

A PHILIPPIANS STUDY

DISCUSSION GUIDE

December 17, 2023

PHILIPPIANS week 14 - Aaron McRae

This Discussion Guide is designed to help you **think more deeply** about the sermon and **engage with others** through thoughtful conversation, biblical exploration and **allow God to work** in your life as you apply what you discover.

➤ CONVERSATION STARTER

Of all the seasons of the year, Winter, Spring, Summer or Fall, which is your favorite season? Why?

➤ EXPLORATION

This week we conclude our series on the book of Philippians. Throughout this series Paul repeatedly reminds us to rejoice in the Lord. But sometimes joy seems far away. It makes us wonder whether there is a difference between the world's definition of joy and the bible's definition of joy.

The world wants us to believe that joy is just happy feelings that last for a moment but then passes quickly. The bible describes a persevering joy that anchors us to God during times of difficulty and uncertainty.

What is the opposite of joy? Unbelief

Philippians 4:4, 4:10-13 (From your bible, read aloud)

These words were written as Paul sat in prison, uncertain about what his future would be. He did not know whether he would ever be released or whether he would ever be able to see his friends again. Either

way, he was content and his joy was constant, because it was rooted in his relationship with Christ.

In his book, Soul Keeping, John Ortberg tells about a very difficult time in his life. Ortberg reached out to theologian, Dallas Willard for wisdom and advice. Willard reminded him. ***"This will be a test of your joyful confidence in God."***

Share about a time when your joyful confidence in God has been tested.

Philippians 1:3-6 (From your bible, read aloud)

Paul expresses his gratitude to God for the Philippians. He rejoices over their friendship, mutuality, fellowship and partnership in the Gospel. He gives them words of encouragement but his praise is to God.

The Philippians had learned from Paul and they had put what they learned into practice, even when it was difficult.

As we move through this Christmas season, there may be those among us who are currently facing challenges that make it more difficult to focus on joy. It is in times like these that Philippians 4:13 takes on its true meaning.

"I can do all things through him who gives me strength."

Notice here that Paul is not drawing attention to himself, he is drawing his attention to God and what only God can do. He is demonstrating that our focus needs to be on God not on our circumstances.

What is one thing that you need God's strength to endure this season? Take a moment to pray for each other.

When we are in a season where life is comfortable and everything is going well we can be tempted to forget the grace of God and begin to rely on our own strength. Paul wants to be sure that we remember where our contentment comes from. True contentment does not come from self-sufficiency, it comes from Christ-sufficiency.

Whatever season we find ourselves in we can be confident that God is at work. This can be particularly challenging when we are in a season of waiting. It may feel as if nothing is happening, but all throughout the bible we see that God is always at work and we can trust that he will provide everything we need in his timing.

Philippians 4:19 (From your bible, read aloud)

God is able AND God is willing to meet our needs. Once again, we must consider the context of verse 19 in light of verse 13, *"I can do all things through him who strengthens me."*

Paul is clearly saying that even in seasons where we are in great need, we can be assured that God will provide. He may not give us what we want, but he promises to provide what we need. This is why we can rejoice when we keep our focus on God.

What is a spiritual practice you can use to help you keep your focus on God during the holidays?

We are all in different seasons of life. Some of us are thriving and some of us are struggling. Some of us are feeling joyful and some of us are relying moment by moment on God's provision. Regardless of where you find yourself, Paul shows us that we can learn and grow in our faith no matter what season we are experiencing.

We have been studying Paul's letter to the Philippians for the past 14 weeks and we have learned so much. One important principle that the Philippians had put into practice was being generous with their finances. One of the reasons Paul wrote to the Philippians was to thank them for their generosity. Paul also wrote to other churches during his ministry. One of those was

the Corinthian church. He actually wrote two letters to the Corinthians that we now find in the New Testament. In his letters to the Corinthians, Paul gave important instruction on being generous givers.

2 Corinthians 8:2 (From your bible, read aloud)

2 Corinthians 9:6-7 (From your bible, read aloud)

What stands out to you from these verses?

How do these verses shape the way you think about giving?

These instructions from Paul are helpful to us even now. We see from scripture that the churches who learned to be generous and joyful givers were part of spreading the gospel throughout the world. We can also take part in spreading the good news about what God is doing around the world through prayer, service and giving.

➤ TAKE AWAY

There is so much that we have learned throughout this series from Paul's letter to the Philippians. His clear message to us is that by centering our lives around Christ, we can experience true joy. Like Paul, we may face trials and difficulties of many kinds, but even in the middle of our pain, we can still experience the joy of Christ.

Share about one thing you have learned through this series that you want to put into practice.

Take time to pray for one another that you may experience true joy this week and throughout the Christmas season.

➤ CHRISTMAS AT HILLSIDE

Christmas Service Times:

- **Saturday, December 23**
 - **4:00PM**
 - **6:30PM**
- **Sunday, December 24**
 - **8:30AM**
 - **10:00AM**
 - **11:30AM**

Shuttles available for all services