

**CROSSWALK**

PRESENTS

**EVERYTHING**

**IS**

**POSSIBLE!**

A SERIES ON PHILIPPIANS

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## **EVERYTHING'S POSSIBLE: A SERIES GUIDE FOR THE BOOK OF PHILIPPIANS**

### **Introduction.**

The Epistle to the Philippians is a well-known writing from which most Christians can quote. The top three quotes are listed below:

“He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ.” (1:6)

“For me to live is Christ and to die is gain.” (1:21)

“I can do all things through him who strengthens me.” (4:13)

These are great texts to memorize and find inspiration and motivation. However, it is easy to neglect the greater context or, even worse, pull one of these verses out without regard to the more remarkable story being told. These inspirational moments are part of a much greater whole that must be considered in order for us to understand them truly.

The good news about this particular book is that it is small, so understanding the whole of the Epistle is not difficult and takes only a little work. In the four chapters, we see a significant amount of organization

and planning. As we study this book, it is important to keep a few things in mind.

1. **Find the Structure.** These letters are not a random and jumbled bunch of words and thoughts. Rather, they are cohesive missives that fit together for a particular purpose and a particular audience. The author is trying to do something in this short letter, so we must look for all the structural hints and clues that help us understand how this letter holds together.
2. **Look for Literary Devices.** Philippians use one particular literary device more than others: the Chiasm. We will talk more about this later, but quickly, it is a device used in biblical poetry that uses repetition to highlight the writer's main idea.
3. **Notice the Repetition.** Paul repeats his main ideas about Jesus' life, death, and resurrection in each section of the letter. We can break this letter into seven clear sections; in each one, he repeats what he wants us to understand.

When I was in a preaching class in college, my professor asked us to spend one month reading the book of Philippians each day. We read this book, all four chapters each day for a month, and each day, we had to write a sermon about some aspect of the text we thought was interesting, inspiring, and meaningful. As mentioned above, there are some great quotes that were easy to use as a foundation for a sermon. However, after about a week of writing sermons on the book of Philippians, things were getting more difficult. By the time we hit day 25, it felt like it was impossible to wring out any more meaning from this little letter!

I made it through and wish I had kept all those notes. They would have been incredibly helpful—or at least fun to look at 30 years later!

But the exercise was not lost on me. Simply going back into the same text repeatedly is a challenge, but I became increasingly familiar with the writing, the repetition, and the points Paul was trying to make. Therefore, at the beginning of this study, we will publish the whole book of Philippians so that you might go back and read it daily. For the audio guide, we will make one extra episode: the reading of the entire book, all four chapters. You will be able to use this as a resource throughout the five weeks of the series. By the end, you should know this epistle so well that it becomes more than just some quotable phrases. It should become a recipe for understanding what it takes to live for God and with God in every situation.

Thanks so much for joining us.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'T. Gillespie', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

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## Day 1.

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

I am writing to all of God's holy people in Philippi who belong to Christ Jesus, including the church leaders and deacons.

**2** May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace.

Philippi is located about 9 miles or so inland from the Northern Shore of the Aegean Sea. It became a colony of the Roman Empire in 31 BC, and Roman military veterans were given land there when their 20 years of service were finished. Due to the influx of retired soldiers and colonists, the Macedonian natives and Greek immigrants living in Philippi probably saw a sharp decline in their social and economic status. Paul arrived to preach around AD 50; the city's culture and institutions would have been completely Roman, with the government's power being in the hands of a pretty small number of elites who would have owned property in the surrounding countryside.

These larger dwellings would have been served by a large underclass that lived mainly in the city—non-Roman laborers, tradesmen, and service workers. Unlike many other cities Paul would have visited, Philippi never had a synagogue. Neither the text of Acts 16 nor the book of Philippians indicate a Jewish community being present.

Paul planted a church there, and when you plant a church, you have a tendency to fall in love with the people who make up that church. This is true of Paul

as well. So, years later, we think around either AD 60 from Rome or perhaps a bit earlier in Caesarea (AD 58-59). In the text, we know that the church in Philippi was worried about Paul, and they sent Epaphroditus to deliver gifts and support for Paul while he was in prison. It becomes clear that this church had helped to fund Paul's missionary work for many years. They were not strangers but supporters and cheerleaders for the work that God had sent Paul to do.

One point that should be noted. We know they were familiar with Paul because he did not designate himself as an Apostle like he seemed to have to do in other letters (Phil 1:1: Compare 2 Cor. 1:1; Gal 1:1; 1 Tim 1:1). They knew him, and they knew the call he had received from God.

This book overflows with joy and thanksgiving, even though it was written from a prison cell. And there are major themes of service, sacrifice, kenosis, and friendship.

1. Have you ever read the whole of Philippians in one setting before? Let's do it every day during this series.
2. Paul was in prison many times. How do you think you would fare if you found yourself incarcerated for the Gospel?
3. Did you notice that Paul didn't introduce himself as an apostle? Is this the difference between writing a formal email and writing a quick text to friends?

## **Day 2.**

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

I am writing to all of God's holy people in Philippi who belong to Christ Jesus, including the church leaders and deacons.

**2** May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace.

Yesterday, we did a lot of the background work for this little letter, but today, I'd like to jump into the exegesis of this text a bit more so that we can understand all of the nuances in Paul's writing. Paul was very good at the Greek in which he wrote, so paying close attention is important.

First and foremost, we see that the letter is written by Paul and Timothy, his frequent travel companion. Timothy is a half-Jewish believer who met Paul in Lystra (Acts 16:1) and worked closely with him in his ministry. Timothy becomes like a son to Paul (1 Timothy 1:2).

In this letter, like in the letter to Rome and the book of Titus, Paul does not refer to himself as an Apostle but rather as a *doulos* or "Slave." Actually, the word "bondservant" is probably the best translation of this word. It is a "slave" or someone bound to another, in this case to God, but it is not a slave by compulsion, but by choice. This word, actually coming from the Hebrew, would have been well known to the Philippians; it would have been used to translate the term "servant of Yahweh," the "slave" of the Lord. It carried a sense of distance and dependence on God while at the same time being a bit of an honorific title for those in special service to God.

This connotation worked in Paul's usage as he and Timothy are "slaves" of Christ Jesus, bound to him as a slave would be bound to a master, and also servants, choosing to serve the Lord.

But then he addresses those to whom he is writing. In this translation, we see it as "church leaders and deacons." Some translations have it as "saints," which is a carrying forward of an Old Testament term used to designate Israel and was used by New Testament writers to connote those in the church. "God's holy people" is a proper and succinct translation, so I am glad the NLT translates it this way. After greeting the church folk, he greets the church leaders or overseers. There are a few interesting things about this. 1) This greeting is plural, so it does not seem there was one person who was leading the church, but rather a group of people. And 2) They greet these leaders after they greet these church people and never really mention the leaders again. Perhaps this is due to his familiarity with the church itself or that this letter was always meant for all of the people in the church, not a single leader or even a group of leaders.

There is more to unpack in these first few sentences, but we should move on at this point. However, I will suffice it to say that he greets these church members and these overseers of the church with a two-fold greeting that holds both the Greek and the Hebrew meaning: Grace to you and Peace. (Charis and Shalom). And of course, this grace and peace comes to us from Christ Jesus, our Lord, and his Father, who was pleased to express his fullness in his son.



1. Would you consider yourself an overseer of the church, a member, or a visitor?
2. Why did you pick the one that you did pick?
3. How can you move into more leadership in the church? I am sure that any church you attend can always use more help!

### **Day 3.**

**Philippians 1:3** Every time I think of you, I give thanks to my God. **4** Whenever I pray, I make my requests for all of you with joy, **5** for you have been my partners in spreading the Good News about Christ from the time you first heard it until now. **6** And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns.

**7** So it is right that I should feel as I do about all of you, for you have a special place in my heart. You share with me the special favor of God, both in my imprisonment and in defending and confirming the truth of the Good News. **8** God knows how much I love you and long for you with the tender compassion of Christ Jesus.

**9** I pray that your love will overflow more and more and that you will keep on growing in knowledge and understanding. **10** For I want you to understand what really matters, so that you may live pure and blameless lives until the day of Christ's return. **11** May you always be filled with the fruit of your salvation—the righteous character produced in your life by Jesus Christ—for this will bring much glory and praise to God.

This part of the letter is just great! It is not unlike Paul to start with a thanksgiving and praise report, and he

does so here as well. He wants them to know that he has some genuine love for them, and he prays for them. He thinks of them with joy, and he recognizes the fact that they have partnered with him in his preaching of the Gospel.

How did they partner with him? They must have been supporting his ministry financially over the years. Even back then, doing ministry took support. Paul must have found it an incredible relief not to have to worry about his finances because he had some great communities supporting him. The same is true today as well. When a ministry does not have to worry about making ends meet each month, it is much easier to do ministry.

Let me take this moment to thank all of you who give to the Crosswalk Ministries, to Online, to Lovewell Creative (A supporting ministry of Crosswalk), and to all the different ministries that are happening all over the world because of your commitment!

Paul's joy in the Philippians is something to take notice of. He does not always say this in his letters, but the emotion and gift he feels from them is pure Joy. Joy lies at the heart of the Christian experience of the Gospel; it is the fruit of the Spirit in any truly Christian life, serving as primary evidence of the Spirit's presence. In other words, if your faith does not bring you joy, then perhaps it is time to reconsider what it is that you believe.

In verse 5, the basis for his thanksgiving is the past, the way that they have supported him. In verse 6, the basis for his thanksgiving is the future. It is the future where he sees God continuing the work that he

started in the Philippians so that when the day of Jesus' return happens, all things will be finished.

But Paul is not finished with his Thanksgiving; we see he is confident because he understands them and has been friends with them for so long. Do you have a friend who is so close that even when you haven't spoken in a while, the friendship does not falter? Someone who you know so well that there is nothing that can break that bond? This is the way Paul felt about those in the church in Philippi.

He ends this portion with his prayer as a petition. It is a single sentence whose overall concern and meaning seem clear enough.

Paul prays (1) for their love to abound more and more; that (2) this might be accompanied by full knowledge and moral insight; so that (3) they might approve of those things that really matter; so that (4) they might be blameless when Christ returns; as (5) they are now full of righteousness, fruit that is (6) effected by Jesus Christ and (7) for the glory and praise of God.

That is enough for today. Have a great day!

1. What is the single-sentence prayer that you have for someone today?
2. Do you feel this good about anyone in your life?
3. What do you think it would look like for your love to abound more and more?

#### **Day 4.**

**Philippians 1:12** And I want you to know, my dear brothers and sisters, that everything that has happened to me here has helped to spread the Good News. **13** For everyone here, including the whole

palace guard, knows that I am in chains because of Christ. **14** And because of my imprisonment, most of the believers here have gained confidence and boldly speak God's message without fear.

**15** It's true that some are preaching out of jealousy and rivalry. But others preach about Christ with pure motives. **16** They preach because they love me, for they know I have been appointed to defend the Good News. **17** Those others do not have pure motives as they preach about Christ. They preach with selfish ambition, not sincerely, intending to make my chains more painful to me. **18** But that doesn't matter. Whether their motives are false or genuine, the message about Christ is being preached either way, so I rejoice. And I will continue to rejoice. **19** For I know that as you pray for me and the Spirit of Jesus Christ helps me, this will lead to my deliverance.

There is so much happening in this text, but the overarching theme is that the Gospel is being preached. He starts by letting them know that no matter what is happening to him, his first priority is to preach the gospel, and he has been able to do that even in chains. The guards know what he is about, and his incarceration has only helped to embolden those believers who know his plight.

Then he says some interesting things. He lets it be known that there are some who preach the gospel out of selfish ambition, but he doesn't really care because the gospel is being preached no matter what. In verse 18, he literally says, "It doesn't matter whether their motives are false or genuine." It is really sort of incredible of him to understand that God can use even those who are preaching out of the wrong

motivations. However, it is true that he often pushes back on those who do not preach a true gospel that saves but a pseudo-gospel that is less than true and does not have the power to save because it says something that is untrue or less of a real understanding of who Jesus really is.

How do you feel about that? I struggle with it a bit. I don't want people preaching the gospel that is not in it for great and honorable reasons. However, Paul isn't so worried about this. I have pondered this a great deal, and I think I have come to an understanding of why Paul wasn't worried.

I think it is because Paul understands the power of the gospel to convict hearts. Of course, we know it is not the words but the Holy Spirit working in people's hearts to hear the saving grace that is held in them. Those words can come from many different places. Things don't have to be "Christian" to hold truth and the grace of God. This is perhaps why I struggle with Christian media at times. A great story of forgiveness shows us who God is, not just because it has the label "Christian" on it. We need to be able to live beyond the boundaries of a "Christian" culture and see where God is at work, clarifying who he is and what he values outside of our little sub-culture of Christianity.

1. Would you care if the gospel was being preached by someone who is doing it for the wrong motives?
2. Why was Paul so okay with it?
3. Where have you found truth outside of the church? Was it in art, music, or another medium that told a story that drew you closer to God?

## Day 5.

**Philippians 1:20** For I fully expect and hope that I will never be ashamed, but that I will continue to be bold for Christ, as I have been in the past. And I trust that my life will bring honor to Christ, whether I live or die.

**21** For to me, living means living for Christ and dying is even better. **22** But if I live, I can do more fruitful work for Christ. So I really don't know which is better.

**23** I'm torn between two desires: I long to go and be with Christ, which would be far better for me. **24** But for your sakes, it is better that I continue to live.

**25** Knowing this, I am convinced that I will remain alive so I can continue to help all of you grow and experience the joy of your faith. **26** And when I come to you again, you will have even more reason to take pride in Christ Jesus because of what he is doing through me.

There are some tough concepts that we need to tackle in today's pericope. Let's start with verse 20. Paul has been bold and courageous when it comes to proclaiming the gospel in all different types of situations. He has been imprisoned, he has been stoned, he has been beaten, and nothing has stopped him from sharing the grace that comes from Christ. He is hoping that he will continue to be this bold in the future, no matter what is to come for him.

But in verse 21, he makes the statement that for him, "to live is Christ, and to die is even better. . ." WHAT? How could he really believe that? Does that mean that Paul is considering suicide in order to be with Jesus? Does this mean that, somehow, not living is better than living for Christ?

It was Paul's understanding that the next thing he would see is Jesus, regardless if it was because his soul left his body and went to heaven or, more like what we believe, if he rested until he was resurrected by Jesus at the second coming. (Obviously, we are not commenting on his belief in the state of those who have died.) What we do know is that he had a deep desire to walk with Jesus as soon as he could. His life had not been a boring and uneventful life. In fact, it had been a dangerous and difficult journey to where he was writing this letter. Paul was ready to lean into the idea that walking with Jesus was a great thing to look forward to. It was so great, in fact, that he would consider leaving this world a kind of grace.

However, he reasons in the next verse that if he stays, there is more work to be done, and he can certainly do it more effectively if he remains here. It actually gives him some comfort to know that when he meets with them again, he will take pride in Jesus for what Christ has been doing through him with their support.

I have reflected on this portion of scripture often, as it holds concepts that are a bit disconcerting and troubling. Particularly, this is true if you believe that one who commits suicide will not make it to heaven. (By the way, this is an overly simplistic understanding of the commandment "You shall not kill." I don't want to get into it, but I think we have to take into account mental health, depression, and the fact that only God knows what is happening in someone's heart and head in those difficult times. Also, it is God who decides people's trajectory, not us. I will just leave this here: we are not the arbiters of who will be in heaven, and while I would never encourage or support

suicide, I don't think it precludes someone from heaven.)

Perhaps we need to understand Paul's perspective. He has done so much for Christ that there is a sense that things may be coming to an end. He has become secure in the fact that if his life is about to be over, he will be with Christ soon, and for that, he is grateful.

What we see here is someone who is less concerned about his circumstances but more concerned about how effective he can be for Christ. It is actually a pretty amazing way to live!

1. Have you ever worried about your effectiveness for Christ?
2. What can you do in order to make sure you are living for Christ and not for your circumstances?
3. Do you have people who support you like the Philippians supported Paul?

## **Day 6.**

**27** Above all, you must live as citizens of heaven, conducting yourselves in a manner worthy of the Good News about Christ. Then, whether I come and see you again or only hear about you, I will know that you are standing together with one spirit and one purpose, fighting together for the faith, which is the Good News. **28** Don't be intimidated in any way by your enemies. This will be a sign to them that they are going to be destroyed, but that you are going to be saved, even by God himself. **29** For you have been given not only the privilege of trusting in Christ but also the privilege of suffering for him. **30** We are in this struggle together. You have seen my struggle in



the past, and you know that I am still in the midst of it.

At the end of this chapter, Paul admonishes his friends to live beyond what is expected of them. To live as those who don't belong here but as those who have a home in heaven already. In this way, we are reminded that we are just travelers here on Earth, and Heaven is truly our home.

He reminds them that they have the privilege of suffering for Christ and that Christ is ultimately in control of their circumstances, so whatever happens is happening for the Glory of Christ. He gives them strength by reminding them that he is in the struggle with them, and it is not going to end anytime soon.

People who go through a struggle together are bonded in a way that few others find themselves. They are united through their suffering, but they also have a particular understanding of one another. We see this in veterans, we see this in people who start up a business together, and we see this in those who play on a team as well.

Struggle creates intimacy and unity of purpose. Paul is recognizing that he and the Philippian church have those bonds and will continue to live and work together for Christ. The idea that their bond is something of Heaven and not from Earth makes it that much more important and that much more transcendent.

1. Is there anyone that you are bonded with in this way? Who is it, and why?

2. To you, what does it mean to be a citizen of Heaven?
3. How can we work together with others for Christ?

## **Day 7. Small Group Study Guide**

### INTRODUCTION

The following is a guide to help facilitate discussion between you and the person you're studying with or with your Connect Group. Feel free to add, subtract, or change questions to fit the conversation, and pray for the Spirit to lead in all things.

### OPEN QUESTIONS

Since Philippians has several favorite quotables for the Christian journey, share one or two of your favorite Scripture texts and why they are among your favorites.

### HEAD

1. Read Philippians 1 together and share any wisdom, insights, or thoughts that come to you from the reading.
2. We know the kind of "slave" Paul speaks of is one who chooses to be bound to another by choice, not by force. What do you think it would have been like for someone who had been a slave by force to then choose to become one of their own free will?

3. Paul's introductions and his closing remarks often use the words Grace (Charis - Greek) and Peace (Shalom - Hebrew). Why do you think these words had become his common greeting and send-off?
4. Paul writes from a prison cell, but his tone is that of joy and gratitude. How do you think he was able to rise above his present circumstances and keep a positive outlook?
5. In verses 15-18, Paul seems to say that a person's motives for preaching the gospel don't matter as long as the gospel is being preached. Do you agree? What are some impure motives you can think of for preaching the gospel?
6. In verses 21-24, do you think Paul has contemplated suicide? If not, can you identify with his struggle?

## HEART

1. Knowing that Paul is speaking to a people he is intimately familiar with, people he was in the trenches with to plant a church in Phillipi, have you had or do you now have people that you've been in the trenches with; be it through a crisis, or planting a church, or starting something new. How do you feel about those people and what difference do they make in your life?
2. What kinds of things do we bind ourselves to in this world? In other words, what besides Christ can we become a slave to? How might we let

go of those false masters, to cling to the one and only, Savior?

3. Let's think about motives for a moment. Why do you go to church? Why do you study Scripture? Why are you, or would you be, compelled to share the gospel with someone else?
4. In verse 27, Paul says to live as citizens of heaven, as if you're already there. How do you think you might approach this life differently if you could continually remember that what you see and experience is only a small part of your story?

## HANDS

Gratitude is such a powerful weapon for our mental health. Who are you grateful for in your life? Who has helped you through a difficult time? Who joined forces with you to do something others thought impossible? Who has made an impact on your life that you wouldn't be the same without? Choose at least one person that fits one of these categories and just write them a quick note of gratitude, and tell them what they've meant to you.

## LIVING WORDS FOR YOUR WEEK

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

## Day 8.

**Philippians 2:1:** Is there any encouragement from belonging to Christ? Any comfort from his love? Any fellowship together in the Spirit? Are your hearts tender and compassionate?

**2** Then make me truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, loving one another, and working together with one mind and purpose.

This week we are studying one of the most famous passages that Paul ever wrote. It begins in Chapter 2 and spans the chapter. You have probably heard this in many church services, weeks of prayer, weddings, and even funerals. It is a phenomenal text at the surface, but as you study it more in depth, it becomes even more profound. We will break this text down very slowly this week.

It starts, in most translations, with a “therefore” or a “so,” connoting that there was something important that had an effect on what he is about to say. Many scholars believe the chapter designations are a bit unfortunate as this thought completes the thoughts previously stated. The NLT translates it without words that might more powerfully connect the two thoughts, and I wish they had kept those words of stronger connection. However, as we study, we can understand that when there is a “so” or a “therefore,” it essentially means that “for this reason. . . .”

The very next few phrases are a tip of the hat to the trinitarian understanding that Paul had of Jesus. He asks three questions: 1) A question about belonging to Christ. 2) A question about God's love for them. 3) A question about fellowship in the Holy Spirit. (While #2 does not refer specifically to God, there is a strong implication the love he is speaking about is the love God has for us.)

Paul has a concern about his appeal that you would have to be pretty hard-pressed not to understand. The reason for this is that he repeats his concern three times (repetition), in different words but with the same point.

The first key word in the appeal, and indeed in the letter is the verb *Phroneo*, which is repeated in the first and third instances, and has to do with the set of one's mind, or how one is overall disposed toward something. In other words, "set your mind. . ." meaning to have them be in the same mindset in order to be in harmony and unity. What he is basically saying is that he wants the Philippians to be one in the same mind.

In the second phrase, we see he wants us all to have the same love, moving in the same direction. It is clear that the Philippians had a great deal of love for one another, but Paul wanted to make sure that they didn't lose that love or let it die due to some internal friction they were dealing with.

The last phrase, "loving and working together in one purpose," reminds us that we are to put other's needs

in front of our own in order to do the work that Christ has given us and to make His joy complete.

1. Has your joy ever been complete?
2. What do you think that means?
3. How can you make sure you have “set your mind” on those things that God wants you to?
4. How can we be more in unity with those in our community?

## **Day 9.**

**Philippians 2:1** Is there any encouragement from belonging to Christ? Any comfort from his love? Any fellowship together in the Spirit? Are your hearts tender and compassionate?

**2** Then make me truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, loving one another, and working together with one mind and purpose.

I know; we talked about this yesterday. However, I don't think we have plumbed the depths of this text, so I thought we could spend one more day discussing it.

I am most interested in this phrase: “Are your hearts tender and compassionate?” I wonder what that means?

Some people might shy away from the idea that their hearts should be tender and compassionate. These words are sometimes seen as less than masculine, as soft, as weak, or as less than worthy of chasing after.

But is this really the case? Jesus's words push us towards rather than away from these words.

I have sometimes heard Christians, people that I really like, and unfortunately, mostly men, push back on these ideas of compassion, mercy, grace, and love as if they are not manly enough or masculine enough to be attributes worthy of Christian men. I want to push back on that notion.

These two words in Greek, translated here as tenderness and compassion, are actually used in Greek as a qualifier for compassion (*splagnizomai*), which means from the "bowels of mercy" or from the "heart of compassion." Compassion is seen as something that we are to strive for again and again.

Compassion and mercy are qualities so deeply embedded in the idea of Christianity that to think they are anything less than the highest of goals is not to understand the story that Jesus was telling us the whole time he was here on earth. These values, this kind of love, and this kind of heart are what we are to strive for rather than to be seen as weak, soft, or less than optimal as humans.

But that is just it; we are humans, and we are built to transcend just survival, retaliation, and revenge. We are built to forgive, to help, to share, and to love. We are made in the image of a creator who loves us more than anything, and we show the image of God through that same self-sacrificing love. If we do anything less, then we sully the good name of God.



1. What are the values you are most interested in expressing to the world?
2. What can you do to make those values incarnate into the world?
3. How do you want people to talk about you when you are gone? What do you want your lasting legacy to be?

## Day 10

**Philippians 2:3:** Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. **4** Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too.

All of this is good.

No.

All of this is exactly what the world needs right now and probably has always needed. Let's break it all down:

1. **Don't be selfish.** This one seems pretty simple. Look to others first; don't be worried only about yourself, but find ways to put other people in front of you. Make sure you have your head inclined to

see the needs of those around you rather than making sure your needs are taken care of. This doesn't mean that we stop thinking about our own needs, but it is a clarion call to see the world in ways that don't necessarily consider ourselves first.

- 2. Don't try to impress others.** This one is tough right now. With the advent of social media, we have a very difficult time not living in a comparison narrative that seems to overtake the joy we have at any given time. It seems that we feel that if we can just put out our best lives on social media, then everything will be fine. These curated lives are meant to impress others, not reflect what is true in our lives. That is not to say that they do not give a glimpse into some great things in our lives, but they continue to create a narrative that our lives are built to be broadcast. What would happen if we committed to be present in every moment of our lives rather than looking for ways to curate an experience for those who were not there?
- 3. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves.** Does this mean we are not to think much of ourselves? No, of course not! But it does mean that pushback on those narcissistic tendencies that so many of us have so much of the time. It means that we seek the good of others, thinking of ourselves less. C.S. Lewis says that humility is "not thinking less of ourselves, but thinking of ourselves less." I have always loved this idea in that it does not devalue who we are, but it reminds us to give thought to others, to their

needs and their hopes is a valuable and important pursuit.

4. **Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too.** While this may seem much like the previous phrase, there is a nuanced difference. It means that we should be exercising that empathy muscle first in our lives. We should find ourselves thinking of the needs of others before our own needs. That doesn't mean that we should not take care of ourselves; a life lived for others, with forethought and with care, should be what we strive for each day.

Questions:

1. How do you think of others first?
2. What does humility mean to you?
3. Have you lived your life trying to impress others?

## Day 11

### Philippians 2:5

You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.

- 6 Though he was God,  
he did not think of equality with God  
as something to cling to.
- 7 Instead, he gave up his divine privileges;  
he took the humble position of a slave

and was born as a human being.  
When he appeared in human form,  
**8** he humbled himself in obedience to God  
and died a criminal's death on the cross.  
**9** Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest  
honor  
and gave him the name above all other names,  
**10** that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,  
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,  
**11** and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
to the glory of God the Father.

What a famous text! I use it in sermons, at funerals, and in so many other ways because it truly shows us the attitude of the Risen Christ. His life, ministry, death, and resurrection are but examples of this attitude that we are called to imitate. Jesus, who has always been part of the Trinity, or Godhead, felt as if a greater purpose was to come down to Earth as a human and live a life that exemplifies servant leadership, sacrifice, care, and empathy. The rest of this text reminds us that he lived and died for us in obedience to God's will, and therefore, he was restored back into the divine trinity as an ongoing reminder of what being a true human can be like.

In other words, the Trinity dis-membered itself in order to send Jesus down to earth and then re-membered Jesus back into his station in heaven. Every time we remember or recount what Jesus has done for us, we empathize with this story, and we make this narrative our own.

But there is more to this text. We use the theological word "condescend" to explain what Jesus did for us. He came down; he emptied himself (kenosis) in order

to be one of us. His love was so great that he wanted to share our experience and to give us what we had been unable to give ourselves; not just an example of what it means to be human, but a new way to be human completely.

1. Have you ever emptied yourself in order to come down to the level of someone around you?
2. How do you know what other people feel? Are you empathetic to their plight?
3. Do you think you have the same attitude as Christ as you deal with those around you?

## **Day 12**

**Philippians 2:12** Dear friends, you always followed my instructions when I was with you. And now that I am away, it is even more important. Work hard to show the results of your salvation, obeying God with deep reverence and fear. **13** For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him.

**14** Do everything without complaining and arguing, **15** so that no one can criticize you. Live clean, innocent lives as children of God, shining like bright lights in a world full of crooked and perverse people.

**16** Hold firmly to the word of life; then, on the day of Christ's return, I will be proud that I did not run the race in vain and that my work was not useless. **17** But I will rejoice even if I lose my life, pouring it out like a liquid offering to God, just like your faithful service is an offering to God. And I want all of you to share that joy. **18** Yes, you should rejoice, and I will share your joy.

Paul reminds the Philippian community how well they have always followed his instructions and

admonishes them that it is of even greater importance to continue to follow these instructions. The second phrase of verse 12 lets them know that they do this as a result of their salvation. Paul's point is that once salvation has been received, they should put into practice this life through obedience to the commands given by Jesus, who he now mirrors in his commands to love one another in unity.

Do you remember your parents leaving and telling you to remember to do what they have told you, even though they weren't there? Did you do it? I often found it hard to continue to obey their commands when they were not around. I didn't do the dishes or make my bed. You can be sure I did those things right before they got home so I wouldn't get in trouble. What probably should have happened was I should have simply done what they asked out of respect and certainly out of gratitude for all they had given me. However, I was a typical teenager who thought he could get away with a few things while they were gone.

Paul wanted to make sure the church in Philippi didn't do the same thing that I did when I was a teenager. They were to keep obeying God with reverence and fear. He then reminds them that they are being developed by God; he is literally working in them to give them the desire for what God would have them do. The outworking of this is as follows:

There will be less complaining and arguing. That would be beautiful if that were the case in church or anywhere in our lives. Sometimes, it is not even our own complaining and arguing that gets to us, we see

it happening all around us and it creates a difficulty for us.

Have you ever worked with a group of people who don't complain and argue? That is an amazing experience. And the work you can finish! Amazing! Oh, every church was able to experience a group of people who were self-sacrificing, who were not worried about complaining, or who were not concerned about what other people have and do not have. Wouldn't it be great if there were no jockeying for positions and we were all just serving in our positions and in our capacities as we were called? I think that is something that we all dream about! I certainly do!

1. How can you cease complaining and arguing?
2. What can you do to lift up the people around you?
3. How can you make sure that your responses in life are the same responses that you give for the grace of Jesus in your life?

### **Day 13.**

**Philippians 2:19** If the Lord Jesus is willing, I hope to send Timothy to you soon for a visit. Then, he can cheer me up by telling me how you are getting along. **20** I have no one else like Timothy who genuinely cares about your welfare. **21** All the others care only for themselves and not for what matters to Jesus Christ. **22** But you know how Timothy has proved himself. Like a son with his father, he has served with me in preaching the Good News. **23** I hope to send him to you just as soon as I find out what is going to happen to me here. **24** And I have confidence from the Lord that I myself will come to see you soon.

The Philippian church sent Epaphroditus to care for Paul during his imprisonment, so Paul sent Timothy to care for the Philippians. Timothy is someone for whom Paul has ultimate respect and responsibility. He knew that if Timothy were there with them, they would be cared for. Timothy was a “good egg,” as some would say; in other words, he was a good kid who would do what Paul asked of him. His name means “Honoring God,” and Timothy proved time and time again that he would do just that.

Paul is concerned that others are not as concerned about the things of God as Timothy is. However, he plans to send Timothy as soon as he knows what is happening to him in Rome. We will learn later that Paul never gets out of that prison and, therefore, is not able to go and see the church in Philippi again.

Have you ever had someone who worked for you or that you worked with that you knew you could trust? Someone who had your best interest or the best interest of the organization in mind at all times? These people are invaluable, and they are, unfortunately, few and far between.

I wonder if you are that type of person. Could this be said about you? What would people say when it comes to thinking about your commitment and your witness to the world? I hope that people will say these same things about me that Paul said about Timothy.

Paul mentions that Timothy has been like a son to him. That is great praise indeed. Timothy seems to be able to do anything. Indeed, anything is possible for Timothy when Paul asks him to do it. It is nice to work



with people who are so trustworthy and committed to the same cause that you are. I hope we all get to have some Timothy's in our life!

1. What could you do to make you more of a Timothy to someone?
2. How can you find out what people think of you?
3. Who is a Timothy in your life? Have you thanked them lately? Do it now!

## **Day 14—Small group study guide**

### INTRODUCTION

The following is a guide to help facilitate discussion between you and the person you're studying with or with your Connect Group. Feel free to add, subtract, or change questions to fit the conversation, and pray for the Spirit to lead in all things.

### OPEN QUESTIONS

When you think back over your life about someone who had a great attitude no matter their circumstances, who comes to mind, and what was it about their attitude that had an impact on you?

### HEAD

1. Read Philippians 2 together and share any wisdom, insights, or thoughts that come to you from the reading.
2. What was the center that was supposed to hold us all together in love and unity?
3. The people Paul describes in verse 2 have a different core than those described in verses

- 3-4. How do we become people centered on love and compassion that put others first, as opposed to the self-centered, preserving our life at all costs?
4. Make a list of all the attributes or actions of Jesus in verses 6-8. What in that list speaks to you the most right now? What do you want to emulate more right now?
  5. Paul and Timothy shared an obvious mentor/mentee relationship. What other mentor/mentee relationships can you think of in Scripture?

## HEART

1. Have you ever witnessed a church that “agreed wholeheartedly” and “Loved one another” that “worked together with one mind and purpose”? If so, what was that like? How did they keep the main thing the main thing? If not, why do you think it’s so hard? What kinds of things do we fight about?
2. Jesus emptied himself (kenosis) to become human. What are some things you and I need to empty ourselves of so that Jesus and His attitude becomes our center?
3. Paul paints a picture of the type of church he wants to see in the world - one full of mercy and compassion, of love and self-sacrifice, a church that doesn’t complain or argue. How can we attempt to follow Jesus so closely yet struggle

so much to achieve this kind of community?  
What can we do differently?

4. Thinking about Paul and Timothy, do you have someone in your life that you are mentoring in the faith and encouraging along the way? If so, who? If not, how might you go about finding one? Is someone doing this for you?

## HANDS

There are two things to pray for this week: one that leads to action, and the first, pray to have the attitude of Christ - selfless, sacrificial, humble, and obedient. For the second prayer, ask God to reveal someone to you that you could journey with as a mentor or a mentee (this may take some time). When an impression becomes a conviction, reach out to that person and see what happens. Just ask if they'd be willing to journey with you in the faith, not as an expert, but as a fellow traveler.

## LIVING WORDS FOR YOUR WEEK

**9** *Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor  
and gave him the name above all other names,*  
**10** *that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,  
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,*  
**11** *and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
to the glory of God the Father.*

Philippians 2:9-11 NLT

## Day 15

**Philippians 2:25** Meanwhile, I thought I should send Epaphroditus back to you. He is a true brother, co-worker, and fellow soldier. And he was your messenger to help me in my need. **26** I am sending him because he has been longing to see you, and he was very distressed that you heard he was ill. **27** And he certainly was ill; in fact, he almost died. But God had mercy on him—and also on me so that I would not have one sorrow after another.

**28** So I am all the more anxious to send him back to you, for I know you will be glad to see him, and then I will not be so worried about you. **29** Welcome him in the Lord's love and with great joy, and give him the honor that people like him deserve. **30** For he risked his life for the work of Christ, and he was at the point of death while doing for me what you couldn't do from far away.

Paul continues his missive to the church in Phillipi by letting them know that their young man, Epaphroditus, would be coming back to them as well. He has good things to say about this young man and even calls him a “co-laborer” with himself. There is a reason why Paul considered Epaphroditus successful.

While the plan for Epaphroditus had not gone as planned since he had taken ill and was quite severely sick, it was still mentioned that he had been a great co-worker with Paul. Why was that?

In the first-century culture of shame and honor, the situation described in the previous texts could have had a devastating effect on the Philippian's relationship with Paul and Epaphroditus' relationship with the church. Imagine the embarrassment of sending a highly expected gift only to have it arrive

broken and spoiled. The recipient now has the added burden of returning it or informing the giver of the unfortunate outcome. The recipient's response completely determines how the situation is viewed by the givers.

But rather than castigating the church or criticizing the messenger, Paul gave some of his highest praises to Epaphroditus, making him sound more like a fellow apostle than a servant. He also calls him "my brother," which left the Philippian believers little choice but to do the same.

This raised the bar for Christian believers back in Philippi, and it also determined the stability of Paul's future relationship with the Philippians.

When Paul mentions "sorrow upon sorrow" or "grief upon grief," he regards his current situation with sorrow, and to have lost Epaphroditus would have been a great grief as well. Epaphroditus had taken it upon himself to travel to Paul and take care of him, and for Paul to have his death or even illness on his conscience would have been a deep sorrow for Paul to bear.

I love the phrase "give him the honor that people like him deserve. . ." In other words, this guy has done a great job, and he needs to be respected and honored for his work. It seems to me that too often, those who sacrifice for the church are ignored, or their contribution is somehow expected rather than cherished.

Anytime someone gives of themselves to the church, we should recognize their sacrifice, their talent, and

their contribution in a way that lets them know that what they have done is important to the church, to God, and to the community they are trying to serve. Church's are sometimes very poor at doing this.

1. Have you ever been honored for the work that you do for the church?
2. How were you honored, and how did it make you feel?
3. What is the best way to honor a great contribution to the family of God?

## **Day 16**

**Philippians 3:1** Whatever happens, my dear brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord. I never get tired of telling you these things, and I do it to safeguard your faith.

Let's talk about Joy for a moment. It's pretty important to the Christian believer. In fact, it is a by-product of our faith in Jesus. New life gives us a new perspective, and that new perspective brings us joy. Paul states that he never tires of writing these things. Paul is possibly referring to the warning and teaching that follows, which he might have delivered in person or in an earlier letter. But for a moment, he wants them to rejoice in the Lord.

Joy is not so ethereal as we might make it seem. Because it is a by-product of our faith in Christ, it is also accessible at any point in our faith journey. Joy can be the fuel that keeps us going, the result of a deep spiritual connection, or even the choice we make everyday.

When you choose joy, you choose life and life abundantly. There is so much that we can focus on that brings us to scarcity and hopelessness. But there is also so much that we can choose to find joy in each day. My family loves sharing Instagram reels of small animals being super cute, not that they could be anything else. This may seem like a foolish thing to do, but it helps us find joy in the little things each and every day.

What gives and brings you joy? How often do you find yourself leaning into those things? Are they part of your spiritual practice? We often think things that bring us joy are anathema to a spiritual life, but the opposite is actually true. I have a hard time believing that Jesus traveled with a bunch of guys and that they never played practical jokes on each other. I would imagine that there was a great deal of laughter that accompanied those travel companions.

David Ferguson, the pastor of our Chattanooga campus, gave a keynote address on comedy in public speaking and in your spiritual life. It was brilliant and spoke to the need that we all have to find joy in all of our endeavors. We have to be willing to laugh at ourselves and with others and find a common spirit of joy together. Without that spirit of joy, we will find ourselves as dry as crackers and cracking just the same.

1. What brings you Joy?
2. How do you bring that into your spiritual practice?

3. What is the funniest thing you have ever heard/done/been a part of?

## Day 17

**Philippians 3:2:** Watch out for those dogs, those people who do evil, those mutilators who say you must be circumcised to be saved. **3** For we who worship by the Spirit of God are the ones who are truly circumcised. We rely on what Christ Jesus has done for us. We put no confidence in human effort,

In the previous verses, Paul warned them about this. We are to watch out for those who do evil and be careful of those who say we must conform to traditions over relationships. I know it says circumcision and called the mutilators, but Paul was making a greater point. He didn't want his new converts to be caught in the lie that what was done before, in another tradition, was still reasonable for them to do or that it would be something that gave them or denied them access to eternal life.

Paul is making the argument that those who are converted are under no aegis to "mutilate" themselves or to perform circumcision on themselves or others in order to be part of the fellowship of believers. Obviously, this would have been something that would have brought great relief to those who were converted to Christianity from a pagan background.

However, this would have been pretty significant to those who were converted from Judaism, and they still felt that those older traditions should be kept.



Circumcision would have been the sign of being “chosen” by God. (See the story of Abraham and the covenant with God)Therefore, they would have had a hard time seeing how these new converts could go without this circumcision. Paul is making the argument that circumcision is not what you think it is. He sees it as something other than circumcision of the body and has moved his understanding into a circumcision of the heart.

How does this relate to us today? Paul tells us that we should rely solely on what Jesus did for us, not on our own human efforts.

Have you ever heard a preacher who keeps saying you are “saved by grace,” but the message of the sermon still seems like he is trying to get you to do whatever you can do in order to make God love you? I have heard this my whole life. Preachers, particularly Adventist preachers, have a tendency to lean on their own understanding and forget to let the gospel speak. Paul understood that “his grace is sufficient” for us and we don’t need to keep working so hard to make God love us. God could not love us any more than he does right now.

But for some reason, it feels like that doesn’t preach nearly as well as scaring the “hell” out of people by holding their sins over their heads. We, as preachers, too often go back to the understanding that heaven is hard to get into, and if our congregations are not worried, then we are probably not doing our jobs.

I hope I am not that kind of preacher. I just want people to know how much God loves them and how

that love propels us to love the world just a little bit better than we could have before we found God's love for us.

1. Have you ever heard of a preacher like the ones mentioned above?
2. What did that preacher say to cause you trauma or to make the gospel unattractive?
3. Do you believe that the grace of God is sufficient for your salvation and your sustenance?

## **Day 18.**

**Philippians 3:4** though I could have confidence in my own effort if anyone could. Indeed, if others have reason for confidence in their own efforts, I have even more!

**5** I was circumcised when I was eight days old. I am a pure-blooded citizen of Israel and a member of the tribe of Benjamin—a real Hebrew if there ever was one! I was a member of the Pharisees, who demand the strictest obedience to the Jewish law. **6** I was so zealous that I harshly persecuted the church. And as for righteousness, I obeyed the law without fault.

Paul had just made the point that he didn't have any hope in human effort, but then he did something interesting: He bragged about himself just a bit. Paul does this in other places as well (2 Corinthians 12), but he always does this under duress. Paul does not actually want to brag, but he does this in order to make a salient point: if anyone is going to trust in

what they have done or in their pedigree, it should be him. However, he always makes that point to show that there is no trust in the flesh at all.

Here is the breakdown of his pedigree. Like every Jewish male child, he was circumcised on the 8th day. He is a pure-blooded citizen of Israel and a member of the tribe of Benjamin. He calls himself a “real Hebrew” if ever there was one!

When I was in Australia, a friend of mine found out that he came from a First Nations bloodline. I asked him what percentage of his make-up was Aboriginal. He looked at me strangely, like I had offended him. When it was clear I meant no offense, he told me that in Australia, any Aboriginal blood made you Aboriginal. This was news to me, and I have thought often about it.

Why do we ask “how much” of something are you? Bloodlines have always meant something to people. Whose people you come from has always mattered to tribes and to peoples. Of course, we chase royalty through bloodlines, and while that doesn’t matter as much today as it used to, who you come from matters still. Paul is making the case that he comes from a good background and a good Hebrew background.

Then, he reminds us that he was a Pharisee and, therefore, was not simply born into something great but had proven he had strict obedience to the law that superseded any right by birth he might have had. Then, he reminds us that even for a Pharisee, he

was zealous and had persecuted the church in its early years.

Paul reminded everyone that if anyone were going to put faith in man's achievements, it would be him. However, he would not recommend this in any way, shape, or form.

1. Have you ever found yourself bragging about your accomplishments?
2. How did it make you and everyone around you feel?
3. Do you think this was an effective strategy for Paul to use to make his point?

## Day 19

**Philippians 3:7** I once thought these things were valuable, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done. **8** Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ **9** and become one with him. I no longer count on my own righteousness through obeying the law; rather, I become righteous through faith in Christ. For God's way of making us right with himself depends on faith.

This text can be divided into two sections: the first explains how worthless everything else but Christ is,

and the second explains how we no longer count on our own righteousness.

Paul has shown us his hefty Hebrew credentials, but he doesn't find them helpful anymore at all. In fact, they sometimes blind him to Christ's plan of salvation for him and for everyone else. When we have done things that are competent and even wonderful, they can easily get in the way of us leaning into the salvation that Jesus created for us on the cross and through his resurrection.

Paul no longer values these things as worthwhile. In fact, he calls them worthless, of no value, because of what Christ has done. Does this mean that what we do doesn't matter?

Yes and no . . .

What it means is that what we do pales in comparison to what Christ has done for us, and it also means that those things are in no way getting us closer to heaven. However, it also means that what we do is not to acquire the love of Jesus but because of the love of Jesus in our lives. Our works are responses to love rather than a means to receive love. As well it means that everything we do can be seen in the light of the love that Jesus has for us and the grace that he has granted us.

The second part of this text helps us understand how Paul no longer counts on his own righteousness. Rather than thinking about the law as something that will save us, the law becomes something else. Rather than being the thing that makes us right with

God, it becomes a great way to show our obedience to God, but it does not bring us closer to God, nor is it the means by which we are saved. The law and salvation are not two ends of a continuum; rather, they are two different things altogether.

We often get confused, wondering if we are saved by grace or by law. The answer is simple: the law never saved us, and salvation has always been God's priority and preference to grant and give us. We are saved entirely by grace, given as a gift through faith to each who would accept it and live in the victorious freedom Christ offers.

1. Do you know how you are saved?
2. Does it bother you that those things you do have no effect on your salvation?
3. Do you think that Christ has offered you everything that you need to be saved?

## **Day 20**

**Philippians 3:10:** I want to know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead. I want to suffer with him, sharing in his death, **11** so that one way or another, I will experience the resurrection from the dead!

Resurrection. For Paul, and for Christians in general, the idea of resurrection cannot be underemphasized or undervalued. It is the foundation of Christian hope, and Paul connects the resurrection of Jesus to the words of the prophets throughout the First

Testament. Isaiah 11:1-2 prophesies about a king who will come from David's line to unite all those who would believe. And Paul clearly sees the resurrection of Jesus as fulfilling not only that prophecy but every prophecy about the Messiah. Paul has no doubt about the place Jesus holds in salvation history.

He wants the Philippian church to understand the power that is still accessible to them, and he wants them to know about resurrection through suffering with Christ. He hopes, and he truly has had the opportunity, to suffer with Christ and experience that resurrection power.

I have often wondered what "resurrection power" really is. Preachers use that term, and if you believe in the resurrection of Christ, then you believe that it is a real power that raised a man from the grave. However, what does it look like in your life? Is it an overcoming power that allows you not to sin? Is it the power of forgiveness so that we are not consumed with guilt for our sins? Is it a power that changes the very nature of the sin that we experience?

These are big questions, much more to take on in the short time we have today. So let me put something out there that might make sense to you. What if resurrection power is as much perspective as it is anything else? That is not to deny the supernatural power that God uses in our lives. However, sometimes, perspective is a superpower. What if we could see things differently, feel differently about the things in our lives, and move differently than we might before?

What if you could see failure and missing the mark as us being “on our way” to a better and more profound life? What if we were not fixated on the failure but on the learning that failure leads us toward? What if Jesus were the great designer, and we thought about our lives as an iterative process of finding our way to the horizon that Jesus designed?

Maybe we have been looking at all of this incorrectly. Perhaps we have been seeking perfection when we should have been seeking growth, hope, and another chance. What if we lived our lives with the perspective that the resurrection means second and third chances? Maybe seeing our lives from the other side of the grave should give us a perspective of hope, courage, and willingness to keep trying. Maybe perspective is what resurrection power is all about.

1. Do you know someone who is great at giving you a perspective you haven't seen before?
2. How can you get ahold of that resurrection power in your life?
3. How can you help change other people's perspectives on their lives?

## **Day 21 - Small Group Study Guide**

### INTRODUCTION

The following is a guide to help facilitate discussion between you and the person you're studying with or with your Connect Group. Feel free to add, subtract,



or change questions to fit the conversation, and pray for the Spirit to lead in all things.

## OPEN QUESTIONS

What's one thing about your life, your accomplishments, or even your family and your ancestry that you are particularly proud of and like to talk to others about (not for bragging, but just because it means a lot to you)?

## HEAD

1. Read Philippians 2:25 - 3:11 together and share any wisdom, insights, or thoughts that come to you from the reading.
2. Paul dotes on Epaphroditus almost unlike any other list of praises he gives another person. What are some of those affirmations he gives Epaphroditus?
3. In what ways do you rejoice in the Lord? What does that look like for you? Why do you think Paul emphasized it so much in his letters?
4. Why do you think people were trying to force the Gentile Christians to get circumcised? Was it to be saved? Was it about tradition?
5. Paul was the Jewish Jew who may have ever lived, but the argument he makes is that all those things are worthless compared to what Christ has done for us. What are some of the accomplishments we put stock in today that may seem like Paul's pedigree but in our world or in our faith tradition?

6. Paul's language in verse 8 is strong, he doesn't just consider his past accomplishments garbage, the Greek is actually dog dung. How do you and I move from trying to earn our salvation, to receiving His love and believing we already have it?

## HEART

1. Knowing how Paul encouraged Epaphroditus, who is someone in your church, your community, that you know could use some encouragement right now? After sharing that name, how might you go about encouraging them this week in some tangible way?  
Everyone needs encouragement.
2. When was the last time you experienced true joy? How about true joy in church? Did either experience make you want to tell others and/or bring others so they could hopefully have a similar experience? (this is evangelism, BTW)
3. We struggle so much to accept the gospel of Jesus that the cross was enough to save us. What kinds of things do we say a believer "Must do" in order to be saved beyond receiving Christ? What evidence is there in a person's life that they have received Christ? Does the evidence save, or does Christ save?
4. In v 3:10, Paul says he wants to know Christ intimately and experience His power, even if it means suffering with him. What might it look like for us to suffer with Christ today? It's not an

easy road, this following Jesus thing, but what kinds of things help us stay the course?

## HANDS

This week, just like we talked about above, there is someone in your circle of influence who needs encouragement. Whatever that looks like, take a few moments to send a text, write a card, or drop by a small token of appreciation...whatever it is, do something. All of us need encouragement. And if the first experience was rewarding, encourage someone else, and so on and so on.

## LIVING WORDS FOR YOUR WEEK

*“So encourage each other and build each other up, just as you are already doing.”*

*1 Thessalonians 5:11 NLT*

## Day 22

**Philippians 3:12:** I don't mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection. But I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me. **13** No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it, but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, **14** I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us.

Paul doesn't want anyone to think that he has already achieved perfection. In fact, the Greek word used

actually means to be perfected, completed or reached a goal. Paul understands that he is a work in progress, that he is “on his way,” and that gives him the grace to succeed and to fail, all under the forgiveness and love of God. Paul wants to contribute to what God is adding to the world, and in so doing, he has to press on toward the goal that God has placed before him.

My very first sermon was on this text. I have told you about it before. I shot off a starter's pistol at the chapel at PUC. Something that would definitely not be allowed today. I wanted people to understand that they were in this race that God had placed them on and that this race was something that they could finish if they could just get started!

I don't want you to miss what is said in verse 13. Paul is talking about perspective (think about what we talked about last Friday). Paul is saying I don't want to look at what I left behind, but I want to move toward what is ahead, what God has called me to, and when I look at things from that perspective, life gets a bit better.

Paul emphasizes finishing the race and receiving the heavenly prize. What is that prize? Is it heaven? Is it something else? Paul would have thought it was at least two things. One would have been heaven, for sure. But the other would have been the presence of God that was unending. This, of course, could be seen as heaven. But we sometimes use heaven as an escape route from being present here on this earth. The truth is that Paul was extremely present in his life, but he also knew the presence of God in his life, and

this allowed him to handle anything that was thrown at him.

1. What is the perspective you have on your life? Are you looking back or looking forward?
2. What do you think Paul was looking forward to as the reward for finishing the race?
3. Did Paul say anything about winning the race? Or just finishing?

## Day 23

**Philippians 3:15** Let all who are spiritually mature agree on these things. If you disagree on some point, I believe God will make it plain to you. **16** But we must hold on to the progress we have already made.

Let's talk about spiritual maturity for a moment. What actually does it mean to be spiritually mature? Hebrews says it this way: Hebrews 6:1-2 says:

**Hebrews 6:1** Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God,

**2** of instruction about washings and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment.

The Search Institute developed a scale from 1988 to 1990. They studied six different denominations and found that Faith maturity is not simply a set of right beliefs; rather, it

is conceived more as a way of life, as a set of priorities, dispositions, and behaviors that evidence that faith is deeper, vibrant, and life-changing. A person of mature faith integrates eight core dimensions into his/her life.

Here they are:

1. A mature faith trusts in God's saving grace and believes firmly in the humanity and divinity of Jesus.
2. A mature faith experiences a sense of personal well-being, security, and peace.
3. A mature faith integrates faith and life, seeing work, family, social relationships, and political choices as a part of one's religious life.
4. A mature faith seeks spiritual growth through study, reflection, prayer, and discussion with others.
5. A mature faith seeks to be part of a community of believers in which people give witness to their faith and support and nourish one another.
6. A mature faith holds life-affirming values, including commitment to racial and gender equality, the affirmation of cultural and religious diversity, and a personal sense of responsibility for the welfare of others.
7. A mature faith advocates for social and global change to bring about greater social justice.
8. A mature faith serves humanity consistently and passionately through acts of love and justice.

These eight things show up when our faith moves from an extrinsic orientation to an intrinsic understanding. In other words, when our faith becomes ours and not someone else's. When it moves to an intrinsic faith and truly becomes ours, we then begin to grow in faith, we begin to mature, and we begin to grow towards these eight guideposts of faith maturity.

Faith maturation is not necessarily tied to our maturity for the rest of our lives, although some correlation certainly exists. Faith maturity does not exist in a vacuum, disconnected from the rest of our lives. However, one can stop maturing in their faith journey for a myriad of reasons. Trauma, disconnection, isolation, and laziness are a few reasons that our faith might not mature. But when we lean into opportunities for discipleship, we have a tendency to grow naturally and organically toward a greater faith maturity.

1. How has your faith development been growing? What are you doing to help it along?
2. Do you use all of the resources available to you through Crosswalk Church?
3. How can your local community help you to continue to grow?

## **Day 24**

**Philippians 3:15** Let all who are spiritually mature agree on these things. If you disagree on some point, I believe God will make it plain to you. **16** But we must hold on to the progress we have already made.

I know this is the same text, but I wanted to spend some more time on faith maturity. In fact, I have a little faith maturity test that I'd love for you to take today; I have left space to do it on this series guide, but if you are listening, come back to it later so you can write down your answers.

Faith Maturity Test:  
Answer the following questions.

Do you. . .

1. Experience God's presence, saving grace, and unconditional love guiding you in your daily life.

2. Seek opportunities for ongoing spiritual growth through prayer, Bible study, and other spiritual disciplines.
3. Rely on your faith to guide your daily decisions, your moral values, and your views on social and political issues.
4. Take care of your physical health, celebrate diversity, and affirm the dignity of all people.
5. Experience a sense of peace, liberation, security, purpose, and self-acceptance that grows out of your faith.
6. Spend time in a Christian community where you can nurture the faith of others, share your faith story, and experience God's presence.
7. Believe your faith demands global and political concern and involvement to improve the welfare of other people.

Live out your faith by spending time serving people in need, promoting social justice, protecting the environment, and promoting peace.

Once you have taken this test, sit and see what your answers say to you. Do you think you might find some growth areas? Do you think you might find some areas where some reading, praying, and mentoring might help a little? What can the church do to help you grow in these areas?

As our faith matures, we discover a peace that transcends much of what we experience in life. We see this in the words of Paul later on in this book, but for now, suffice it to say that we can experience a peace as we grow toward a mature faith as well.

**Day 25**



**Philippians 3:17** Dear brothers and sisters, pattern your lives after mine and learn from those who follow our example.

Does it sound arrogant for Paul to tell people to follow his example? He wants them to pattern their lives after his. I think if we heard a pastor or a preacher say this, we would be concerned. Should we be concerned that Paul throws this out like it is conventional wisdom?

Paul does this in other places as well (1 Corinthians 4:16; Gal 4:12), and he is sure that there are others the Philippian church should follow: Christ, Timothy, and Epaphroditus (Philippians 2:5, 22, 25, 29), as we discussed before. Paul thought of a few as having been consistent in their journey of faith and having arrived at a relatively mature expression of their faith. Therefore, when he sensed this, he would put them up as examples of Christian living. He himself is one of those examples, and he has proven again and again that his faith was something that carried him through difficult times, trials, and tribulations. He suffered greatly for the gospel. In fact, these are all the things that he had been through:

**2 Corinthians 11:25-30:** Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. Once I spent a whole night and a day adrift at sea. I have traveled on many long journeys. I have faced danger from rivers and from robbers. I have faced danger from my own people, the Jews, as well as from the Gentiles. I have faced danger in the cities, in the deserts, and on the seas. And I have faced danger from men who claim to be believers but are not. I have worked hard and long, enduring many sleepless nights. I have been hungry and thirsty and have often gone without food. I have shivered in the cold, without enough clothing to keep me warm. Then, besides all this, I have the daily burden of my concern for all the churches. Who is weak without my feeling that weakness?

Who is led astray, and I do not burn with anger? If I must boast, I would rather boast about the things that show how weak I am.

Paul was not joking around. There was much he had to carry for the gospel, and only those who were mature in their faith could do this and still rejoice in the Lord always!

1. How has your faith maturity allowed you to transcend your situation?
2. Have you suffered for Christ? What did that look like?
3. How can you also be a model of Christian living?

## Day 26

**Philippians 3:18** For I have told you often before, and I say it again with tears in my eyes, that there are many whose conduct shows they are really enemies of the cross of Christ. **19** They are headed for destruction. Their god is their appetite, they brag about shameful things, and they think only about this life here on earth.

Here, Paul does not seem to be speaking of those who do not proclaim Christ as their savior, but those who do and yet still live as if they have no salvation. He is saddened by their unwillingness to give up the things of this life and to continue to head for destruction. They can't seem to see beyond their lives on this earth, and they just allow their appetites and desires here on earth to control their passions.

Paul mentions four descriptions of these false teachers. They are not just Christians who misunderstood a portion of the gospel. These are unsaved individuals who reject the gospel itself and who will experience destruction apart from faith in Christ. Second, for false teachers, Paul notes their focus on greed. Many false teachers, then and now, seek money in order to make a profit (1 Timothy 6:5) rather than truly serving God. In contrast to Christ-like believers,

false teachers are more concerned with their own desires than the needs of other people (Romans 16:18).

Third, these false teachers call evil good and promote sinful actions as being right. More than simply excusing sin, they celebrate it and take pride in it. And fourthly, the goal of false teachers is not on Christ and being with him for eternity. In contrast with Paul's teachings throughout chapter 3, their goal is on the here and now. Their only thought is what they can get out of life and other people today.

All four of these traits are posed as the opposite of what believers should pursue in following Christ. Believers are to know Christ, be humble, promote what is right, and set their minds on heavenly things.

Paul has deep concerns for the Philippian church, which might be taken in by these false teachers and lose their salvation.

In today's world, many people are "okay with Jesus." While I'm not 100% sure what this means, I am glad people feel positive about Jesus. The only problem is that we are not really asked to be okay with Jesus; rather, we are asked to see Jesus as both God and human. The question of scripture and the historical question of Christianity is, "Who do you say that I am?" The way that we answer this question determines what we really think of Jesus. As Jesus did not make reasonable claims, but claimed that God was his father and he had a pre-existence in heaven, we have to come to some understanding of who he really is. To claim that Jesus was a "good man" and that we are okay with him does not really answer this question in a way that makes sense and in a way that we can center our lives around.

Scripture and Jesus, by his words, do not give us the opportunity to think of him as less than God, and to do so makes us as foolish as those false teachers in Philippi.

1. What do you think about Jesus?
2. Do you know anyone who is “okay with Jesus?” What does that mean to you or to them?
3. How can we continue to share the good news that Jesus is Lord with people around us?

## **Day 27**

**Philippians 3:20** But we are citizens of heaven, where the Lord Jesus Christ lives. And we are eagerly waiting for him to return as our Savior. **21** He will take our weak mortal bodies and change them into glorious bodies like his own, using the same power with which he will bring everything under his control.

Roman citizenship was a highly prized commodity in the ancient world. With it came many rights that other citizenships did not abide by. A right to a trial in Rome, amongst other things, became one of the benefits that Roman citizens were unable to access.

But Paul is promoting a citizenship that is much greater than the one offered by Rome or any other municipality. He encourages believers to embrace a far better identity as citizens of God’s kingdom. Most residents of Philippi probably lacked Roman citizenship. For any believers who did hold Roman citizenship, Paul’s statement here presents a challenge to look beyond their earthly status and show the highest allegiance to Christ.

We are asked the same thing today. Where does your allegiance lie? Is it with the earthly citizenship that you carry? Or is it with the kingdom of God? And can you have dual citizenship?

A few months ago, there was a tragic knife attack in Sydney, Australia. It was a British citizen who stopped the knife-wielding attacker, and he was granted Australian citizenship on the spot. Citizenship is something that is granted as a reward, as a thank you, and as a privilege. We are granted access to the kingdom and, with it, all of the rights as a child of God. This is the kind of citizenship that allows us to transcend where we were born or what we have sworn allegiance to in this world and allows us to live in a way where our love knows no boundaries or borders.

I would guess that the question before you today is where do you want your citizenship to stand. It might be easy to say that we are simply citizens of the country that we live in, but our dual citizenship is in heaven. I am not sure you can have it both ways. Allegiance is a funny thing; it is hard to divide.

Does this mean that if you are a citizen of heaven, you no longer participate in or keep the laws of the land where you find yourself? Of course not; what kind of witness would that be? While we still participate, we know that our ultimate allegiance is to what God asks of us, and we make decisions based on that fact as a priority in our decision-making and in our lives.

1. Where is your citizenship?
2. What does it mean to you to be a citizen of heaven?
3. How does that play out every day in your life?

## **Day 28 Small Group Bible Study**

### INTRODUCTION

The following is a guide to help facilitate discussion between you and the person you're studying with or with your Connect Group. Feel free to add, subtract, or change questions to fit the conversation, and pray for the Spirit to lead in all things.

## OPEN QUESTIONS

Share about a goal or accomplishment that you are particularly proud of, that took you some time to achieve. What kept you going when things got tough? What was it like when you finally achieved your goal?

## HEAD

1. Read Philippians 3:12 - 3:21 together and share any wisdom, insights, or thoughts that come to you from the reading.
2. What do you think the “heavenly prize” was that Paul was striving for? Was it simply heaven, the life after death? Was it more than that? Explain.
3. Paul doesn't seem to be chasing perfection in verses 12-14. What is he chasing, and why does it make a difference in reaching his goal?
4. What do you think it means, or looks like, to be spiritually mature as opposed to spiritually immature? If maturing means growth, how can we tell if someone is growing?
5. In verse 17, Paul says we should “pattern our lives” after his, and we believe Paul was trying to pattern his life after Jesus'. But we also recognize what Paul said in Philippians 3:12 - he's not perfect. So, how do we reconcile these two things?
6. Seeing Paul's contrast between those who are enemies to the cross and those who live as

citizens of heaven, if you were to make a list under each of these headings of attributes/differences, what would those lists look like?

## HEART

1. Why do you think we in the Christian faith have such a hard time admitting and sharing our faults, our mistakes, our sins?
2. Have you ever chased after perfection? If so, what was that like?
3. How do you and I mature in our faith?
4. Humility is such an important aspect of maturing in our faith, as people, as servants of Christ. But how do we go about practicing humility, and do we have a role to play in helping other people be more humble?
5. It can be so hard at times to live as citizens of heaven in a world falling apart. What are some ways you can think of that we can help each other remember where our true citizenship lies?

## HANDS

This week, we challenge you to write out what you look forward to about heaven. Along with that, write out some things that would help you remember to live here on earth, as if you're already in heaven. Title it, "I Am A Citizen of Heaven," and put it somewhere you'll see it on a regular basis.

## LIVING WORDS FOR YOUR WEEK

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

Philippians 1:27 NLT

## **Day 29**

**Philippians 4:1** Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stay true to the Lord. I love you and long to see you, dear friends, for you are my joy and the crown I receive for my work.

I love what Paul has to say here. He feels as if the joy that comes from this work is incarnated in the person he gets to share it with. His joy and reward are those people who accept the gospel and allow God to work through them into their communities and into the lives of those they influence. It is enough for him that they stand firm in the gospel and continue the good work that God has started in them. In this way, Paul does not need reward; rather, he encourages them to continue to stand firm in the grace that they have been taught.

There were things that were happening in the church that Paul needed to address, and he will do that in the next text, but before he gets to that, he wants to encourage them, he wants to let them know his warm feelings for them, and he also wants them to stand firm in what they know to be true.

It is interesting that as we come to realize who God is, we tend to be amazed at his grace for us. We fall in love with him more and more, and we commit to living our lives in



the direction that God would have us go. However, after following for a while, we can be distracted by new teachings, by those leaders who say great things, but the fruits of their ministry are sometimes rotten and by the simple boredom of being a believer. There are so many implications for the gospel in our lives that it is easy to get distracted by those implications, and we forget to stand strong in the gospel that was first given to us in a simple and winsome manner.

It is my hope that we can stay focused on the gospel and let its implications filter through our lives as we go about the work that Jesus has for us. By remaining focused on the gospel, so many other things fall in line, albeit in a nuanced way that is not to everyone's liking. It is easy to get caught up in some really great things, and we should advocate and be active in creating a more equitable and caring world. To fight racism, to speak out against genocide, and to create systems of advocacy for those who have less than us is important, and we must do it.

We should also do it in a manner that is informed by the gospel rather than creating really good work without a nod to the gospel and to the king of the kingdom that we want to see become a reality in the world. Our understanding of equity, justice, and hope comes from the way that we have been dealt with by God through Jesus. To forget this is to do great work yet leave out the author of such great things.

1. What do you advocate for in your life?
2. How does the gospel inform how you feel about big issues in the world?
3. How do we advocate for grace, love, mercy, justice, and equity while still recognizing that it comes from Jesus?

**Day 30**

**Philippians 4: 2** Now I appeal to Euodia and Syntyche. Please, because you belong to the Lord, settle your disagreement. **3** And I ask you, my true partner, to help these two women, for they worked hard with me in telling others the Good News. They worked along with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are written in the Book of Life.

**4** Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again—rejoice!  
**5** Let everyone see that you are considerate in all you do. Remember, the Lord is coming soon.

Who are these people? Let's take a look. Paul names two women who had worked with him and apparently were at odds. Their quarrel may have been a key reason why Paul wrote this letter. They would have been leaders in the Philippian church. By addressing their dispute in a letter to the entire congregation, it seems Paul was encouraging accountability.

It is pretty well considered that these women were leaders in the church and, as such, seemed to be beyond the words that Paul mentioned in other letters about women not speaking in church. He felt that working beside these women was worthy of note, and therefore, we should take seriously women who work for Christ through the church. His statements about women not speaking in the church come from the letters to the Corinthian church, where there were known to be many mystery cults where women were encouraged to lead. It is reasonable to think that he was not making universal comments about women in the church but speaking directly to the context in which the Corinthian church found itself.

Paul wants these two women to agree in the Lord. There is nothing worse than a church divided, a church fighting, and a church that cannot agree. Nothing is of greater joy for Satan than watching people who have found grace fight amongst themselves. Churches can be difficult

places for people to get along, and it is always discouraging when churches or people within the church fight.

What is the best way to help people to get along? One of the ways we talk about a lot here at Crosswalk is to make sure that we are always looking toward the horizon that God has called us toward. It is easy to get lost in the weeds of what the right way to do something is, who likes what, and how we can do things better. All good conversations, but when we forget where we are going, they become arguments for argument's sake, and that does not do anyone any good!

So, we are to keep pressing on toward the goal that God has set for us, and that is different for every community and for every one of us. But the end goal is important to continue to keep in sight.

1. What do you believe is the end goal that God has called you to?
2. How can you make that happen? What steps are you able to take to make that happen?
3. Have you ever been in an argument in church that could have been handled better and created a bigger impact if you had?

### **Day 31**

**Philippians 4:6** Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. **7** Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.

Don't worry about anything. . .

Yeah, right.

That would be great, wouldn't it? To live a life that doesn't have anything to worry about. I think we would all love that. However, this doesn't seem to be the way that anyone can really live. We worry about everything; well, at least it feels like I do. We carry too many burdens, from family to finances to fellowship concerns. Our jobs create anxiety, our world seems like it is a mess and disconcerting, and even the price of eggs has us worried from one day to another. There seems to be more than enough for us to worry about every single day.

But here we have Paul telling us that we don't need to worry about anything. And I really wish it were that easy not to be anxious. There are a few people that I have in my life who deal with an anxiety disorder, and it seems like it is a difficult road. I am so glad they are getting professional help. I encourage anyone who is dealing with this issue to seek the help you need. And I don't think Paul was speaking to people who deal with inordinate amounts of anxiety. I think this message goes to all of us, as Paul understood what it was to look at your future and be concerned with what lies ahead.

His remedy for anxiety seems to be prayer. This is not a new refrain for Paul as he encourages us to pray without ceasing in other places as well in his writings. (1 Thessalonians 16-18). Why would prayer be something that alleviates anxiety?

I have thought a lot about this. I don't think it is just in the praying. Rather, I think it is in the release. What I mean is that one of the things that we can do when we pray is to release that which is giving us anxiety and developing worry in us. We can not just ask God to take it from us, but we can give it away. Whatever ritual you need to do—opening your hands, walking to let it out, anything really—let it give you a sense of release and surrender, and then move on.

When we were in Jr. High, a pastor did a week of prayer, and at the end, he had us write down those things that gave us anxiety, and then we burned them in the fire he had made in the parking lot. It was obviously symbolic, but I still remember it, and I still believe it was a worthwhile exercise. There was no magic, but there was a physical manifestation of what we were trying to do, and that helped.

Verse 7 talks about the “peace” of God. That word can be translated as well-being, and that is perhaps a more appropriate word for what we are seeking. There is an actual well-being test you can take (<https://www.mymentalhealth.guide/get-tested/well-being-test-who-5>) to see where you are on the well-being scale. You should take it. But you should really think about how prayer will help you with what you are dealing with.

1. How are you doing on the well-being scale?
2. Do you have a sense of peace or anxiety most of the time?
3. What can you do, as a ritual, to allow yourself to feel a sense of surrender from those things that are causing you anxiety?

## **Day 32**

**Philippians 4: 8** And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise. **9** Keep putting into practice all you learned and received from me—everything you heard from me and saw me doing. Then the God of peace will be with you.

This is such a great and powerful text, but it is also really great advice for us. We don't always spend our time chasing the things that were listed above. Whether it is

social media, entertainment, or just what we do when we are bored, we don't always seek true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, and admirable things.

In fact, do we know what those things are? Do we have a clear understanding of what it looks like to go after these things in our lives? I think we live in a world where so much is being offered up to us that is less than this list, but because we are not creating, developing, and making things that are what we have listed above. Perhaps we have lost the ability to make things that meet these standards.

Now, I am not a maker by any means. I can't really create things with my hands. However, as I write here, I realize that maybe this is my "making." I have a friend who makes buttons and spoons, and they are amazing. My son is so good at making things with his 3D printer and envisioning cool things (he is in the product design program at Walla Walla University). My wife and my daughter are artists, and they make things that make the world more beautiful. My youngest son is a musician, and his music is fun and funny, creating emotions in your heart and mind. I write and create sermons and give talks that hopefully move people closer to the abovementioned things. I guess we are makers in our own right.

What do you make or bring into the world that connects us to those things that are true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, and admirable? It can be anything. But perhaps it is time for us to stop consuming and start creating.

1. Do you make anything?
2. Do you make people laugh?
3. How can you make more of what you do to make the world a better place?

**Day 33**

**Philippians 4:10:** How I praise the Lord that you are concerned about me again. I know you have always been concerned for me, but you didn't have the chance to help me. **11** Not that I was ever in need, for I have learned how to be content with whatever I have. **12** I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little. **13** For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength. **14** Even so, you have done well to share with me in my present difficulty.

**15** As you know, you Philippians were the only ones who gave me financial help when I first brought you the Good News and then traveled on from Macedonia. No other church did this. **16** Even when I was in Thessalonica you sent help more than once. **17** I don't say this because I want a gift from you. Rather, I want you to receive a reward for your kindness.

These are some of the most quoted texts in scripture. 4:13, in particular, is a famous text, but all of it is important for us to understand Paul, his mindset, his understanding of well-being, and how we might understand how we can live.

The overarching theme is that Paul is not a victim of his circumstances, but he has found a way to be content and to have well-being, regardless of what is happening around him and what is happening to him. He can find joy, peace, and happiness through it all because he is not living for this world, for the future, or anything else other than for Christ and what Christ would have him do. He has found the secret, and it does not lie within us but in Christ's purpose for us.

When he finally understood this, no hardship might harm him or stop him from his purpose and his calling. He could endure anything, suffer through all of it, and find peace

and joy within it as he was no longer living for anything that this world might have to offer him. His life was now fully committed to the cause of Christ, and while he knew full well that he might die for this cause, it was something that he had not only come to peace with but understood as a present reality.

He is thankful for their help, but his worry is not for himself; rather, it is for them and their anxiety about the help they have sent him. So Paul thanked them and let them know that he was just fine and that they didn't need to worry about anything—as he no longer had to worry about anything either.

1. Have you ever felt this way?
2. What is your secret to being content in all situations?
3. How can this text give you hope in the midst of suffering?

### **Day 34**

**Philippians 4: 18** At the moment I have all I need—and more! I am generously supplied with the gifts you sent me with Epaphroditus. They are a sweet-smelling sacrifice that is acceptable and pleasing to God. **19** And this same God who takes care of me will supply all your needs from his glorious riches, which have been given to us in Christ Jesus.

**20** Now all glory to God our Father forever and ever! Amen.

**21** Give my greetings to each of God's holy people—all who belong to Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me send you their greetings. **22** And all the rest of God's people send you greetings, too, especially those in Caesar's household.

**23** May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.



As we come to the end of this text, we see that Paul couldn't be happier or more gracious, and he is deeply grateful for everything they have done for him through Epaphroditus. Even the gifts that came with him are great!

He sends his regards to everyone in the church and wants them to be encouraged by his situation as he has everything that he needs, which he probably didn't really have. His willingness to see his suffering as glory to God is pretty awe-inspiring, and I am sure the Philippian church would have read this missive as such.

They had to have been completely blessed and even a little shocked by the positive nature of this letter that was given to them in the midst of such suffering. What Paul really gave them was a blessing, so they didn't have to be anxious over their young man, over what Paul was experiencing, and over what they were dealing with in the church.

This letter ends with positivity, grace, and the real joy Paul has for his people in Philippi.

1. Who do you have joy for, and for whom could you write a letter with such positivity?
2. How can you bring this kind of joy and well-being to people in your life?
3. And how can you put more true and admirable things into the world?

### **Day 35—Small group Bible Study.**

#### INTRODUCTION

The following is a guide to help facilitate discussion between you and the person you're studying with or with your Connect Group. Feel free to add, subtract, or change questions to fit the conversation, and pray for the Spirit to lead in all things.

## OPEN QUESTIONS

What has been your favorite travel destination so far in life, and what is one you'd still like to visit?

## HEAD

1. Read Philippians 4 together and share any wisdom, insights, or thoughts that come to you from the reading.
2. Why is it so easy for us to forget the gospel that first won us over to Christ? What kinds of things do we tend to let distract us from the simple yet powerful gospel?
3. Concerning v. 4, have you ever heard it said that if you are happy, tell your face? Why do you think so many Christians struggle to be “full of joy”?
4. In Paul’s admonition to not worry, he mentions prayer and gratitude. Why do you think he encourages us to be grateful when we are feeling worried or anxious?
5. In v 8, Paul actually continues his advice to not worry but tell you to instead, fix your thoughts on what is true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, admirable. Why might this practice help us worry less?
6. When Paul says that he “learned” how to be content and “learned” the secret of living, what do you think he means? Do you think this learning happened quickly or over a lifetime?

## HEART

1. In v 6, Paul copies his Rabbi, Jesus, by saying not to worry. In the series guide, Pastor Tim talks about the reality of how hard that is but focuses on prayer as a way of releasing what's worrying you. If you're willing to share, are there things you need to release to God in prayer tonight that you've been worried about?
2. In the Scripture, we get the word peace from the Hebrew word, shalome, but peace really doesn't do shalome justice. Shalome is a state of living in perfect harmony with God and His creation. It's a state of being where nothing could bother you. If you could experience shalome today, what would it free you from and why?
3. Are there ways you can practice contentment? If so, share some. If you can't think of any, spend some time meditating on the first line of Psalm 23 and see if anything comes to mind, *"The Lord is my Shepherd, I have all that I need."* (don't just read it once, read it through 3-5 times before responding).
4. Do you think there are times in our spiritual lives when we pray for what we need but later realize that we didn't need what we thought we did; rather, our "need" was really just a "want"? How can we work at distinguishing between that which we need and that which we want?

## HANDS

What is one thing you've been wanting? Maybe something you've spent a lot of time thinking about? What if you were to practice surrendering that want to God, and just imagining handing it over into His hands? Try it with one thing this week, and start small. Then review at the end of the week if you still want it, think you need it, or if your perspective has changed. Or even take note of whether your perspective on God has changed.

#### LIVING WORDS FOR YOUR WEEK

*"My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer me who lives, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."*

Galatians 2:20 NLT