

An aerial photograph of a winding river in a dry, brown landscape. The river is dark green and flows from the top left towards the bottom right, with a large, irregular loop in the middle. The surrounding land is a mix of light and dark brown, with some sparse vegetation and small pools of water. The title 'SHIFT' is overlaid in large, bold, black letters, with a thin green outline around the letters. Above the title, the text 'A STUDY IN HUMANITY' is written in a smaller, green, sans-serif font.

SHIFT

A STUDY IN HUMANITY

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How to use this guide

Review the context and big picture every week – The goal of a book study is not just to learn each individual lesson, but to build understanding of the Bible, how it fits together, and how to study it.

Try not to use this guide as a script. The purpose of this material isn't to give you exactly what to say. Rather it is to give you the content you need to structure and develop your own lessons. Teach as much as you feel is important for your class. Feel free to go off topic if your own study leads you to approach the passage in a slightly different direction.

Don't feel like you have to cover everything. There is a lot of material in each lesson. Some classes like to cover a lot of ground. Other classes like to camp on one point and drill deep. Start by teaching the Main Point, then teach the Main Bullet Points. Use the extra detail and discussion questions as you see fit. The goal is to generate discussion, specifically regarding life-application. So don't worry if you don't get all the way through a lesson.

Philippians 1:1-11 – The Attributes of Real Peace

Finding Philippians in the Bible

The Bible is a more than a book; it is a library of 66 different books, written over a couple thousand years, in multiple languages, by numerous authors, to multiple audiences. The first step in studying any book of the Bible is knowing where it is located.

Here is where Philippians fits in the roadmap of the Bible:

- The Bible is broken into 2 groups: Old Testament and New Testament.
 - o The Old Testament is written in Hebrew and is about how God created a nation called Israel to be his chosen people. He chose them not because they were special, but because they weren't. They were as sinful, stubborn, and rebellious as any people group. He chose them so that He could teach them who He was, and so that they could be a lighthouse to the nations. He chose them, because it was part of His plan of redemption, a plan that culminates in the New Testament.
 - o The New Testament is written in Greek and is about two things: Jesus and the Church. The New Testament tells how a man named Jesus was born in Israel, how He taught and performed miracles, how He was crucified, how He was seen alive 3 days later, and how His followers saw that the resurrection of Jesus was the culmination of God's promise of redemption.
 - o Philippians is in the New Testament.
- New Testament is broken down into 4 groups:
 - o Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John – these books recount Jesus's birth, ministry, crucifixion and resurrection. They are biographical, but they aren't biographies. Biographies try to tell the whole story of a person's life. The gospels focus on the ministry of Jesus and especially on the last week of his life.
 - o History: There is only one book in this category: Acts. Its full name is Acts of the Apostles. It is part two of Luke's Gospel. It tells the story of how the Church grew from a few scared followers of Jesus in Jerusalem to a multi-ethnic group spread all over the Roman Empire.
 - o Letters: Also called Epistles, this is the largest group of books in the New Testament running from Romans all the way to Jude. More about this below.
 - o Revelation: Like Acts, there is only one book in this category. The reason is that there aren't many books like it. It is a type of literature we don't really have any more called "Apocalyptic." It is an often misunderstood book. It's a book of prophecy intended to give hope that God has a plan and is in control no matter what the circumstance.
 - o Philippians is a Letter.
- The Letters section of the New Testament:
 - o The Letters of the New Testament really are just that - Letters. They were written by specific authors to specific audiences to address specific circumstances.
 - o The Letters of the New Testament are arranged in 2 main groups:
 - Letters by Paul, named after whom they were written to:
 - Some written to Churches: Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians.
 - Some written to People: 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon
 - General Letters, named after those who wrote them (except for Hebrews):
 - Hebrews, James, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, Jude
 - Sometimes called the "Catholic Epistles." Catholic is just a word that means general and refers to the fact that these letters are intended for a wider general audience.
 - o Philippians is a Letter by Paul to a Church
- Paul's Letters – Paul's letters are arranged in the New Testament along the lines listed above (Letters to Churches and to People). In addition to that arrangement, there is another way that Paul's letters are organized which makes studying them a little easier: Early Epistles, Major Epistles, Prison Epistles, Pastoral Epistles.

- o Early Epistles: Galatians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians – These are the earliest letters Paul wrote, probably dating from 40's AD. These are also some of the earliest writing in the entire New Testament.
- o Major Epistles: Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians – These are the longest of the writings of Paul. Though they are in the form of letters, they read more like sermons or theological treatises.
- o Prison Epistles: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon – These were written by Paul while imprisoned. More about this later.
- o Pastor Epistles: 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus – These are letters written by Paul to young pastors on how to organize and lead the churches they were responsible for.
- Philippians is a Prison Epistle.

Who Wrote It: Paul and Timothy (v. 1)

Who It's Written to: The Church at Philippi (vv.1-2)

Philippi is a city in the northern part of Greece. It was named after the father of Alexander the Great, Philip of Macedon. It was situated on an important road named the Via Egnatia which ran from the west coast of Greece all the way to the Black Sea. The road was a continuation of the Via Appia which ran from the City of Rome all the way to Brindisi, which is in the heel of the boot of Italy.

Though in Greece, Philippi was a Roman Colony. A major battle had been fought there during the Roman Civil Wars in the 40's BC. After the war, Octavian, later known by the name Caesar Augustus, settled veterans from his army in this city.

Knowing that the city was full of retired soldiers is an important part of the background of this book. After serving your time in the Roman Army, a Roman soldier was given some money and a parcel of land in a strategic city on the fringe of the empire. This was done for a variety of reasons. First, no one wanted professional soldiers just hanging around Rome with nothing to do. Second, in the days before planes, trains, and automobiles, moving soldiers took time. These retired soldiers could serve as a local militia in times of crisis. Third, as people with land and wealth, these retired soldiers would naturally become people of some prominence in these cities. The hope was that they would represent the ideals of Rome and start shaping the people in the area to look, act, and live like Romans.

Paul's visit to Philippi is mentioned in Acts 16:11-40. They met a women named Lydia, healed a demon-possessed woman, were arrested, and spent some time in a Philippian jail.

Why it Was Written: The Occasion (v.7)

There were a couple of incidents that led to Paul writing this letter.

- Paul's imprisonment (1:7) – Paul wrote this letter from prison. Though a subject of debate, the most likely reason for his imprisonment was in Rome. Romans didn't use prison as a punishment by itself. It was a place to hold someone either while awaiting trial or while awaiting the execution of the sentence. If awaiting trial, a prisoner might have a great deal of freedom, like Paul himself is mentioned having at the end of Acts, while he awaited trial before Caesar. It is unknown if Paul wrote this letter during the imprisonment mentioned in Acts 28.
- Philippians Provision (1:3-5, 4:18) – One interesting characteristic of ancient prisons: friends and family had to provide food and clothing for the prisoner. While in prison, the Philippians had sent Paul a monetary gift to aid with his provision. Paul is writing to let them know he has received everything in full and to thank them for their gift.
- Epaphroditus's illness (2:19-30) – The Philippian gift had been delivered by a man named Epaphroditus, who stayed to minister to Paul. While with Paul, he became very sick and almost died. Paul says that he wrote this letter so that he could send Epaphroditus back to them as a messenger so that they wouldn't worry about him.

What is the Main Point: Grace and Peace (v.2)

Sometimes we skip over the openings of Paul's letters thinking they contain empty formalities that Paul is saying as a way of introduction. Though these passages do fulfill those roles, they also give us a window into Paul's purpose for writing. Paul says in verse 2: "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." This might just sound like nice sounding church words, but the truth is that these words would be controversial to a church full of Roman citizens like the one at Philippi. By looking at this passage we can see how Paul shows us the attributes of real peace.

Real Peace Comes From Jesus (v.2)

The Roman Empire claimed to bring peace. Philippi as a Roman Colony was there to represent Rome and reinforce the Roman Peace. The Roman Empire was ruled by an emperor whose main title was Caesar. Another title, though, that was used through the empire was Lord. So when the early Christians said "Jesus Christ is Lord," it was more than a nice sounding religious phrase to say at church. They were saying something that was treasonous. It was almost as if they were saying "King Jesus is Caesar." Sounds different, doesn't it.

So when Paul says "Peace" and "Lord Jesus Christ," he is reminding the Philippians of their real loyalties and revealing the theme of the entire book. This book covers a wide variety of topics, but ultimately under it all, it boils down to peace. Paul is demonstrating that source of real peace.

Real Peace Brings Grace (v.2) Roman Peace was imposed by war and enforced by the army. It was peace through conquest. The Peace of Jesus comes in a different way. Not through beating rivals into submission, but by bestowing grace. Grace is one of those words that we say frequently at church but rarely define. It means "receiving a good thing that you don't deserve." We are all rebels who have revolted against the true and rightful Lord of all creation. Caesar may establish peace by destroying those who rebel against his authority. But Jesus isn't looking to crush us. He is eager to forgive us and restore us to our positions as sons and daughters. Real peace brings the unmerited favor of God through Jesus.

Real Peace Produces Trust (v.6)

The only way to maintain the peace brought by Rome was through fear. Romans used inhuman acts like crucifixion in order to scare the provinces they ruled into staying obedient. Peace through fear isn't real peace, it's just intimidation, trying to convince people by force to stay quiet and stay out of the way and do what they are told.

As opposed to the fear brought by Rome, the real peace brought by Jesus produces confidence. Look at what Paul says in verse 6: He has confidence in Jesus. Another word for confidence is trust. Paul trusts Jesus. What does he trust Jesus to do? To finish the work He started.

The retired soldiers sent to Philippi were there to finish the work started by the armies. They were supposed to ferret out the last vestiges of rebellion, to complete the conquest, to crush all opposition.

Paul tells the Philippians that real peace produces confidence in what God is doing in their lives. God started a good work in their lives. God will bring it to completion. Real peace comes when you realize you can trust God with what He is doing in and with your life.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How might a group of retired Roman soldiers have a different understanding of what peace is and where it comes from? How do we sometimes have a different view of peace?
2. Paul is trying to underscore the need to serve Lord Jesus instead of Lord Caesar. What rival lord do we sometimes allow to distract us from service to Jesus? What kind of peace do those rival lords offer?
3. What is grace? What does it mean that real peace comes from grace?
4. How do people sometimes use fear to achieve peace? How does real peace found in Jesus produce confidence?
5. What does it mean that God will complete the work that He started in our lives?

Philippians 1:12-26 – Change Your Perspective

“How’re you doing?” “What’s up?” We ask and are asked these questions so much that it has come to mean nothing more than “Hello.” Sometimes, though, we meet someone who wants to use this as an opportunity to “download” on us. They respond “do you really want to know?” Not wishing to appear rude, we answer, “Of course.” What happens next is we end up getting the whole truckload dumped on us of things that are going wrong in their life.

The point of this example is not to encourage us to be insincere with others, or to hide our true feelings. Rather, it is to underscore the idea that often we confuse “being authentic” and “being negative.” We live in a society that either encourages us to “be real” with others “warts and all” or tells us to put a good face on it and hide how we are doing.

The two choices seem to be between being Eeyore the famous complainer from the Winnie the Pooh books, and Batman, hiding our pain beneath a mask of supposed strength. In Philippians, Paul offers us a third choice. He opens his letter with an update on how things are going for him. This section is both honest about the obstacles he is facing and genuine in his rejoicing. The reason he is able to do this is because he has changed his perspective and encourages us to do the same. By looking at his description of his circumstances and the encouragement he gives to his audience, we can gain valuable insight ourselves into how to rejoice in the midst of hardship by seeing things from a heavenly perspective.

~~Paul’s Commission: “the greater progress of the gospel” (v.12)~~

If anyone had a reason to complain about his situation, it was Paul: imprisoned, on trial for his life, being lied about, abandoned by those who are supposed to be helping take care of him. Think if it was you. How would you be likely to respond? I don’t know about you, but I would grumble and complain. I would feel sorry for myself. I would earnestly desire to get out of the predicament that I was in. But not Paul. In verse 12, he says that his “circumstances had turned out for the greater progress of the Gospel.”

Paul is writing to a community full of former soldiers who would no doubt understand what it means to be a part of something larger than themselves. They knew what it meant to give and receive orders. They had probably endured many hardships and sacrificed a great deal in order to accomplish the missions they were assigned.

The key to enduring any situation is making sure you know, believe in and are committed to your mission. Paul says his mission is the gospel. His primary purpose is to make the gospel known and to invite people into the kingdom of Jesus Christ. It is a mission he is not ashamed of. In Romans 1:16, he says, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.”

When we focus on our own selves and think the purpose of life is to be comfortable and to enjoy things, we will complain when we find ourselves in hard circumstances. When we see ourselves as soldiers in God’s army, and when we see our mission as being a part of the advance of the gospel, then we will be better able to endure the hardships we face.

~~Paul’s Confidence (vv.13-18)~~

Because Paul knows his mission and has his focus on God and on the goal of spreading the gospel, he is not just able to endure hard times; he is able to see how God is using them to do good. He has confidence that God is at work in every circumstance for His glory and our good.

~~o God Works in Difficult Places: “my imprisonment in Christ is well known” (vv.13-14)~~

Paul’s imprisonment, though seemingly a negative thing, has become a positive thing which God is using in a powerful way. Paul says that the whole Praetorian Guard has heard about the gospel

because of it. The Praetorian Guard was an elite unit of the Roman Army tasked specifically with protecting the emperor and guarding the city of Rome. We don't know how it spread. Perhaps Paul engaged his jailers in conversation. Perhaps they overheard his talking with visitors. Perhaps they read his letter. However it happened, Paul saw God triumph not over but through circumstances. A lot of times we view our bad circumstances as opportunities for God to deliver us. But often God has put us in these circumstances to accomplish a specific goal. Our prayer in the bad times of life shouldn't be only about getting out (which is okay, for we are told to let our request be made known to God) but also about doing God's will while in that circumstance. Paul could have moped around until God delivered him, but rather he started sharing the gospel.

o ~~God Works Through Difficult People: "in every way Christ is proclaimed" (vv.15-18)~~

Paul says that some people are attacking him because of his imprisonment. They viewed his imprisonment as God's judgment on him. Paul isn't distressed that he is unable to defend himself while in prison. What matters more is that people hear and receive the good news of Christ. Paul has confidence that people's jealousy and competition and attempts to make life hard on him won't derail God's plan.

He also realizes that he would be erring to make his gospel centered on him. We live in a world where people hunger for the spotlight and are tempted to make even their witness for Jesus a source of competition. Many Christians today focus on becoming celebrities, not saints. Jesus told us where that path leads. In Matthew 7:21-23, He says, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'" Jesus said that there will be a lot of people trying to show Him their spiritual resume documenting all they accomplished. But it won't work. Paul realizes the focus shouldn't be on him but on his mission, so he is able to see how God uses even difficult people to accomplish His plan.

~~Paul's Conviction (vv.19-26)~~

Paul has been talking about how God can use any circumstance for His glory to accomplish His purposes. The natural question on the minds of the Philippians would be "What is going to happen to You?" Sometimes we wonder the same thing. When we talk about God's plan sometimes we have a false dichotomy in our head between God's glory and our good. We sometimes think that the two are incompatible. We sometimes falsely assume that God is like a general who wins glory by sending privates to die on the beach, Maybe God uses us up to accomplish His plan. Paul dismisses these mistaken assumptions with what he says next. Paul is convinced God won't waste or ruin his life.

o ~~Paul Trusts God With His Life (vv.19-20)~~ – Paul doesn't say that he knows what will happen or that he knows God will do what Paul wants him to. He says he knows that God will deliver him and that God won't put him to shame. This is an important starting point. Not looking to God to do what we are expecting, but trusting that whatever God does will be for our good as well. Paul is essentially writing a blank check to God with his life saying "I know that how you spend my life will be good." There is nothing wrong with wanting a situation to turn out a specific way. There is nothing wrong with asking God to work things out that way. The proof of that: Jesus in Gethsemane. In Matthew 26:29, Jesus prayed to God asking, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me." But what Jesus prays next is equally important, He concluded His prayer with: "yet not as I will, but as You will." Pouring out our hearts to God is something we are asked to do. Later in this book, in Philippians 4:4 Paul tells the Philippians to "let your requests be made known to God." But we will never be able to do so with thanksgiving unless we have confidence that we can trust God with our lives no matter what.

o ~~Paul Trusts God to Do What's Best (vv.21-26)~~ – Paul trusts God to deliver him but doesn't know what exactly that deliverance will look like. Both release from prison and death would count as God

delivering Him. As Paul says in verse 21, “For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.” Similar words of trust in God no matter what occur in Daniel, where Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego risk the fiery furnace because they refuse to worship the king. They respond to King Nebuchadnezzar with a similar confidence that God will deliver them, though they don’t exactly know how. In Daniel 3:17-18, they say, “If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But even if He does not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.” They know that God will deliver them either from the fiery furnace or from the king, and, regardless, they are confident like Paul that they can trust God with their lives. Paul doesn’t know which way is best. Verse 23 says, “I am hard-pressed from both directions.” He trusts that God’s plan is not just for God’s glory but for the good of Paul and also the Philippians (verse 24: “to remain on is more necessary for your sake”).

Paul’s Conclusion (vv.27-30)

Paul has been talking about how he has changed his focus away from his trials and away from himself and adopted an eternal perspective allowing him to see God doing great things even in the midst of hard times and difficult people. He trusts God to do the right thing even when Paul himself doesn’t know what that is. He concludes this section by giving the Philippians an exhortation about how to apply what He has just said and learn from it.

- **Consistency: Don’t Let Trials Derail You (v.27a)** – The first command Paul gives is to keep living out the gospel. In trials, we can become worried about persecution or become exhausted by trying to stay faithful. Paul encourages them not to let trials derail them. That is exactly the point of a trial: to convince you that following God isn’t working and is no longer worth it.
- **Cooperation: Don’t Let Trials Divide You (v.27b)** – Another effect of trials is division. When we are tired or discouraged or face opposition, we begin to get frustrated with the ones we are supposed to be working alongside. Trials can divide. The people you live closest to and work alongside are the ones who see you at your best and worst. There is always ample fuel to keep fires of resentment burning, if we let it. Paul encourages the Philippians to dedicate themselves to maintaining an attitude of cooperation, to remain devoted and committed to each other and to our task. It takes a conscious choice, because when times get tough none of us is easy to live with.
- **Confidence: Don’t Let Trials Defeat You (v.28)** – Many of us want everyone to just get along. If you are one of those kinds of people, it is easy to interpret attacks and trials in defeatist ways. Even if you aren’t that kind of person, you might believe a lie our society tells that the stuff you are good at is supposed to be easy for you. The problem is that the Bible assures us that not everything is going to be easy for us. In John 16:33, Jesus told His disciples: “In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.” Paul says the same thing here. Expect trouble. More than that, be glad when you have trouble because it is proof that you are dangerous to the enemy. Paul goes so far as to say that the Philippians have been granted, “not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake.” The attack proves you are dangerous. The conflict we experience on account of the gospel underscores whose side we are on.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. If you were imprisoned and being attacked by opponents, how would you describe this to others? What enables Paul to rejoice in the midst of these hardships?
2. Have you seen God work in hard times/difficult people? How can we learn to trust Him in future hard times/difficult people?
3. How would you describe the confidence Paul has in God? How can we learn to have the same confidence?
4. How do trials divide people? How can we develop an attitude of cooperation instead of division?
5. How do we let trials defeat us? How can we learn to see attacks as a sign not of defeat but of victory?

Philippians 2:1-11 – Empty Yourself

Paul has spent the first chapter of Philippians talking about the hope and trust he has in God even in the face of imprisonment, abandonment, opposition, and possible death. He is not being naïve, or stupidly optimistic. He isn't trying to grin and bear it or keep his chin up. He is honest and frank about his hardships but equally confident, not that his situation will turn out the way he wants, but that whatever happens, God knows what He is doing and can be trusted with Paul's life.

As chapter 2 starts, he begins his exhortation to the Philippians. He hinted at his message in the last words of the previous chapter when he encourages them in verses 27-29 of chapter 1 not to let persecution and hardship divide them or distract them from the goal of following Jesus and finding life in His name.

He appeals to these Roman citizens/soldiers turned colonists to give up all their ambition and competition, to stop thinking of their responsibilities as Romans, and start seeing themselves as ambassadors of Christ. The rest of the book is full of exhortation to consider everything else loss compared to knowing Christ (3:7), to think primarily about being citizens of heaven (3:20).

Before he does any of this, he starts with a powerful description of what Christ did and encourages the Philippians to follow in His footsteps. Paul is telling the Philippians that Christianity is more than spiritual fire insurance designed to prevent you from going to "the bad place" when you die. It is supposed to change your life, to give you a new identity, a new set of priorities, a new goal.

Do You Really Believe This Stuff? (v.1)

Paul begins with what sounds like a bit of flowery Bible talk that we often skip as we look for the more practical or meaty sections that contain practical application. The truth is that he is encouraging the Philippians to ask themselves whether they really believe the truths of Christianity. By believe, he means not just mental agreement to a list of truths, but the willingness to modify how we live because these truths have changed the way we see the world.

Paul uses four phrases that are more than just rhetorical questions. They are probing questions about where we draw encouragement, where we find consolation, where we seek fellowship, and how we feel towards other people. If we don't seek these things from the one true source, where do we find them? And what does it reveal about what we really believe?

- **Encouragement in Christ**— We all need encouragement. Paul asks the Philippians where they draw theirs. Is it from their wealth and status as Roman Citizens or in the fact they are followers of Jesus? He isn't asking for a Sunday school answer. He is saying on a daily basis when they feel discouraged, where do they run for support; what do they tell themselves to pick themselves up and keep going. Do they remind themselves who they are in the world or who they are in Christ. We all need to ask ourselves this. Where do we draw our encouragement? In what do you place your confidence? From what do you draw hope?
- **Consolation of Love** – More often than we care to admit, answering the first question leaves us realizing that we often run elsewhere for encouragement. We seek false fulfillment in a variety of places. The enemy's purpose in sin is to separate us from God. Once we realize that the fulfillment offered by sin is empty and false, the next lie sin tells us is that we ran from God, so now we can't go back. Consolation is comfort and reassurance we receive after loss or failure. Paul mentions here the consolation of love. The comfort and reassurance that God loves us and is faithful to us, even when we stumble and fall. The Old Testament word for that is "lovingkindness;" it refers to God's covenant devotion to us. It means that God loves us even when we act like we don't love Him. This isn't an excuse to sin. It is a consolation that we can return to Him when we realize the death sin brings. It reminds us that though God hates sin, He isn't startled by it, or afraid of it. When sin's

promises have proved empty, He wants us to run to Him to be made clean and whole. Running from God because you sin is like running from a doctor because you are sick.

- ~~Fellowship of the Spirit~~ – Christianity is more than a set of ethical principles, historical facts, and religious ideas that we keep telling ourselves. It does have ethical principles. It is rooted in historical fact. It does teach religious ideas. But all of them declare that the God who made the universe and was revealed in Jesus, also calls us into relationship with Him by the power of the Holy Spirit. God is real, personal, and present. We are invited to learn to live in fellowship with the Spirit. In Ephesians 5:29 Paul writes, “be filled with the Spirit.” The phrase “be filled” is a nautical term and refers to a sail continually being filled and guided by the wind. Paul asks his readers to consider what they are using to guide and steer their lives. We are invited to learn to let the spirit guide our lives. Doing so is the only answer to the sinful dead-ends we continually pursue. In Galatians 5:16, Paul writes, “Walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desires of the flesh.”
- ~~Affection and Compassion~~ – The first three exhortations are about how we relate to God. This last phrase is about how we see other people. He asks them if the compassion God has for them has spilled over into how they see others. Compassion literally means “to suffer alongside someone.” It means to see things from their point of view and to love them the way God loves us. It is significant that Paul ends here instead of beginning. There is only one source of love in the universe. We will never truly be able to love others until we have experienced the love of God. When we realize the hope we have in Christ, the consolation we have in his devotion to us, and the fellowship we are invited into despite our repeated rebellions, we will be overcome with compassion for others as well.

Decide to Live it Out (vv.2-4)

Everything Paul said in verse 1 was simply introduction. What motivates you? What drives you to do things? What are you seeking with your life? If it really is the things of Christ, here is what living it out looks like.

Sometimes in the midst of fear or difficulty, we retreat back into things we think will provide for and protect us better than God. We think we have to look after ourselves because God isn't doing it. So, we are tempted to return to our old habits of selfishness and sin.

Paul encourages us to stop listening to those voices and start listening to the voice of truth again. We demonstrate which voices we are listening to by our actions. Paul tells the Philippians to make his joy complete by choosing to listen to the promises of God rather than the empty threats of fear or the empty promises of sin. We demonstrate our choice by our actions. Paul lists three actions that characterize a life trusting God.

- ~~Real Unity (v.2)~~ – Paul encourages the Philippians to seek true unity. The first proof of trusting God is the ability to lay down your agenda and trust that God is at work. He doesn't want superficial, pretend unity. The unity he describes is all encompassing and penetrates to the core of our being. Look at the four phrases used to describe the unity: be of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in Spirit, intent on one purpose. You can't fake that. You can't go along with the flow and call that unity. We are called to think the same, love the same, be in the same community, and have the same goal. We will only ever be able to do that if we trust God to be at work in our midst. Notice it doesn't say do this if other people do it too. Sometimes we excuse our divisiveness by pointing to other people who are not pursuing unity. We can't wait until everyone is on the same page before we seek unity. We seek unity in order to get everyone on the same page. This is only possible if we truly believe God is at work in our midst. Paul models this behavior later in Philippians when talking about people who might disagree with him. In Philippians 3:15, Paul writes, “If anyone has a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you.”
- ~~Real Humility (v.3)~~ – Paul moves next to discuss the motivation for our actions. Perhaps he does this because it is difficult to pursue real unity when we see ourselves and others incorrectly. We are told to avoid to habits of thought: selfishness and empty conceit. How can you spot when

you are acting this way? The easiest way is by comparing it to what Paul says next. True humility means considering other people as more important than ourselves. When we treat ourselves as more important than other people, we are being selfish. Think on a daily basis how often we all act selfishly in a thousand small ways because we believe we are more important than others. How differently we would treat people if we really saw others the way God does, not as things to be used, but as souls bearing the image of their Creator.

- **Real Service (v.4)** – Real unity is only possible if you see other people as more important than yourself. Real humility will have the natural consequence of serving other people. If you really believed other people are more important than yourself, you will not be so consumed with getting what you want. Sometimes we are focused completely on our own interests because we think we are the center of the universe. Sometimes we do it because we think everything is up to us and if we don't look out for ourselves, then no one will. Confidence in God enables us to stop being consumed only by what we think we need. It frees us to be conduits of blessing to others as well. Real service in the end turns out to be the same as real unity. You obtain real unity not by insisting everyone do it your way, but by looking after other people's interests and trusting that God and other people are looking after yours.

Do What Jesus Did (vv.5-11)

Paul concludes his exhortation with: "have this attitude in yourself which was also in Christ Jesus." If we are followers of Christ, we should seek to act like Him. We need to realize that Jesus calls us to nothing that He hasn't done already. He didn't just tell us the way, he demonstrated the way.

Verses 6-11 are referred to as the "Kenotic Hymn." Its structure and content are different from the way Paul wrote the rest of the letter. It seems to be an early Christian hymn. No one knows if Paul wrote it himself, or if he is using it because he expects the Philippians to be familiar with it. The name Kenotic Hymn comes from the phrase in verse 7 "He emptied Himself." The Greek word that means "to empty" is "kenosis." In this hymn, Paul celebrates how Jesus emptied himself on our behalf in order to show us how we should serve other people.

- **He Laid Down His Rights (v.6)** – The Hymn starts off with a description of who Jesus is and how He saw Himself. "Although He existed in the form of God" means that Jesus was God. He had every right to demand that others, especially those created by Him, do what He said. "He did not consider equality with God a thing to be grasped" means He didn't think that what He was "entitled to" was the most important thing. "A thing to be grasped" means "a thing to be shaken in someone's face in order to get what you want or demand what you think you are owed." Jesus didn't think His divinity should be used to exclude Him from service or gain Him special privilege. If Jesus didn't think his divinity was something to be exploited to His advantage, what things do we need to stop trying to insist on or to exploit in order to get our way.
- **He Emptied Himself (v.7)** – The incarnation required that Jesus humble himself. The gap between God and man is so much that this humbling is described as an "emptying." It can be hard for us when we are convinced of our own self-importance to stop focusing on ourselves and think of other people as more important. We should remember that Jesus did it first and it was harder for Him. We are often deceived about our own self-importance. Jesus knew exactly who He was. He is the one by whom, for whom, and through whom all things were created. He wasn't wrong. To go from that to being a man required Him to empty Himself. All we need is a healthy dose of realism and perspective.
- **He Obeyed (v.8)** – Jesus didn't just bridge the gap between God and Man; He became the lowest of men. Jesus had the right to be served. Instead, He came to serve. He obeyed God. He died on behalf of us. Each aspect of this verse shows the depth of his willingness to obey. He didn't just become a man; he became a servant. He didn't just obey; He died. He didn't just die; He died on a cross. There was nothing He wasn't willing to do in order to demonstrate His complete surrender to the plan of God.
- **God Exalted Him (vv.9-11)** – The result of Jesus emptying himself is that God exalted Him. Jesus

didn't exalt Himself. He was obedient. God exalted Him. That is what we are called to do as well. Not that we are supposed to be trying to become God. But rather, we are supposed to see Jesus as a model. What God did for Jesus in the big picture, He promises to do for us in our lives, if we will trust and obey. James 4:10 says, "Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you." 1 Peter 5:6-7 says, "Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you." It is not our job to exalt ourselves or hold on to what we think we are owed. We are called to humble ourselves like Christ did, emptying ourselves, obeying in all things, trusting that God won't waste our lives, trusting that God will exalt us at the proper time, trusting that He does indeed care for us.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What do "encouragement in Christ," "consolation of love," and "fellowship of the Spirit" mean? How do we experience them? Where else do we sometimes go for encouragement, consolation, and fellowship?
2. Why do we think of ourselves as more important than others? How can we learn to reverse this?
3. What is humility? How do we get it? How do we demonstrate it?
4. What things do we sometimes "grasp" and try to use to get us special treatment? Why do we do it? How can we learn to let them go?
5. What does it mean to obey God and trust that He will exalt us at the proper time? What is required of us to do that?

Philippians 2:19-30 – Work Out Your Salvation

Ephesians 2:8-9 is a passage that is central to the Christian understanding. It says, “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.” Our salvation is a gift that we receive from God, not something we earn.

This belief is so central to Christianity that many people get uncomfortable when they read the word “work” in the same sentence as “faith” or “salvation.” We read passages like James 2:27, which says, “For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead,” and are worried that we have found an instance where the Bible contradicts itself.

The truth is, though, that these supposed contradictions are not describing faith itself but rather the fruit of faith. The verses above from James don’t mean, “You have to work to earn your salvation.” It means something more along the lines of, “If God has saved you, it will produce a change in your life.” A body that is alive breathes and moves. A faith that is alive produces works. The works are a result not a cause of faith. They are the fruit of faith, which Jesus himself told us to look for. In Matthew 7:16-17, Jesus says, “You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they? So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit.”

The passage today causes similar consternation. Paul tells the Philippians, “Work out your salvation with fear and trembling.” At first glance, this verse seems to suggest that we do everything. It could easily be mistaken to mean, “Figure out how to save yourself.” Fortunately, that is not the intended meaning. When we look closely at this verse and the ones that follow, we will see Paul calling us to live out our faith in a world that needs to see it.

What “Work Out Your Salvation” Means

“Work out your salvation” doesn’t mean “work to save yourself” or “God helps those who help themselves.” It means something like: “work out for yourselves the details of what it means to live out your salvation in every aspect of your life.”

Evidently, in Philippi, there were people who were trying to tell new believers how they needed to act. Normally, these were Jewish Christians who would tell Gentile converts that since Jesus was the Jewish Messiah, in order to truly please God and to follow Jesus rightly, they needed to keep the Jewish law. These people were called Judaizers. In Philippians 3:2 Paul warns, “Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision.”

Paul was telling the Philippians that it was up to each individual Christian to figure out how to best honor God with their life, that the Christian life might be expressed or lived out in a variety of ways.

This is nothing new to the writings of Paul. Romans 14 is a whole chapter dedicated to the idea that we should each try to honor God with our lives and avoid judging other people’s choices. Colossians 2:16 says, “Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day.” 1 Corinthians 6:12 says, “All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything.”

But Paul didn’t invent this idea. In Mark 12:30-31, Jesus himself, when asked what the greatest commandments were, said, “you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”

“Work out your salvation” doesn’t mean: “here are 900 rules. If you can keep them, God will be impressed.”

“Work out your salvation” means: “Love God with every fiber of your being. Love your neighbor for the same reason you love yourself. Now spend the rest of your life wrestling with what that means and how to do it.”

How to Do It

After giving the command, Paul gives some guidance on how to do it. It may seem contradictory that Paul is telling us to figure it out ourselves, then proceeds to tell us how to do it. But these aren't detailed instructions or specific commands; they are general principles that reflect the general attitude of a person looking to follow Jesus and live out their salvation. The application of how to do it is left to us.

Seriously: “with fear and trembling” (v.12)

It may sound contradictory that a God who loves us, saves us, and wants to give us His peace now expects us to live shaking in fear and trembling with terror. This is not the case. As we have talked about before, fearing God doesn't mean to be afraid of him, but to respect and be in awe of Him. When Paul tells us to work out our salvation “with fear and trembling,” He means for us to have an attitude of respect and reverence. He wants us to take it seriously. He wants us to realize that working out our salvation is a central task and major challenge for every believer. He desires that we undertake it realizing its importance. One of the reasons legalism is so tempting a ditch to fall back into for some people is because it allows you to forcefully “encourage” others to take seriously something they seem to be behaving flippantly about.

Hopefully: “for it is God who is at work in you” (v.13)

Sometimes we take things seriously when we are nervous about the outcome. Paul tells us that we are to engage seriously in the task of living out our salvation but aren't supposed to be despondent. We can be hopeful, realizing that even when we fail or can't figure it out or make a misstep, we can be comforted that God is at work in us. Paul has already said earlier in Philippians 1:6, “For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus. Realize God is at work.” As we try the best we can to live out our salvation, we can trust that God isn't leaving us alone to do it ourselves. He is with us. He is at work in us. He will bring His plans to fruition.

Cheerfully: “Do all things without grumbling or disputing” (v.14) In any meaningful work, there is an element of difficulty or tedium that must be overcome. There will also be moments when you become confused, afraid, and tempted to worry that things won't work out the way you had planned. Paul encourages us to do our work without grumbling. The word is similar to how the people of Israel were complaining in the wilderness while leaving Egypt on their way to the Promised Land. They were experiencing hardships so difficult that they were longing to go back and be slaves.

The secret to doing work without complaining is to remember the God who assigned you these tasks. Colossians 3:23-24 says, “Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve.” The point of this verse is not that we have to pretend to like something because Jesus is watching. But rather, that we can rejoice that Jesus has put us right where we can be most effective for his kingdom. The task we're assigned might be boring, difficult, frustrating, or whatever, but we can trust that, as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12:18, “God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired.” The opposite of grumbling isn't false cheer or a saccharine smile. It is trust and perseverance. God planted us in the soil where He knew we would grow most fruitfully. We grumble when we doubt Him and wish we were somewhere else, doing something else, with someone else.

Discerningly: “in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation” (v.15)

The phrase “be in the world but not of the world” is not in the Bible. But the idea is found in several places in the New Testament. In Matthew 10:16, Jesus says, “Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves.” Jesus never intended us to live apart from the world. Rather, we are supposed to live in the world but not be affected by it. Often, Christians grow comfortable in the culture and end up looking no different. We forget that we are called to live differently, to stand out. Throughout the Bible, the part of the world that is focused on seeking itself and not God is frequently

described as “crooked and perverse.” Working out our salvation means being discerning about culture and learning what we can embrace but also what we need to distance ourselves from. In the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5:14-16, Jesus says, “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.” Paul repeats this idea when he says that Christians “appear as lights in the world.” We need to learn to shine in a way that stands out from the darkness of the world and draws people to the source.

~~Persistently: “holding fast the word of life” (v.16)~~ The circumstances and situations of life are constantly changing. We often have to make difficult decisions that we weren’t prepared for. Many times we will be exhausted by the road we are traveling or the burden we are shouldering. In those moments, we will be tempted to give up, or to start looking for an easier path. Paul encourages us “to hold fast the word of life.” Endurance is what we need. Perseverance is what we need. Hebrews 12:2 says that we are to, “Run with endurance the race set before us.” Ephesians 2:10 says, “We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.” God has placed the race in front of us which He intended for us to run. It’s a long race, which requires endurance. Instead of a race metaphor, here in Philippians, Paul uses a wrestling image. He tells us to “hold fast.” The world is sinking, and the gospel is the life preserver. He tells us to cling to it with everything we have and not let go, no matter what.

~~Joyfully: “Rejoice...share your joy with me” (vv.17-18)~~

Above all, Paul calls us to be joyful. Joy is a persistent theme through the book. He says it frequently. This isn’t a pretend, superficial, or forced happiness, but a deep, confident expectation that God is at work even in the hard times. The same idea is repeated in James 1:2-4 which says, “Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.” That is why Paul in Philippians is able to be joyful even as he writes from prison and possibly faces his own death. He knows that God is good and is working all things for good.

This kind of rejoicing is hard, especially on our own. That is why Paul wants to share his joy with the Philippians and wants them to share their joy with him. We need community so that we can lean on each other when we are having a hard time on our own. Sharing our joy is a way to help others be joyful as well. It doesn’t mean bragging about all the good stuff in our lives. It means showing others the reasons we have for rejoicing even in the midst of hardship. We need help seeing the good sometimes. One way we learn to see the good in our own lives is by seeing how it manifests itself in others.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How do people often misunderstand this meaning of “work out your salvation?” What does it actually mean?
2. How can we learn to accept others when they work out their salvation in a way that looks different than us? How can we still hold each other accountable without falling back into legalism?
3. What does “with fear and trembling” mean? How do Christians sometimes fail to stand out as “lights in the world?”
4. Paul gives 6 guidelines as to how we are supposed to live out our salvation: seriously, hopefully, cheerfully, discerningly, persistently, and joyfully. What do they mean? Which is the hardest for you?
5. What does it mean to share our joy? Why do we need to do it? How do we do it?

Philippians 3:1-16 –Rejoice in the Lord

Texans love Texas-shaped things. While traveling through Colorado, I was asked by a child what shape the state was. I asked why she wanted to know. The reason: she didn't see the shape of the state anywhere. It bothered her. Why didn't they put the shape of their state on stuff? I told her that she was from Texas and that Texans are very proud of the shape of our state. We put it on everything from signs, to t-shirts, to waffles. The child responded, "What shape are waffles in Colorado?" After we talked about the normal shapes that most breakfast foods came in around the country, our conversation moved on to the topic of the things we celebrate. I asked her to look at things she saw in Colorado and to try to figure out the things they were proud of. She quickly had an answer: mountains.

We all have things we are proud of that cause us to raise our heads up high and stick our chests out, that we take tremendous joy or pleasure in. The fancy word for this is "rejoicing." We rejoice in our family, in our freedom, in our favorite foods, etc.

Philippians 3 starts off with the encouragement to "Rejoice in the Lord." Many times, we read phrases like this and think we know what it means. But if we asked ourselves, do we really know what rejoicing in the Lord means or how to do it? Does it mean to be momentarily or routinely happy about what God is doing? Is it about feeling gratitude towards God for all he is doing? Does rejoicing in the Lord conflict with other types of rejoicing?

When Paul talks about rejoicing in the Lord, he isn't talking about a momentary or cursory experience. He is describing a reorienting of our lives away from what we think will bring us joy towards the only thing that will. Another way to say "rejoice in the Lord" is "find true fulfillment in the Lord." As we find true fulfillment in Jesus, we will rejoice in what He is doing in the world and in our lives. In the next several verses Paul shows us how he pursues true fulfillment in Jesus Christ. We can learn to rejoice in the Lord too, if we will follow this path.

Rejoicing in the Lord Requires Forgetting Yourself (vv.1-7)

There seems to have been a conflict going on in Philippi. After Paul had preached the gospel to them, some people had come later and told them there was more they needed to do to be followers of Jesus. These people were called Judaizers. They were called this because they went to newly converted Gentile Christians and told them that since Jesus was the Jewish Messiah, they themselves needed to become Jews and keep the law themselves. Paul is emphatic in his rejection of this idea. In verse 2, he calls these people "dogs," "evil workers," and "the false circumcision." He highlights circumcision because this was the usual initiation rite into Judaism.

In verse 3, Paul lists three attributes of the real followers of God.

- ~~Worship in the Spirit of God~~ – We, the people of God, do not worship God merely by going through the motions of external ritual or ceremony. We worship like Christ commanded "in spirit and in truth." We follow a person, not rules.
- ~~Glory in Christ Jesus~~ – The true people of God are those who boast not in what they have done but rather in what Christ has done and is doing in and through them.
- ~~Put No Confidence in the Flesh~~ – They put their hope in nothing but in Christ. They don't trust their own intelligence, wealth, health, friends, or anything like that to enable them to fully accomplish the purpose for which they were created.

This last point is key for everything that comes after. In order to fully rejoice in the Lord, we have to reject all of those other things that we seek for true fulfillment. The first thing we have to reject is ourselves. In Mark 8:35, Jesus says, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me."

Denying ourselves is the first step towards receiving who God created us to be. It means rejecting those ways in which we have pursued false fulfillment outside His will.

Denying ourselves also means realizing that the things that I think to be my biggest accomplishments and greatest attributes might be getting in the way of me becoming who Jesus wants me to be. That is where Paul turns next. In verses 4-6, He shows how he had every reason to hope in his own flesh, but that, ultimately, he realized it was nothing compared to knowing Jesus. He was a Jew of Jews. If being a Jew could save you, fulfill you, make you rejoice, then Paul would have known it. But what he realized was that all those things which other people think are good things turn out to be things that hinder him as he seeks God.

The first step in learning to rejoice in God is to reject those other things that we are trying to center our lives on and find meaning in. One of the best descriptions of this can be found in the first stanza of Isaac Watts' old hymn, ***"When I survey the Wondrous Cross." When I survey the wondrous cross / On which the Prince of glory died / My richest gain I count but loss / And pour contempt on all my pride.***

Rejoicing in the Lord Requires: Focusing Completely on Christ (vv.8-11)

~~Forsaking Everything (v.8):~~ Paul says that he considers everything as worthless compared to Christ. This doesn't mean he doesn't value other things, but rather that nothing compares to knowing Christ, nothing else is able to provide true fulfillment. There is much in the world to enjoy. God does indeed know how to give good gifts to His children. But when we try to live for them and look to them to fill us up, we end up finding heartache and despair. This is why Jesus says in Matthew 13:44, "The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid again; and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field." Paul says he has experienced the loss of all things in order to know Christ. But he doesn't mind. He is that man in Jesus's parable who is so joyful at possessing the field with the treasure in it, that he does not miss what it cost him to gain it.

~~Found in Christ (vv. 9-11):~~ Paul says He has lost everything in order to gain Christ. Paul goes on to explain what "gaining Christ" means. What follows is a complete picture of the Christian view of salvation. The Bible talks about salvation as having three dimensions: justification, sanctification, and glorification. Justification is the removal of the penalty of sin. Sanctification is the removal of the power of sin. Glorification is the removal of the presence of sin. Often we talk about salvation as if it only is about justification. No one wants to experience the penalty of their sin. But God wants to do more than paying the penalty of your sin. He wants to remove it from your life so that you can experience true fulfillment.

- ~~Justification – Righteousness Through Faith (v.9):~~ Some people mistakenly believe that righteousness is not important for the Christian. We just have to receive the gift of Jesus. The truth is that righteousness is the gift that Jesus came to give. The issue isn't whether righteousness is important. The issue is how you get it. Here Paul says that it comes not by trying to keep the law but by being close to the one who is righteous. In Romans 1:16-17, Paul says, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith"
- ~~Sanctification – The Fellowship of His Suffering (v.10):~~ Christ's suffering paid for the sin of the world. Our suffering doesn't do that. God uses our suffering and trials not to make us pay for our sin, but to draw us closer to Jesus and to perfect us. We already read in Philippians 1:6 that we are being perfected. James 1:2 says that trials perfect us.
- ~~Glorification – Bodily Resurrection (v.11):~~ The goal of this whole process of salvation is not to ruin our lives or to make us pay for our mistakes, but ultimately to give us the only life that will bring us true fulfillment. The culmination of that life is in the resurrection of the dead. As Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15:56-57, "The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Rejoicing in the Lord Requires: Following with Endurance (vv.12-16)

- ~~Forget the Past~~: Paul doesn't mean forgetting the whole past. It means stop using the past as a reason for beating yourself up or building yourself up. So many times we think we deserve or don't deserve something because we are remembering the past. We are to learn from the past, but not live in it.
- ~~Focus on the Prize~~: Paul repeats the phrase "I press on" twice in this passage. It reminds us that salvation isn't a momentary acceptance of a religious truth, it is a life of continually following Jesus. It involved finding our place in God's kingdom. In verse 12, Paul says, "That I may lay hold of that for which I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus." Jesus didn't just save us from our sin. He saved us for His kingdom. He has a part for us to play in His body the church. We are to want that most of all. "Reaching forward to what lies ahead" means embracing whatever we encounter as that which God has intended for you. Notice it doesn't say grudgingly accepting what lies ahead.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What does it mean to "put confidence in the flesh?" What additional burdens are sometimes added to what it means to follow Jesus?
2. What does it mean to "count all things to be loss" compared to knowing Jesus?
3. What are the three dimensions of Salvation? How do we sometimes present a truncated view of salvation to people?
4. What does the phrase "that I may lay hold of that for which I also was laid hold of by Christ Jesus" mean? How do we do it?
5. What is the upward call of God in Christ Jesus? How do we press on?

Philippians 3:17-21 – Embracing Heavenly Citizenship

George Bernard Shaw once said, “England and America are two countries separated by a common language.” We speak the same language but either use the same words for different things, or different words for the same thing. Maybe you have experienced this. A biscuit is a cookie. A chip is a French fry. A crisp is a chip. The technical term for these examples is a “idioms,” the unique way a group of people use words to express themselves.

Sometimes the idioms of various peoples are humorous. Other times, they can cause problems because people are using the same word to mean different things. The more distant two people are separated, either in space or time, the more likely that problems of idiom may occur.

The Bible is full of easily misunderstood words. We misunderstand not because we don't know what the word means but because the word was used in a slightly different way. One example is the famous verse “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind.” Many people read that they are to love God with their heart and assume that heart means emotions, because the heart is a figurative way that we talk about emotions and feelings. But ancients didn't. They viewed the heart as the source of will and action. We still have remnants of this in our language with expressions like “Take heart” which doesn't mean “be emotional” but “have courage” In fact, our word “courage” comes from the Latin word “cor” which means “heart.”

The reason this is important is because there is a word in Philippians that is central to understanding the book, but which we understand in a slightly different way than they did. That word is “citizenship.” Paul reminds his readers in Philippians 3:20, “our citizenship is in heaven.”

When we think of what the word “citizenship” means, we often associate it with rights and protection. My citizenship is in America so therefore I am guaranteed certain privileges, afforded certain protections, and if I don't do so already, will one day perhaps go live there.

The Romans didn't see citizenship that way. Instead of rights, they focused on the responsibilities that came with citizenship, which caused them to change their expectations. Many of the Philippians were Roman Citizens, but that didn't mean they would one day return to Rome. Rome sent out their citizens to colonies to represent Rome wherever they were, extend Rome's influence over that area, and be examples of the ideals that Rome represented. Their job was to transform the corner of the world that they were sent to into a miniature version of Rome.

So when Paul refers to our citizenship in heaven, he is appealing to people who understood what that word meant from a Roman perspective. He is telling people who were very proud of their Roman citizenship to see their primary identity as something different.

In this context, citizenship in Heaven focuses on our responsibility to extend the influence not of Rome but of God where we live, to be a part of transforming our corner of the world into an outpost of heaven. Our citizenship in heaven doesn't primarily focus on where we will end up, it focuses on who we are representing and what we are building now. It emphasizes that part of the Lord's Prayer which says: “Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”

The goal of this passage is to help us understand what it means to think of ourselves primarily as citizens of heaven and how to grow in our citizenship.

~~The Model of Citizenship (v.17)~~

Paul starts his discussion of what it means to be a citizen of heaven by talking about mentors. So many

people today pursue freedom and independence. Unfortunately, what most people find is isolation which leads to slavery to sin. Christianity reminds us that our lives were never meant to be lived in isolation. Christianity is an imitating and mentoring faith. You learn by following, you learn to follow Christ, by following someone who is following Christ. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 11:1: "Imitate me even as I imitate Christ." In this passage, Paul goes on to say a couple important things about mentorships.

- We Need Community – "Join in following" (v.17): Paul doesn't call us as individuals to follow other individuals. He calls us to be a part of community of people who are all following Jesus.
- We Need Mentors – "Join in following my example" (v.17): We need mentors, people who are farther down the road than us that can help show us the way.
- We Need Multiplicity – "Observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us." (v.17): We need mentors, plural. Paul says follow me, but don't only follow me. He says that we should pick out a variety of good models who are all following Jesus. This is to ensure that we aren't led astray. We are less likely to wander astray if we are following several people all headed in the right direction. If one person goes off course, we will see the deviation and be able to stay on track.

The Marks of Citizenship (vv.18-19) Paul goes on to warn the Philippians of the dangers of not following well. He says that some people had started well but ended up headed in the wrong direction. Paul doesn't mince any words. He calls them "Enemies of the cross of Christ." He takes no joy in calling them that. He says he does so "weeping." He is not glad about the outcome. But he warns us to be careful. Ideas have consequences. The choices we make lead places. Paul's description of these enemies of Christ proves a powerful negative example and stark contrast to what a believer is supposed to be. Be looking closely at this list and considering their opposites, we will discover the marks of heavenly citizenship that Paul is calling us to.

- ~~Different Destinations:~~ "Whose end is destruction..."
 - o Paul makes it clear that the roads the enemies are following lead to destruction. The natural consequence of a life lived in service to sin and self is death. That is where the road leads. Romans 3:23 says, "The wages of sin is death." Sin produces death. You can't live in sin without beginning to experience death. The destination of a life lived on that road is ultimately ruin. If we want to avoid that destination, we need to make choices to get off that road.
- ~~Different Deities:~~ "Whose god is their appetite..."
 - o Paul describes these people as doing whatever their bodies tell them to. If they are hungry, they eat. If they are thirsty, they drink. If they are grumpy, they get angry at people. They don't have the ability to rise above the way they feel. The god they obey is their own desires. Whatever they want, they take. We all obey someone or something. We need to realize that our desires and appetites are broken by sin. They are not best indicators of what will bring us peace and happiness. We need to learn to obey something else first. Being a citizen of heaven means learning to obey God and not our own appetites. As Proverbs 3:5-6 says, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight."
- ~~Different Delights:~~ "Whose glory is in their shame..."
 - o Paul describes these enemies of the gospel as people who glory in their own shame. Those things they are most proud of are the things that they should be ashamed of. They are proud of their sin. They don't know why it is wrong. Forgiveness is hard for someone in this position because they don't think they need forgiveness and don't want the sin out of their life. They take delight in it. This is the way sin enslaves. Eventually we delight in our sin and can't imagine our lives without it. We may want God to excuse it, but we don't want God to remove it from our life. A citizen of heaven is someone who learns to delight in the right things. If you are a slave to your appetites, you will start longing for sin. If you begin to trust God, you begin to take delight in Him.
- ~~Different Determination:~~ "Who set their mind on earthly things..."
 - o Someone who is determined has set their mind on something and won't give it up at any cost. Paul says that these enemies have set their focus on this world and getting as much as they can. They will follow God as long as it suits their purposes but the moment that God demands something that costs, or calls them to somethings different than what they want for themselves, they cease to serve. John warns us of this choice in 1 John 2:16: "All that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and

the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world.” The world entices us with pleasures (lust of the flesh), possessions (lust of the eyes), and promotions (boastful pride of life). A citizen of heaven isn’t focused on these things, but rather is determined to obey the words of Jesus that say, “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.” (Matthew 6:33)

The Mission of Citizenship (vv.20-21)

Paul concludes his discussion of citizenship by describing our mission. Because our citizenship is in heaven, we are supposed to be focused on certain goals.

- Stewardship “from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior”(v.20) –Paul tells the Philippians that citizenship means awaiting the return of Jesus. This doesn’t just being caught up in end times prophecies, it means learning to live a life of stewardship. Jesus told several parables about a King entrusted who his servants with various amount of treasure and then went away. When he comes back, he asks what each person has done in his absence with what he had been entrusted with. Being a good steward means seeing all that we have as a gift given by God and seeing our role as using those gifts for His purposes and not our own.
- Hope “who will transform...”(v.21a) – In addition to stewardship, the mission of a citizen of heaven is to live in hope. Hope is a difficult thing to have when one looks at the broken state of the world we live in. Looking forward to Christ’s return reminds His followers that when He returns, He will fully restore all that sin has broken. Revelation 21 describes what will happen when Christ Returns, specifically verses 4-6: “He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.’ And He who sits on the throne said, ‘Behold, I am making all things new.’” We are called to live in hope, not because the world is perfect, not because nothing bad ever happens, but because evil will not have the last word. There will not be a single place where sin seems to have won a victory that won’t be overturned. Living out our citizenship in heaven means being an ambassador of hope to a world that is full of people overcome by suffering, pain, evil, sin, and death.
- Dependence “by the exertion of the power that He has...” (v.21b) – Paul ends his discussion of heavenly citizenship by talking about the power of Jesus. A citizen of Heaven will only ever be able to live out his calling by relying on Jesus for strength. We are called to be dependent on Jesus and rely on Him. Dependence is a word that often doesn’t sit well with us. We want to be independent and self-reliant. But the Christian is called to find their strength is Jesus. Jesus told His followers in John 15:5, “I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.” Paul isn’t telling us not to work hard. He is expecting us to do so and in the process to find a supernatural provision of strength to prosper and defend us. The perfect proof of this is Colossians 1:29, where Paul say, “For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.” Staying connected to Jesus is the only thing that will give us the power we need to do the works He has called us to do.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What does it mean that Christianity is an imitating and mentoring faith? What is the purpose of mentorship? Why do you think that such relationships are rare?
2. How do we find good mentors? Why does Paul encourage us to have a variety of models and examples to follow?
3. How did Ancient Romans understand the purpose of citizenship? How does that change our understanding of what it means to be a citizen of heaven?
4. What does Paul mean by “enemies of the cross of Christ?” What does is mean for a person to act like their “god is their bellies?” What does “set their mind on earthly things” mean?
5. What does it mean to see ourselves as stewards of what God has entrusted to us? Why is hope so important in our world? What is the source of a Christian’s hope? Why is dependence such a distasteful word for us? Why is it an important part of our citizenship in heaven?

Philippians 4:1-9 – Finding Peace

Our society is plagued by an epidemic of anxiety. We worry constantly about everything. Will we have enough money? Will we get sick from some random disease? Will some tragic accident befall us? Will we be successful in our careers? Will our children turn out okay? On and on it goes. We come up with new things to worry about. The good news is that struggling with anxiety is not something that we are alone in dealing with. Evidently the Philippians had a similar problem. They were struggling with worry and anxiety, so as Paul concludes his letter to them, he encourages them to leave behind their anxiety and learn to receive the peace of God. Looking closely at what he tells them will help us in our search to find peace.

God wants to send His peace through Jesus into your heart to settle your soul. This passage reveals to us both the nature of God's peace and how it can invade our lives.

Understanding God's Peace (v.7)

Before we discuss how to receive God's peace, it is important to ask ourselves what it is we are being offered. So we are going to start in the middle of this passage in verse 7 where Paul describes the peace of God which will come into our lives as a remedy to our anxiety.

1. God's Peace Starts with You – Paul doesn't say that the peace of God will cause all your problems to disappear. The peace of God works first not on your circumstances but on your heart and mind. In most problems and conflict, we always think the problem is outside of us. If our boss wasn't so mean, if our spouse wasn't such a jerk, if our bills weren't so high, then maybe we could have peace. But this is backwards. There will always be conflict, and bills, and reason to worry. God's peace starts with us and settles our soul.
2. God's Peace Will Guard You – The chief effect it will have. It will guard you. This word doesn't quite mean what you think. In Greek, the word does mean to guard, but it is a specific kind of guarding. If I told you that this church had a guard, you might think of someone positioned at the entrance prohibiting unlawful entry. But the word here means more than that. It means to "garrison." A garrison is a military term for soldiers sent into a building for the purpose of defending it. A guard stands at the gate. A garrison fills the entire space and defends by occupying it. God promises that He will give you peace. He promises to send it into every corner for your soul...to fill you up and defend you against the attacks of the enemy and the anxieties of your soul.
3. God's Peace Surpasses All Comprehension – because it is rooted not in our circumstances or in ourselves but in who God is and what He has done and is doing. It's not going to make sense to others or to you, because we are used to basing our happiness on our circumstances. Anxiety convinces us that we have to solve every problem before we can be calm. The peace of God comes into our lives and settles our souls.

Receiving God's Peace

What do you have to do to get God's peace? Please don't misunderstand. I am not saying "what do you have to do to earn God's peace." There is nothing we can do to earn it. But how do we access it? How do we experience it?

- Change What You Fear (vv.4-5): It's hard to stop doing something unless you start doing something else in its place. Paul doesn't tell us to stop worrying. He says take your focus off your circumstances and off yourself and place it on God. Don't be anxious about anything but instead rejoice in the Lord always.

Anxiety ends when we turn from worry to worship. We will only be able to do this if we think God is bigger than our problems. We have to change what we fear. Fear has two connotations in the Bible. Fear can mean "to cower in terror at." This definition is often synonymous with "to be afraid of." But there is another definition of fear that means "to wonder and be amazed at." This definition is synonymous with "to be awed by." Anxiety diminishes when we stop fearing our circumstances and start fearing God, not in the bad sense, but by being amazed by who God is and desiring to draw closer to Him.

This passage gives several reasons to rejoice in God instead of being consumed by our anxiety:

- o ~~God is In Control~~ – Rejoice in the Lord, not in yourself, or in your circumstances, because He is in control. And be kind. Because God is in control. You don't need to be angry, mean, selfish, or controlling.
 - o ~~God is Close~~ – The Lord is near. God isn't some distant benefactor. He is close. He promises never to leave us nor forsake us. Hebrews 13:5 says, "He Himself has said, 'I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you.'" The last words of the Gospel of Matthew are, "lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."
 - o ~~God is Personal~~ – God isn't some anonymous force. He is a living and personal God. He desires to be in relationship with you. So don't worry. Instead, tell Him everything. In everything, through prayer and supplication, let your requests be made known to God.
 - o ~~God is Good~~ – You can pray and ask for things and do so "with thanksgiving" because the God we serve is a good God.
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- ~~Change What You Focus On (v.8)~~ – Paul next encourages us to think about things that are true, right, pure, honorable, etc. This might not seem connected at first look, but it is. He is telling us that to experience God's peace, we need to change what we focus on. He isn't telling us to deny that evil exists, or dismiss evil as unimportant. He is simply encouraging us not to dwell on it either. The reason: what we focus on ends up consuming us. The more we turn something over in our own mind, the more we become convinced of its truth. This has a couple of important consequences for our mental health and for our relationship with others. Focus on your fears, and you will become more anxious and afraid. Focus on what frustrates you about someone or something, and you will become angrier and angrier. Focus on something you think will bring you fulfillment, and you will convince yourself you can't live without it. We have to be careful what we focus on. That is why the Bible is filled with encouragement to "Delight yourself in the Lord (Psalm 37:4) and "Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. (Colossians 3:2)" When we dwell on God and His truth, we shift our focus away from our fears, frustrations, and false fulfillment to a God who is bigger than all of it.

 - ~~Change Who You Follow (v.9)~~ – Finally, Paul encourages us to make sure we have good role models to follow. This isn't the first time in Philippians that Paul has reminded us of our need to have good mentors. In Philippians 3:17, He said, "join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us." Here he goes into detail about what a good mentor looks like and what learning to follow will produce. Verse 9 says, "The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you." Paul says do what I do and you will find peace. He isn't exalting himself. The peace that Paul has comes from God. As he said in 1 Corinthians 11:1, "Imitate me, even as I imitate Christ." Paul says follow Jesus first, and if you want to know what that looks like, follow me as I try to follow Jesus.

Many of us are consumed by anxiety. We falsely look for solutions in trying to control our circumstances. The truth is that the world will always give us reason for worry. If you want to find peace you need to settle your soul. That kind of peace only comes from God: a good, personal, close, sovereign God who loves you and has a plan for your good and His glory. As we turn from worry to worship, as we change what we fear, what we focus on, and who we follow, we will see God fill us up with the deep down assurance that everything is okay no matter what the circumstances.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What are some sources of anxiety? How do people try to cope with anxiety?
2. What is the peace of God? What does it mean that it will guard our hearts? What does it mean that it “passes all comprehension?”
3. What does turning from worry to worship mean? How do we do it?
4. How can changing our focus help us find peace? What happens when we focus on what frustrates us? What happens when we focus on what frightens us? What happens when we focus on what we think will bring us fulfillment?
5. How can having good mentors help us find peace? How can we follow good mentors without exalting them? How can we be good mentors without exalting ourselves? What does “imitate me even as I imitate Christ mean?”

Philippians 4:10-23 – Finding Contentment

I once met a man who hosted a radio call-in show in Los Angeles. The host invited people to call in with any questions that they might have regarding Christianity and specifically about the Bible. I asked him how he prepared himself for such a monumental task of being ready to answer any Bible question people might have. He told me that it wasn't as hard as you might think. Not that people didn't have good questions, but many of the questions came from taking specific verses out of their context. He said that when people asked a question about a specific verse, his first rule was to open the Bible and read the surrounding passage. Ninety-nine times out of a hundred, he said, the answer to their question was found right there.

This led him to come up with his first rule of Bible Study: Never Read a Bible Verse. This doesn't mean that we shouldn't read the Bible, but that we should not take single verses and wrench them of their context. When we do so, we run the risk of misunderstanding what it means. Bible verses are more like links in a chain than pearls strung on a string. Links in a chain depend on each other for their strength.

The reason this is important is because the passage we are looking at today contains one of the most often misunderstood and misapplied passages in the Bible: Philippians 4:13. If asked to quote it, most of us can: "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me."

Some people don't realize that the word Christ isn't in the actual verse itself. That shouldn't trouble us too much. It is clear that Paul is talking about the power of Christ in him.

The bigger problem is that many people misunderstand the meaning of this verse. Some interpret this verse to mean that Christ will give them the power to dare and do great things. That may be the case, but this verse doesn't teach it. This verse, when you look at the larger context, isn't about achievement but endurance. In verse 10, Paul is talking about how he has learned to be content in every circumstance. Contentment is the central point of this passage. Learning what it means, and how we pursue it will give us a greater understanding of what Paul means in the famous verse 13.

Contentment is one of those words that doesn't sit well with us sometimes. We wrongly think it means to "settle" or "resign ourselves" to a lower tier of existence than what we were seeking or expecting. We think the call to contentment is the religious equivalent of a parent saying to a fussy child, "You get what you get and you don't throw a fit." That is not what Biblical contentment is. Contentment is not the opposite of having and pursuing God-sized dreams. By looking at what Paul says in this passage, we will gain insight in what it means for us to pursue contentment.

What Contentment Doesn't Mean

Before we consider what real Biblical contentment is, it is necessary first to remove some of the bad ideas that people associate with contentment.

- ~~Contentment Doesn't Mean Not Having Needs (vv. 10, 15)~~ – Some people falsely believe contentment means that you have everything you need. That is not the case. Paul says in verse 11, that he has learned to be content. At the same time, in verse 10 he talks about others being concerned about his needs. In verse 14, he talked about people giving gifts for his needs. Paul had needs, and he wasn't afraid to make those needs known. He also was content, so contentment must not mean the same thing as not having needs.
- ~~Contentment Doesn't Mean Everything is Good (v. 14)~~ – Sometimes we falsely think contentment means thinking everything is okay. In verse 14, Paul calls his situation an "affliction." He clearly wasn't okay with it. He was concerned about his situation, considered it less than ideal, and wanted relief from it.
- ~~Contentment Doesn't Mean Not Being Upset (v. 15)~~ – We also sometimes associate contentment with never getting frustrated. But Paul was clearly frustrated with the way people had expressed their

concern for him. In verse 15, Paul talks about how all the churches had forsaken him except for the Philippians. He is glad about the Philippians' concern, but he is also upset at how the other churches let him down.

If contentment doesn't mean these things that we often associate with it, what does it mean?

Contentment Means: Trusting God's Plan (vv.10-12)

It's okay to be frustrated by how things are going. It's okay to wonder what is going on. It's okay to want to get somewhere else. But contentment starts when we realize that things aren't random. God is up to something. All throughout scripture we are reminded of the fact that we serve a God who makes good plans. The most famous example is found in Jeremiah 29:11, which says: "For I know the plans that I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope." It's important to remember that these words are addressed to a people that have just been sent into exile for their disobedience to God. They are reminded that God is a God who makes good plans. God doesn't say "let me tell you the plans I have for you." God says, "I know the plans I have for you." The idea being, we need to learn to trust God that He is up to something in the midst of hard times. Paul goes a little deeper in Philippians and shows two specific aspects of trusting God's plan.

- **Trust God's Timing (v.10)** – Paul tells the Philippians he is glad they have "revived...concern for me." They had sent him some money to help support him while under house arrest. He goes on to say that he knows they were always concerned about him but they "lacked opportunity." In Greek there are two words for time: *chronos*, which refers to the simple passing of time; and, *kairos*, which refers to the right time for something." Paul understands that the Philippians wanted to help but lacked *kairos*. Sometimes we feel responsible for manufacturing opportunities for ourselves. Sometimes we wonder why things don't happen when we want them to. A huge part of contentment involved learning to trust God's timing. We are called to wait on God, trusting that He is neither slow nor forgetful.
- **Trust God's Placement (vv.11-12)** – In addition to trusting God's timing, Paul says he has learned that God has something good for him to learn in every circumstance. He says in verse 13, "in every circumstance, I have learned the secret..." Paul doesn't say that every situation is great. What he does say is that in every situation there is some unique blessing that you would miss if you were somewhere else. Sometimes we feel like we have to rank things based on what we would prefer. If we don't get what we prefer, then we are miserable. I remember hearing a single friend express a desire for marriage and family. When it was pointed out that there are unique blessings to singleness that one doesn't have when married, the friend got upset because they thought they were being told they were better off where they were. That was not the point. The point is that the key to being content and trusting God's plan is to learn to find in every situation the unique blessing that God has for us there rather than on being fixated on some other place we would rather be.

Contentment Means: Trusting God's Power (v.13)

Now we come to the famous verse. Paul is talking about contentment, learning to see the unique blessing of where God has placed you. Perhaps that may seem difficult to you. Perhaps there are certain situations where it seems impossible for God to bless you and use them. Paul wasn't some spoiled rich kid who lived an easy privileged lifestyle. He suffered all kinds of ill-treatment: beating, imprisonment, stoning, whipping, abandonment, shipwreck, and isolation, to name a few. Read 2 Corinthians 11:23-29 for a full list. If anyone had reason to complain, it was Paul. Yes, in this letter that Paul wrote from prison while on trial for his life, Paul frequently encourages the Philippians to rejoice. The truth is that on our own, we will always slip back into self-pity and exhaustion. The way to embrace joy is to rely on God. That is what Philippians 4:13 means. Not, I can accomplish whatever I want because God gives me superpowers. But, I can endure any circumstance, no not just endure, but rejoice in any circumstance because it is God who gives me the power to do so. This is a lesson all throughout scripture. Try to do it on your own, you will fail. Learn to rely on God and you will produce fruit.

Contentment Means: Trusting God's Process (vv.14-17)

Paul talks about his need and how grateful he is of the Philippians' support. He tells them he is most glad not for the gift, because he knows how to get by in any circumstances, but he is glad they had the opportunity to give. Verse 17 says, "Not that I seek the gift itself, but I seek for the profit which increases to your account." He wasn't panicking that he wouldn't have enough. He is rejoicing that the Philippians had the opportunity to use their abundance to bless others. He didn't need the money as much as the Philippians needed to give it.

In the midst of hard times, we sometimes wonder why God doesn't just give everyone everything that they need. Why are some people rich and others poor? One part of the answer is that God allows these inequities so that we have the privilege of being used by God to bless others. Paul is glad that the Philippians provided for him.

In 2 Corinthians 8:13-15, Paul says something similar. Evidently, people in Corinth were objecting to giving up their hard-earned money to help people who they thought didn't work as hard as they did. Paul says this in reply: "For this is not for the ease of others and for your affliction, but by way of equality—at this present time your abundance being a supply for their need, so that their abundance also may become a supply for your need, that there may be equality; as it is written, 'He who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little had no lack.'"

Paul is saying that God gives more than enough to some people so that they will have the joy of learning to be conduits of God's blessing to other people. Equally, God gives less than enough to others so that they will have the joy of depending on God to faithfully provide for them in miraculous ways.

Like He did with Paul, God moves us into periods of abundance and lack in order to teach us stewardship, dependence, and service. Contentment means learning to trust God's process as He does that in our lives.

Contentment Means: Trusting God's Provision (vv.18-20) The last aspect of contentment that Paul talks about is perhaps its most central attribute. If you have this, everything else flows from it. Paul trusts that God knows His needs and is able to give what they require to Him. He says in Philippians 4:19, "And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus."

Believing this verse and trusting that God will provide is the true secret to being content. We become tight fisted in our blessing and desperate in our need when we think that we are the source of everything. There is great freedom in realizing that God is the true source of everything good in our lives. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 4:7, "What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?"

Trusting God's provision means living lives of generosity that require us to be remain dependent on God to continually provide. Jesus told us to pray for daily bread. We are told to come to Him each day for what we need for that day. The best example of this type of trust comes from a widow Jesus observed in the temple. Luke 21:1-4 says, "And He looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the treasury. And He saw a poor widow putting in two small copper coins. And He said, 'Truly I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all of them; for they all out of their surplus put into the offering; but she out of her poverty put in all that she had to live on.'" This widow was free to give because she trusted God to provide. If we learn to depend on God like this widow did, we will find our lives characterized by contentment.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are some negative ways that people define contentment? How is Biblical contentment different from that?
2. What does it mean to trust God's plan? How can we learn to see the unique blessing of each circumstance? 3. What does it mean to trust God's power? How can we learn to rely on God and not ourselves in hard times? 4. What does it mean to trust God's process? Why is it more important to the Philippians than to Paul that they give?
5. What does it mean to trust God's provision? How do we demonstrate that we believe God will provide?