

joy
happens



joy happens

A candid look at the Apostle Paul's letter to the Philippians as it relates to our present circumstances.

Authored by
Pastor James Granger

Joy Happens

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Thanks.

Thank you to my family, especially to my son Luke, for showing such tremendous courage and grace over the past few months.

Many thanks also to Pastor Noel Jesse Heikkinen, Debbie Huntley, Josh Michels, Nora Nicholson, Pastor Tony Pyle, and Young Yi for their tireless work in editing and formatting this content.

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Intro

The past few months have been, by far, the most difficult in our lives. We have a sick child. Our youngest son Luke has cancer, and his care has required multiple surgeries, countless hours in the hospital, and an extremely aggressive regimen of chemotherapy. This situation came suddenly and has filled our lives with uncertainty, sorrow, fear, and pain. It has been unspeakably difficult, and at the same time we have experienced God's peace and God's mercy in ways we never imagined possible. God has shown up in our lives through His saints, the Church, who have prayed for us, provided for us, and listened to us. We are not alone in our circumstances. God's people have demonstrated God's presence in our lives, and for that we are extremely grateful.

God has also revealed Himself to us very powerfully through the wisdom of His Word.

Several months ago I began meeting together with a group of men every Friday morning to dive into the book of Philippians. We meet for about an hour each week, and our primary aim is to read the text normally. We read a small section of Philippians out loud a couple of times, and then we try to determine what the author intended to communicate to the followers of Jesus who lived in first century Philippi. It's a pretty simple process, yet this study has had a profound impact on my heart and mind over the past few months. I've studied Philippians quite extensively in the past, so I'm very familiar with the content, but in this crazy season of life it reads very differently to me

Introduction

and applies in fresh ways to my life. The uniqueness and power of God's Word is that by His Spirit we can gain timely insight, comfort, and direction each time we interact with His truth and wisdom.

My hope is to challenge to you through this short book. First, grab a few others who want to be intentional about exposing themselves to God's Word. It might be your Life Group, your family, your ministry team, or just a random group of friends. Just find some people. Then, find a regular time when you can gather to read and talk about Philippians together, eight to ten verses at a time. Nothing fancy, just read and discuss, and feel free to use the articles and questions on the following pages to spark your thinking as well. Finally, and here's the key, *submit*. What's going to happen when you dig into God's Word is that God's Word will dig into you. The truth and wisdom that you'll find in Philippians will encourage you, challenge you, even convict you, because God's aim is to change you for His glory.

Early in Philippians chapter one you will find Paul's prayer for his friends in Philippi. He writes,

It is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for 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

It is this same prayer I will be praying for you and for anyone else who picks up this little book.

For Christ,
Pastor James Granger
Riverview Church
January 9, 2016

Part I

Philippians 1:1-11

Philippians 1:1-11

Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus,

*To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with
the overseers and deacons:*

*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord
Jesus Christ.*

*I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in
every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy,
because of your partnership in the gospel from the first
day until now. And I am sure of this, that he who began a
good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of
Jesus Christ. It is right for me to feel this way about you
all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers
with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the
defense and confirmation of the gospel. For God is my
witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ
Jesus. And it is my prayer that your love may abound
more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so
that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure
and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit
of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the
glory and praise of God.*

Reflections

We all face different kinds of “prisons” as we go through life. Illness can be a prison. So can the loss of a loved one. Toxic relationships, broken promises, addiction...there are many experiences that can restrict our freedom. So often we are paralyzed by the impossible circumstances in front of us.

Most of this book will be written from my son Luke’s bedside, either at home or in a hospital room. It strikes me that lengthy stays in the hospital have a lot in common with incarceration. You’re confined to a small room. You can’t leave. The food is lousy. You feel helpless. You can see the outside world, but you can’t participate. You’re not free. It would be easy for Luke to believe he’s being punished, because he feels like a prisoner so much of the time. The truth is, Luke did nothing to cause his sickness. It’s just something awful that has happened. His time in the hospital, though extremely trying, is actually meant for his good. Often times the circumstances of our lives can bring undeserved heartache.

How do we respond when life confronts us with painful situations beyond our control?

The writer of Philippians, Paul, penned the letter from a jail cell in Rome. Paul was not a criminal. He was a noble man, a leader, and a man of deep faith. In fact, he devoted his entire life to spreading the Gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ, to as many people as possible. His “crime” was that he lived fervently for Jesus, and that bothered many of the religious and political leaders of his day. Wanting to silence Paul, they put him on trial and threw him in jail, even though the charges against him were bogus. Paul, an innocent man, finds himself in a first century Roman prison alongside the murderers, thieves, and other villains of his day.

How does Paul respond when life confronts him with a painful situation beyond his control?

Well, his response is both fascinating and inspiring. In the midst of Paul’s miserable conditions, it would be easy for him to be concerned about himself and to be completely focused on his own plight. Instead, Paul sees his imprisonment as an opportunity to be a blessing to others. Being in prison, Paul has a lot of time on his hands, and he knows a lot of people who could use a word of encouragement. Paul loved visiting churches, but he no longer can do that, so instead he begins writing

Part I

letters. Most scholars believe that not only did Paul write Philippians from his Roman jail cell, he also wrote Colossians, Ephesians, and Philemon, and perhaps others from there as well.

As Paul opens his letter to the Philippians his words immediately bring comfort. Paul starts by saying, “I’m praying for you!” Right from the outset he emboldens the saints in Philippi, saying, “I thank my God in all my remembrance of you” (Philippians 1:3). Paul then gets very specific with his prayers. He prays for their love, their wisdom, their holiness, and their righteousness all to increase for the glory of God (Philippians 1:8-11). Out of his pain, Paul lifts up his friends in prayer. I have found that seeking the best for others in prayer allows us to dwell less on our own trials and more on the trustworthiness of God.

Paul also provides comfort with his words of encouragement. He says, “And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:6). Paul is suffering, and he seems to sense that the Philippians might be weary as well, but he maintains an eternal mindset. He urges his readers to persevere, expressing confidence that God will continue to work in them to grow them in Christ. This eternal, Gospel perspective will be a huge emphasis throughout Paul’s entire letter, as he seeks to encourage his friends to press on toward Jesus.

To Consider

1. Describe some “prisons” you have faced in your life. What opportunities for blessing did these circumstances present?
2. How much of your focus is on eternal things? How does an eternal perspective affect the way you handle your daily life?
3. Who are you praying for? How can you best pray for others?

To Do

Think of a person or group of people who are an encouragement to you, and/or might need encouragement from you. Take some time to pray for them, as Paul does for the saints in Philippi. Then, write a brief letter thanking them for their faithfulness and send it to them today.

Part II

Philippians 1:12-18

Philippians 1:12-18

I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice.

Yes, and I will rejoice.

Reflections

The Bible is filled with situations where seemingly awful or hopeless events bring about salvation for people and glory for God. Joseph is falsely accused and imprisoned, and God uses him to save the world from famine. Daniel is dragged into exile, and the pagan nation of Babylon ends up hearing about God. Perhaps the best example of this pattern is the story of Jesus Himself. Jesus is beaten, flogged, and crucified, and God was pleased to use His death to save the world. In Paul's letter to the Romans he wrote, "for if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life" (Romans 5:10). God is in the business of bringing light through darkness.

Paul brings this perspective to his jail sentence in Rome. He tells his friends in Philippi, "what has happened to me has really served to advance the Gospel" (Philippians 1:12). Paul certainly could have been frustrated because he was a traveling evangelist, which meant that his entire life's work was dependent upon being able to freely move from city to city in order to tell people about Jesus and develop churches. Now he finds himself in prison, and he's forced to change his expectations. Paul does not diminish or romanticize his plight. His situation is beyond unfortunate. Nobody wants to be in prison. But Paul's Gospel intentions are undeterred. He begins to look for ways that his imprisonment is giving him unique opportunities and influence that wouldn't otherwise be possible.

First, Paul recognizes that he is encountering people in prison whom he wouldn't have met otherwise, and he's able to share Jesus with them. He writes, "it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ" (Philippians 1:13). The Roman imperial guard was an elite military unit that carried tremendous worldwide respect and influence in the first century. Paul's status as a high priority prisoner meant that he was now rubbing shoulders with members of this special forces crew, and apparently he was talking with them about Jesus. The entire imperial guard (and all the rest!) knew that Paul's imprisonment was for Jesus.

Astonishing.

Often when we experience inconveniences (or worse) our focus is so much on ourselves that we move right past human interactions without a second thought. My family faces this dynamic every day. Because of my son Luke's medical condition, we have encountered hundreds of people whom we wouldn't have met otherwise, and we've

Part II

also re-kindled a bunch of old relationships. We meet new people, and hear from “old” people, every single day. The parade of doctors, nurses, hospital workers, insurance providers, fellow sufferers, family members, and neighbors ... the list is endless. Yesterday, a complete stranger approached me, introduced himself, and asked how Luke was doing. He told me how inspired he was by Luke’s courage. I was able to ask him about his own life and faith, and now I’m able to pray for him. Today, I got an email from a former student I worked with, expressing his concern for Luke. We’re beginning a dialogue that we haven’t had in over ten years. I am praying for him as well.

It would be fairly easy to dehumanize a prison guard (or nurse, or store clerk), but Paul starts a conversation. He builds relationships with some of the guards, and they like what he has to say about Jesus. In order for word to spread so far and so fast, the soldiers must have been talking to one another about their conversations with Paul. Paul now has influence in an arena he never could have imagined prior to being thrown in jail.

Paul also observes that the community of faith is gaining confidence and boldness by watching him suffer in prison. He says, “most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear” (Philippians 1:14). In other words, the fact that Paul chooses to rank the Gospel over his circumstances is inspiring to other believers. They’re more confident in their position in Christ and, therefore, more fearless in proclaiming Christ to others. This encouragement continues to this day! Think about the millions of people who have read Paul’s letter to the Philippians and who have gained courage because Paul had time to write while he was in prison. Amazing. Paul takes this Gospel focus even a step further, noting that there are some people who are putting a negative spin on Paul’s imprisonment, but still aiming to advance the Gospel by relishing Paul’s misfortune. Incredibly, even in the face of such immature behavior, Paul celebrates the fact that Jesus is being proclaimed because of his circumstances. He says, “What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice” (Philippians 1:18).

To Consider

1. Have you had a situation in your life that in the moment you wished wasn't happening, but now, looking back, you can see clearly how God was at work?
2. Paul's life inspired confidence and boldness in other believers. Who do you look to for inspiration? How can you be a similar example to others?
3. Paul is able to "rejoice" when the Gospel is proclaimed, even when he doesn't completely approve of the motives of those proclaiming it. Where do you see this in your life? Are you able to look past flaws and different preferences of others in order to celebrate when the Gospel is being proclaimed?

To Do

Think about the next 24 hours of your life, where you will be going and who you will likely interact with. Take a moment to pray for the people you expect to encounter. Think about a way you can engage at least one person in a conversation on a different, perhaps deeper, level than you've done in the past.

Part III

Philippians 1:19-26

Philippians 1:19-26

For I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again.

Reflections

Imagine for a moment you're a first century Roman official, in charge of the prosecution of a prisoner by the name of Paul. Paul is a troublemaker because his worldview and his lifestyle have a tendency to stir entire communities to action. Paul is part of a new faction of "Christians" who are convinced that a Jewish man named Jesus Christ has saved them to eternal life by dying on a cross for their sins and, three days later, rising from the dead. You've attempted to reason with Paul, to get him and his friends to stop speaking so fervently about Jesus, to no avail. You've tried punishing Paul physically with beatings, but he has remained undeterred. In the Roman Empire it's not uncommon to put someone to death if they are causing problems, and you're thinking this might be the only remaining recourse available to silence Paul once and for all. How is Paul going to respond to the threat of death?

For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

Philippians 1:21

It's one thing to say you believe that, in Christ, the life we will experience after death is indescribably superior to life here on earth; to live as though that's true is a whole different matter. Most of us would prefer to live as long as possible and for our loved ones to do the same. I know I would. Paul considers his two options, living for Christ or dying for Christ, and he considers it a "win-win" situation! He says, "I am hard pressed between the two" (Philippians 1:23). His reasoning? Well, dying and being with Jesus is clearly his preference, since he states, "my desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better" (Philippians 1:23). At the same time, Paul recognizes the opportunity he has for "fruitful labor" while he's still alive. He's aware that "to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account" (Philippians 1:24). In other words, Paul can't wait to die and be with Jesus, but he's willing to stick around for a while longer in order to be able to tell more people about Him.

Again, I tend to think and live just the opposite way. For some reason, the part of me that wants to stay here on this earth often overrides the part of me that wants to die and be with Jesus. This in spite of the fact that I've spent the better part of my life working to convince others to trust in Jesus as Savior so they can spend all eternity together with Him in heaven. I know in my mind that what is waiting for me after I die far outweighs my experience here on earth, and I really do believe it, but...not like Paul. Paul uses words like "eager expectation," "hope," and "full courage" to describe his mindset toward the possibility of dying. Wow.

Part III

This has been a tough week. A friend lost a child. Another mass shooting. Long days in the hospital. Our world is stained by sin and death abounds. Yes, there is joy and pleasure in this life, there's no denying that, but I am weary from the weight of the pain and brokenness that surrounds me. More than ever my heart is resonating with Paul's words:

For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

Philippians 1:21

I think it's natural to have a fear of dying, which is why I'm so grateful to God for saving me. I can't wait for the "gain" that is "far better" that Paul describes in his letter to the Philippians. I'm praying for God to help me not to have so much fear of death.

At the same time, like Paul, we all have "fruitful labor" to accomplish while we're here on earth. Gospel labor. Paul says, "I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again" (Philippians 1:25-26). Paul cares deeply about the salvation and spiritual growth of others and wants his life to cause others to "glory in Christ Jesus." While he eagerly awaits his arrival at his eternal home in heaven, he is aware that God will continue to use him to influence to help people find Jesus, and he's eager to participate in God's work. As he said:

For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

Philippians 1:21

To Consider

1. Are you more eager to live as long as possible, or to die and be with Jesus? Why?
2. What is the specific “fruitful labor” God has given you to accomplish? Where do you have the unique opportunity to leave a Gospel imprint?
3. How confident are you in your salvation? Have you put your trust in Jesus?

To Do

Spend a few minutes today reading (try Isaiah 25:8-9 or Revelation 21:4-7) some of what the Bible has to say about our future in heaven. Ask God to help give you an appropriate desire for heaven, as well as a “fruitful” life of helping others find heaven as well.

Part IV

Philippians 1:27-30

Philippians 1:27-30

Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God. For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

Reflections

We are living “In the meantime.”

For most of the first chapter of Paul’s letter to the Philippians, his emphasis has been to encourage an eternal perspective. Being a Christian in the first century was a risky choice, which Paul himself was experiencing first hand. By this point in his life he had already endured tremendous suffering and hardship as a result of his persistence for the Gospel. Now, he was writing from prison, with his life in jeopardy, and yet his first aim is to encourage his friends in Philippi to not be afraid. Now, as we reach the end of chapter one, Paul shifts his focus. Having established the mindset of hope, Paul turns his attention toward how that hope ought to impact their daily lives. In other words, now that they’ve been reminded that their eternal future is secure and glorious, how should they live “in the meantime?”

Paul begins with an exhortation. He says, “let your manner of life be worthy of the Gospel of Christ” (Philippians 1:27). If our hope is in Jesus (it is), and Jesus is coming back (He is), and heaven is going to be incredible (it will be), then the way we live our lives ought to reflect these realities. The “manner” of our life (how we conduct ourselves on a daily basis) ought to be “worthy” of the Gospel of Christ.

What does that look like?

I think it’s important to remember what Paul is *not* saying here. There is nothing any of us can do to make us “worthy” of having Jesus die for us. We can’t earn our salvation. That’s the whole point of the Gospel...we’re *not* worthy, but Jesus is. So what does Paul mean here? He clarifies with his next statement: “I (hope to) hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the Gospel, and not frightened in anything by your opponents” (Philippians 1:27-28). Paul identifies two characteristics of a “manner of life” that are “worthy of the Gospel of Christ” — perseverance and unity.

It makes sense that Paul would emphasize perseverance in this context. Perseverance is continued effort in the face of difficulty, and these were difficult times. First, Paul urges them to “stand firm.” Don’t give up. Don’t be discouraged. Hold your ground. Then he challenges them to “strive for the faith.” Keep working hard. Show some effort. Press on. Finally, Paul implores them to “not be frightened in anything by your opponents.” This makes perfect sense as well. Fear can be an enemy of perseverance. Fear paralyzes.

Part IV

Fear is disheartening. Paul wants them to push past their fear of man, to take courage, to fight hard. This is a way of living that's befitting of the Gospel of Christ.

Paul then speaks of unity. He asks his friends in Philippi to stand firm "in one spirit," and "with one mind" to strive "side by side" for the faith of the Gospel. Paul continues in this vein at the beginning of chapter 2, saying "complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind" (Philippians 2:2). It delights Paul to hear stories of Christ followers who are living in unity. We also know from Paul's writings that he loathes infighting among Christians...we'll observe one example of this at the beginning of Philippians 4. True unity in Christ honors Jesus. When Christians are divided, it's a Gospel distraction.

Paul ends this section by saying, "it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have" (Philippians 1:30). Perseverance and unity. A close-knit team of people doggedly pursuing a Gospel mission together, suffering together for His sake, that's a "manner of living" that's "worthy" of the Gospel of Christ. Jesus is coming back. "In the meantime," Paul says, let's proclaim His name in the way we choose to live.

To Consider

1. What distracts you from living a manner of life that's worthy of the Gospel of Christ? Be specific.
2. What causes fear in your life? How does the eternal mindset of Paul give you an example that can help drive away that fear?
3. What's the difference between freely striving as a response to God's grace versus working hard to earn God's favor? How can you avoid the trap of legalism as you pursue a life of perseverance and unity?

To Do

Who are you teamed up with in your efforts to help others hear about Jesus? It could be your Life Group, your family, or perhaps you're involved on a ministry team. Take a few minutes to pray for the others on your team by name, that you would pursue unity and persevere together for the Gospel.

Part V

Philippians 2:1-11

Philippians 2:1-11

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Reflections

Imagine a community in which each member ranked the needs of others above their own needs. Before anyone bought food for themselves, they would first make sure the people around them were fed. Each conversation would be an opportunity to serve, and selfish motives would be replaced by a rich and meaningful empathy. If people argued over anything, it would be who gets to be the first to give when an opportunity to be generous presented itself.

Possible?

Paul thought so. The central theme of this section of Philippians is a godly attitude called “humility.” Paul describes it this way: “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others (Philippians 2:3-4).” Humility is an attitude of the heart that genuinely considers others to be of tremendous value, and therefore places tremendous value on the needs of others. In that sense humility is not a low view of self. In fact, Paul says, “look not only to your own interests.” You’re significant. You just count others as more so. That’s humility. Paul not only thinks it’s possible to live humbly, he commands it.

Where does humility come from?

We develop true humility when we understand who we are in light of who God is and what God has done for us. As such, Jesus is our perfect example of humility. Paul says, “have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:5). The “mind” that we are to have is a humble one, and Jesus Himself is the author. It’s important to note that Paul uses the word “yourselves.” Remember, he’s writing to the Philippians, a community of faith. Humility breeds humility. One of the benefits of a personal pursuit of humility is that it encourages those around us to live with the same attitude.

Jesus was fully human, but he was also fully God. He could have been proud and domineering. Incredibly, He ranked Himself below others. Again, Jesus showing humility does not mean that He’s not significant. Quite the opposite. Paul says it this way, “though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to

Part V

the point of death, even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:6-8). The choice Jesus made to become a human was a choice to serve. He willingly chose to “empty” Himself, with the ultimate act of humility being His death on the cross. The Gospel itself was born out of humility, the perfect humble heart of Jesus Christ.

And that’s the reason why Paul urges humility in the first place, for the Gospel.

See, when we live humbly, our lives become a presentation of the Gospel. Jesus’ death on the cross was the ultimate embodiment of humility, which means when we demonstrate humility we’re proclaiming Jesus. Paul writes it like this: “Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:9-11). Because Jesus humbled Himself on the cross, God has raised the name of Jesus above all other names, so that many would confess Him as Savior and God would be glorified. Our aim in living lives of humility is the same, to bring glory to God.

Jesus is that amazing. Not only is He our perfect example of humility and the source of all humility, the glory of His name is also our motivation to be humble in the first place.

To Consider

1. Are you humble? When are you most tempted to swell with pride?
2. What person (or kind of person) do you find most difficult to consider their needs more important than your own?
3. How can you and your community develop a consistent heart of humility?
Consider the example of Jesus, and Paul’s specific instructions as you develop your response.

To Do

This week find a very practical way to rank the needs of others higher than your own needs. This could mean serving someone you wouldn’t normally serve, or perhaps being generous in a way you haven’t done before. Try to involve others in your efforts.

Part VI

Philippians 2:12-18

Philippians 2:12-18

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

Do all things without grumbling or disputing, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain. Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me.

Reflections

Do you work out? If you do, you know that consistent physical exercise requires a great deal of discipline, because each successful workout involves overcoming discomfort. For some people, the most difficult hurdle to overcome is just getting started. It's easier to *not* work out, less stressful to do nothing. For others stretching or taxing the muscles is the biggest challenge, because of the burns and aches that go along with that process. A good workout involves increased heart rate, heavier breathing, and typically some soreness and recovery afterward. It's no wonder that the New Year's resolution that's most often made but not kept is to start a new exercise regimen. It's a hard commitment to keep!

In the middle of chapter two of Paul's letter to the Philippians, Paul challenges his friends to spiritual fitness. He says, "...as you have already obeyed, so now, not only in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12). The good news for them was that they weren't starting from scratch. They were already in decent shape. Paul says that they've "already obeyed," and when he says "so now" he seems to be encouraging them to keep doing more of what they've already been doing. Paul wants them to continue a process they've already begun, to "work out" their salvation with "fear and trembling."

What does it mean to "work out" our salvation?

It would be so easy to make the mistake of thinking we need to work *for* our salvation. Whenever there is work involved, we'll always be tempted to believe we're earning God's favor. That can't be what Paul means here, because we know throughout Scripture (see Ephesians 2:8-9; Romans 6:23; 1 Peter 1:3-5; and others) it's clear that salvation is a gift from God. Plus, Paul's letter is to "saints in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:1), so his readers are already saved. It seems clear that Paul's intent here is not to imply salvation by works.

Most scholars believe that Paul's exhortation is really more about sanctification, the lifelong process by which God makes a saved person righteous. The Greek word for "work out" is "*katergazomai*," which is a really fun word to say. This word means to "continue to work until completion." Once we are saved, for the rest of our lives God will continue to work in us and on us to make us holy. What's comforting is that, although this process involves hard work on our part, it's God Himself who does all the heavy lifting. Paul says, "...for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for His good

Part VI

pleasure” (Philippians 2:13). We are participants in our own sanctification through obedience, but we aren’t making ourselves righteous. God is the one who changes our hearts. Not only that, it is God who gives us both the desire and the ability to do the work of obedience anyway, and it’s all “for His good pleasure.”

Amazing.

Paul then gets specific. One of areas we are to “work” on is to “do all things without grumbling or questioning” (Philippians 2:14). If you’ve never attempted to go through your entire day without complaining, give it a try. It is hard work! There is disciplined effort and self control required, because you’re exercising a muscle that doesn’t often get stretched. It’s easier to be contentious, to whine and complain, and to bemoan the circumstances of our lives.

Why go through the effort required to be gracious with others when things don’t go our way? Paul gives the saints in Philippi three reasons. First, when they avoid grumbling and questioning they reflect Christ. Paul says their blamelessness will be like a beacon of light in a dark world. Second, when they avoid grumbling and questioning they’re obeying God’s Word, and this makes Paul proud of them and thankful that his own efforts have been fruitful. Finally, when they avoid grumbling and questioning it produces joy, both for Paul and for the Philippians themselves. Paul says “I am glad and rejoice with you all. Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me” (Philippians 2:18). This idea of experiencing joy through suffering and trial is a theme Paul weaves throughout the remainder of his letter.

To Consider

1. Think about your experience with physical exercise. What principles can you apply to your spiritual fitness?
2. What are some examples of times in your life where God has stretched you in order to make you stronger and grow you in righteousness? How did it feel in the moment? How does it feel now that you're looking back on it?
3. Are you a complainer? What benefit do you get from complaining? Paul says do all things without grumbling or questioning. How could avoiding a contentious spirit lead to blessing in your life?

To Do

Identify a common situation that occurs in your life that you're likely to complain about or become contentious about. Talk with your Life Group or with some close friends about your desire to see that pattern change in your life, and ask them to pray for you. Consider the opportunity to shine the light of Christ in the world as you seek to grow in this area of your life.

Part VII

Philippians 2:19-30

Philippians 2:19-30

I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be cheered by news of you. For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But you know Timothy's proven worth, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel. I hope therefore to send him just as soon as I see how it will go with me, and I trust in the Lord that shortly I myself will come also.

I have thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, and your messenger and minister to my need, for he has been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill. Indeed he was ill, near to death. But God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. I am the more eager to send him, therefore, that you may rejoice at seeing him again, and that I may be less anxious. So receive him in the Lord with all joy, and honor such men, for he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me.

Reflections

One of the biggest blessings I've experienced is the joy of watching younger people I'm leading mature in their faith and grow in their leadership skills. I've had the privilege of seeing dozens of my young friends enter into full-time ministry and have a huge Gospel impact in many lives. I've seen others find their niche in the secular world, honoring God in their lives as teachers, nurses, business owners, and just about every other profession you can imagine. My wife, Laura, and I have provided pre-marriage counseling to numerous young couples, and then watched them develop godly marriages, and start young families with the intent of being on mission for Jesus.

Words cannot express how meaningful it has been for us to see God at work in this manner.

Paul has spent the better part of two chapters in his letter to the Philippians setting the focus on eternal things, and then describing the manner of life the saints ought to live in light of that eternal perspective. Now, at the end of the second chapter, Paul turns his attention to two men that he lifts up as examples of the very kind of Gospel living he has been describing throughout his letter. These two men are named Timothy and Epaphroditus.

For Bible readers, Timothy is the more well known of the two. In Acts 16:1-4 Paul arrived in Lystra, and he hand picked Timothy to be one of his "disciples." This meant that Timothy would go everywhere with Paul, watching and learning how to best share the Gospel with as many people as possible. Timothy's reputation was excellent, and Paul found him to be a teachable young man who knew his Bible and had a growing skillset as a leader. Now, as Paul writes from a Roman jail cell, he tells his friends in Philippi that since he cannot visit himself he intends to send Timothy instead. He writes, "you know Timothy's proven worth, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the Gospel. I hope therefore to send him just as soon as I see how it will go with me, and I trust in the Lord that shortly I myself will come also" (Philippians 2:22-24). You can sense how proud Paul is of Timothy, referring to Timothy as his "son" and boasting of Timothy's "proven worth." Timothy is a living, breathing example of the life Paul has been challenging the saints in Philippi toward.

Epaphroditus is lesser known, and came to Paul through a much different path. Paul referenced him as "your messenger," indicating that at one point the Philippians had sent him with a message for Paul. It seems that at some point Epaphroditus

Part VII

then ceased his role as messenger and became Paul's assistant and/or caregiver. Paul describes Epaphroditus as his "brother," his "fellow worker," his "fellow soldier," and "minister" to his need. Paul holds up Epaphroditus as an example of humility, perseverance, and sacrificial service. He asks the saints in Philippi to "receive him in the Lord with all joy, and honor such men, for he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me" (Philippians 2:29-30).

Timothy and Epaphroditus are examples of the manner of life that is worthy of the Gospel.

Paul also mentions that Epaphroditus had "nearly died" for the work of Christ. We're not exactly sure when it happened, but at some point he had developed a life-threatening sickness. Paul says he had become "ill, near to death." For me personally, this was the most difficult, yet, also the most hopeful aspect of this section of the story. Our son Luke is battling a serious illness. When someone close to you is suffering, your heart becomes very heavy. Paul describes this godly "sorrow" and "anxiety" at the thought of his close friend dying. I am experiencing that every day, along with so many others who are watching a loved one in pain.

Our hope is in God. Epaphroditus survived. Paul says that God "had mercy on" Epaphroditus, sparing his life, and that God's mercy was also on Paul himself in sparing him from watching his friend pass away. Our daily prayer is for God to have mercy on Luke, as he did Epaphroditus, and on us as well, that others may then receive Luke with joy and glorify God for the work He has done in his life.

To Consider

1. Is there someone who has served a role like Paul's in your life? Who has been available to you to show you the way when it comes to spiritual maturity?
2. Is there someone who has served a role like that of Timothy or Epaphroditus in your life? Who have you been able to influence, and then watch as they grow in their own faith?
3. Have you endured illness yourself, or perhaps the illness or even loss of a loved one? What impact did that have on your heart? Were you able to experience God's mercy through these difficult moments?

To Do

Consider the sorrow in the hearts of those who might be suffering through the illness or loss of a loved one. Make an intentional effort to offer encouragement through your presence and through prayer. Pray for God's mercies to be great in their lives.

Part VIII

Philippians 3:1-11

Philippians 3:1-11

Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you.

Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh—though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

Reflections

Have you ever put together your résumé? Is it up to date? A good résumé includes all the credentials that would be relevant to the vocational opportunity you're pursuing. Educational background is important. So are pedigree, experience, and training you've received in your chosen field. You should also include some evidence of the strength of your personal integrity and provide good references who can vouch for your character. Hopefully, your qualifications are strong enough to enable you to get the job.

When it came to earthly spiritual credentials, perhaps no one had a stronger résumé than Paul. Pedigree? Paul had it in spades. He was "circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews" (Philippians 3:5). Experience? Yep. Paul had previous employment as a Pharisee, with specific expertise as a zealous persecutor. Character? Paul was able to declare himself completely righteous and blameless when it came to the law, which by the way he was one of the world's foremost experts in the law as well. Paul says, "If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more" (Philippians 3:4). If a person could be overqualified to earn their way into God's favor, Paul would be that person.

And all of it, Paul freely admits, means absolutely nothing without his faith in Jesus Christ.

He says, "But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ" (Philippians 3:7). Wow. Whatever human achievements or qualities once put Paul in high standing among the religious elite, those things he now considers loss. "Indeed," he says, "I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord" (Philippians 3:8). It's as if Paul tears up his résumé and replaces it with a simple picture of a cross. Paul continues in this vein, saying, "For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith" (Philippians 3:8-9). The only credential I now need, says Paul, is faith in Jesus Christ.

There's a great deal to be learned from Paul's insistence that faith in Jesus alone is what will save him. We're all tempted to believe we're qualified, that somehow our résumé is good enough. We might be proud of our pedigree (perhaps having been raised in a Christian home) or grew up attending an excellent church. Maybe we attended a Christian school, or have some seminary education, or we might have years of ministry

Part VIII

experience under our belts. We might even have developed strong character, or possibly we're highly thought of by others in the community. Don't be mistaken, these are all good things. It's just that none of them will save us.

All of it, we must freely admit, means nothing if we don't have faith in Jesus Christ.

The final two verses of this section contain a bit of a twist, one that you might not like at first glance. Paul desires his righteousness to depend on faith in Jesus so that he "may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead" (Philippians 3:10-11). Paul doesn't just want to know Jesus, or benefit from the power of Jesus, he also wants to share in the sufferings of Jesus, even if that means death! Talk about credentials. I'm amazed at Paul's willingness to suffer in order to be like Jesus. How good would that look on a résumé? And yet even that Paul counts as "loss" for the sake of Christ.

To Consider

1. Which part of your spiritual résumé are you most tempted to believe qualifies you for good standing with God? Is it your pedigree, your experience, your character, or something else?
2. How much comfort do you gain from knowing that faith in Jesus is the only credential you need for salvation?
3. Paul freely desires to "share in the sufferings of Jesus." How about you?

To Do

Put together a written spiritual résumé, including your pedigree, experience, virtues and anything else about you that potentially could qualify you to earn your way into God's favor. Once it's finished, tear it up, or even burn it, and then spend some time thanking God for providing Jesus as the only credential needed to save you.

Part IX

Philippians 3:12-21

Philippians 3:12-21

Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. Only let us hold true to what we have attained.

Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

Reflections

Citizenship comes with benefits.

As a citizen of the United States, I am entitled to the rights that go along with being an American. The United States is my home. I can live anywhere I want within the borders of my country, and I can move freely from place to place as I please. I am afforded safety by the law, by the police, and by the military in my country. When I visit other countries, I am just a guest, a foreigner. I feel out of place because I don't know the language and the customs. However, if something were to happen to me, the American government would still protect me.

Citizenship comes with benefits.

Paul tells the saints in Philippi that our “citizenship is in heaven.” He doesn't say our citizenship will be in heaven, he says it is in heaven. Right now. Heaven is our home. It's where we belong, it's where our identity lies. We are safe and protected. Because that is true, it stands to reason that earth is foreign ground. We don't belong here. This place just doesn't feel like home. Paul describes it this way: “For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things” (Philippians 3:18-19). When we set our minds on earthly things, when our appetites become our god, we “walk as enemies of the cross of Christ.”

Paul urges a different path, saying, “let us hold true to what we have attained” (Philippians 3:16). In other words, our charge is to live what's already true, as citizens of heaven and children of the King of Kings, Jesus Christ. We're just visiting earth for a while, until we can return home. Don't become too comfortable with the things of earth. It's not our home. Paul has his eyes fixed on heaven and on living a life worthy of a citizen of heaven. He wants his readers to have the same aim. He writes, “I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:14).

Citizenship also comes with responsibilities.

Citizens are obliged to obey the laws, to live peaceably with others, and, most importantly, to honor the king. Paul says, “Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us” (Philippians 3:17). How

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bold is Paul! He has no problem holding himself up as an example, boldly challenging his readers to “imitate” him. Paul knows he is “pressing on” toward Jesus and is comfortable with others following him to help them follow Jesus. Notice as well that Paul does not consider himself to be the only such example. He encourages them to “keep their eyes” on anyone who walks as a citizen of heaven.

Perhaps my favorite part of this section of Philippians is the very end of chapter three. Paul’s language is very future oriented throughout, as he “forgets what lies behind” and “strains forward to what lies ahead.” Then, at the end of the chapter, he writes this: “But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables Him even to subject all things to Himself” (Philippians 3:20–21). This promise means a great deal to me. My son Luke has lost a leg and his body is sick, but Jesus is powerful and all things are subject to Him. He is in control. In heaven, everything will change. I eagerly await my Savior. I envision the day that Luke will be given a new body in heaven, a spiritual body (see 1 Corinthians 15:44). I picture him running free, no longer in pain, living in complete peace, enjoying all the benefits of a citizen of heaven.

To Consider

1. Do you feel more like a citizen of heaven or of earth? What advantages does citizenship in heaven have over earthly citizenship?
2. Paul uses the phrase, “their god is their belly.” What appetite are you tempted to make into a god in your life?
3. How can you live a life that “holds true” to the salvation and citizenship you’ve already attained? Consider the idea that good citizens honor the king, in this case Jesus, as you form your response.

To Do

Make a list of things that you’re thankful for, things that are true right now because your citizenship is in heaven. Take a moment each day this week to reflect on these blessings, asking God to help you keep your circumstances, whatever they might be, in perspective.

Part X

Philippians 4:1-9

Philippians 4:1-9

Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved.

I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

Reflections

What makes you anxious?

Anxiety is a sense of nervous anticipation that arises when we think about what might happen. When we experience significant anxiety, our minds will start racing and often times we develop physical symptoms as well. It's not uncommon for an anxious person to experience headaches, upset stomach, chest pain, or difficulty sleeping. Strong negative anxiety, usually resulting from fear, can be paralyzing to the point where, in some people, anxiety becomes so strong they suffer panic attacks.

We get anxious about all kinds of things. Relationships often make us anxious. Finances do as well. We get anxious about the future and then turn around and get anxious about the past. We can become anxious about our jobs or about the college we might (or might not) attend. We sometimes experience anxiety around our physical health, or maybe it's health insurance that makes you anxious. Or the price of gas. Or the weather.

We get anxious about all kinds of things.

Then Paul says, "do not be anxious about anything" (Philippians 4:6).

Imagine a life without anxiety. Different. Relaxing. Better.

Paul does not simply tell his readers to stop being anxious. He provides three helpful mindsets to cultivate in their lives that can replace anxiety. First, he urges the saints to "rejoice in the Lord always, again I say rejoice" (Philippians 4:4). To "rejoice" is simply to delight or to take joy. It can be difficult to always rejoice. If we aim to rejoice in our circumstances, we will likely fail. That's why Paul says, "rejoice in the Lord," because the Lord is always worthy of our delight. We can choose to rejoice in the Lord because, well, He's the Lord!

Then Paul says, "Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand" (Philippians 4:5). Often times anxiety results from irrational thinking. We panic. We assume the worst. We "borrow trouble." We forget that the "Lord is at hand." Paul encourages his readers to be reasonable. Think things through. If the Lord is indeed "at hand," does it make sense to worry so much? Clear thinking, through the lens of a clear understanding that God is always present, will help eliminate anxiety.

Part X

Paul gives one more imperative. He tells the saints in Philippi to “not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God” (Philippians 4:6). Instead of allowing anxiety to rule in our hearts, Paul gives instruction to instead pray about everything with an attitude of thanksgiving. This is brilliant advice. Prayer reminds us that God is good and that He’s present. When we go to God in prayer, we’re showing that we trust Him. That by itself will reduce anxiety. When you add in an attitude of gratefulness, it’s the perfect combination to address anxiety in our lives.

The best thing about this final command from Paul is that it comes with a promise. If we choose to replace anxiety with thankfulness, going to God with prayer in everything, Paul promises that “the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:7). Isn’t that amazing? Consider a heart guarded by the peace of God. There would be no room in that heart for anxiety!

Paul then reiterates this command and promise with these powerful words: “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you” (Philippians 4:8-9).

When we remember who God is, when we remember that He is near, we experience the comfort and protection of His supernatural peace and we can indeed “be anxious for nothing.”

To Consider

1. What is your greatest cause of anxiety? Is it reasonable?
2. How often do you pray? Are you willing to pray about anything and everything?
3. Paul continues to talk about thankfulness. How will you remember to be thankful on a daily basis?

To Do

Write a list of people, things, and situations that typically cause you to feel anxious. Tell the folks in your Life Group or maybe a few friends about the items on your list. Then, simply pray. Ask God for help. Ask Him to clear away the anxiety and guard your heart with His peace.

Part XI

Philippians 4:10-23

Philippians 4:10-23

I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble. And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only. Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again. Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit. I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.

Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me greet you. All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

Reflections

Even though Paul never uses the word “trust” in this passage, as we reach the end of Paul’s letter to the Philippians, trust is a key theme in Paul’s conclusion. Trust is simply confidence and belief in the reliability of another person. A trustworthy person is someone with a track record of effective follow through. Paul closes his letter with several different expressions of trust that were an encouragement to me as I wrapped up my study of Philippians.

Paul’s first statement of trust is found in Philippians 4:11, where he says, “I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content.” Content people are satisfied and relaxed. Paul has experienced virtually every kind of circumstance imaginable. He’s been wealthy, and he’s been poor. He’s lived with excess, and he’s lived in scarcity. At times Paul has been threatened, beaten, and imprisoned. At other times he has moved freely about the Roman Empire, sharing the Gospel with thousands of people. Whatever the case, he knows that he is to remain content. To be content regardless of the situation requires trust in God and confidence that God will keep His promises every time.

In verse 13 Paul then says, “I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.” Again, this is an expression of implicit trust in God. Paul makes a bold statement here...that he can do “all things.” Thankfully, Paul doesn’t trust in himself. His confidence is in the One who gives him strength, the Lord.

Later Paul makes one more statement of trust, saying, “and my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19). Wow. The confidence Paul expresses here is inspiring. Paul has developed an unwavering trust in the Lord in the midst of some awful experiences. God has always provided for Paul and has always sustained him. He’s reliable. His track record is perfect. Because of this, Paul believes that God will meet the needs of the Philippian church, knowing that He has unlimited resources (riches in glory in Christ Jesus) available to Him.

Out of Paul’s trust in God Paul has also developed a unique trust relationship with the saints in Philippi. The Philippian church has “revived their concern” for Paul, and “shared in his trouble.” They’ve provided emotional support for Paul, as well as physical support in meeting Paul’s basic needs. He effusively thanks them for their consistent generous support of his ministry. The trust level between Paul and the Philippians is very high, because they have come through for one another time after time.

Part XI

Paul ends his letter with the following benediction: “To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen. Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me greet you. All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar’s household. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit” (Philippians 4:20-23). There is a warmth and trust between Paul and the church in Philippi that has resulted from years of striving together in the Lord. Their unity in the faith was used by God to advance the Gospel in Philippi.

To Consider

1. Are you content regardless of the situation?
2. Proverbs 3:5 says, “trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your understanding.” When are you most tempted to rank your own understanding above the Lord?
3. How has God proven reliable in your life? Does His track record inspire confidence? Consider the sacrificial work of Jesus on the cross as you formulate your response.

To Do

Note how grateful Paul is because of the consistent financial support he receives from the Philippians. Find an opportunity to support someone who works in full-time ministry, and begin to develop a Gospel partnership with them through encouragement and financial support.

Final Thoughts

*Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown,
stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved.*

Philippians 4:1

Paul's letter to the Philippians is a gift. Through this letter God provided the saints in first century Philippi with wisdom, perspective, encouragement, and so much more. In turn, millions of readers since have been similarly blessed, as God continues to use His Word to shape and to embolden His saints toward His ultimate aim, which is to bring glory to Himself.

Paul's final salutation to the Philippians at the outset of chapter four provides an excellent summary of three major themes in his letter. First, Paul's deep affection for his friends in Philippi is evident throughout his letter. Here he refers to them as "brothers" whom he "loves and longs for," his "joy and crown," and also his "beloved." These are terms of a powerful sense of appreciation and admiration Paul displays in his writing. Paul prays for the Philippians, compliments them, thanks them, and continuously offers encouragement to them. The church in Philippi would likely have been moved to tears and motivated to serve because of the fond words they received from Paul.

Final Thoughts

Second, it's noteworthy that Paul calls them his "joy." This is a huge theme in Paul's letter. Seventeen times he uses the word "joy" or "rejoice" to describe both the current state of his heart and his hope for his readers. He tells them that they bring him joy, that he "rejoices" in them, and then he urges them to live lives of joy regardless of the circumstances they face.

Finally, Paul exhorts his audience to "stand firm" in the Lord. Again, this is a consistent charge Paul gives, that they ought to persevere and live lives that are befitting of the eternal future God secured for them in Jesus Christ. Paul uses words like "strive," "press on," "work out," and then "stand firm." Knowing that the circumstances of his readers were difficult, and were probably about to get worse, Paul asks them to resist the urge to give up, and instead put full effort into a manner of life that honors God.

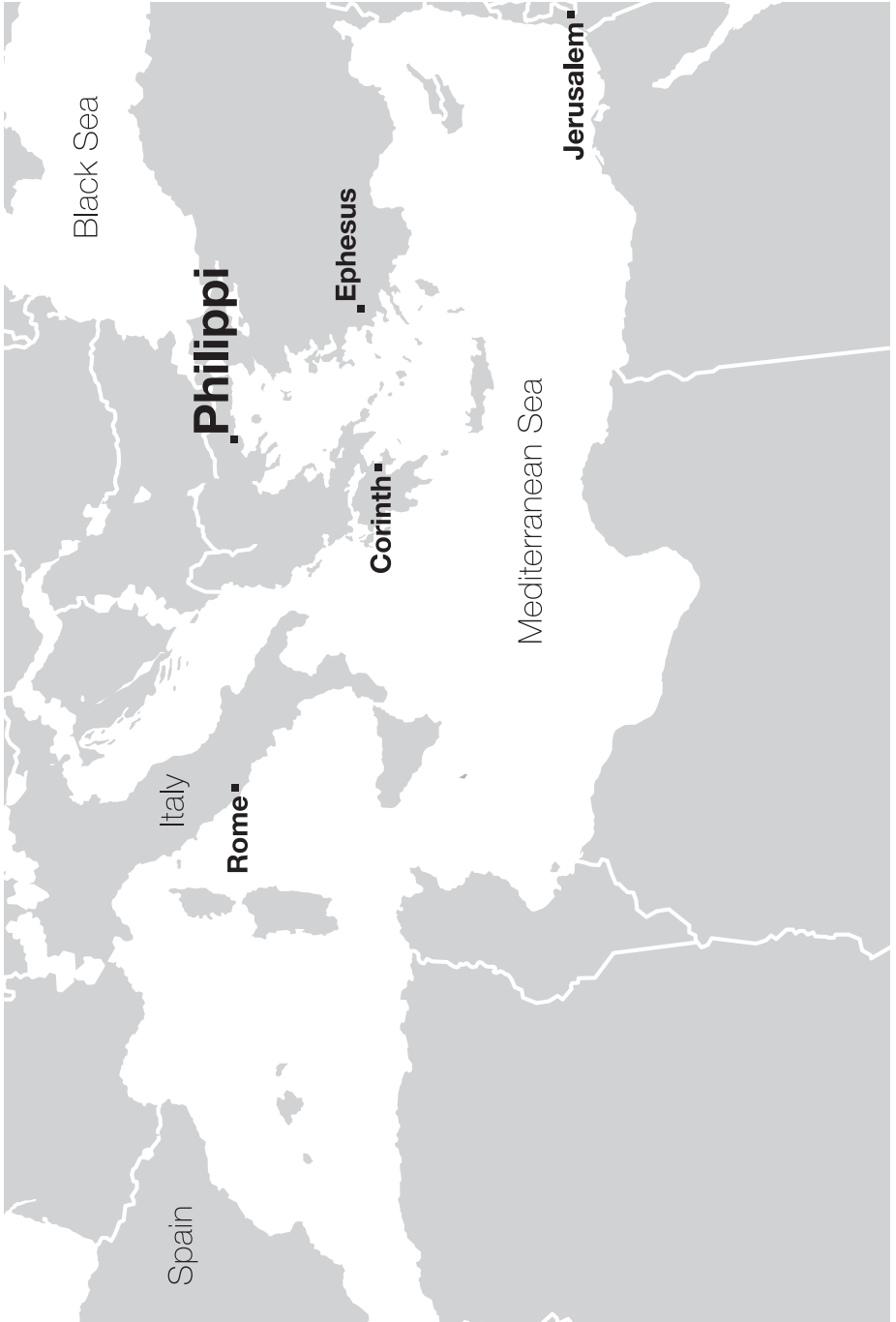
It is this same challenge I leave you with today, through the timeless themes in Paul's letter. As Pastors, we love you very dearly, we pray for you regularly, and we rejoice in your faith. Our hope is that through the power and wisdom of God's Word each of you would develop an eternal perspective that informs your life. Continue to find Him, not only in the pages of Philippians, but in the rest of the Bible as well. We pray that you would find joy in your pain as well as in your blessings. We urge you to let your manner of life be worthy of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, so that through your efforts God would be glorified and many would be brought to faith.

Brothers and sisters, who we love and long for, you are our joy and crown. Therefore, stand firm in the Lord, to the glory of God and of Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

Pastor James Granger
Riverview Church

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