

THE JOY OF THE GOSPEL

A STUDY IN PHILIPPIANS

INTRODUCTION

Philippians was written by the apostle Paul to the first Christian church in Europe, a community that he helped found (Acts 16). It was a church that faced many difficulties. It struggled with persecution and difficult financial conditions, yet it was a church close to the heart of Paul.

This letter was written by the Apostle while he was in prison facing possible execution. Hearing of his plight, the church in Philippi had sent him aid. That support came in the form of a friend, Epaphroditus, who was sent to help him in his ministry. The church in Philippi also supplied Epaphroditus with gifts to provide for Paul's material needs. Unfortunately, shortly after his arrival, Epaphroditus became seriously ill, and instead of caring for the Apostle's needs, Paul ended up taking care of Epaphroditus.

Out of concern for his health, Paul decided to send Epaphroditus home. The letter to the Philippians was written to thank the church in Philippi for their support. He especially wanted to let them know how grateful he was for the work of Epaphroditus. He wanted to commend a man who did his best but failed due to circumstances beyond his control.

One would expect a letter written under these circumstances to be grim and despairing, however that is not the case. The letter is full of hope and encouragement. The word "rejoice" in various forms appears around 34 times, which is more often than in the rest of the New Testament combined. Paul is genuinely more concerned with the church than he is with himself.

This letter causes us to reflect upon the difference between happiness and joy. Happiness is centered on outward circumstances, but joy is centered in inward realities. Despite being in prison, Paul is a man whose life has found purpose and meaning. He is connected to God in a way that brings joy and hope. Soren Kierkegaard once wrote, "What I want is a faith for which I can live or die." Paul found such a faith. As he wrote in Philippians, "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." (Philippians 1:21). We all want a faith like that, a faith that can transform our darkest hours by the power of hope.

LESSON ONE

BACKGROUND AND THANKSGIVING

ACTS 16 & PHILIPPIANS 1:1-11

INTRODUCTION

In order to put the letter to the Philippians into its proper context, we need to read Acts 16. Here we find the account of Paul's entry into Europe. Called to Macedonia by a vision he arrived in Philippi, a Roman city with so few Jews that it had no synagogue. What Jewish residents there were gathered at the river on the Sabbath to pray. Acts tells us how Paul and his partner Silas made three notable converts in Philippi, all of whom were Gentiles. These converts were Lydia, a rich businesswoman who feared God, an unnamed and tormented slave girl, and a jailer who converted with his whole family. Paul remained in Philippi for only a short time before departing to continue his work in other cities.

PART ONE: WHAT DID WE READ?

- 1) What business was Lydia involved with?
- 2) Were the owners of the slave girl pleased to discover that she was healed?
- 3) When the jail was destroyed by an earthquake, did Paul and Silas try to escape?
- 4) Who are named as the authors of the letter to the Philippians?
- 5) In the first eleven verses of the letter, does Paul mention that he is in prison?

PART TWO: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

- 1) Why was Lydia gathering with others to pray at the river?
- 2) Why were the slave girl's owners unhappy when she was healed?
- 3) What did the jailer expect to happen after the earthquake?
- 4) A thanksgiving was a normal part of a letter in the ancient world. How much do you think Paul really means what he is saying in this letter's thanksgiving section?
- 5) What is Paul's hope and prayer for the Philippians?

PART THREE: HOW DOES IT APPLY TO US?

- 1) Paul went to Europe at the urging of the Holy Spirit. How open are you to the Spirit's urging?
- 2) Paul and Silas worked with all types of different people in Philippi: poor, rich, and middle class. Do you find it easier to work with people of a certain class? Why or why not?
- 3) Paul and Silas were singing hymns while they were in prison. Does your faith keep you joyous even in times of difficulty?
- 4) The jailer had his whole household baptized. Do you think this was appropriate?
- 5) The opening verses of the letter speak to the importance of praying for one another and the importance of growing in the faith. How important are those things to you?

PRAYER

"Lord, help me to be bold and have courage to lift up prayer and praise to your name even when my circumstances appear bleak. Let your light of hope and love shine through me into others as I glorify you wherever I go!"

Sharon Sherstad

LESSON TWO

PAUL'S PLIGHT

PHILIPPIANS 1: 12-26

INTRODUCTION

In today's scripture lesson, Paul writes about his imprisonment. He does not want the Philippians to think that being in prison means that God has abandoned His people or Paul himself. On the contrary, God is at work even in these difficult circumstances. Paul does not know what the future holds, but he is confident in the God who holds the future.

PART ONE: WHAT DID WE READ?

- 1) Does Paul feel that he is able to share the gospel while in prison?
- 2) Paul lists different motives for those who share the gospel. What are they?
- 3) Does Paul think that his imprisonment will lead to death?
- 4) Does Paul sound like someone afraid to die?
- 5) What reason does Paul put forward as to why he thinks God might want him to live?

PART TWO: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

- 1) Do you think it is possible to be in chains and yet not be discouraged?
- 2) Why would Paul's imprisonment provide encouragement to others?
- 3) Paul attributes different motives to those who share the gospel. Does this sound plausible to you?
- 4) In verse 19 Paul speaks of his deliverance, what does this word mean to him?
- 5) What do you make of Paul's discussion of life and death?

PART THREE: HOW DOES IT APPLY TO US?

- 1) If you were imprisoned for Christ (or for any reason) do you think you could maintain a positive attitude like that of Paul's?

2) How good are you at being humble? What do you think it means to be humble?

3) Is unity with other believers a goal for you? What about right faith and teaching? Which is more important?

4) What does it mean to you to work out your salvation with fear and trembling?

5) Do you feel that your life does stand out like a shining star? Why or why not?

PRAYER

Lord, let this mind be in me and in our home, let us have the mind of Christ, who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his advantage. God, give us the hearts and love to put each other first, to make ourselves nothing by taking the nature of a servant. Humble us that we may become obedient to die to self in our home. Lord, You exalted Jesus to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. To YOUR glory, God the Father. Make us like Jesus. More of You, less of me.

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LESSON THREE

A LIFE WORTHY OF THE GOSPEL

PHILIPPIANS 1:27-2:18

INTRODUCTION

Paul writes urging the Philippians to live a life worthy of the gospel. What does that mean? To live a Christ-like life. Jesus came with a servant's heart to bless all He met. We should follow His example. If we do, our lives will shine like stars in a dark world. We will find meaning in life and death.

PART ONE: WHAT DID WE READ?

- 1) How does Paul tell us to conduct our lives?
- 2) We are told that we cannot only believe in Him, but also what?
- 3) What does Paul describe as the number one characteristic of Jesus?
- 4) How are the Philippians to work out their salvation?
- 5) If we can act without complaining or arguing, what does Paul say that we will be like?
- 6) Paul hopes to boast of what?

PART TWO: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

- 1) What does Paul say are the characteristics of a life that is worthy of the gospel?
- 2) Does unity with Christ lead to unity within the body?
- 3) How can we hope to have the same humility in our lives that Christ manifested in his?
- 4) If we humble ourselves as Christ did, does that mean that we too will be exalted?
- 5) Why is it so negative to complain or argue?

PART THREE: HOW DOES IT APPLY TO US?

- 1) Is it your goal to live a life worthy of the gospel?

- 2) When there are disagreements over how the gospel should be preached, how do you speak of those who disagree with you?
- 3) Is it true that our motives do not matter as long as we preach Christ?
- 4) Are you confident that in Christ all the circumstances of your life will work out?
- 5) How do you feel about living and dying?

PRAYER

Our heavenly Father, this glimpse into the light and life of the Apostle has warmed and thrilled our hearts and lives even this day. We consider the marvel that it was written twenty long centuries ago, still the power of the Spirit teaches, transforms, changes us. We pray that we may recognize that it doesn't come by some effort to convince ourselves, some struggle for positive thinking, but a quiet resting upon an unchangeable fact, that Jesus Christ lives His life within us, and that He is quite competent to meet every situation. May we look to Him and stop looking at our circumstances and learn to rejoice in His victory. In Christ's Name. Amen

Ray C. Stedman

LESSON FOUR

PARTNERS IN THE GOSPEL

PHILIPPIANS 2:19-30

INTRODUCTION

This section deals with two of Paul's partners in ministry. The Philippians had sent Epaphroditus, one of their own, to minister to Paul while he was in prison. Through no fault of his own, he failed in his mission. Instead of caring for Paul, he became ill and needed care himself. Paul wants to send him home, but he doesn't want Epaphroditus to be considered a failure. Indeed, most scholars believe the reason Paul wrote this letter was to thank and commend Epaphroditus for his efforts and to urge the Philippians to appreciate his efforts.

Paul also had had a partner in ministry named Timothy, who was like a son to him. Paul writes that he would like to come to Philippi for a visit, but given his imprisonment, it is his plan to send Timothy instead.

PART ONE: WHAT DID WE READ?

- 1) Where does Paul hope to send Timothy?
- 2) Why does he want to send Timothy?
- 3) What is Paul's relationship with Timothy?
- 4) What terms does Paul use to describe Epaphroditus?
- 5) How ill was Epaphroditus?
- 6) How does Paul say the Philippians should receive Epaphroditus?

PART TWO: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

- 1) How does sending a representative compare to going yourself? In what circumstances is it okay to send someone as your replacement?
- 2) How would you describe Paul's relationship with Timothy?
- 3) Does Paul hope to go himself? How consistent is Paul's view of his future in this letter?
- 4) Is Paul being kind to Epaphroditus, or is he truly grateful for his efforts?

5) Do you think Epaphroditus is worthy of being honored by the Philippians? Do you think he will be?

PART THREE: HOW DOES IT APPLY TO US?

- 1) Who could you send in your place to handle an important task?
- 2) Is there anyone in your life that you trust completely? Why or why not?
- 3) Has anyone failed in doing an important task for you? How did you treat them?
- 4) If someone tries, but fails, are they worthy of honor?
- 5) Is the effort what is important the success of an action?
- 6) How do you feel about those who try to help, but end up being a burden?

PRAYER

Our Lord, as we read of these two men we are captured anew by that spirit of holy recklessness, willing to risk all for the advancement of thy work and cause. Lord, we see the need for such a spirit today. We know it doesn't come by any fervor of the flesh, a passionate flinging away of ourselves in some cause of our own making, but rather by that quiet dependence upon you, and a readiness in little things to be expendable for your sake. Teach us that, Lord, burn these letters upon our minds and hearts. As it is written above our platform: "You are not your own, you are bought with a price." Help us to live in the remembrance, the continual daily experience of that. We pray in His name. Amen

Ray Stedman

LESSON FIVE

PROFIT AND LOSS

PHILIPPIANS 3:1-16

INTRODUCTION

In this paragraph, Paul talks about the things that matter. He had a background and pedigree that almost any Jew of his day would have envied. Yet he counted it all as a loss, for he came to realize that in Jesus Christ he had discovered something of far greater value and importance. Now all that mattered to him was the new future made possible in Jesus.

PART ONE: WHAT DID WE READ?

- 1) Who does Paul say the Philippians should watch out for?
- 2) What reasons does Paul give for having confidence in the flesh?
- 3) What makes Paul consider all his life in the past as a loss?
- 4) What does Paul want to know?
- 5) What does Paul say he is pressing on toward?

PART TWO: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

- 1) What kind of danger does the early church face? Is it still a problem today?
- 2) What importance should degrees and accomplishments have for Christians?
- 3) Do people have to get rid of things in their life in order to follow Christ?
- 4) How would you define the things that Paul is seeking to dispose of and the things he is seeking to gain?
- 5) What is the goal of the Christian life?

PART THREE: HOW DOES IT APPLY TO US?

- 1) What opponents does the church face today?

2) What accomplishments would you cast aside to further the gospel? Are they cast aside or used?

3) What are your goals for life? Have you attained them?

4) Is the Christian life about striving for perfection or is it about receiving the gifts of Christ?

5) What attitude should a mature Christian hold about the purpose of life?

PRAYER

I pray you empower me to live out this pursuit of Jesus with the same power you raised Jesus from the dead with. Mold me into Jesus' image even if it means bringing pain in the process. Help me to see the glory ahead of me as infinitely greater than the temporary pain I will face as You grow me. Open my eyes to selfish pursuits. Give me a hatred for sin so that I will be eager to die it. Help me to see Jesus as the ultimate prize in my life that is worth more than anything else this life could ever offer. Give me a sense of urgency to pursue Jesus with all I have all the time. Convict me when I am tempted to take breaks and pursue the things of this world. Help me to look beyond my past and to strain forward to what lies ahead as I have Jesus as my goal. Give me endurance so that this pursuit may be a lifelong pursuit. I recognize I can never accomplish this. Thank you for being there to uphold me when I can't uphold myself. In all of this let me find my joy in You and Jesus. You are everything!

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

Thomas Dawsey

LESSON SIX

DISCERNMENT

PHILIPPIANS 3:15-4:1

INTRODUCTION

In the ancient world, the most common type of letter was a parenetic letter. Basically, this was a letter written by a parent or parentlike figure urging their children to follow the parent's example. To modern ears, these types of letters sound prideful, but parents in the ancient world were not afraid to lift themselves up as an example. Paul writes that the Philippians need to show discernment. They should follow his example, not the example of the world.

PART ONE: WAHT DID WE READ?

- 1) Who does Paul ask to follow his example? Will they be alone?
- 2) Paul says that many live as enemies of what?
- 3) What is the destiny and what is the god of those who oppose Christ?
- 4) Where does Paul say that the citizenship of the Philippians lies?
- 5) Paul describes the Philippians as his joy and what?

PART TWO: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

- 1) Paul paints a very black and white picture that starkly contrasts the world with the followers of Christ. Is such a contrast justified?
- 2) Does Paul accurately describe the world?
- 3) Does Paul accurately describe Christians?
- 4) Is it easy to discern what examples to follow?
- 5) Paul feels that other believers are a joy and a crown to him. Isn't that a lot of a person's identity tied up in other people?

PART THREE: HOW DOES IT APPLY TO US?

- 1) Would you ever name yourself as an example for others to follow? Why or why not?
- 2) Are you comfortable with a stark contrast between Christians and the world?
- 3) Do you feel like you are a citizen of Heaven? Why or why not?
- 4) Is your identity tied up in the progress of others? Who is your crown?
- 5) Do you think that being a Christian is about standing firm?

PRAYER

Dear God, our Savior, you grant us citizenship in heaven. In your Son Jesus, we find peace and freedom from the consumerism of this world. May our minds be set not on earthly things, but on your ultimate purposes. Help us to place our hope in you. Let more people come to know your saving help in Christ, our Lord. Amen.

LESSON SEVEN

THANK YOU AND GOODBYE

PHILIPPIANS 4:2-21

INTRODUCTION

Paul closes his letter with a hodgepodge of final thoughts. He warns the Philippians not to quarrel. He urges them to rejoice, even in difficult circumstances. He tells them to keep their aspirations high. He closes with thanks for their gifts and support. Finally, he gives a benediction and final greetings. What can we make of this odd collection of closing concerns?

PART ONE: WHAT DID WE READ?

- 1) What does Paul tell Euodia and Syntyche?
- 2) In 4:4 what does Paul tell the Philippians to do twice?
- 3) In 4:8 Paul says a word that is typically used by preachers about ten minutes before the end of a sermon?
- 4) What does Paul say to thank the Philippians for their gifts?
- 5) The Philippians gift is described as a fragrant what?

PART TWO: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

- 1) What dangers do personal squabbles cause to the church?
- 2) Why is it so important that the Philippians rejoice?
- 3) Paul urges the Philippians to focus on higher things. Why is that so important?
- 4) Why is it so important to give thanks for gifts given by fellow Christians?
- 5) Are our gifts, given to other Christians, like the sacrifices of the Old Testament?

PART THREE: HOW DOES IT APPLY TO US?

- 1) Have you ever had a disagreement with someone that negatively affected the church? Is there

someone now that you struggle to get along with?

2) Are you good at focusing on the higher things?

3) Are you good about thanking others for their help?

4) How do you feel when people fail to thank you for your help? When do they thank you?

5) How important do you think gifts are?

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, help me like Paul to be contented in all circumstances of life. Whether I find myself in humble means or endowed with more prosperous surroundings. Help me to learn how to get along when I am abased or endowed with much prosperity. I pray that in all things I may be contented - whether I am being filled with good things or find myself facing hardship and hunger. Give me a contented heart that looks to Jesus for my strength, my support and my supply - and whether I live in abundance and or find myself in dire need. I pray that I may live day by day to Your praise and glory, in Jesus' name I pray, AMEN.

Source: <https://prayer.knowing-jesus.com/Philippians/4>