# THE LOYE OF CHRIST

Lessons from the Upper Room



LEADER GUIDE WEEK 1



## WEEK 1

## WATCH

Make sure everyone can see the screen and the audio is at a comfortable level.

## READ

Take some time in advance to read and consider the Bible study questions and come up with personal examples to encourage discussion.

# **DISCUSS**

We hope those who participate in the study walk away knowing, feeling, and doing differently as a result of amazing discussion.



## **BIG IDEA**

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn was born into devout Russian Orthodox family during the Russian Revolution in 1918. As a teenager, he atheist and embraced became an teachings of Marx and Lenin. However, while serving as a captain in the Red Army during World War 2, he was arrested and exiled for exhibiting anti-Communist behavior. Through his military involvement, he saw many things that opened his eyes to the reality of it all, leading him to search his own heart. It was during this time that he became a follower of Christ. Later, he wrote about as imprisonment and the atrocities that had taken place in his home country, he stated: "The only way to survive in prison is to abandon all expectations in this world and live for the next."

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Much like Solzhenitsyn, Paul viewed his circumstances in prison as an opportunity to advance the gospel, regardless of the cost. As he wrote in Philippians 1:21, "For me, living is Christ and dying is gain." As followers of Christ, while we are not persecuted and imprisoned for our religious beliefs, when we face struggles or adversity, we must remember that we are still called to live our lives with the same mindset of Jesus, Paul, and many before us. In this week's study, we are reminded that our purpose in serving God is to glorify Him, and that any hardship, trial, or suffering we face should point us to our hope and future with Him!

#### Passages we'll review:

Philippians 1:12-18; Deuteronomy 10:12-17

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# **OPENING**

What stood out to you from the message this week? What led you to really think? Did anything challenge you?

How would you describe your outlook on life: Do you see the glass as half-empty or half-full? Why do you think that is?

# WATCH

Make sure everyone can see the screen and the audio is at a comfortable level.

What jumped out at you from the video in this session? What are some of the key points that affected you more than others?

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## READ

#### Read Philippians 1:12-14

Paul's imprisonment wasn't due to any wrongdoing he had committed. He was imprisoned simply for preaching the message of the gospel. And yet, God used his imprisonment as a means to reach those who would not hear the Truth any other way! Paul was chained to a member of the Praetorian Guard at all times. Every six hours, Paul had an opportunity to share with another member of the guard! They witnessed his life as he prayed, wrote to the other believers, and shared his life with people in person. Because of the accusations, Paul's case went before the top Roman officials who had study the Gospel message Paul proclaimed to determine whether it was a new "sect" or simply another version of the Jewish sect. Only through Paul's chains did these people have the opportunity to be exposed to the message of God's saving grace!



When have you seen someone handle suffering or difficulty with the same approach as Paul? What impact did it have on those who follow Christ? How did it impact those who didn't follow Christ?

(Open for discussion)

Where has God been able to use bad for good in your life? Have you ever seen Christ exalted during a time of adversity in your life? Share with your group. How can our response to our difficulties exalt Christ?

(Open for discussion. Sometimes, the "chains" that bind us allow us to accomplish things we couldn't do any other way. We must choose to view our circumstances in light of what God will do through them, instead of what God didn't do or what pain/suffering it caused us.)

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Paul's chains gave him an opportunity to connect with the lost, but it also gave courage to those who were already followers of Christ! We often face adversity when we set out to share the gospel with those around us. How can we use the response of the Christians in Philippians to challenge and encourage us?

(Paul's positive outlook and singular focus on doing God's work strengthened the believers in Rome as they lived their lives daily and shared the gospel message with those around them. They were encouraged to fight the good fight and be bold in their efforts to live for Him! We can also find strength in Paul's perspective. We, too, must keep the right perspective; we must remember that God is bigger than our circumstances and that nothing can stop the plans God sets in motion!)

#### Read Philippians 1:15-18

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Paul wrote of the conflict occurring in the church among those who were sharing Christ with others. Why does Satan rejoice when he sees this? How should we respond to these situations?

(Satan seeks to use any means possible to stop the spread of the gospel to a lost and dying world. When followers of Christ are distracted by disagreements and wrong motives, their message can be weakened. We should respond as Paul did. Rather than spending time arguing or pointing fingers, we can choose to focus on the end result as they also spread the gospel message to those who need to hear it!)

Paul's love for Christ and the gospel of Christ dominated his life. He was single-minded in his purpose and ministry. His concern for the honor of Christ's name and the proclamation of Christ was more important to him than his physical comfort, freedom, and the ill intentions of others towards him. He did not allow the criticism of others to affect his ministry and efforts!

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How difficult is it for you to hold Christ and His gospel message in such high regard? What changes are needed in your thinking to come to the place where Christ is the one thing that makes you rejoice, regardless of life's difficulties and negative experiences?

(Open for discussion)

## **DIGGING DEEPER**

Read Deuteronomy 10:12-17

As we go through life, it is easy to allow the distractions of life to pull us away from our purpose here on earth. Just as Paul encouraged the Christians in the early church, Moses knew the importance of reminding the people of Israel of how they should respond to who God is and what He had done on their behalf.

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ACT OF LOVE!

#### from His did God desire What responses people? How would you describe the relationship they would have had with God if they displayed these things? Does this also apply to us today?

(God desired that His people would fear Him, walk in His ways, love Him, serve Him wholeheartedly, and obey His commands. In short, God was asking them to place Him at the center of their lives. Everything they did was to revolve around Him. By doing this, the life they lived for Him wouldn't be a chore or a burden, but rather for their best interest and God's glory. The same is true for us today! When we follow Christ completely, we give Him control of our hearts and lives and allow Him to guide and direct our paths. Like Paul, even when times are difficult, we know that we have the promise of eternity with Him!)

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#### Why should we respond to God in this way?

(Open for discussion. We are reminded that everything belongs to God. He made all things, and He is above all things. He is all-knowing and all-powerful, and nothing takes Him by surprise. He is holy and just, worthy of all of our praise.)

"The heart that delights in God and longs only to see His glory advance will seldom be conscious of sacrifice. God in His wisdom asks that we first love Him and then live in keeping with that core value. He does not want His people to think of what they do as sacrificial, even though from the world's point of view it may be just that. Gratitude for the grace of God will always be found near the the center ofbiblical Christian's most powerful motivations." (Doug McIntosh)

Remember that God has a reason for everything. He can use even the most difficult circumstances to bring glory to Himself and draw others to Him!



# **PRAY**

Consider the following as you pray together:

- When you reflect on the ways you have handled pain, suffering, and struggles in the past, would you say your attitude has been like that of Paul? What areas in your life need a change of perspective? Give these areas to God. Seek Him as your source of strength and pray to see your situation through His perspective.
- What allows you to speak boldly without fear? What hinders that boldness? What is one specific way that you can follow the example of the Christians in Philippians and live boldly in your faith this week?
- Think about your circles of influence, whether at home, church, work, or elsewhere. Knowing the victory that we have in Christ, how can you allow the gospel message to work through you and impact others as you face obstacles and challenges?



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