

Day 1 - Intro to Philippians

Philippi was one of the first places in Europe where the gospel was preached; the founding of the church is related in Acts 16:11-40. It was a vital, healthy church which had always graciously supported Paul in his missionary efforts. Paul accepted the support of very few, and the Philippians were one of them because of their good reputation. It is worth noting that the Philippians in general were very poor, yet were among Paul's biggest financial supporters. How should this challenge us today, as we are among the world's top 1% in terms of wealth?

Content wise, the main, overriding theme of Philippians is the idea of joy. But to many of us, that means nothing; joy is a word which has been robbed of much of its meaning by overuse. What is joy?

Joy is surely what we usually think of it as, excitement, energetic happiness. But that is the end result. First, especially in the midst of difficult times, we must ask God for an eternal perspective. We become un-joyful because we see the world from a human view; we have our eyes on circumstances, on other people, on the news. We must turn our eyes on Jesus; only when we see him can we see the world through his eyes. But we also must be prepared to pay the high cost of looking toward Jesus; when we see the world as he does, our priorities *must* change—and herein lies the crucial element of joy. We live no longer for today's gods of health and wealth, who are unreliable and thus can only give a temporary, halting joy. We must live for Jesus—and he is never changing, and thus his joy is never ending. When we put Christ first, we are given peace beyond understanding. We know that regardless of how much life sucks, Christ has a plan for it all—he knows all and can do all. If you will, he's got the whole world in his hands. And what is more, he is coming back again. When I turn these things over in my heart, I always find a quiet peace and a happiness which surprises my previously sad, filthy, angry heart.

Philippians is often called the 'letter of joy', which is a little bit ironic when we consider that Paul wrote it from a jail cell. But in light of our previous discussion, we see that this isn't strange at all; to Paul, joy in Christ is present regardless of physical circumstance. As you read Philippians, note how Paul's eternal perspective and hope in Christ's love and imminent return drive his joy. Make sure also to read 2:5-11 with care; it is one of the most profound passages on Christ in the New testament. Note also Paul's trademark rant against heresy in CH 3.

Have fun! May God bless you through this epistle.

Day 2 - Philippians 1:1-11

1Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus,

To all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons: 2Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 3I thank my God every time I remember you. 4In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy 5because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, 6being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

7It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart; for whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me. 8God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus. 9And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, 10so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, 11filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.

Questions:

1. What does it mean that "he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion"?
 - a. What are the implications, for your spiritual and daily life?
2. What does it mean love someone "with the affection of Christ Jesus" as opposed to 'with the affection of me'?
 - a. How is this love different in its intensity and degree?
 - b. How is this love different in its scope/who it extends to?
3. Why is knowledge and discernment associated with the abounding of love?

Food for thought:

In the passage, Paul simply greets the Philippians but still offers us some nice pieces of wisdom. Paul speaks to God's faithfulness—God will carry the work in us on until completion, and further more he will do it until the day of Christ Jesus! Not only is this a promise that God will be faithful to us while we live on earth, it is a promise that God's faithfulness will carry to the day of judgment. He will not betray our trust and send us to hell arbitrarily. He will faithfully bring us into heaven to live with him forever.

It is also worth noticing how Paul associates the abounding of love with knowledge, insight, and discernment. It's good to learn things like apologetics, theology, and the more cerebral side of Christianity, but without the LOVE of Christ, these have no use because the foundation is missing. Love is the most crucial aspect of Christianity and it is absolutely indispensable in all we do.

Day 3 - Philippians 1:12-30

12Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. 13As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. 14Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly. 15It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. 16The latter do so in love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. 17The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. 18But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice. Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, 19for I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance. 20I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. 21For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. 22If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! 23I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; 24but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. 25Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, 26so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me. 27Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel 28without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved—and that by God. 29For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him, 30since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.

Questions:

1. What is a situation in your life where someone was doing the right thing for God for the wrong reason? Did you resent this or praise God for his glory?
2. “To live IS Christ”. Why these words? Why not, ‘to live is to serve Christ?’
3. Do you fear death? Should you fear death?
4. Why does Paul write that the Philippians have been ‘granted’ the privilege of suffering? What kind of suffering is Paul referring to? How is this different from other types of suffering?

Food for thought:

Paul yearns to be taken into heaven, because heaven is in truth far better than earth. Regardless of how much we may fear the actual act of death, I think this is something we can agree on: heaven is going to be awesome and for sure a lot better than earth. Why, then, are we still here on earth?

It is because there is still work to be done—and because God has entrusted his work to us, to jars of clay, as it were. Sure, angels may still roam the earth and do stuff...who knows? But the major agent of God’s work on this earth is the church. And who is the church but Paul, the people who lived in Philippi, you, and me? We are the church. We are God’s agent of change in this world. So we must care. We can’t float through life building our personal empires and living on the education and wealth which our birth in America has given us. We must be engaged, whether in missions, charity, politics, evangelism, or whatever else.

Day 4 – Thursday – Jesus Christ’s Example

Read Phil 2:1-11

1If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, 2then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. 3Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. 4Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

5Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

6Who, being in very nature God,

did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,

7but made himself nothing,

taking the very nature of a servant,

being made in human likeness.

8And being found in appearance as a man,

he humbled himself

and became obedient to death—

even death on a cross!

9Therefore God exalted him to the highest place

and gave him the name that is above every name,

10that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,

in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

11and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,

to the glory of God the Father.

Questions/Activities:

1. In v. 1 Paul reminds us of the blessing we have through belonging to Jesus. Have you ever been encouraged and comforted by God when you were feeling down? If so, take time to thank Him for those times. If not, ask Him to show you His encouragement and comfort.
2. Write down the names of two people that you admire: celebrities, family, or friends. Have they ever disappointed you? Done something foolish or wrong? Failed at a critical time? Ignored you when you needed them?
3. Now think about the example of Jesus’ life as summarized in this passage. What things that make Him different than other people we admire? Thank God for these things.
4. Paul commands us to imitate Jesus’ example. In this passage he does not ask us here to preach eloquently, to perform miracles, or to die on the cross. He does ask us to put the others’ interests before our own. Think of one person that you know well, perhaps a classmate or family member. What would it mean for you to put his or her interests first today? How would you pray for him or her? What would you say to him or her? Refrain from saying? What would you do for him or her? Refrain from doing? Spend time asking God to show you how to do this and give you the strength to follow through.

Day 5 – Friday – Shining as Stars

Read Phil 2:12-18

12Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, 13for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.

14Do everything without complaining or arguing, 15so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe 16as you hold out the word of life—in order that I may boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor for nothing. 17But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you. 18So you too should be glad and rejoice with me.

Questions/Activities:

1. Have you ever been away from city lights on a cloudless night where you can see the stars? Imagine that sight in your mind.
2. Now draw a picture of some stars. Label one with your name. Label others with the names of believers you know.
3. In between the stars write down some of the evil that you see around you in this “crooked and depraved generation”.
4. Stars do not light up the whole sky like the sun, but they are important points of light. What does Paul say that we should do to shine as stars? When in the past week have you complained or argued? Confess this to God and ask his forgiveness.
5. Vs. 12-13 talks about how we partner with God to become the person He desires us to be. If we have given our loyalty to God through Jesus Christ, then the Holy Spirit works in us to perfect us. God has made us with free will. We must obey Him so that what He wishes will come to pass in us. Thank God that He is working in you. Ask God what His “good purpose” for you is. Ask Him to show you your part.

Day 6 – Paul’s Two Partners

Read Phil 2:19-30

19I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. 20I have no one else like him, who takes a genuine interest in your welfare. 21For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. 22But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel. 23I hope, therefore, to send him as soon as I see how things go with me. 24And I am confident in the Lord that I myself will come soon.

25But I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger, whom you sent to take care of my needs. 26For he longs for all of you and is distressed because you heard he was ill. 27Indeed he was ill, and almost died. But God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, to spare me sorrow upon sorrow. 28Therefore I am all the more eager to send him, so that when you see him again you may be glad and I may have less anxiety. 29Welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honor men like him, 30because he almost died for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up for the help you could not give me.

Questions/Activities: *(We will look primarily at this passage, but also refer back to the earlier parts of chapter 2)*

1. Here Paul talks in a conversational way about two of his partners, Timothy and Epaphroditus. How have they contributed to God’s work? How many ways can you find?
2. How have they put Jesus Christ’s interests (v. 20) and others’ interests (v. 4) before their own? How have they worked without complaining or arguing (v. 14)?
3. In this passage how does Paul model the humility that he has talked about in this chapter? How does he put the interests of his partners and the church at Philippi before his?
4. Do you know someone like Timothy or Epaphroditus, “who has taken a genuine interest in your welfare” (v. 20)? Even a little bit? Thank God for that person and ask God to sustain them.

Day 7 – Rubbish

Spend some time reading and marking up **Philippians 3:1-11**

1Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you.

2Watch out for those dogs, those men who do evil, those mutilators of the flesh. 3For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh— 4though I myself have reasons for such confidence.

If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: 5circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; 6as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless.

7But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. 8What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ 9and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. 10I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

Questions:

Paul makes a distinction between confidence in God and confidence in the flesh. Why would Paul have reason to have confidence in himself?

What two reasons does Paul give for why he has put his faith in Christ?

Things to reflect on:

The first thing that jumps out at you in this passage is that Paul gives a long list of the reason he has to boast. **A Hebrew of Hebrews, a Pharisee, a persecutor of the church, under the law blameless.** Basically, Paul is the super Jew. No one can compare to his credentials or reputation when it came to living the life of a good Jew. However, Paul has **counted as loss** all of these things, considering them as **rubbish**, in comparison to knowing Jesus. The word Paul uses for “rubbish”, *skubala*, in the Greek is a term of extreme disgust, usually in reference to garbage or human waste. He treats his huge list of credentials as “crap” in comparison to knowing Jesus. **What are the things that I put my worth and identity in rather than Jesus? Academics? Sports? Relationships? Looks? Clothes? Musical Ability? My Ethnicity? YG?** Nothing that we do gives us reason to have confidence in ourselves, no matter how righteous or good we think it makes us. Paul has established that none of his spiritual credentials are what makes him righteous. Rather, it is his faith in Christ (**3:9**) Finally, Paul gives us the reason that he has put his faith in Christ and counted all of his human credentials as garbage. He wants to know Christ and share in his sufferings, in order that he might attain the resurrection from the dead. This isn't a works based salvation, but rather, a desire to remain faithful to what God has called him to. But more on this tomorrow...

Spend some time praying and asking God to help you find your identity in Him.

Day 8 – Wednesday - Pressing On Towards the Goal

Spend some time reading and marking up **Philippians 3:12-4:1**

12Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. 13Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, 14I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

15All of us who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. 16Only let us live up to what we have already attained.

17Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you. 18For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. 19Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things. 20But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

1Therefore, my brothers, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, that is how you should stand firm in the Lord, dear friends!

Questions:

What has Paul not yet obtained? And what does he press on to make his own? How has Paul contrasted himself and those who walk according to his example with those who are enemies of the cross of Christ?

What is the “therefore” in 4:1 there for?

Things to reflect on:

Paul here is continuing his thought from the previous 11 verses. His attaining the resurrection from the dead is not a works salvation, but rather his desire to remain faithful to what God has called him to. Thus, in **3:12**, Paul is quick to say that he himself is in this journey of trying to remain faithful. He has not been made perfect, but rather every day presses on towards that goal of standing before God as a faithful servant of Jesus Christ. **What have we made our goals in this life? Make money? Get married? Have a family? Paul is calling us to make this our goal: be found faithful in Jesus Christ.** Additionally, Paul exhorts the church in Philippi to imitate him as their example. He contrasts himself with those whom he tearfully calls enemies of the cross. Paul's goal is to stand faithful before God in heaven, and boasts in Christ, having set his mind heavenward. However, those who walk as enemies of the cross, their end is destruction, they boast in themselves (see yesterday's devotional), and they have their minds set on earthly things. Paul drives this point home by reminding us that our citizenship is in heaven. Paul concludes this whole section with one final exhortation. He drops a “therefore” in 4:1 that reminds us to look back at everything he's told us just now about counting all things as loss in comparison to knowing Christ, and our goal to be faithful to God's calling. For these reasons, Paul urges us to **stand firm in the Lord.**

Spend some time praying and asking God to make your goal to be faithful to him and to stand firm.

Day 9 – Can we all just get along?

Read Phil 4:1-9

1 Therefore, my brothers, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, that is how you should stand firm in the Lord, dear friends!

2 I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord. 3 Yes, and I ask you, loyal yokefellow, help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.

4 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! 5 Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. 6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

8 Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. 9 Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

Questions/Activities:

1. There were two women in the church that were having a dispute that was so serious that Paul had to address them in this letter. (v2). What does Paul ask the church to do? How have we in the youth group/church been able to handle conflicts and issues with the understanding that disputes affect the whole church?
2. List all the ways that your gentleness is evident to all. Then list ways that you *could* show gentleness in your life.
3. How should we present our requests to God (vs 6)? How do you usually present your requests? With this in mind, make sure you practice that today. Spend some time praying the way that Paul calls us to in this verse.
4. What is an example you can think of that Paul is talking about in verse 8? (whatever is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable – what does that look like to us today?)

Day 10 – Thanks for Their Gifts

Read Phil 4:10-23

10 I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you have been concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. 11 I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. 12 I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. 13 I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

14 Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles. 15 Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; 16 for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid again and again when I was in need. 17 Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account. 18 I have received full payment and even more; I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. 19 And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.

20 To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.

21 Greet all the saints in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me send greetings. 22 All the saints send you greetings, especially those who belong to Caesar's household. 23 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.

Questions/Activities:

1. Can you think of a time in your life where you felt “content”? What did that mean? What do you think Paul meant by saying he learned the secret of being content in every situation (vs 12)?
2. The opportunity for this church to give was a chance to partner with Paul in a ministry that was to build God’s kingdom? Have you seen similar opportunities for you to live sacrificial in this way? What are some of those examples in your life?
3. The end is a blessing and closing to this letter. Spend time reflecting on the lessons God can be praised because of what you learned through studying Philippians.