

THE PRISON LETTERS: THE BOOK OF PHILIPPIANS

Key Verse: And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight,, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God. Philippians 1: 9-11

Author: Paul

Date of Writing: A.D. 61

Background: Paul wrote this epistle (letter) while he was in a prison of unknown location, possibly Rome. The recipients were the believers in the church of Philippi which Paul, Silas, Timothy and Luke founded during Paul’s second missionary journey. The letter was penned approximately 10 years after the establishment of the church there. Paul and his co-laborers went to Philippi in Macedonia at the expressed call of God’s Spirit through a vision of a man calling “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” (Acts 16: 6-11)

Those who comprised the Philippian church included: Lydia, an influential, wealthy worshipper of God who welcomed the missionaries to stay in her home (Acts 16:13-15); a demon-possessed slave girl freed from an evil spirit by the power of Jesus’ Name (Acts 16: 16-20); and the jailer of the prison where Paul and Silas declared to him, “Believe on the Lord Jesus and you will be saved—you and your household”. (Acts 16: 22-40) The gospel affected people of all walks of life in Philippi, just like it does today.

Paul and the Philippians enjoyed an intensely personal and tender relationship. This Macedonian church had been a great joy to Paul because they had “taken root” in the gospel truths, had supported his ministry financially when other churches had failed to do so, and they had even sent a personal assistant, Epaphroditus, to help take care of Paul’s needs while he was now in prison. This concept of Paul’s indwelling joy “spills over” in his letter. Be on the lookout for 2 recurring themes as you read this letter: “joy” and “in Christ”. In these 4 chapters, ”joy” appears 16 times; “in Christ Jesus” occurs 48 times; “in Christ” appears 34 times; “in the Lord” appears 50 times. Surely, only “in Christ” can we experience real joy!

As you read this letter originally intended for Paul’s dearest friends, remember that this letter is intended for you as well. Romans 15:4 states: “for everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.” You might want to read these 4 chapters of Philippians first in a conversational English paraphrased version such as The Message, followed by answering the questions from a translation of the Bible.

Day One: Joy Despite Difficult Circumstances**Read Philippians 1:1-30**

Prayer Focus: “Lord, Paul was joyful even though he was in a prison. Grant me an open heart for Your Spirit to show me through Your Word how to have joy “in You” no matter what circumstances I’m living in today. Free me to experience and express real joy. Amen”

1. Paul prayed a “praise and thanksgiving” prayer (1:3-6) & a “request” prayer (1:9-11) for the Philippians. List the two reasons for his thanksgiving to God (1:3-6) _____

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List the four requests Paul made of God for the benefit of the Philippians lives (1:9-11)

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____
- d. _____

2. What do Paul’s prayers teach you about how you should pray for yourself and for others?

3. What does Paul say has happened as a result of his imprisonment? (1: 12-14)

4. What is Joy? (Define in your own words)

What are the 3 sources of or reasons for joy? (1: 4, 25, 26)

5. What are Paul’s considerations in choosing between life and death? (1:20-26)

To what extent have you adopted Paul’s attitude toward life and death? Fill in the blanks personally: “For me to live is _____ and to die is _____.”

6. What does it mean to conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel? (1: 27-30)

7. What do the following verses tell you about God’s intended attitude for you toward suffering?

Philippians 1: 29-30 _____

Acts 5: 41 _____

Romans 5: 3-5 _____

James 1: 2-3 _____

Day 2: Joy in Humility and Service

Read Philippians 2: 1-18

Prayer Focus: “Father, by the work of Your Holy Spirit in me, cause me to humble myself before You and others so my life would look more like Your dear Son Jesus’ life. Amen”

In Philippians 2:1-18, Paul directs his readers to Jesus Christ, a person equal with God, yet who is the supreme example of true humility. This passage urges you to imitate Christ’s attitude.

8. What is the difference between humility and a poor self-image? Define each.

9. How did each of Christ’s actions illustrate humility and a concern for others? (2: 6-8)

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10. (2:12-13) Paul says you are to “work out your salvation” because “God wills and works in you”. Describe practically how these seemingly opposite actions work together in your life. What work is yours and what work is God’s? The following verses may help you.

Philippians 1: 3-6 _____

John 6: 44-45 _____

Romans 10: 9-11 _____

Ephesians 2: 7-10 _____

Humility almost always exhibits itself in service to others. Epaphroditus and Timothy were held up to the Philippians as examples of humble service.

Read Philippians 2: 19-30

11. Describe Timothy’s relationship and service to Christ, to Paul, and to the Philippians. (2: 19-25)

12. Describe Epaphroditus’ relationship and service to Christ, to Paul, and to the Philippians (2: 25-30)

13. What are some practical ways you can develop a relationship with and service to Christ, to your church leaders, and to your Christian brothers and sisters?

Day 3: Joy in the Pursuit of The Goal

Read Philippians 3:1-11

Prayer Focus: “Lord, impress on and in my heart and mind what is of true value for my life. Cause me to align my daily life with what You say is the goal. I ask for Your grace to remain faithful in my pursuit of You until I stand before you face-to-face at the finish line of my life. Amen”

Paul warned his readers not to put their confidence in the flesh, but in God. Paul, himself, had human advantages he could have trusted in---so do you.

14. Describe Paul the Pharisee (3: 4-6) How is he different from Paul, the Christ-follower: (3: 7-10)?

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15. How do you compare your knowledge of Christ with all the other things in your life? What is your real goal? Do others see evidence of how you answered that question?

Explain. _____

Read Philippians 3: 12-16

16. The Christian life Paul lived was compared to an athlete running a race. List below what both athletes and Christians must do to cross the finish line.

Athletes	Christians
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Where do you need a mid-course correction in your race of life?

Read Philippians 3:17-21

17. Paul contrasted Christians with “the enemies of the cross”. What are the concerns and destinies of each group?

18. Philippians 3:20 says our citizenship is of heaven. What does that mean?

19. What does a reading of 1 Corinthians 15:35-54 teach you about your resurrected body? _____

Day 4: Joy in Unity, Joy in Prayer, Joy in Thought Life

Read Philippians 4:1-9

Prayer Focus: “Father, I confess that if I could dwell in unity with everybody, pray with true confidence in You, and control my thought life, I would indeed find great joy for my life. You tell me how to do all three of these things in today’s lesson. May I be a doer of Your Word and not a hearer only so I can experience Your joy and stability with You. Amen”

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Most of Paul’s letter is filled with encouragement for the Philippians to continue what God has begun in them. In this section, however, you discover a relational problem between 2 women in the church. It is possible to believe in Christ, be involved in work for His kingdom and yet have broken relationships. But there is no excuse for remaining un-reconciled. Do you need to be reconciled to someone today?

20. What did Paul suggest to solve the problem? (4:2-3)

21. What are some things that the Philippians (and you and I) should and should not do to have the peace of God that would create true joy?

Vs. 4 _____

Vs. 5 _____

Vs. 6 _____

Vs. 8 _____

Vs. 9 _____

22. Consider a situation in your life right now that is causing you anxiety, worry, destructive and unproductive thoughts. How could you apply these principles to your situation?

Day 5: Joy in Contentment

Read Philippians 4: 10-23

Prayer Focus: “Father, You see the world I live in...one filled with so many undeserved blessings, yet I confess I am guilty of often complaining about what I lack and what I want...of having “ingrown eyeballs”. Deliver me from my self-focus that causes me to compare, complain, compete, control. Pierce my heart that I might be content and complete in You. Show me how to live that way....today. Amen”

23. Define contentment.

24. What would it take for you to be content? What outside forces are most likely to cause you to become discontent? Since God does not always change negative outside situations, what can He change *in you* to make contentment possible? Contentment is an inside work.

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25. What was Paul’s secret for contentment? (4:11-13)

26. How had the Philippians helped Paul in the present and in the past? (4:14-18)

27. What makes money so magnetic and giving it away so stressful for many people? What about you?

28. What benefits does Paul expect the Philippians to receive from their giving? (4:17-19)

How could you experience those same benefits? _____

As you apply the precepts and principles encouraged by God through Paul’s letter to the Philippians, can you see that your life would be filled with” *joy*” “ *in Christ*” and that God could answer Paul’s prayer for you? “This is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ...to the glory and praise of God. Amen” THAT is a life of Joy!