming a Christian. These credentials that would have placed him in the “Who’s who of true blooded Jews.” From a Jewish point of view, these credentials are faultless. But Paul says they are worthless, they are like filthy rags. In fact, anything and everything that a person can do is worthless in comparison to knowing Christ.

4. Why would Paul’s background have been a source of pride to him before he became a Christian? Why do you believe he was so willing to give it up for Christ?

5. How can pride hinder our relationship with Christ?

6. In verses 3-6, Paul explains what it means to “put confidence in the flesh.” According to these verses, what type of fleshly things could have made Paul feel worthy of God’s approval?

Read Phil. 3:9-11. Pray and answer the following questions:

Is Paul guilty of false modesty? After all, according to Jewish tradition, he was part of the religious elite. And from a Christian perspective, he was one of the Faith’s greatest missionaries. Certainly all of those accomplishments must count for something, right? Well, Paul says they don’t, and he ought to know.

7. Imagine that Paul is being interviewed by a reporter from the Roman Times Newspaper. The reporter says to Paul, “You had it all!” You were at the top of the religious and academic world, and you lost everything. Now you are in jail. You have no influence, no power, and no platform. In the light of Paul’s words in this section (See 3:4-11) what do you think he would say to the reporter? How can Paul’s example influence the way we view our own credentials and accomplishments?

8. What would happen if you considered all things “loss” and “rubbish” for Christ’s sake? What things might you have to consider loss that you now have?

9. In verse 9 Paul contrasted two kinds of righteousness, two ways of being in a right relationship with God. What are the characteristics of each?

10. According to verse 10, what are the results of having righteousness that depends on faith? What does verse 10 mean to you?

Journaling

Compare your notes and daily Scripture references from the last four days. Take some time to pray and meditate on what God showed you in a practical way this week and how you can apply it to your Christian walk. (If you are married, pray together with your spouse, and share your thoughts) Write your insights down for review and group discussion.

Home Group Study
The Book of Philippians
“Jesus Our Joy”
Lesson Six - Phil. 3:12-4:1
“Onward to the Goal”

In the previous section, Paul is a "spiritual accountant" figuring his gains and losses. In this section he is a runner, pressing toward the prize. The figure of a runner is a favorite with Paul. Of course, Paul is not suggesting that we run to get to heaven! The Olympic runners in ancient Greece had to be citizens of the nation they represented. They also had to be free men, not slaves. The unsaved sinner is a slave, but the Christian is a citizen of heaven and has been set free by Christ. Each Christian is given a special place on the "track" for his or her own service, and each one has a goal established by Christ. Our task in life is to *"reach forward to those things which are ahead"* (Phil. 3:13). Paul is not talking about salvation but sanctification.

How do we reach the goal God has set for us? For one thing, we must be honest with ourselves and admit where we are: as Paul declared, *"Not that I have already attained"* (Phil. 3:12). Then, we must keep our eyes of faith on Christ and forget the past (past sins and failures, and also past successes). We must press on in His power. The Christian life is not a game; it is a race that demands the very best that is in us: *"But one thing I do"* (Phil. 3:13). Too many Christians live divided lives. One part enjoys the things of the world and the other part tries to live for the Lord. They get ambitious for "things" and start minding earthly ambitions. Our calling is a "high calling" and a "heavenly calling"; and if we live for this world, we lose the prize that goes with our high calling.

Read Phil. 3:12-16. Pray and answer the following questions:

Paul has just finished explaining that our accomplishments are worthless when it comes to salvation. Salvation is all God's doing; our only participation involves putting our faith in Christ. Now, Paul is ready to move the discussion along to the next logical step. Actually, he'll be referring to many steps: the steps we take on life's spiritual journey that happens between salvation and when we will be joined with Christ in heaven. We often refer to this as our "Christian walk," but Paul compares it to running a

race. Just as athletes place themselves under strict training and compete with all their might, so believers should “*press toward the goal for the prize,*” Phil. 3:14. This means that we must place ourselves under training, discipline our bodies and minds, and watch where we are going. This leaves no place for complacency, laziness, distractions or moral slackness. Are you winning? Are you training? Are you in the race? To what degree are you “*pressing toward*” to reach the end of the race?

1. What was Paul’s attitude about his past?
2. Paul compares his quest for heaven to a race. What are the similarities?
3. As Followers of Christ we are all called to “*press toward the goal for the prize.*” What is the goal God calls us to reach?
4. What picture (athlete, soldier, farmer) is most meaningful to you in describing what is involved in “*pressing toward*” reaching the end of the race in your Christian growth? Why?
5. What are you doing to invest your life in seeking this goal?

Read Phil 3:17-19. Pray and answer the following questions:

Having finished his diversion, Paul gets back on track. He resumes his “Training manual” for encouraging the Philippians in their walk with Christ. At this point, he suggests that they look to him as a personal trainer and that they avoid others who would distract them from the goal of knowing Christ better. As believers we need to be careful when someone holds himself up as an example. People who do this usually want to be on a pedestal, and they seek the praise of others. Those are the people that shouldn’t be role models. In this passage, Paul tells the Philippians to copy the way that he walks with

Christ. Paul isn't making this suggestion out of conceit or pride. Just the opposite. He does so from a spirit of humility.

6. In verse 17 Paul is like a coach calling his team to follow his example. Summarize the tips the coach has given us in this passage.

7. Name a person who has served as an example or model for you. In what ways has this person helped you grow in your faith?

8. Paul recognized that leaders always lead by personal example, whether they are aware of it or not. And their example extends far beyond the nature of the task at hand. People pattern their motives and values after executives, supervisors, and other leaders. Paul encouraged others to follow his example. What sort of example do you set for others? Are you aware of how you influence them? Are you close enough to the people around you, and in touch enough with your own tendencies, to have confidence in how others might follow you?

9. List five characteristics of the people Paul warned against. What kind of people would fit this description today?

Read Phil. 3:20-21, 4:1. Pray and answer the following questions:

10. According to Paul how is the Christian different from those whose minds are set on earthly things?

Home Group Study
The Book of Philippians
“Jesus Our Joy”
Lesson Seven - Phil. 4:2-9
“Stress – Free Living”

If anybody had an excuse for worrying, it was the Apostle Paul. His beloved Christian friends at Philippi were disagreeing with one another, and he was not there to help them. We have no idea what Euodia and Syntyche were disputing about, but whatever it was, it was bringing division into the church. Along with the potential division at Philippi, Paul had to face division among the believers at Rome. Added to these burdens was the possibility of his own death! Yes, Paul had a good excuse to worry - but he did not! Instead, he took time to explain to us the secret of victory over worry.

What is worry? The Greek word translated "Anxious" (careful) in Phil 4:6 means "to be pulled in different directions." Our hopes pull us in one direction; our fears pull us the opposite direction; and we are pulled apart! The Old English root from which we get our word "worry" means "to strangle." If you have ever really worried, you know how it does strangle a person! In fact, worry has definite physical consequences: headaches, neck pains, ulcers, even back pains. Worry affects our thinking, our digestion, and even our coordination.

From the spiritual point of view, worry is wrong thinking (the mind) and wrong feeling (the heart) about circumstances, people, and things. Worry is the greatest thief of joy. It is not enough for us, however, to tell ourselves to "quit worrying" because that will never capture the thief. Worry is an "inside job," and it takes more than good intentions to get the victory. The antidote to worry is the secure mind. *“And the peace of God shall keep (guard like a soldier) your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus”* (Phil. 4:7). When you have the secure mind, the peace of God guards you (Phil. 4:7) and the God of peace guides you (Phil. 4:9). With that kind of protection - why worry?

Read Phil. 4:1-3. Pray and answer the following questions:

Stress has been identified as one of the great killers of our day. It causes physical problems such as high blood pressure, headaches, and ulcers, as well as emotional problems like depression, irritability and burnout.

Paul was living with many powerful stressors (he was in prison, facing possible execution while defending himself against critics and heretics inside the church), yet he seemed to be strangely at peace. In this study Paul reveals some of the secrets of his peace.

1. How might the words in verse 1 apply to the situation between Euodia and Syntyche?

2. In verse 2 Paul pleads with Euodia and Syntyche “*to be of the same mind in the Lord.*” What effect do you think their broken relationship was having on the rest of the church?

3. What would it mean for them to “*be of the same mind in the Lord*”?

Read Phil. 4:4-7. Pray and answer the following questions:

Philippians is described as a book filled with joy. Here in verse 4 Paul encourages the Philippian believers to be full of joy. We may wonder how this is possible, especially considering the problem and pressures we face. But consider Paul. He gave up his security and status and endured an endless series of trials for the sake of his love for Christ. And writing this as a prisoner of Rome he tells us to rejoice.

4. In this passage Paul gives a few “do’s” for Christians and one big “don’t!” What does Paul call followers of Christ to “do,” and why is each one important for a healthy spiritual life?

5. What is the big “don’t” in this passage, and why do you think Paul hits this so hard?

6. What is one situation in your life that is causing anxiety and tension?

7. What is one “joy” you are experiencing in your life right now?

8. How does prayer work? What are some common traps we fall into in our prayer life? How can we avoid these traps?

Read Phil. 4:8-9. Pray and answer the following questions:

9. Paul gives us a list of eight things that should be the focal point of our thought life. What are they and why is each one important?

a.

b.

c.

d.

e.

f.

Home Group Study
 The Book of Philippians
“Jesus Our Joy”
 Lesson Eight - Phil. 4:10-23
“A Guide for Living”

The trouble with him is that he's a thermometer and not a thermostat!" This, statement by one of His deacons aroused the pastor's curiosity. They were discussing possible board members, and Jim's name had come up. "Pastor, it's like this," the deacon explained. "A thermometer doesn't change anything around it - it just registers the temperature. It's always going up and down. But a thermostat regulates the surroundings and changes them when they need to be changed. Jim is a thermometer - he lacks the power to change things. Instead, they change him!"

The Apostle Paul was a thermostat. Instead of having spiritual ups and downs as the situation changed, he went right on, steadily doing his work and serving Christ. His personal references at the close of this letter indicate that he was not the victim of circumstances but the victor over circumstances: *“I can accept all things”* (Phil 4:11); *“I can do all things”* (Phil 4:13); *“I have all things”* (Phil 4:18). Paul did not have to be pampered to be content; he found his contentment in the spiritual resources abundantly provided by Christ. Contentment is not complacency, nor is it a false peace based on ignorance. The complacent believer is unconcerned about others, while the contented Christian wants to share his blessings. Contentment is not escape from the battle, but rather an abiding peace and confidence in the midst of the battle. *“I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, to be content”* (Phil 4:11). Two words in that verse are vitally important, "learned" and "content."

The verb “learned” means “learned by experience.” Paul's spiritual contentment was not something he had immediately after he was saved. He had to go through many difficult experiences of life in order to learn how to be content. The word “content” actually means “contained.” It is a description of the man whose resources are within him so that he does not have to depend on substitutes without. The Greek word means “self-sufficient” and was a favorite word of the stoic philosophers. But the Christian is not sufficient in himself, he is sufficient in Christ. Because Christ lives within us, we are adequate for the demands of life.

Read Phil. 4:10-13. Pray and answer the following questions:

Paul took time to thank the Philippians for their generous gifts to him and the church at Jerusalem. And he explained how to be content in any circumstance. The Philippians were good examples of what it means to care for each other. God wants us to care for each other too, and to realize that He is the one behind every gift. When we become too concerned about hanging on to what we have, we cannot be used to help others in need. When we are too ashamed to admit our own needs, we cannot be used to bless others who feel led to give. Only when we look at our own life from God's perspective can we experience the complete joy of giving and receiving.

1. According to the apostle Paul, what is the source of true contentment?
2. How does Paul's understanding of contentment fly in the face of conventional wisdom?
3. We live in a world that is pathologically consumed with the accumulation of material things. What do you think the apostle Paul would say to a person who made one of the following statements: a. I'll be content when I get my next promotion, raise, or new car. b. I will be content when I have all my needs met. c. This world is too uncertain; there is no hope for finding lasting contentment.
4. We tend to feel content when we are "well fed" and "living in plenty." Describe a time when you did not have some of the basics of life yet you still felt content.
5. How did your faith in Jesus help fill you and satisfy your needs during this time?

Read Phil. 4:14-19. Pray and answer the following questions:

We should give for the same reason that we should exercise our bodies. Our muscles are made so that they are best off when forced to work. If you “save” your muscles by never making them do anything, you actually are hurting them and yourselves. You haven’t “spent” any energy, but strangely the result is you have less strength and energy than if you had. Eventually you will become like a jellyfish plopped helplessly on the beach.

Sometimes this is true of your giving muscles as well. God has made us to be givers. It isn’t something we have to do in order to please Him so much as it’s something we need to do to keep ourselves working properly. We are healthy and whole when we are both giving and receiving.

6. What happens in the following areas when a follower of Christ learns to give joyfully and sacrificially?

- a. In the life of the giver
- b. In the lives of those who receive the gift
- c. In the heart of God

7. What can stand in the way of a follower of Christ giving freely?

8. What helps a Christian grow more confident and disciplined as a giver?

9. What kind of offering or sacrifice was Paul referring to in 4:18? What does this example suggest about God’s response to Christian giving?

10. How can the promise of verse 19 encourage us to give to the needs of others?

Read Phil. 4:20-23. Pray and answer the following questions:

In the last two chapters of Philippians, Paul describes a type of contentment that isn't based on self-sufficiency. It comes in grateful acceptance of his dependence on God and the sharing in the gifts offered by others. His contentment isn't in the over indulgence of appetites but in the taming of appetites. His contentment doesn't bring the absence of suffering; it brings the enablement to continue in service to the Kingdom of God. Paul gave himself to something bigger and greater than himself. His life had purpose and significance beyond itself. He was not free of worry, pain or limitations, but he was content.

And so the letter ends. It started with Paul's statement that his imprisonment has advanced the Gospel "*But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel*" Phil.1:12. Perhaps this was the best illustration that difficulty is of no consequence when you experience the joy of knowing Christ and seeing Him at work in the details of your life.

11. How does Paul's final blessing to the Philippians encourage you?

12. Why does Paul refer to the other Christians around him as brothers? What does this tell us about the nature of the church?

Journaling

Compare your notes and daily Scripture references. Take some time to pray and meditate on what God showed you in a practical way this week and how you can apply it to your Christian walk. (If you are married, pray together with your spouse, and share your thoughts) Write your insights down for review and group discussion.

Home Group Study
The Book of Philippians
Lesson Review
Putting Philippians to Work

Now that you have completed your study of this exciting and practical letter, don't lose what you have learned! The best thing about Bible study isn't the learning but the living. So, here are a few suggestions for keeping the joy in your life.

A. Surrender your mind to the Lord at the beginning of each day. This is a part of dedication: Rom 12:1-2 *"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."* Give God your body, mind, and will, by faith as you start each day.

B. Let the Holy Spirit renew your mind through the Word. Daily systematic reading of the Bible is a must if you are going to have victory and joy.

C. As you pray, ask God to give you that day a single mind, a submissive mind, a spiritual mind, a secure mind. As you ponder the day's schedule, be sure that nothing you have planned robs you of the joy God wants you to have. Perhaps you must meet a person you don't especially like. Ask God to give you the submissive mind that you will need. Or, maybe you must go through a difficult experience. Then be sure you have the single mind, concerned with Christ and the Gospel, and not only with your own personal likes and dislikes.

D. During the day, "mind your mind!" If you find yourself losing your inner peace and joy, stop and take inventory. Do I have the single mind? Did I just miss an opportunity to glorify Christ? Or was I a bit pushy, so that I lost the submissive mind? If you discover you have sinned, then immediately confess it to the Lord (1 John 1:9). If possible, go back and remedy your mistake. If this cannot be done, ask God to give you another opportunity for witness.

E. Guard the gates of your mind. Remember Paul's warning in Phil 4:8: *"Whatsoever things are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, of good report think*

on these things.” When an unkind or impure thought enters your mind, deal with it instantly. If you cultivate it, it will take root and grow - and rob you of your joy. Sometimes Satan will throw his "fiery darts" at you, and sometimes he will use other people to do it for him. One of the best ways to defeat the wrong kinds of thoughts is to fill your mind with Scripture; so take time to memorize the Word of God.

F. Remember that your joy is not meant to be a selfish thing; it is God's way of glorifying Christ and helping others through you. **Jesus** first, **Others** second, **Yourself** last; and the result is **J.O.Y.**

Pray and answer the following questions:

1. In lesson one, you were asked what you thought Paul’s purpose was in penning this letter. After finishing lesson eight, how would you now explain his purpose?

2. What are the most important lessons you have learned from Philippians about the following topics?

a. Partnership in Christ (1:4-11, 2:1-4, 4:1-3)

b. Joy (1:4, 2:2, 3:1, 4:1)

c. Circumstances and suffering (1:12-14, 4:11-13)

d. Christ (1:6, 2:5-11)

e. The Christian mind (2:2, 3:19-20, 4:2)

f. Knowledge and knowing (1:9, 3:8, 4:12)

g. Courage and confidence (1:6, 2:1, 3:3-7, 4:6)

h. God at work in us (1:6, 2:13, 3:12, 4:7)

3. What areas (thoughts, attitudes, opinions, behavior) have changed in your life as a result of studying Philippians?

4. What subjects from Philippians continue to challenge you personally, and what do you plan to do about it?