

advancing  
- in -  
joy



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## *Study 1*

*Read: Philippians 1:1-11*

**"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." — Philippians 1:3-5**

### *Overview*

We learn in the book of Acts (16:6-40) that the church at Philippi was started by the Apostle Paul with a rather surprising mix of people — there was the affluent and educated Lydia (16:13-15), an oppressed slave girl (16:16-24), and the blue collar jailer (16:25-40). The only thing this group had in common was an encounter with Jesus that turned their lives around and made them followers of him. Around 10 years later, Paul is writing to this church he loved in order to encourage, update, and exhort them so that they will continue to stay faithful to this good news and advance it with joy.

While we see the theme of "joy" throughout the letter (referred to around 20 times), it is not just any joy. As Tony Merida states,

"Paul also uses this occasion to encourage the believers to persevere together with joy in spite of opposition. Drawing on known military language of the time, Paul exhorts the Christians to advance the gospel bravely, as fellow servants of the true King, in the face of terrifying opponents. One must not miss this theme of partnership for the advance of the gospel. It's not just an epistle of joy. It's about fearlessly advancing the gospel with joy, working together in hardship. Indeed, Paul's overarching concern is with the gospel, a word that appears more in Philippians than in any other letter (per hundred words). Paul writes much about the glorious nature of the gospel that believers must defend and declare." ([Exalting Jesus in Philippians](#))

This makes sense of what we see right out of the gate when Paul encourages them by saying, "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" (Philippians 1:3-5).

Paul reminds the church that Jesus began a good work in them, and HE will bring it to completion (1:6). Paul loved this church and, in the midst of opposition and conflict, encourages them to grow in both love AND knowledge, which results in lives of discernment and the righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God (1:9-11).



## *Message notes and application*

Write down notes as you listen to the sermon and read the text. What is the main point of the text? What catches your attention, challenges, or confuses you?

## *Passage questions*

1. Read Acts 16:6–40. How was the church in Philippi started (Acts 16:10) and with whom? What does this tell us about the power of the gospel and the diversity of the church?
2. Paul uses “partner” language (1:5, 7), which denotes those involved would share in doing the work on one hand and financial responsibilities on the other (N.T. Wright). What does it look like for us to tangibly play our part in partnering together in the gospel and furthering Jesus’ mission?



3. What is the significance of Paul saying that God not only begins the work but will complete the work (1:6)? How does this bring assurance, hope, and freedom?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. Why is it important to have both love and knowledge/discernment (v. 9)? What does it result in (vv. 10-11)?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. Talk about the implications of this prayer (vv. 9-11) for your life (think of everyday implications).

### *As you go...*

- Think about Acts 16 and the start of the church. Who is in your life who may seem far from God that you can begin praying would have a life changing encounter with Jesus?
- As you read this passage, write down what it looks like for you to find joy in partnering with Jesus' church in advancing his mission.
- Paul wanted the church to be able to discern what really matters in life (1:9-11). Take some time to pray for discernment for yourself, your group, and for your church — that you all may be passionate about the things that really matter (from Exalting Jesus in Philippians).



## *Prayer*

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the good news of the gospel. We thank you for your power in changing lives — no matter what our backgrounds are. God, we pray that we will have joy and freedom in the gospel as you continue to do the work you began in us that you will bring to completion. We thank you that we get to be a part of that work in our lives and the lives of others as we all partake in your grace.

“And this is what I am praying: that your love may overflow still more and more, in knowledge and in all astute wisdom. Then you will be able to tell the difference between good and evil, and be sincere and faultless on the day of the Messiah, filled to overflowing with the fruit of right living, fruit that comes through King Jesus to God’s glory and praise.” (1:9-11, via N.T. Wright)

## *Prayer requests*



## *Study 2*

*Read: Philippians 1:12-18a*

**"I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel." – Philippians 1:12**

### *Overview*

Paul moves from his prayer for the church to an update on what is going on with him. In a dramatic understatement that keeps the attention off himself, Paul simply states "what has happened to me." What has happened to Paul is that he is in prison for preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul encourages them that God is even using his imprisonment to "advance the gospel." While he is in prison, he has had the opportunity to share the gospel with the Roman guards (there would be upwards of 9,000 men in the imperial guard) and have it affect many of them. On top of that, his imprisonment, and Christ's work through it, has encouraged and given boldness to other Christians in sharing the gospel.

Of those speaking the Word, Paul goes on to say that some of them preached from goodwill and out of love while others preached from envy and out of selfish ambition. While it is hard to say who exactly was proclaiming Christ without sincerity (either self-motivated preachers or those who weren't Christians mocking the gospel), Paul looks above the fray and again celebrates that either way, Christ is proclaimed and in that he rejoices!

In what seems ironic, we often see how opposition to the gospel turns into opportunity for the gospel to advance (ESV Study). The Old Testament account of Joseph — who was left for dead, sold into slavery, and thrown into prison, all before rising to a position of authority of power — would have been on Paul's mind as he would be reminded that what was "meant for evil, God meant it for good, the saving of many lives" (Genesis 50:20). All of this points us to Jesus, who through the ultimate (and unjust) suffering on the cross brought salvation and many sons to glory (Hebrews 2:10).

What mattered to Paul the most was the gospel. So whenever Christ was proclaimed — whether his conditions were good or bad, or whether people's motives were good or bad — he could rejoice! When we keep our hope and focus on Jesus, we can rejoice in all circumstances as God uses all things to advance the gospel.



## *Message notes and application*

Write down notes as you listen to the sermon and read the text. What is the main point of the text? What catches your attention, challenges, or confuses you?

## *Passage questions*

1. What do verses 12–18 say about Paul's priorities, aims, concerns, and joys? What is primary in Paul's mind according to these verses? (from ESV Study)
2. What allowed Paul to have joy, even in the midst of the horrible circumstance of being imprisoned (vv. 12–14)?





3. Read the following passages and discuss why it is important to have a right understanding of God's plans and power as well as the good news of Jesus.

Genesis 50:15–21 (particularly v. 20)

Acts 2:22–24

Hebrews 12:1–2

4. Verse 14 says that the other Christians became more confident and “much more bold” in light of Paul's imprisonment. Who has encouraged your faith through their faithfulness to Jesus and proclaiming his goodness despite their circumstances?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. While we don't know exactly who those who preached Christ from selfish ambition were, what are some differences we see between the insincere and those who preached out of love (vv. 15–17)? How can Paul be encouraged either way?

### *As you go...*

- Talk about where you are currently tempted to feel discouraged because the plans you had were badly thwarted or because malicious people are trying to make life difficult. How does the gospel bring freedom and even “rejoicing” in these circumstances?
- Discuss where you may be living out of envy or selfish ambition and how your words and actions could be afflicting others and the cause of Christ. Take some time to repent.
- Brainstorm how you can use your present circumstances as opportunities to stay faithful and joyful while trusting in God to give you opportunities to speak the gospel to others.



## *Prayer*

Sovereign God who created all things and reigns over all things, we come before you knowing that your thoughts are higher than our thoughts and your plans are higher than our plans. We praise you that you use not only the good, right, and true things of this world, but your goodness is so vast that you can even use the brokenness, disobedience, and hard things for good. God, we confess that our sin has brought that brokenness into this world. We, with Paul, thank you for the good news of Jesus — his life, death, and resurrection that brought us life from death.

God, we pray that this good news would allow us to see all circumstances and all situations as opportunities to advance your gospel and bring hope, love, and freedom to a world that is in bondage and slavery. God, give us the courage and boldness to speak your Word without fear. God, we repent of our selfish ambition even in proclaiming your name, and we thank you and rejoice that you can use even that for good!

## *Prayer requests*



## *Study 3*

*Read: Philippians 1:18-30*

**"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." — Philippians 1:27**

### *Overview*

Paul takes his rejoicing one step further in this passage. He has proven that God gives him reason to rejoice while in prison, but he (and the church) knows that being killed is a real possibility as well. So he emphatically reassures the Philippians that, if that happens, "I will rejoice" in that too.

"For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (1:21). Living is about serving Christ; dying is about being with Christ (Merida).

Paul says that either way — if he lives or if he is executed — Christ would be honored and he wins. If he is delivered and lives, there is more work to be done, and he can continue to build up the church and spread the gospel. But if he is executed and dies, he will depart and be with Christ, which is "far better" and what "he desires." Paul's confidence and hope is in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, which brings freedom from even death and results in a life that advances the gospel.

Paul writes that his hope is that he will come and see the church in Philippi once again (26). In the meantime, he calls them to let their "manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ." Pastor Matt Chandler explains it this way: "What does this word worthy mean? For Paul, it means ascribing worth. When he commands others to live in a 'worthy' way, he means we should live in such a way that shows what we believe is of supreme worth. For Christians, it means living in such a way that Jesus is seen as big, that Jesus is seen as glorious. See, in the spiritual economy of Paul, God and his gospel are most important, not Paul and his well-being." ([To Live Is Christ to Die Is Gain](#))

While there will be opposition and conflict, Paul encourages them to stay rooted in the gospel, which brings unity and strength to stand against oppression. When we treasure Christ above all things — comfort, conveniences, and things we collect in this world — we can let go of those things for the sake of Christ. We can follow Jesus, who willingly suffered a brutal death on the cross to bring new life. We can stand against all oppression and evil in the world because we know that "to live is Christ, and to die is gain."



### *Message notes and application*

Write down notes as you listen to the sermon and read the text. What is the main point of the text? What catches your attention, challenges, or confuses you?

### *Passage questions*

1. How does Paul seek to bring encouragement about the future to the church at Philippi in this passage, in light of his pending circumstances?
2. How does having Paul's perspective of complete trust and hope in Christ in life, death, or suffering (vv. 19–21) bring freedom, power, and purpose?



3. With this passage in mind, read 2 Corinthians 5:1-10. Do you have a fear of death? What is our hope and purpose in life or death?
  
4. Paul saw that his living would benefit others as they grew in faith, found joy in Christ, and glorified Jesus more and more (vv. 24-26). How can you live (practically) to help others grow, find joy, and glorify Jesus?
  
5. Paul uses military language to encourage the church to stand firm for the faith and live a life worthy of the gospel of Christ. What does Paul call the people, and us, to be about? (In our calling, life, unity, community, the church, expectations, etc.)

### *As you go...*

- Think about the various areas of your life (home, vocation, neighborhood, community, schools, etc.). What does it look like to have courage and honor Christ (v. 20) in those areas? How does the truth that “to live is Christ and to die is gain” allow it?
- Who has God placed around you that you can help to grow in faith, find joy in Christ, and glorify Jesus? Intercede, invest, and invite them into your life.
- Think about the context of the church in our culture (both internally and externally). What battles and opposition to the gospel are there? What does it look like to stand firm together and live as citizens of heaven?



## *Prayer*

As I arise today, may the strength of God pilot me, the power of God uphold me, the wisdom of God guide me. May the eye of God look before me, the ear of God hear me, the word of God speak for me. May the hand of God protect me, the way of God lie before me, the shield of God defend me, the host of God save me. May Christ shield me today. Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me, Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ on my right, Christ on my left, Christ when I lie down, Christ when I sit, Christ when I stand, Christ in the heart of everyone who thinks of me, Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me, Christ in every eye that sees me, Christ in every ear that hears me. Amen.

— Prayer of St. Patrick the Evangelist (via [Exalting Jesus in Philippians](#))

## *Prayer requests*



## *Study 4*

*Read: Philippians 2:1-11*

**“And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” — Philippians 2:8**

### *Overview*

After encouraging the Philippians to live a life worthy of the gospel, the opening verses of Philippians 2 offer a daunting and beautiful picture of what that means. These verses are about perfect humility and unity. They are a picture of Christ.

First, Paul reminds the believers what they have experienced in Christ: encouragement, comfort from love, participation in the Spirit, affection and sympathy. These are the things they have received from God and the things they, as the church, will reflect if they live a life worthy of the gospel. They will be united, “being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind” (v. 2). If they live a life worthy of the gospel, they will be humble, because unity is impossible without humility.

Paul’s words in verses 3–4 sound nice at first. It’s not hard to appreciate the idea of caring for one another and looking out for one another. But Paul isn’t offering vague encouragement about being better people — he’s commanding the church to set aside pride. He’s commanding the church to “do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit.” This true humility is impossible without Christ, which is why Paul follows his command with a beautiful hymn of Christ’s character, sacrifice, and exaltation.

Philippians 2:5–11 should be planted deep in the heart of every believer, because this is the gospel. The Son of God, who was lacking nothing and perfectly holy, took on the form of man in order to become a servant of man. His life of perfect humility, selflessness, and obedience to God culminated in shameful death on a cross. This is the example Christ set for us — willingness to be humiliated for the sake of loving others; willingness to obey God, even if it means death.

There is joy and hope in living for Christ and following his example of selflessness, because death was not his end. By conquering death, Jesus became our Lord and Savior, and God “highly exalted him...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” (vv. 9–11). By serving out of love and doing nothing out of selfish ambition, the Church displays Christ to itself and the world, to the glory of God the Father.



### *Message notes and application*

Write down notes as you listen to the sermon and read the text. What is the main point of the text? What catches your attention, challenges, or confuses you?

### *Passage questions*

1. Read Philippians 2:1-2 again. Where do you see these elements at work in the church? Where do you see room to grow?
2. Write down steps we can take as a body of believers to better reflect Christ in the way Paul suggests in verses 1-2. Discuss these ideas as a group.





3. Where do you find yourself acting or being tempted to act out of selfish ambition? What would change in these circumstances if you were able to consider others more significant than yourself?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. Read Isaiah 53 and Philippians 2:5-8. How is Christ's humility displayed in these verses?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. Read Philippians 2:9-11. In what ways do these verses give us reason to hope and rejoice, no matter our circumstances?

### *As you go...*

- Spend time meditating on Philippians 2:5-11. Do you truly believe the words in this hymn? Ask God to help you to live a life worthy of the gospel in response to what Christ has done.
- Challenge yourself to memorize Philippians 2:5-11. Work on it with friends or family, and hold each other accountable.
- Do you know anyone in the church who is walking through a difficult time? Think of some practical ways that you can show encouragement, love, and sympathy to them this week.



## *Prayer*

Heavenly Father, I recognize that, without the sacrifice of your Son and the gift of your Holy Spirit, I am incapable of living a life that brings you glory. We, as a church, cannot be of one mind and live as Christ unless we humbly confess that Jesus Christ is Lord and that you are our strength. You have shown us encouragement, comfort, love, affection, and sympathy. Help us to do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit, but to gladly emulate the character of Christ by serving others and considering others before thinking of ourselves.

Plant the truth of the gospel deep in our hearts so that we can rejoice as you are teaching us to be more like you. We recognize that we have nothing apart from you and wait expectantly for the day when 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.

## *Prayer requests*



## *Study 5*

*Read: 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.”**

**— Philippians 2:12-13**

### *Overview*

In verses 12-18, Paul continues to dig into what it looks like to follow Christ. What is the appropriate response to Christ's life of obedience and sacrifice that is spelled out in verses 6-11? Paul tells the Philippians to “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.” In [The Message of Philippians](#), J. A. Motyer describes this as “commitment to what we have to do and reliance on what God is doing.”

We seek to obey, knowing that the Holy Spirit gives us the power to obey; we seek to walk in righteousness, knowing that we have no righteousness apart from Christ. Walking with Christ means pursuing God and following his example and commands while, at the same time, recognizing that we're unable to pursue God and follow his example and commands in our own strength. This is humbling, which is why fear and trembling are natural responses to a greater understanding of salvation. It's God's love, power, and work in us that gives us the ability to glorify God and be more like Christ.

Paul then gives a practical command to help the Philippians reflect Christ in their lives and stand out as different from a sinful world: “Do all things without grumbling or disputing.” This command is truly antithetical to the attitude of a world encouraging us to fight for what we “deserve.” Doing everything without grumbling or disputing means not calling people out for disrespecting you, it means not complaining to a coworker when your boss fails to notice the extra hours you've been working, and it means not venting on social media when your day doesn't meet your expectations. These may seem like simple rules to live by, but they're not. Living a life of rejoicing rather than grumbling is the result of a changed mind and a desire to emulate Christ.

Paul's desire, out of love for the Philippians, is for them to be more and more like Christ. He is willing to be poured out for them if it means that they grow in their faith, become more like Christ, and have a deeper knowledge of God. Then, he could rejoice with them in the advancement of the gospel.



### *Message notes and application*

Write down notes as you listen to the sermon and read the text. What is the main point of the text? What catches your attention, challenges, or confuses you?

### *Passage questions*

1. Paul tells the Philippians to “work out your own salvation,” not to “work for your own salvation.” Why is it important to notice the difference between these two commands?
2. What do you think it means to “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling”?



3. How are obedience to God and reliance on God intertwined, and why is humility required for true obedience?
  
4. Are you prone to grumbling, complaining, or venting? Why do you think Paul is so adamant about doing everything without grumbling or complaining?
  
5. In Philippians 2:17, Paul is able to rejoice even if he is completely poured out for the sake of the faith of the Philippians. Where are you being spent for the sake of the gospel? Thank God for using you in these places. As a group, pray for one another — that the Holy Spirit will give you strength, a right view of God, and the ability to rejoice as you continue to serve.

### *As you go...*

- Make a conscious effort to do everything without grumbling or complaining this week. It may help to ask a friend or family member to follow up with you each day to see how you did. Embrace God's mercy and forgiveness (and be quick to apologize to others) in the moments when you slip up, and give thanks to God for giving you the strength to continue to do his will.
- Continue memorizing Philippians 2:5-11.
- If you don't currently have anyone you're pouring into for the sake of the gospel, ask God to open your eyes to opportunities to disciple others. Rest in the strength and power that he provides.



## *Prayer*

Lord, I humbly come before you recognizing that I can do no good thing apart from you. Thank you for strengthening us by your grace and enabling us to obey your commands. Thank you for giving me the power to love you with all my heart and to love others as myself. Holy Spirit, work in us and allow us to live lives of thankfulness, doing everything without grumbling or complaining. Let us be light in a dark world. We rejoice in what you've done and what you are continuing to do. Renew our minds so that we might rejoice in times of struggle as well as in times of peace, knowing that it is God who works in us, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

## *Prayer requests*



## *Study 6*

*Read: Philippians 2:19-30*

**“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.”**

**— Philippians 2:29-30**

### *Overview*

In verses 19-30, Paul seems to switch from exhortation to practical business as he relays information about Timothy's upcoming visit and Epaphroditus' return. But, even in the few sentences Paul writes about these men, we are given more examples of what it looks like to live as Christ.

Paul writes of Timothy that he has “no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ” (vv. 20-21). Paul has full trust in Timothy, because Timothy's heart is to do the will of God and serve as Jesus served. Timothy lives out what Paul writes about earlier in Philippians 2 — doing nothing out of selfish ambition, but in humility counting others as greater than himself. A vital part of the unity Paul calls for so frequently in his letter is trust among believers. Though neither Paul nor Timothy was perfect, they could trust that they were both seeking to bring glory to God in all they did. Because they both feared the Lord and walked in humility, they didn't have to worry about accidentally offending one another or wounding each other's pride, and they didn't have to worry about ill intent. They were of one mind — to bring glory to God and advance the gospel.

Unlike Paul and Timothy, Epaphroditus was a layperson in the church. Lest anyone be tempted to believe that following the example of Christ is primarily the responsibility of those called to fulltime ministry. Not only did Epaphroditus love the church well — as evidenced by their concern for his health and his distress over their concern — he nearly died in service to them. He's one of the unsung heroes of the Bible. If Epaphroditus performed miracles or saw thousands turn in obedience to Christ, we're not told about it. What we do know is that he was a man with a changed heart who faithfully served the Lord and looked out for the needs of others above his own. Paul encouraged the Philippians to “honor such men” (v. 29). He held no important rank and, due to illness, most likely couldn't serve Paul as the Philippians intended, but Epaphroditus loved the church, was willing to serve even while suffering, and understood God's mercy.



## *Message notes and application*

Write down notes as you listen to the sermon and read the text. What is the main point of the text? What catches your attention, challenges, or confuses you?

## *Passage questions*

1. Who are the people in your life who model Jesus? In what ways do they model Christlikeness? (from Exalting Jesus in Philippians)
2. Read Romans 16:1-16, noting the names Paul mentions. How can we be encouraged and challenged by the way Paul writes of these largely unknown faithful servants?





3. Humility and love for God above all else allow us to rejoice in what others are doing for the sake of the gospel. Do you find it easy to appreciate the ways others are (however imperfectly) seeking to serve God and others, or does it sometimes feel like a competition? Why do you think this is?
  
4. Why is it important to honor and encourage, but not deify, those who are faithfully serving Christ and the church?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. Think of ways that you can cultivate selflessness as a way of life. What are some practical changes you can make in your daily life?

### *As you go...*

- This week, make a point of thanking someone who has displayed Christlikeness to you.
- Get in touch with someone you know who either attends another church or is out in the mission field, and ask about what God is doing in their community. Spend time thanking God for the ways he is at work and praying for these other believers.
- Look at your list from question 5, and come up with a plan to start incorporating these changes in your life.



## *Prayer*

Heavenly Father, you are always faithful. Thank you for using people like Timothy and Epaphroditus to encourage us and show us what it looks like to live for you, following Christ's example. Give us hearts that delight in serving others for the sake of the gospel, even when doing so means sacrificing our own comfort or safety. Give us a heavenly perspective and willing hearts as we go throughout our days. Lord, we have tasted and seen that you are good. Help us to be faithful servants, remembering your faithfulness and mercy toward us. Even in the seemingly mundane moments of our day, be glorified in all we do.

## *Prayer requests*



## *Study 7*

*Read: Philippians 3:1-11*

**“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.” — Philippians 3:8**

### *Overview*

Verse 3:1 says “finally” or “so then” and introduces the second half of the letter with the basic command for them to “rejoice” or “celebrate” in the Lord Jesus — this forms the framework for everything else that is to come. To celebrate and rejoice, because Jesus is Lord and because we are his people, is the sure antidote to all false or rival beliefs (Tom Wright, [Paul for Everyone – The Prison Letters](#)).

The primary false message or rival belief that Paul was warning them against was legalism — adding your works to the finished work of Jesus for your salvation. There were “Judaizers” who would say they accepted Jesus as the Messiah, but would call people to continue to adhere to the Jewish traditions for their salvation (i.e. circumcision). “Paul says ‘we are the circumcision’ to speak not of a circumcision of the flesh, but that of a changed heart...Paul is saying that those who trust in Christ are the true people of God; they are the true circumcision. Following this statement, he provides three distinguishing marks of a Christian, of the true people of God.” (Tony Merida, [Exalting Christ in Philippians](#)).

First, followers of Christ are those who “worship (or serve) by the Spirit of God” — they possess the Spirit of God through Christ and live a life of worship and service to him. Second, they boast, glory, exalt in, and advance the name of Christ. Finally, with that, they don’t put confidence in the flesh — in their status, achievements or good works — but in Christ’s work on their behalf.

This passage culminates in the ultimate goal of the Christian: “to know Christ.” Paul refers to Christ nine times in these final five verses. Paul has been using credit/debt language to show that supreme value, worth, and gain is found in Christ and from Christ. It is through faith in Christ that we are made righteous (v. 9 — justification), it is through his power that we become more like him (v. 10 — sanctification), and it is through Christ we will be resurrected (v. 11 — glorification).

While our tendency is to seek life, hope, and justification in many things, this passage reminds us that true life is “knowing the true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.” (John 17:3)



## *Message notes and application*

Write down notes as you listen to the sermon and read the text. What is the main point of the text? What catches your attention, challenges, or confuses you?

## *Passage questions*

1. What are some things that you and others around you rejoice in, ascribe value to, and pursue? Why do we treasure these things?
2. What does this passage (particularly verses 1 and 3) call us to rejoice in, worship (serve), glory and put confidence in? Why?

How does this apply to the various areas of your life?



3. Why is Paul so adamant against putting “confidence in the flesh”?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. In verses 4–7, Paul lists four items pertaining to his birth privileges (status) and three having to do with his religious achievements, yet said they were of no gain. Where can you drift toward putting confidence in your status and what you have achieved?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. Read verses 9–11. How does “knowing Christ Jesus my Lord” (v. 8) allow justification (righteousness before God), sanctification (becoming like Jesus), and glorification (resurrection into eternal life with God)?

How does that shape who you are (what you value, what you do, and what you are or are seeking to become)?

### *As you go...*

- Discuss how people seek to twist the good news of Jesus in Christianity today. Pray for clarity and discernment.
- Make a list of the things, accomplishments, or activities in your life that you can have a tendency to drift toward for your righteousness.
- What helps you to know and experience Jesus? What fuels your faith in him and the power of his resurrection? Fight for those things.



## *Prayer*

Heavenly Father, we thank you that you are good and worthy to rejoice in! God, we live in a world and have desires in our hearts that pull us to worship and put our confidence in things other than you! We confess and repent of those things — our religious backgrounds or good deeds, our family history or name, our self-righteousness and good deeds, our stuff and the things we do.

We thank you for your grace and the work of Christ that shows those things as rubbish and brings true life through knowing him. Help us to gain Christ, to have faith in him, to know the power of his resurrection in our lives. God, we look forward to the day of the resurrection when we will know you fully and worship you eternally.

## *Prayer requests*



## *Study 8*

*Read: Philippians 3:12-4:1*

**"I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."  
— Philippians 3:14**

### *Overview*

Paul picks up where he left off in the last passage as he looks forward to the day when he will be made perfect in his resurrected state (Christ's second coming). His call is to keep focused on that goal and to stand firm as we await our Savior — the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul wants them to know that even he — with all his accomplishments and understanding of the gospel — hasn't arrived and won't "arrive" until Jesus arrives! As N.T. Wright states in Paul for Everyone, "He is gently warning against any tendency to a super-spiritual view of Christianity which imagines that the full life of the age to come can be had in the present, without waiting for the resurrection itself. Paul is quite clear about this. He hasn't 'arrived' in that sense, and nor has anyone else. True maturity, he insists, actually means knowing that you haven't arrived, and that you must still keep pressing on forwards towards the goal. The seasoned athlete knows that the race isn't won and lost until the end has been reached."

The gospel doesn't cause Paul to think there is no need to change, nor does he think that he will be perfect. Paul shows that the gospel — "Christ Jesus made me his own" — compels him to "press on" and "make Christ his own" (v. 12). This good news of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus gives Paul power in the present and for the future. It causes him to strain for what lies ahead. He doesn't count on his past accomplishments or failures, but presses on toward the goal which is Christ Jesus.

Paul encourages the church to imitate him in this focused pursuit of Christ and warns them against false teachers who "walk as enemies of the cross of Christ." He keeps their focus on Jesus — standing firm in him and advancing his mission until the day he comes and transforms all things and subjects all things to himself.

"The Christian life is neither one of perfection nor of passivity, but a progressive pursuit of Christ and his likeness as we await his return and the consummation of all things" (ESV Knowing the Bible – Philippians Study).



### *Message notes and application*

Write down notes as you listen to the sermon and read the text. What is the main point of the text? What catches your attention, challenges, or confuses you?

### *Passage questions*

1. What is one goal that you set and accomplished? How was it a process? What was different about being in the process versus when the project was complete?
2. How does the good news that "Christ Jesus made me his own" compel Paul (and us)? What does he pursue (vv. 12-16)?





3. While Paul acknowledges he hasn't arrived, he still calls the church to imitate him and his pursuit (v. 17) Who do you have in your life who you can learn from, grow from, and imitate in your pursuit of Christ? Who is imitating you?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. What warnings does Paul give against false teachers (vv. 18-19)? How should we heed that warning today?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. Read verses 3:20-4:1. What do you find beautiful and compelling about this truth? How does this picture of the future for those who are in Christ shape our present?

### *As you go...*

- Write down the things you tend to strive for and put your hope in.
- Discuss how the truth of this statement can be reflected in your daily life: "The Christian life is neither one of perfection nor of passivity, but a progressive pursuit of Christ and his likeness as we await his return and the consummation of all things."
- Take time to think about, learn about, and focus your mind on heaven and the coming of "a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ."



## *Prayer*

Tony Merida lists five “challenges” from this passage for growing in maturity and knowing Christ. Pray that these would be a reality in your life:

- Humbly acknowledge that you haven’t arrived.
- Passionately pursue greater knowledge of Christ.
- Never lose the wonder of the gospel.
- Follow cross-centered, heavenly-minded examples.
- Live in light of your true citizenship.

## *Prayer requests*



## *Study 9*

*Read: Philippians 4:2-9*

**"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."  
— Philippians 4:6-7**

### *Overview*

Peace is hard to come by. Five minutes with the nightly news or today's newspaper only confirms that human relations, whether at the personal, corporate, or national level, are more prone to strife and discord than they are to flourishing and harmony. While we work hard for relational health, social justice, and international peace accords, we are far more susceptible to bitter rivalries, systemic injustice, and war. Such has been the trend of recorded history since the beginning, or at least very near the beginning.

The Bible makes it clear that our lack of peace ultimately stems from our sinful nature and the initial act of rebellion in the Garden of Eden, as recorded in Genesis 3. Our fractured relationship with our Creator has worked itself out like a spider's web to affect every area of our lives, both individually and corporately. This is, after all, why Christ came.

So when we come to Philippians 4 and see Paul give the church at Philippi some basic application points to consider, it should come as no surprise that the central focus of his instruction is peace. In verses 2-3, he seeks to resolve a personal matter between two sisters so that there would be peace in the church. In verses 4-7, he directs the church at Philippi to rejoice and cast off anxiety. And what does he promise in their place? The peace of God. Then, in verses 8-9, he gives the Philippians a list of things to think about and notes that the God of peace would be with them.

Are these words of encouragement any less applicable in our own day? All of us have had times in our lives when setting aside our differences with a brother or sister in the church was more important than claiming our own rights or our own way of doing things. We've all sought the Lord in prayer for any number of reasons, needing his surpassing peace as we wait for his sure answer. But perhaps most pressing is our need to give our hearts and minds over to the things that glorify God, those things that are excellent, praiseworthy, lovely, and commendable, so that the peace of God will be our constant companion.



### *Message notes and application*

Write down notes as you listen to the sermon and read the text. What is the main point of the text? What catches your attention, challenges, or confuses you?

### *Passage questions*

1. When you think of “peace,” what setting or time in your life instantly comes to mind? Describe that thought for the rest of the group, centering on why you see that place or situation as idyllically peaceful.
2. If Paul were to write a letter to your local congregation and mention you by name for some disagreement, what would your response be? Are there any relationships you have with fellow believers that are currently strained because of a disagreement? Talk through how to best resolve those with your group.



3. What are some things in your life that make you the most (or even somewhat) anxious? How is it that Paul can encourage the Philippians to “not be anxious about anything”?
  
4. As a group, write out a list of 10–20 things that you would put on “Paul’s list of things to think about” according to verse 8. (This should look a bit different from “raindrops on roses and whiskers on kittens.”) What will it take for you to make these things the center of your thought life this week?
  
5. In John 8:31–32 Jesus says, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth and the truth will set you free,” which is strikingly similar to what Paul says to the Philippians in verse 9. What are some ways you could bring your actions and Christ’s teachings (and subsequently, Paul’s teachings) into closer alignment this week?

### *As you go...*

- Seek out a Christian brother or sister with whom you have a significant disagreement and make restitution.
- Confess your anxiety to the Lord and to a close friend. With that confession, add two things for which you are thankful.
- Take the list of 10–20 things your group wrote down in light of verse 8 and copy it to a notecard or small piece of paper. Pull that copy out multiple times during the day and read through it.



## *Prayer*

Lord, were I to recount the moments in my day for which I should give you thanks I would soon find my lips to tire and my heart to overflow with joy. Not only do you sustain my every breath, you deliver me from evil in ways I could only begin to understand. Teach me to walk in light of my standing with you, in light of my satisfaction in you, and in light of my hope in all you are about to do.

## *Prayer requests*



## *Study 10*

### *Read — Philippians 4:10-23*

**"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." — Philippians 4:11b-13**

### *Overview*

"I want to tell you a secret...." When we hear these words, we all tend to lean in and listen a little closer as a dear friend has an important message, one meant just for us, not everyone. It's a message that lets us know we have a special friendship. What Paul shares with the Philippians is not just any secret, but the secret to being content.

Paul is writing this "thank you" letter to the church in Philippi from prison. As he mentions how grateful he is for their revived concern and financial gifts, he is quick to point out that he is not commending them in order to solicit a gift — no! He then goes on to proclaim a secret he has learned, and learned at no small cost. A short biography of Paul's life (see 2 Corinthians 11:24-27) shows us that he dealt with beatings, public lashings, stoning, shipwrecks, sleepless nights, and religious espionage. The secret he has learned is to be content whether in feast or famine, with plenty or with the bare essentials. His contentment does not ebb and flow with his circumstances, rather it remains grounded. But grounded in what?

A.W. Tozer put it this way, "The man who has God for his treasure has all things in One. Many ordinary treasures may be denied him, or if he is allowed to have them, the enjoyment of them will be so tempered that they will never be necessary to his happiness. Or if he must see them go, one after one, he will scarcely feel a sense of loss, for having the Source of all things he has in One all satisfaction, all pleasure, all delight. Whatever he may lose he has actually lost nothing, for he now has it all in One, and he has it purely, legitimately and forever."

Paul could be content in any and every situation because he learned (and was no doubt continually learning) that Christ was his all. Circumstances were simply the backdrop for Christ's work being on display in his life. It was no longer a question of "Do I have enough?" but of "What does Christ want to do in and through me today?"



## *Message notes and application*

Write down notes as you listen to the sermon and read the text. What is the main point of the text? What catches your attention, challenges, or confuses you?

## *Passage questions*

1. Where are you trying to find contentment? (Where do your thoughts run to in your free time? What do you do with your “me” time? What compels you?)
2. Look up Colossians 1:26–27 and 2:2–3. Here Paul again mentions the “secret.” What is the common thread to all of these secrets? How would you explain what this currently looks like in your daily life? What do you hope or desire for it to look like?





3. Describe a time when you were in need and God used someone else to provide, or when you provided for someone else's need. What are some ways God might be calling you to do this today?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. Philippians 4:13 is commonly quoted with little explanation or context. What do you think this verse actually means, considering the rest of the chapter?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. Philippians 4:19 says, "And this same God who takes care of me will supply all your needs from his glorious riches, which have been given to us in Christ Jesus." How do you press into God in time of need when he seems not to be answering your prayers for provision? What do you think he might be up to?

### *As you go...*

- Spend some time this week thinking through and writing down the things that you are allowing to bring discontentment to your life. Bring those things to the foot of the cross.
- Share in the trouble (verse 14) of someone the Lord brings your way. Seek to help according to the gifts he has given you.
- In verse 21, Paul says to "Greet every saint in Christ Jesus." However that would look for you (phone call, card, letter, etc.), intentionally seek out members of the body of Christ this week to connect with.



## *Prayer*

"O to behold the glory of Christ...Herein would I live; herein would I die; herein would I dwell in my thoughts and affections...until all things below become unto me a dead and deformed thing, no way suitable for affectionate embraces."

— John Owen

## *Prayer requests*