



A Study on Paul's Letter to the Philippians

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Introduction

Living in the United States of America in 2013 is both an incredible privilege and a surreal experience. This is what I mean: Compared to the world around us, we have an *abundance* of just about everything! *Financially*, despite the many prognostications that would tell us otherwise, we are quite well off. The vast majority of us live in abundant *safety*, protected by a legal system which, despite its sometimes visible failures, largely does what it's designed to do. Technology and affluence have given us an abundance of *comfort*, combining to make the average person's life easier than it's ever been. We live in a land of *freedom*, largely being able to do what we want when we want to, guided by a founding document that guarantees us "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

The *pursuit* of happiness?

Yes, while our founding documents guarantee us life and liberty, we are only granted the right to *pursue* happiness. There simply is no guarantee. In fact, in spite of the abundance in which we live, happiness seems to be more than a bit elusive. While we have abundance in our wealth, safety, comfort, and freedom, as a society we seem to have precious little joy. And sadly, that reality doesn't seem to improve drastically within the church! In fact, just the opposite is often the case: The church seems to be full of people who are worrying more, striving harder, and finding even less satisfaction in life than the world around them. What makes joy such a rare commodity?

Paul's short letter to the church at Philippi consists of 104 verses. Within those verses, the words "joy" and "rejoice" are used 16 times! Paul must have been in a great mood, right? Well, not exactly. Most scholars believe that Paul's letter was written from within a Roman prison, where he was being held for no just reason and was daily faced with the possibility of death. He had been imprisoned in various places for over four years at the time. Yet, he rejoices and encourages his favorite church to do the same! In the middle of such difficult circumstances, how can Paul exude such joy?

I believe the answer to that question is both the reason to study the book of Philippians and the secret to the church regaining her joy and once again "shining as lights in the world." (Philippians 2:15) Listening to the Apostle Paul's

tender heart for the Philippian church and his passion for the gospel, we can and should be awakened to the joy that is available to each of us as well. In John 10:10, Jesus promises the same: “I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.” The NIV replaces that last phrase with “...have it to the full.” Surely the full and abundant life that we are promised in Christ is not dour and constantly serious!

However, for many of us, we find life to be full of difficulties. There is great pain that we experience, stress that we endure, relationships that don’t go as we’d hoped, and circumstances that knock us flat. Is Christian joy simply pretending that these things don’t exist? Should we, like the ostrich, just bury our head in the sand and hope that it all goes away? By no means! Paul doesn’t ask us to ignore the situations in the world around us or the things that stress our lives; rather, he calls us to grow into maturity in our faith—and, thereby, find joy that supersedes our circumstance.

As I’ve studied this profound letter, I’ve been convicted again and again on two fronts. First, I realize that I take myself and my life a bit too seriously at times. Prior to my time as the Lead Pastor at York Alliance, I was regularly reminded that I was the only youth pastor *ever* that didn’t like to have fun! I’m not sure that was exactly true, but I’m certainly realizing that life doesn’t need to be as serious as I’ve sometimes made it out to be. However, not only can I sometimes take myself a bit too seriously, I’m also convicted that I often don’t take the gospel of Jesus seriously enough. Flannery O’Connor said it well:

Either one is serious about salvation or one is not. And it is well to realize that the maximum amount of seriousness admits the maximum amount of comedy. Only if we are secure in our beliefs can we see the comical side of the universe.¹

While we often take ourselves a bit too seriously, I’m afraid that most of us don’t take the gospel nearly seriously enough. Only when we learn to be very serious about the gospel can we live within real, enduring joy regardless of circumstance. My prayer for this study is that we’ll each find ourselves growing into joy.

Grace and peace,
Brian Kannel
York Alliance Church

¹ From *Mystery and Manners*, quoted in Charles Swindoll, *Laugh Again*, (Word Publishing, Dallas, TX, 1992.), pg. 160.

How to Use This Book

This book is designed to be used as a companion resource to the Fall 2013 sermon series at York Alliance Church. Each Sunday's message will provide the central teaching of the Scripture passage for that week. You will receive most benefit from this study as you utilize it in conjunction with both the Sunday messages and a weekly LIFE group gathering, a small community with whom you are able to discuss and apply these truths. If you are unable to attend one of the Sunday morning gatherings for any reason, the sermon audio can be found at www.yorkalliance.org/resources.

Please be aware that studying the Bible can be a challenging endeavor. Of course, there are very few worthwhile things in life that don't require some effort on our part. But beyond the difficulty of study in general is the fact that we have a very real enemy who is actively opposed to our understanding of the Word of God. Paul tells us that our battle is not "against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over the present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places." (Ephesians 6:12) Therefore, if you find yourself feeling discouraged, frustrated, or unable to understand something, I want to strongly encourage you to stop and pray. Ask God to guide your heart and thoughts, and to give you understanding. Also, don't do this study in isolation. While most will complete the actual studies individually, I would encourage you to get connected to someone else who is doing this study, and connect with that person each week to talk about what you're learning. Along the way, if you have frustrations or are confused about something you're studying, they can provide encouragement and guidance as you journey through the study together. If you get stuck along the way, you should feel free to skip a section, or even an entire study, and move to the next one.

This particular study guide takes a slightly different approach than typical study guides as well as those that we've used in the past at York Alliance. Therefore, a few notes may be helpful as you begin your study using this guide:

- Each week's study will consist of three components in addition to the study itself: meditating, memorizing, and moving.
- The study component will consist of two studies, each focusing on a specific aspect of the passage. They will focus both on the passage itself *and* how it

fits into the broader narrative of the Bible. Each study will conclude with application questions, challenging you to intentionally apply to your life the principles that you've learned throughout the study.

- Over the course of the twelve week study, you will be encouraged to memorize four key passages from Philippians, with three weeks spent on each passage. The ESV translation of the passage will be provided at the beginning of each week's study, but you are welcomed to memorize it in whatever translation you prefer.
- Also, on the opening page of each week's study, there will be a "movement" section which will encourage you to commit to a specific activity over the course of the week, one that corresponds with the focus of the week.
- Finally, at the end of each week's study, there is a "letter on a letter" meditation where I've imagined Paul's words to the 21st century church in North America. By paralleling my words with Paul's, these letters are not meant to be presumptive in any way but, rather, to help us think more deeply about the message of Philippians specifically for York Alliance.
- A blank sermon note sheet (for use on Sunday mornings and/or with the sermon audio available online) as well as a "Facilitation/Application" sheet are included. While the primary intent of this page is that it be used within York Alliance Church LIFE groups, these sheets can actually be used in a variety of other settings.
- Although the English Standard Version is utilized throughout this study, feel free to use any English translation with which you are comfortable. In fact, you are encouraged to read from multiple translations, particularly with passages that you are struggling to fully understand.

If you have questions about how to best utilize the book or have comments on what you're finding in it and/or on your experiences with it, they are welcomed! Email me at bkannel@yorkalliance.org.

"Lord Jesus, we confess to you that our lives look far too much like the lives of everyone else around us. We worry, we feel defeated by suffering and circumstance, and we can take ourselves far too seriously while not taking You and Your Gospel nearly seriously enough. As we study this great letter, soften our hearts and rearrange our perspectives. Speak, not simply to our intellects, but to our emotions and to our spirits as well. Move us deeper in our relationships with You, and help us to grow into men and women of joy. Unify our hearts in the gospel, and give us the perspective of eternity. May we emerge, declaring with Paul, that for each of us, to live is Christ and to die is gain. Amen."

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Setting the Stage

Before we dig into Paul's letter to the Philippians, it's vital that we understand a bit of the unique relationship that Paul had with this church. The best way for that to happen is for us to go back to the beginning and look at the way the church at Philippi was founded. Take a few minutes right now and read Acts 16.

When we read of Paul's life, it's vital for us to avoid two pitfalls. First, we must remember that, while the letters of Paul that have become part of the canon (the collection of books that are a part of our Bible) are certainly divinely inspired and, as such, inerrant, Paul's life, decisions, and actions are *not* inerrant. While Paul was a great man of God and greatly used by God in his generation, his own words in Romans 7:14-23 indicate to us that he wrestled with sinful thoughts and behavior, just as we do. Therefore, when we read the history of Paul's life in the book of Acts, we must recognize that Luke (the author of Acts) is recording for us what actually happened and is not necessarily saying that Paul's life and decisions are perfect.

However, on the other side, we must also take great care to not take as fact more than the Bible actually records for us. We might make inferences or best guesses with the historical information that we've been given, but we must be sure not to place the weight of Scriptural truth on those inferences.

Therefore, these are the facts as Luke lays them out for us at the end of Acts 15 and the beginning of Acts 16:

- Paul and Barnabas separate before Paul's second missionary journey due to a sharp disagreement regarding the inclusion of John Mark.
- As a result of this disagreement, Barnabas sailed with John Mark to Cyprus while Paul chose Silas and departed for several churches within modern-day Syria and Turkey.
- It was during this part of the journey that Timothy joined Paul and Silas. It's quite likely, but not certain, that Paul led Timothy to faith in Jesus.
- Not only did Paul's second journey get off to a rocky start, it seems to quickly run out of steam with the Holy Spirit "forbidding" them (Acts 16:6) and "not allowing them" (Acts 16:7) to preach the Word or even travel to certain areas.

- It was only then that Paul received a vision from the Lord calling he and his companions (at least Luke, Silas, and Timothy) to come to Macedonia.

Had Paul been impetuous in his decision to part with Barnabas or to begin this second missionary journey? Was he doing the work of God while missing the will of God along the way?² These questions must remain speculative, as the Scripture does not comment on them. However, it's in the midst of this difficult season that Paul and his company travel to the Macedonian city of Philippi.

Luke describes Philippi as “a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony.” (Acts 16:12, italics mine) Philippi wasn't the capital city of the province of Macedonia—that was Paul's next stop, Thessalonica.³ However, he notes that Philippi is a Roman colony, which is an important perspective to keep in mind while studying this letter. A colony of Rome would be afforded the same rights and privileges as those who lived on Italian soil,⁴ and while Philippi was not designated as the capital of either the district or the province, it was the only Roman colony in the area.

Upon arrival in Philippi, they immediately meet a group of God-fearing women who are meeting outside of the city for prayer. This indicates (1) that these women were not idol worshipers or materialists, but recognized the God of Israel, and (2) that there were not enough Jewish men within the city to establish a synagogue. Among these women was Lydia, a seller of purple goods (Acts 16:14), who seems to be analogous to a modern-day wealthy fashion executive. God opens her heart to the gospel, and she becomes the first convert in Philippi, providing a home and likely financial support for Paul's ministry there.

Luke's narrative immediately takes us to the opposite end of the socio-economic spectrum, introducing us to a demon-possessed slave girl. She follows the company for several days, before Paul finally casts the demon out of her, causing much consternation from her owners when her fortune-telling ability and, therefore, their opportunity for financial gain is exorcised with the demon. While Luke is not explicit, it seems likely that this slave girl also would have joined the ranks of the church in Philippi, at least in spirit if not in presence.

² J.A. Motyer, *The Message of Philippians*, (IVP, Downer's Grove, IL, 1984.), pg. 12.

³ Ralph Martin, *The Epistle of Paul to the Philippians*, (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, 1959.), pg. 15.

⁴ Motyer, pg. 15.

One final conversion marks the beginning of Paul's relationship with the church in Philippi. After Paul and Silas were imprisoned at the word of the angry slave owners, God dramatically acts to free them through a sudden earthquake which shook open the doors of the prison and broke open the bonds that held the prisoners. Having first witnessed Paul's ministry, then his worship in chains, and, finally, his words of assurance following the earthquake, the Philippian jailer begs Paul to show him the way of salvation. Paul declares the word of the Lord to him, and he and his family are saved and baptized into their new faith. (Acts 16:31-33)

Upon their release from prison, Paul declares his Roman citizenship and, while the city authorities apologize to Paul and Silas, they ask them to leave the city, which they do. However, they leave behind a fledgling church consisting of various socio-economic backgrounds, who are together seeking to work out the gospel as a community held together solely by the bond of Christ. While the letter to the Philippians indicates that maintaining their unity was a struggle at times, it seems that the Philippian church was Paul's favorite church.⁵ Within the letter to the Philippians itself, as well as in his correspondence with the church in Corinth, Paul commends the Philippians for their generous financial support, made all the more remarkable due to the fact of their poverty. (2 Corinthians 8:1-2) In addition to financial support, they maintained a steadfast connection to Paul and his work, even within the most difficult times. Philippians, then, is a letter of friendship, signifying deep love, commitment, and tenderness for the church in Philippi.⁶

Finally, it's vital that we not only understand the background of the Philippian church, but also Paul's context as he writes to the Philippians. As we'll reference throughout this study guide, Paul is writing this letter from prison. For the sake of our study, we'll assume that he is in a Roman prison near the end of his life, which is the leading scholarly position, although there are some who place him in prison in Ephesus or elsewhere. Regardless, he is most certainly in prison and being held for nothing more than the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus. If Rome is indeed his location, he's been imprisoned for over four years at the time of the writing of this letter, having enduring shipwreck and nearly drowning at sea, being bitten by a poisonous snake, among other calamities. (see Acts 23-28) These circumstances make Paul's message of "Joy" all the more powerful.

⁵ Frank Thielman, *The NIV Application Commentary: Philippians* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 1995.), pg. 18.

⁶ See Gordon D. Fee, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, 1995.), pgs. 2-14.

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Week One: Joy in Gospel Partnership

Philippians 1:1-11

Paul tenderly opens his letter to the Philippians with a heart-felt prayer rejoicing in his relationship with the church in Philippi. However, more than the emotional connection that he feels with them, he's thankful for the partnership in the gospel that holds them together. As believers, we are called to be those who hold to the gospel as central and remain unified around the gospel of Jesus, trusting that, just as God has begun to work in us, He will also complete that work.

Memorization:

"In every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice, 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." (Philippians 1:18-21, ESV)

Movement:

With whom do you have a real gospel partnership? Beyond a simple friendship, these relationships aren't determined by proximity, common interest, or station in life. Rather, they are grounded in a common desire for Jesus to be glorified and for the Kingdom of God to advance.

Take a few moments this week and write a note to at least one person with whom you have a partnership in the gospel. Include in your note a prayer for that person, asking God to continue to work in that brother or sister's life. If you struggle to find a relationship in your life that qualifies, take some time this week to have a discussion with a Christian friend about partnering in the gospel!

Saints and Servants

The way that we identify ourselves indicates a great deal about the way that we perceive our identity, as well as the relationship we have with the person with whom we're talking. For instance, in casual relationships, we often identify ourselves by our vocation: "Hi, I'm _____, and I'm an insurance salesman." Or, "My name is _____, and I work in construction." However, among friends we might identify ourselves more by an interest: "How's the golf game?" or "How 'bout dem Bears?" But among our closest friends, our identity moves closer to the core, recognizing things like faith, emotional status, and family connections.

Paul begins his letter with a form that would have been very familiar to his Philippian audience, but he uses some terms that must have been quite shocking to them, and vary greatly from the other letters of Paul that we have.

Look at the following verses: 1 Corinthians 1:1, 2 Corinthians 1:1, Galatians 1:1, Ephesians 1:1, Colossians 1:1, 1 Timothy 1:1, and 2 Timothy 1:1. What seems to be Paul's customary designation with which he opens his letters?

Now, look at the way that he begins the letter to the Philippians. What word does he use for both himself and Timothy?

While most of our translations, including the ESV, use the word "servant," Paul is not using the polite, churchy word for servant. He'll use that word, *diakonoj*, later in verse 1, which the ESV translates "deacons." No, he uses the word *doulos*, which is better translated "bondservant" or "slave."

Look up the following verses which use the word *doulos*:

- Matthew 8:9
- John 13:16
- Romans 6:16-17, 19

Based on these usages, how might you define *doulos*?

As he writes to the Philippians, why might Paul call himself a slave instead of an apostle? To Whom is he enslaved?

Even more startling than Paul designating himself and Timothy as slaves is the phrase that he uses to address those in the church at Philippi. What is the *entire phrase* that Paul uses in vs. 1 to describe those in the church?

The term "saint" is used over 60 times in the New Testament as the "customary word for Christians."⁷

- What's the first thing that comes to mind when you think of a saint?

Unlike our predominately Catholic view of sainthood, Paul is using a designation for those who are made perfect in the sight of God. While our lives are not yet made perfect, God sees us that way! However, that's not based on us, which is why the entirety of the phrase is vital. According to Paul, what kind of saints are they?

Being "in Christ" is the full designation of sainthood! Why? Look at 2 Corinthians 5:21 for a clear explanation!

Application:

- Do you see yourself as a "slave" to Christ? Why or why not?

- Do you see yourself as a "saint" in Christ? Why or why not?

⁷ Motyer, pg. 24.

God-Dependent Prayer

Paul's prayer for the Philippian church is a model of both thanksgiving and asking God to do bold things in the lives of the believers there.

Look at Paul's prayer in vs. 3-11.

- What are some of the ways that Paul is thankful for the Philippians? (vs. 3-8)

- What does Paul ask God to do in their lives? (vs. 9-11)

These bold requests all seem to hinge on vs. 6, which is one of the most famous sentences that Paul ever wrote. Paraphrase that sentence:

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Who is charged with the *action* in vs. 6?

Our imagination might more clearly grasp this verse with a tangible example. Remember Lydia, who we met in Acts 16? She could certainly tell her "faith story" about the time she began to believe. However, as her story is clearly told in Acts 16, how did she come to faith? (See Acts 16:14.)

Now, look at Ephesians 1:4. When did God choose all who would believe?

This, then, is what Paul refers to as the beginning of “a good work” in Lydia, and it’s in this confidence that he can make the bold requests found in vs. 9-11. Upon more careful examination, Paul is really just asking that God would do *one thing*, and that out of that one thing, everything else would flow. Look back at vs. 9-11 one more time. What’s the one thing?

Paul is praying that their love would “abound” more and more, with knowledge and discernment. How might you say that in your own words?

Read 2 Corinthians 5:17. What does Paul say about those who are in Christ?

When does this occur?

Now, read 2 Peter 1:3-4. Whose power (vs. 3) and whose nature (vs. 4) are at work in us?

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When we see these realities all held together, we might say that Paul is praying for the Philippians, and for us, to *become what we already are*.⁸ It’s as though, at conversion, a seed has been planted. Paul is now simply praying that God would accomplish in us the natural outcome of that seed—that it would grow!

Application:

- Do you see the primary effort behind your growth in Christ belonging to you or to God? How does that affect the way you grow in maturity?

⁸ Motyer, 55.

Meditation: A Letter on the Centrality of the Gospel

To all the saints in Christ Jesus at York Alliance Church, with the pastors, staff, Governing Board, LIFE group coaches and leaders, and the many others who intentionally and faithfully serve Jesus. May you all get—*really* get—how much God loves and forgives you, and may you live within the peace that comes from knowing how much He loves you.

It's such a great joy to be a part of the York Alliance family along with you. Ours is a community for which I'm incredibly thankful. There are many reasons why, but here are three: This is a place where the Spirit of Jesus is present, where laughter punctuates every formal and informal gathering we have, and where deep, heartfelt prayer is not just promised, but practiced, right here in our midst. However, as much of a joy that it is to be a part of this local body of Christ, my thankfulness goes far deeper. Here's why: If the joy of being a part of York Alliance was simply made up of the kinds of things listed above, no matter how deep and meaningful our connection was felt, that joy would be conditional. At moments in time when we don't as keenly sense the Spirit working among us, rather than seeking Him together, we would jump ship and find a "better" church. When pain or frustration or anger or offense keeps us from laughing together, which will most certainly happen at some point in time, rather than working through the difficult work of reconciliation, we'll simply avoid one another and laugh with someone else. And when prayer doesn't happen as quickly as it should—or even worse, when we don't acknowledge one another nor recognize the pain we're each bearing, or when we get so caught up in our own lives that we're not as concerned as we should about the lives of others—we'll get offended and back away. Maybe we'll stop coming to Celebration gatherings, maybe we'll intentionally remove ourselves from community, or maybe we'll leave the fellowship all together.

No, I'm not thankful simply for the characteristics of this community. I'm thankful for our partnership in the gospel that holds it all together. Because Jesus has given His life for us, we give our lives for one another—and not just for each other, but for the entire world! Because of our partnership in the gospel, I'm more concerned about your growth in Christ than your upward mobility at your

job. Because of our partnership in the gospel, you're more concerned about my neighbor's salvation than about the length of his grass—and we both see the length of his grass as a great opportunity to love in a practical way! And because of the way that gospel has transformed each one of us, we will continue to work to see the presence of the Spirit among us, to be unified in the joy we have in Christ, and to bear one another's burdens with joy.

My prayer is simple: That just as we submitted to God for our salvation, we would also just as quickly and willingly submit to for our growth into maturity in Christ. I pray that we wouldn't just learn the language of the gospel so that we could go through the motions, but that we would truly be changed at the heart level by the love of Jesus in us. But I pray that it wouldn't stop there! May the love of Jesus *keep changing us* to be more and more like Him. I pray that each of us would be so in tune with His Holy Spirit that we would become men and women of the Word, committed deeply to each other and to living pure lives. I pray that God would give us a deep distaste for sin so that we find ourselves constantly confessing and running from our sin into the arms of our Savior.

And may that transformation ignite our hearts for the world around us. The gospel was never intended to terminate on us. Rather, as we're transformed by the gospel, I pray that we would band together, risking our time, money, safety and comfort to see the gospel of Jesus actually lived out in the world around us. From the poorest of the poor right here in York to those all around the world who have a desperate need for the gospel to be spoken to them, may we be a community of people who are concerned for much more than just us.

I pray that we would never lose sight of the gospel. When we feel superior to others, may Jesus remind us how broken we are and how everything good in us comes from Him alone. When we feel worthless and beat-up, may Jesus remind us how incredibly much He loves us and the way He has formed us (and still is forming us!) into a beautiful work of art. When we feel as though we have no purpose and, if we're totally honest, we're just bored, may Jesus remind us that He's given us the greatest task the world has ever known. We are called to *know Him* and *to make Him known* in the world around us! That's something worth rallying around.

Thoughts about this letter:

What's a practical way that this applies to my life?

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LIFE Group Facilitation Sheet

Welcome one another in Jesus' name!

Icebreaker: "What's your favorite team of any kind?"

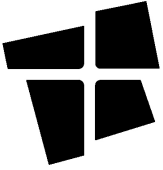
Worship Jesus through Scripture, music, singing, and prayer. Be creative! Invite Him to the center of your gathering.

Word: Philippians 1:1-11

- How have you seen Jesus at work recently?
- Has anything specific jumped out to you, either in this passage or in the study guide this week?
- Do you see yourself as a "slave" to Christ? Why or why not?
- Do you see yourself as a "saint" in Christ? Why or why not?
- How does seeing ourselves as God sees us change the way that we behave?
- What are you most thankful for about York Alliance Church? What about this LIFE group?
- Do you feel like you can honestly say that we are partners in the gospel? Why or why not?
- In your own life, what stands in the way of your ability to grow into maturity in Christ?
- Is this LIFE group a place of "joy?" Why or why not?

Works: The gospel is never intended to terminate on us, but to flow through us into the world around us. How can we be a part of God's plan in that way? Pray intentionally about ways that you can be God's hands and feet in the world around you and, particularly, those people in your life that need to experience the love, grace, and blessing of God. Pray very intentionally for opportunities to *partner* in the gospel with LIFE group members this week as you reach out to those in the world around you!

Note: Please check the website for any announcements and upcoming events!
www.yorkalliance.org



Joy in Gospel Partnership

Philippians 1:1-11

Sermon Notes:

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Week Two: Joy in Gospel Proclamation

Philippians 1:12-18

Every circumstance in our lives is ordained by a sovereign God, and Paul reminds us that, whether we are experiencing joy or suffering, there is always an opportunity for the gospel to advance. Our lives are to be centered on the gospel so that both positive and negative circumstances are viewed primarily in the light of the opportunity they present for the advance of the gospel of Jesus. It's only when we have this perspective that we can find joy in the midst of suffering.

Memorization:

"In every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice, 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." (Philippians 1:18-21, ESV)

Movement:

As the saying goes, hindsight is 20/20. That means it's easier to see more clearly when we're looking back at our lives than when we're in the middle of living them. This is particularly true in our spiritual journey as our sovereign God weaves together joy and pain for His glory and our growth into Him.

This week, take some time to chart out the major events of your life. Pay particular attention to the most painful times. What was God doing in the midst of those things? Can you see from this perspective? If you still can't see His purposes, have you made a determination to trust Him anyway? There may be

loss that still must be grieved, opportunities lost that should be mourned—and maybe aspects of life that, from this perspective, need to turn with praise to God.

How to Have Joy in the Midst of Struggle

Have you ever paid attention to your conversation with those around you? For many of us, the most satisfactory conversations are about a topic that's very near and dear to our hearts... *US!* Great conversationalists, salesmen, and politicians have known for years that if you want to really make a connection with someone, ask them about *them*—it's a subject everyone likes to talk about.

As Paul begins vs. 12, it appears that he is going to take the opportunity to do what we would do in his shoes—to talk a little bit about him. Specifically, it seems he's going to tell us about the nature of the suffering and imprisonment to which he's been subjected. However, he quickly changes the subject!

Read Philippians 1:12-14. What are the three main outcomes of his imprisonment according to Paul?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

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Like us, Paul quickly moves to his favorite subject. Unlike us, that subject is the gospel! Specifically, he's most concerned about the advance of the gospel in the world around him.

How does Paul have such an ability to transcend the situation in which he finds himself and to see the big picture of what God's doing in the world around him, even rejoicing as he sees God do His work *through his own suffering*? I think there are two statements from Paul that give us a window into how he's able to see with this kind of perspective:

- Read Acts 20:24. Write Paul's statement in your own words.

- Read Galatians 2:20. Write this statement in your own words.
- What common theme do you see in these two statements of Paul's?

Paul is simply putting into practice what he's already taught the Corinthian church. Read 1 Corinthians 6:1-8.

- What is Paul telling the Corinthians to *not* do?
- What ultimate reason does he give for this advice? (vs. 7)

It's counter-intuitive, but Paul is teaching us that it's only when we *stop* pursuing our own joy and start instead pursuing God's glory—it's only then that we will truly have joy!

Application:

- Are there areas of your life that you hold as more valuable than the gospel? What are they? (*Hint: If you have trouble figuring these out, think about the things that you get most angry about. Those things usually points to idolatry!*)
- What might you say is the driving force of your life? Does your life reflect that? Why or why not?

Two Groups, One Result

Throughout his letters, Paul isn't shy about discussing the conflict that he has with various groups that oppose him. In fact, later in this very letter, he will call one particular group "dogs"—and he wasn't talking about cute little puppies! (Philippians 3:2)

In the second half of this passage, Paul speaks very carefully about a group that is acting in opposition to him. Paul's words are very carefully chosen in order to contrast the two specific groups that have been made "more bold to speak the word without fear" (Philippians 1:14) because of his imprisonment.

As you look at Philippians 1:15-18, fill out the following chart⁹ that compares these two groups:

| | <u>Paul's Friends</u> | <u>Paul's Rivals</u> |
|--|-----------------------|----------------------|
| What they do (vs. 15) | | |
| Why they do it (vs. 15) | | |
| Why else they do it (vs. 16-17) | | |
| Motivation (vs. 16 and 17) | | |
| Nature of the proclamation (vs. 18) | | |

⁹ Idea for chart from Theilman, pg. 61

This carefully balanced description of these two groups set the Philippians up for what is Paul's very surprising conclusion. What is his response to *both* groups?

There were certainly times that Paul didn't rejoice in the teaching of those who disagreed with him. Specifically, the letter to the Galatians was largely written to refute teaching that disagreed with Paul.

- Read Galatians 1:6-9. How would you summarize what Paul is saying?

- Read Galatians 5:7-12. What is Paul's somewhat surprising wish?

Clearly Paul reacted quite differently in the case of the Galatian church. What's the difference? Look again at Paul's words in Philippians 1:18. What's the difference?

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In Galatia, there was a false message being proclaimed while, in Philippi, the truth was being proclaimed even though Paul was being attacked personally. "When people mess with the message, they need to be rebuked, exposed, and corrected. But when they mess with the messenger, they need to be ignored."¹⁰

Application:

- Do you tend to react more strongly when your personal character is attacked, or when the gospel is misrepresented. *Why do you think that is?*

¹⁰ Swindoll, pg. 55

Meditation: A Letter on Enduring Suffering with Joy

Brothers and sisters, I want to be sure that you know I am in no way wanting to minimize the deep level of suffering that many of us have endured. Because we're deeply connected to one another, I'm privileged to have had the opportunity to bear with you, in small ways, some of the pains you've experienced. The stories are many, and they are intense: broken marriages, rebellious children, difficulty and even persecution at work, economic problems, sicknesses, chronic pain, deaths of people whose lives we cherished—all these and more. We've wept, both together and alone. We've felt the pain deeply. And it is well that we should. God has created us to feel and, at the point that we no longer feel pain in the midst of suffering and loss, we in some way stop being human.

As real as the pain we feel is, however, there is a warning contained within that pain as well. Every pain, from the small annoyances and frustrations to the very, very big ones—each one—contains a small voice of temptation. The voice is sweet. It's sympathetic. It's soothing. And it's from the pit of hell. This is what it says: "This is about you." Okay, maybe not in those exact words, but just as clearly:

- "They don't understand... they never understand..."
- "Why doesn't anyone care about me?"
- "I'm all alone in this."
- "If they really loved me, they would... (you can fill in the blank), and if they really loved me, I shouldn't have to ask..."
- "I deserve to simply withdraw from everyone for awhile. Nobody understands anyway."

Maybe some of these phrases, or others like them, sound familiar. Some of them even contain some elements of truth as we journey together in this broken world.

But here's the thing: they all bring us back to a focus on self, which makes it impossible for us to focus on Jesus.

Deep pain, disappointment, grief, conflict, and suffering all give us a choice. As

we hurt, will we press into the heart of God and seek out His best in the situation? Even when we don't know, can't know, or may never know the *reason* for the suffering, do we still look for what He's doing in the midst of it? Will we extend grace to those around us who, like us, can be a bit too concerned with our own lives to truly love one another well? Will we extend grace to those who aren't sure how to respond, so unfortunately, choose not to respond at all? Or, on the other hand, will we enter into the downward spiral of self-pity, focusing on the deficiencies of others and living as those who are entitled to be loved, not as those who are the humble recipients of that love.

Yes, our suffering is quite real. It's deep. It's painful. There are times that it seems to be senseless. In those moments, it certainly seems easiest to withdraw, to give ourselves a pass from the work of growing into the joy of the gospel. And, yes, at times while walking through suffering, we as the church will fall short as we seek to care for one another.

Brothers and sisters, how can our suffering and pain most clearly and loudly proclaim the name and renown of Jesus? How would it look for us to live our lives, and endure suffering, with the simple declaration that, in all things, we long for Christ to be proclaimed? First, we must identify that small voice of temptation—and refuse it. Rather, may we each hear the voice of grace in the midst of our suffering that gently reminds us that He who would not spare His own Son for our sakes will also, along with Him, give us *all* that we could possibly need.

May we have the grace to weep with one another in suffering, to support one another through pain, and to focus on the gospel of Jesus in every situation, no matter how difficult.

Thoughts about this letter:

What's a practical way that this applies to my life?

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LIFE Group Facilitation Sheet

Welcome one another in Jesus' name!

Icebreaker: "What's the saddest movie you've ever seen?"

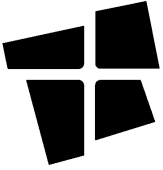
Worship Jesus through Scripture, music, singing, and prayer. Be creative! Invite Him to the center of your gathering.

Word: Philippians 1:12-18

- Where is Jesus working in your life right now?
- Has anything specific jumped out to you, either in this passage or in the study guide this week?
- What's your default reaction when someone disagrees with you? Why do you think that is?
- When you face suffering, do you tend to withdraw or bring others into your life?
- What's something in your life that, if you're honest, is more important to you than the gospel?
- How can the gospel grow in value to you?
- Do we support one another well in suffering? Why or why not? How about those in our lives—do we support them well?
- Can you think of an opportunity for gospel proclamation that you've *missed* in the past week? What is it?
- What's one way we can practically proclaim the gospel to the world around us this week?

Works: Every day we each have opportunities to advance the gospel. However, for a variety of different reasons, we often don't take them. Think of a specific person that you're likely to have an interaction with this week that, if you were bold enough to take it, would give an opportunity to proclaim Christ. Get into pairs, and pray that you would have eyes to see and ears to hear what God is doing around you, but specifically in your relationship with that person, and then pray that God would give you the boldness to proclaim Christ this week!

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Joy in Gospel Proclamation Philippians 1:12-18

Sermon Notes:

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Week Three: Joy in Life and Death

Philippians 1:19-30

The perspective of eternity should dramatically alter our perspective on our earthly lives. As we grow in our understanding of the gospel, Paul's hypothetical decision between life and death should become a real dilemma for all who believe. Our temporal lives, then, should contain far greater risk as we recognize the hope that we have in eternity, and they should be marked by a surpassing joy which comes from knowing that our eternity is secure in Christ.

Memorization:

"In every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice, 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." (Philippians 1:18-21, ESV)

Movement:

How do we live our temporal lives with an eternal perspective? While this is the clear admonition of Scripture, practical application can be far more difficult.

This week, evaluate your normal, everyday life. Choose one activity that you do regularly but you know does not have direct eternal value. Eliminate it from your schedule for the week. It might be a diversion of some kind (games, sports, etc.), entertainment (anything from internet and social media to television), exercise, or even home maintenance. There are many in our lives, but just choose one. Then, intentionally replace that activity with something eternal: an intentional relationship, time in the Word or worship, serving others in intentional ways, etc. Journal about how eternal living might be a greater part of normal life.

The Value of Life and Death

“To be, or not to be—that is the question.” Most of us have heard the quote before. Many of us know that it is taken from Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. But far fewer of us have any idea what it means!

Paul’s infamous statement in Philippians 1:21 is like that: “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” Most of us have heard it before. Many of us know that it’s found within the letter to the Philippians. But far fewer of us have any idea what it really means.

Read Philippians 1:18-26 slowly.

- What reason does Paul give to say that it is better to live?
- What is the singular reason that he gives for preferring death?

Clearly, Paul *prefers* to die and be with Jesus, but is willing to sacrificially remain in order to continue to build up the church. Can you get your head around that? If given the choice, he would gladly choose death over life! How is this possible?

- Read 1 Corinthians 15:19. Where does Paul infer that we are to have hope?

If our hope is not based in this life alone, but on an eternity with Jesus, our perspective on this present life starts to shift. Things that we hold to be extremely valuable begin to take their proper place. Use this simple exercise: Think of something that you are pursuing in this life and put it in the first blank below. Then, complete the thought with eventual result of that thing:

“For me, to live is _____,
and to die is _____.”

Think of some of the common pursuits of our lives:

“For me, to live is money, and to die is to no longer have it.”

“For me, to live is family, and to die is to leave them behind.”

“For me, to live is power and influence, and to die is to no longer have either.”

“For me, to live is to be famous, and to die is to be forgotten.”

“For me, to live is great relationships, and to die is to no longer have them.”

These are just a few examples of the many things we pursue in our lives. And they are good things! However, they can't be ultimate things, and when we try to make good things into ultimate things, they simply can't bear the weight.

Read Ecclesiastes 1:12 – 2:11. This is a record of King Solomon's pursuit of all the temporary pursuits of life in a way that's far beyond our best efforts.

- What are the areas that Solomon pursues? (*Hint: if you look carefully, you may find up to eleven different areas! However, a handful will give you the point.*)
- What is his final verdict in 2:11, which is also the theme of the entire book?

Living for the temporary can never truly satisfy us because, as Solomon realizes in Ecclesiastes 3:11, God has put eternity in our hearts. Eternal longings can never be filled by the temporary, no matter how much of the temporary we have.

Application:

- What's a practical way that you can have a greater focus on eternity?

Living Worthy Lives

For Paul, life was a clear “if/then” equation: *IF* the gospel of Jesus is true, *THEN* we should live like it! In other words, *if* Jesus loved us enough to give up His rights as God (Philippians 2:5-8), perfectly fulfill the law on our behalf, become the unblemished sacrifice for our sin, die a very real death and then be raised victoriously from death to life, *then* we should live our lives in a way that proclaims these truths to the world!

In Philippians 1:27, Paul uses the fascinating Greek word *axios*, translated *worthy*, to describe this reality: “Only let your manner of life be *worthy* of the gospel of Christ...” *Axios* has two closely related meanings¹¹:

1. “Of equal weight” or “balancing.” Our lives should “balance” the love and sacrifice of Jesus for us. Think about an old-style scale that balances weight on both sides. Similarly, our lives should “balance” the gospel.
2. “Becoming,” as in wearing something that’s becoming, or adorning something. There should never be a clash between what we believe and how we act. Our lives should be “becoming” to our doctrine.

With this definition in mind, re-read Philippians 1:27-30.

- In what three ways does Paul call us to live *worthy* lives?

Unity

After joy and maturity, unity is the third great theme of Philippians. We’ll take a cursory glance right now, and then look at this concept in much greater detail in next week’s study.

- Read Philippians 2:1-6. What are the steps to living with “one mind?”

What is to be our motivation and model for this kind of life?

¹¹ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Christian Unity* (Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI., 1980.), pg. 24-25.

- Read Hebrews 3:12-13. What are we called to do for one another within the community of faith?

Boldness

The encouragement that comes from unity gives us the ability to be bold in our pursuit of the gospel, even among our opponents.

- What sign does Paul say that our boldness in unity will be? (Philippians 1:28)

If we're unified around the eternal things, we live boldly in a way that reflects eternity, even to those who would like to believe that this life is all there is.

Suffering

We'd like it if painful experiences weren't part of the equation. However, boldness in unity gives us what we need to endure suffering when it comes.

- Read Philippians 1:29-30. Why does Paul say that we'll endure suffering?
- Read John 15:18-20. What does Jesus say about suffering?

While we never are to pursue or glorify suffering, suffering in some form is an inevitable result of living lives that "balance" the gospel.

Application:

- What areas of my life clearly "adorn" the gospel?
- What areas of my life don't really "balance" the gospel?

Meditation: A Letter on Eternity

In the midst of the difficulties and challenges of this life, it's vital for all of us to know and remember that, in the end, *we win*. Ultimately, we will win not based on anything that we've done or not done—we win because we'll get to be with Jesus. It's such a glorious idea: We'll someday know Him to the same depth that He now knows us! (1 Corinthians 13:12) What an incredible, glorious hope!

But, if we're totally honest, how much hope do we really place in eternity? How *real* is heaven to us? Yes, books on heaven pepper the best-seller lists but, for most of us, heaven remains a disembodied semi-reality, full of chubby baby angels that float around with harps, which not only doesn't motivate us in this life, it gives us no hope for the next. For most of us, if we're faced with the question of life or death, we quickly and even selfishly choose life! Why? Because death is no longer a door; instead, it's become a dead end.

D.L. Moody once said, "Some day you will read in the papers that D.L. Moody, of East Northfield, is dead. Don't you believe a word of it! At that moment I shall be more alive than I am now!"¹² How can we become those who, rather than fearing death, hold out such hope?

The answer, I believe, comes not from the way we think about death, but from the way that we live our lives. As I think about most of us, myself included, I find that the vast majority of our energy, passion, resources, and focus in our temporal lives is spent on the temporal. Could it be that we don't long for eternity *then* because we don't live for eternity *now*? For death to truly feel as though it is gain, my life must first be Christ! If my life is family, death is separation. If my life is money, death is loss. If my life is power, position, or prestige, death is weakness, demotion, and anonymity. But if my life is Christ—a whole-hearted, passionate, all-consuming pursuit of Jesus—then to die is most certainly to gain.

The old gospel song declares:

This world is not my home, I'm just a-passin' through

¹² Quoted in William R. Moody, *The Life of Dwight L. Moody*, (Fleming H. Revell, Grand Rapids, MI, 1900.), pg. iii.

My treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue¹³
But our treasures are here. They're inside our locked doors, within our garages, behind our fences and our gates. Our treasure might even be within our local church—in our friends, our programs, our ability to use our gifts, our preferences and our passions. There's only one place our treasure isn't, and that's "beyond the blue." Let's be honest: we might just be "passin' through," but we're certainly not living like it. We're far too at home in this world.

So it's no surprise, then, when that's what our lives reflect. Are we standing firm in one spirit and striving together with one mind? Of course we are—with those who are just like us, pursuing the same treasure that we are pursuing. If life is family, we are unified with those who share that same pursuit. If life is material gain, we are unified with those in our social class. If life is pleasure, we are unified with those we can eat, drink, and be merry alongside. And, as for opposition, who is really opposed to such things? As they say, "to each his own!" As long as we're not, with one voice, declaring that we're lost in our sin, that the hope that this world offers is a sham, and that we're desperately in need of the saving work of Jesus, opponents will be few and far between. Suffering? Sure, we sometimes suffer pain and loss. But suffering "for his sake?" With a prayer of thankfulness, we admit that kind of suffering only seems to happen "over there somewhere."

What's the big deal, really? If we're honest enough to admit it—in those really quiet times when life slows down enough for us to breathe and actually think—we find that all we're really missing is... joy. Life keeps going, filled with lots and lots of really good things. But the nagging feeling underneath all of it is that those things don't really matter. Not in any truly important way, at least. Not in an *eternal* way. We bounce from happiness to happiness, with spells of darkness in between that we don't like to talk much about—but we miss real joy. Why? Because, one day, heaven and earth will pass away. (Matthew 24:35) And if everything we treasure is here... well, our hearts seem stuck here as well.

So, friends, here is my prayer. May each of us, one worldly treasure at a time, live with the temporal *subject* to the eternal. We don't throw out our families—rather, we recognize our family as our first opportunity for discipleship. We don't get rid of our homes and cars and bank accounts—rather, we aggressively look for opportunities for those temporal things to make an eternal difference. We don't quit our jobs—but we certainly recognize that we're *all* in full-time ministry,

¹³ Albert E. Brumley, *This World is Not My Home*, 1936.

even though we do a wide variety of things to pay the bills. And as our lives more closely reflect the gospel of Jesus, we will find our joy is there as well.

Thoughts about this letter:

What's a practical way that this applies to my life?

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LIFE Group Facilitation Sheet

Welcome one another in Jesus' name!

Icebreaker: "What's one thing you want to do before you die?"

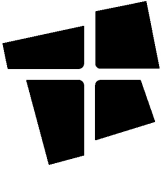
Worship Jesus through Scripture, music, singing, and prayer. Be creative! Invite Him to the center of your gathering.

Word: Philippians 1:19-30

- How is Jesus working in your life?
- Has anything specific jumped out to you, either in this passage or in the study guide this week?
- What's your first reaction when you think about dying?
- What's a practical way that you can have a greater focus on eternity?
- How is your life involved in "fruitful labor" for the gospel? What do you think that looks like?
- In what ways does a passion for the gospel of Jesus unify us? Are we experiencing that unity as a group? Why or why not?
- What are some ways that your life "adorns" the gospel? Are there ways that your life doesn't "balance" the gospel well?
- How might we as a group live and act in a way that is "worthy" of the gospel of Christ? (see definition of *worthy* on pg. 39)

Works: When we're focused on the eternal, things like fear, insecurity, and embarrassment start to fall away and we can live and speak with greater boldness. This week, think about how your group can be *unified* for the advance of the gospel. What is a way that you can work together to boldly declare the greatness of Jesus to a lost world? Pray very specifically for a way to love and serve in a unified way, and then *do it!* Pray by name for those in your life that you know might be effected by your bold, unified effort!

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Joy in Life and Death

Philippians 1:19-30

Sermon Notes:

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Week Four: Joy in Humility

Philippians 2:1-11

The call to unity around the gospel is not without either example or empowerment. Jesus' journey to the depths of humility goes far beyond what any of us are called to do. The example of Jesus is given to us so that our lives might be transformed to be like His, and so that we would love others as He has loved us. It was for the joy set before Him that Jesus endured the cross—in the same way, humbly laying down our lives brings us joy as well.

Memorization:

"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." (Philippians 2:5-11, ESV)

Movement:

Humility runs very much counter to our nature. There's something in us (the sin nature!) that longs to be recognized and honored.

This week, decide to do something secretly to serve people around you, and don't let anyone know you did it. It might be a job that everyone hates at home or at work, it might be a way of blessing a neighbor or a friend, or it might be serving someone you don't even know. The only rule is that no one is allowed to know that you did it. How did it feel to serve in this way? Consider committing to do that same thing each week until Christmas!

Christian Unity

Ask any married person: Coming to a unified decision between two people with unique ideas, backgrounds, and wills (as well as with two sinful natures!) can be a very difficult process! Now, imagine multiplying that by dozens or hundreds. How can we ever expect to have unity within even one local church, let alone the Church in the world?

And yet, Paul begins this next section of his letter by doing just that: he calls us to unity. Before we look at the letter itself, it's important for us to understand that this cry for unity does not stand alone—Jesus Himself made the same plea.

Read John 17:20-23.

- What is Jesus' prayer for the church?

- What does He say the result of this will be?

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Christian unity, then, is not simply a good idea—it's a key way that the gospel is reflected in the world! With that in mind, look at Paul's admonition to unity to the Philippian church.

- Read Philippians 2:1. What are the five characteristics of our relationship with Christ that Paul lists?

- Now, look at 2 Corinthians 13:14. In what way does this blessing parallel Philippians 2:1?

This structure parallels the salvation experience in many ways: Because we are found in Christ we can fully experience the comforting love of the Father, and join with the Spirit who indwells us to do the work He's called us into. His words in Philippians simply remind us that salvation gives us a new heart, which is now filled with new sensitivities that allow us to identify more deeply with one another.¹⁴

Armed with an understanding of our salvation as the source of our unity, Paul then calls us to be unified in vs. 2 ("being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind"). How does he then tell us that we are to accomplish this task of Christian unity?

- Vs. 3

- Vs. 4

It's vital for us to see that the humility and other-ward focus that Paul is calling us to have is grounded in our personal experience with the gospel. He effectively says to us, "Remember that Jesus counted you as more significant than He did Himself, and gave His life to save you for *your* sake. Can't you find it in you to do the same?" The call to unity is not to agree with one another on everything but, on the non-essential things, to graciously prefer one another and give each other the benefit of the doubt. Come to think of it, that might work for marriage too!

Application:

- Think about a conflict, spoken or unspoken, that you've had with a fellow believer. How might you have avoided that conflict?

- How does your life reflect the oneness that Jesus prayed for?

¹⁴ Motyer, pg. 103-104.

The Process of Humility and Exaltation

Few theological concepts have greater or more regular practical application than that of Christian humility. We are constantly in a battle with our flesh over whether we will place ourselves in the position of honor, or use our lives to honor others. While that might sound like a very “spiritual” process, it works itself out in very practical ways:

- You come home to a full dishwasher, even though your spouse has been home for an hour and you’ve emptied it the last three times in a row. What do you do?
- You’re exhausted and ready to rest, but your four-year old neighbor wants you to come over and see his new tree house. What do you do?
- You’ve planned all week to take the free Saturday to get caught up around the house, but find out on Friday that your friend is re-modeling their basement and needs help moving furniture. What do you do?
- Your boss, who’s been swimming in details because of a big business deal, forgot to fill you in on some details. The president of the company just asked you a question that you can’t answer because you don’t have the right information. How do you explain the situation?

These hypothetical situations likely bring to mind dozens of real ones! Humility is not an impractical Christian doctrine—it’s one of the most practical things ever!

Paul wants us to be clear that Jesus is our ultimate model of humility. His descent from glory to humility takes him a far greater distance than we will ever have to go! Read Philippians 2:6-8.

What are the steps of humility that Jesus’ life took?

- Vs. 6
- Vs. 7a
- Vs. 7b
- Vs. 7c
- Vs. 8

From equality with God to death on a cross—that’s quite a journey! Was He taken by surprise in the middle of this process? By no means!

- Read 1 Peter 1:19-20. When was it determined that Jesus should be crucified?

- Read Hebrews 12:1-2. What was the motivation for Jesus’ sacrifice?

But, of course, the story doesn’t end there. Looking back at Philippians 2, we find two very direct outcomes that came from the humility of Jesus.

- Read Philippians 2:9-11. What two things happened because of Jesus’ willingness to die on the cross?

Now, go back to Philippians 2:5. To what is Paul calling us as he shows us the example of Jesus?

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We are called to follow His example of humility. Unlike Jesus, our humility won’t result in our exaltation—He’s the only One in all creation that deserves the title of “Lord!” However, it will result in our joy. As we consider others better than ourselves, as we serve with joy, and as we determine not to get caught up in the little frustrations and disagreements that fill our lives, we’ll find that having the attitude of Christ truly brings us abundant joy!

Application:

- When is it hardest for you to act with humility?

- What is a practical way that you can humble yourself in your daily life?

Meditation: A Letter on Humility in Christ

Remember your salvation. For some of us, we've been saved for so long and from such a young age that it's easy to forget—but it's vital that we don't! If you can't remember what your life was like before Jesus saved you, use your imagination a bit. You know the tug of your sinful nature that's within you even now? Imagine where you might be had that nature been offered free reign in your life. For most of us, that's a very, very scary prospect!

It's when we remember who we are—who we really are—that we have grace for one another. When I'm deeply in touch with my own sinfulness, it's tough for me to react defensively to those around me. When I recognize where my life would be if left to my own desires and whims, it's much easier for me to concede my position to someone else. And most of all, when I remember how fully and completely Jesus has served me, I'm far more likely to serve those around me.

However, I recognize that even discussing humility in such frank terms will be grating to some. We live in an age of self-esteem and feel-good morality. It's a time when, incredibly, one of the historical "Seven Deadly Sins"¹⁵ has actually become a virtue!¹⁶ With such a dramatic cultural shift, there are many, even within the church, who quickly object to such frank talk of humility. For instance:

"It's simply not practical!"

"I would be walked all over if I acted like that."

"I'm not going to be anyone's doormat!"

"We have to stand up for what we believe."

OK. I hear all of those things, and I understand the objections. But, could it be that the lack of this single character trait is the reason that we no longer experience persecution in our day, nor the transformational church growth which always seems to accompany it? Could it be that, because we are unwilling to act with humility towards one another within the body of Christ, we spend all of our time sorting out the problems we unearth within the church and have little

¹⁵ Wrath, greed, sloth, pride, lust, envy and gluttony is the traditional list.

¹⁶ Without wishing to point fingers, P.R.I.D.E. is the acronym used for the desired character traits and behaviors at one of our local elementary schools. I'm just thinking that using one of the seven deadly sins for your elementary school t-shirts doesn't seem like a good idea...

time left to truly impact the world around us? Could it be that, despite popular opinion, the call to Christian humility has not changed as we've progressed into the Information Age?

Consider this: Because of the gracious salvation we've experienced, we are never to have selfish motivation as the reason behind our actions. Everything that we do should be done to honor those around us as more important than we are—regardless of social status, IQ, age, or fashion sense. We should be constantly paying attention to what *everyone else needs* with no regard for our own desires.

Why?

Because Jesus willingly left heaven behind, giving up all of His rights as God, and took *our* form, the Creator becoming the created. Once He got that far, He went even further, allowing Himself to be agonizingly and brutally murdered on a cross. Yes, God died. Real death. Because He did—not just that He died, but He gave up His rights as God, became man, and even allowed death to be a possibility, and then, yes, actually died—God exalted Him and gave Him the Name of highest honor, so that one day every created thing in all the universe will bow before Him as Lord.

He has loved us. Now, we are to love others. He did it selflessly. So should we.

The apostle James tells us that, when we are proud, God is opposed to us. I don't know how your life is going, but I find life to be challenging enough without God being actively working against me. But He also tells us that He gives grace to the humble. So, as we maintain an attitude of humility, God is constantly offering grace to us.

Lord Jesus, teach us to be like you. We have a long way to go.

Thoughts about this letter:

What's a practical way that this applies to my life?

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LIFE Group Facilitation Sheet

Welcome one another in Jesus' name!

Icebreaker: "What chore do you like doing the *least* at your house?"

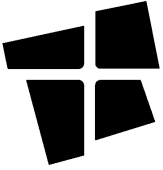
Worship Jesus through Scripture, music, singing, and prayer. Be creative! Invite Him to the center of your gathering.

Word: Philippians 2:1-11

- Where have you seen Jesus at work around you this week?
- Has anything specific jumped out to you, either in this passage or in the study guide this week?
- Why do you think pride is largely regarded as a virtue and not a sin in our culture today?
- Where might you be right now, and what might your life be like, if you had never come to faith in Jesus?
- What is a way that you can practically count others as better than yourself?
- Do you struggle to see other people's needs? Are you quick to meet them? Why or why not?
- When is it the hardest for you to act in humility?
- Does this group reflect the "oneness" that Jesus prayed for in John 17? Why or why not?

Works: As we get our eyes off of ourselves, it's much easier for us to focus on loving and serving those around us. This week, consider taking some time before you meet again as a group and serve someone outside of your group in a practical way—someone that needs to experience the love and grace of Jesus that you've experienced. Maybe you serve as a whole group, or maybe you split into a few different teams to make a maximum impact. Serve someone else as Jesus has served you—and see what the outcome is!

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Joy in Humility

Philippians 2:1-11

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Week Five: Joy in Working Out

Philippians 2:12-18

We live in the middle of the tension between the work that God is doing in us and the work that we are called to do as we work out our salvation, a process we call sanctification. It's vital for us to remember that this process is not so that we might achieve a greater holiness but, rather, so that we might reflect the truth of the gospel to the world around us and that many would come to know Him. When our lives are spent the way God has intended, we have deep satisfaction.

Memorization:

"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." (Philippians 2:5-11, ESV)

Movement:

The smallest words can sometimes give us the biggest fits. In Philippians 2:14, Paul slips in that tiny word "all," and in so doing, calls us to live our entire lives without grumbling or questioning (complaining).

Think about an area of your life where you tend to grumble and complain, and make a decision to take a week off from grumbling. You might need to recruit some accountability to help you remember! For the next week, follow Paul's simple but extremely difficult command: "Do all things (at least in the area you're choosing!) without grumbling or complaining."

What is it that we're called to do, and what is it that God is going to do in us?

The Bible confidently maintains that the sovereignty of God and the activity of men must be fully and completely held together. We are to obey, and by that obedience, work out our salvation with fear and trembling. As we obey (but not because of it!), God is at work in us, accomplishing His pleasure and will within us.

Paul had no qualms with this seeming paradox. Look at Acts 18:1-10.

- What kind of reception did Paul get in Corinth from the Jews?
- What does God tell Paul to do in vs. 9?
- What reason does He give in vs. 10?

One commentator describes it this way:

Our work, as obedient, responsible, sensitive believers, arises out of the internal work of God: work, says Paul, for (because) God is at work in you. His is the basic activity; ours responds to what he is doing. His is the inner work of transformation and renewal; our obedience to him is how we enter into the benefit of His indwelling...The new nature is ours by gift of God, but the activation of that new nature... is the responsible work of obedience.¹⁷

Application:

- What is something that God is calling you to obey in as you work out your salvation with fear and trembling?

¹⁷ Motyer, pg. 128, 130-131.

Shining Like Stars

As I write this, our family is spending a few days at my in-law's house in West Virginia. Now, when I say West Virginia, feel free to allow all of the stereotypes to form in your head! That only gives you a partial picture of the small town of Worthington, West Virginia, where they live.

There are lots of great things about visiting here: hundreds of acres of mountain to play on, a stream to splash in, and wonderful "Grandma" toys for the kids to play with. However, I think the best thing about this house might be those clear, dark nights—it seems like you can see every star in the sky!

Paul's admonition to the Philippians uses the analogy of stars that are just like those in the West Virginia night sky. Read Philippians 2:14-15.

- What does he tell us *not* to do?
- What is the result of not doing that?

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The Greek word that Paul uses for grumbling is *gongysmon*,¹⁸ and this is the only time in all of his writing that he uses the word. However, it makes many appearances in the Greek version of the Old Testament. Look at one such occurrence:

- Read Exodus 16:2-12. Underline every time you see the word "grumbling" in this passage. Do you think the author is trying to make a point?
- Without explicitly saying it, what group of people is Paul telling the Philippians *not* to model their lives after?

Paul warns us to be careful to not repeat the sin of Israel. In fact, he says that when we obey God's call in our lives (vs. 12a), work to live as worthy of the gospel

¹⁸ Theilman, pg. 139.

(1:27, 2:12b), and stop our grumbling, four things will be true of us. What are those four things?

These four things, Paul tells us, are dramatically different than those around us who don't know Jesus. In fact, Jesus Himself said that same thing would be true. Read Matthew 5:16. What does Jesus tell us to do?

Peter doesn't pick up the metaphor, but he calls us to be prepared in a very similar way. Read 1 Peter 3:14-16.

- What does he say we should be prepared to do?
- To whom are we supposed to respond in that way?
- How are we supposed to do it?

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Stars aren't aggressive like the sun. They aren't invasive like a fire. And they certainly aren't artificial like the light in your kitchen. They simply shine. And that's exactly what Paul tells us that we will do when we live without grumbling or questioning in the world around us.

Application:

- What situations are the hardest for you to not grumble or complain? Why?
- Are there things in your life that "dim" your light? What are they?

Meditation: A Letter on Sanctification

My dear friends, let's face facts. Obedience can be tough. Following Jesus can be a very long haul. We live in the middle of a culture of instant gratification, obsessed with 5 steps to this, 7 steps to that, and 12 steps to the other thing. But here's the problem: Holiness doesn't work that way.

Salvation is a glorious reality. There is a moment in time when we recognize that, although we are weary sinners, Jesus has given His life for us and, although we bring absolutely nothing (except our sin) to the table, He's inviting us to come to dinner anyway. In that glorious moment, we desire to follow Him with all that we have and, oftentimes, through prayer, we even tell Him so.

And then the next day comes.

During the next day, and during the days and weeks and months and years after that, obedience can be tough. Now that we're in Christ, the things that we've always done have a tendency to make us feel quite convicted. But, we also quickly find that we're not really sure how to start doing something else. At that moment, we have a choice: Either we start to work out how to live life as a follower of Jesus, or we start to harden our hearts to His voice and choose to live without the joy and peace He so freely offers. It's kind of like the GPS in my car—when I drive off course, it will give me directions to get back on course. But if I continue to go off course farther and farther, even though that voice is still there trying to lead me back, at some point it just becomes background noise. Getting back on course is simply too much work. And, sooner or later, I just turn the thing off and go my own way.

But here's the thing: If we *start* to obey, we find that the Holy Spirit is already in us and He's actively working to make us more like Jesus. And, truth be told, obedience isn't largely made up of those huge, life-altering decisions. Sure, they come around now and again, but it's much more about living in the details of everyday life. God calls us to do everything—from the most menial task to the huge life-changing decisions—without grumbling. Without complaining. He honestly seems to be more concerned with our attitude than our actions—not that He wants us to disobey, but obedience with a bad attitude won't get it done either. Love others because of Jesus and out of a deep recognition of grace, not because you're supposed to.

And don't just do it with church folks, or when it's expected. Discipline your life so that everything—*yes, everything*—is done with a good attitude. Responding to your kids, or to your spouse. Working for that unreasonable boss. Going to that LIFE group that doesn't seem to want to move anywhere. Talking to that person who so desperately needs a friend, but seems to require more grace than you can muster. Do it *all* without complaining or arguing. And when you do, you'll find that your life is pure and that you stand out. Yep, a consistently good attitude in our world will certainly get people asking questions!

Friends, hold fast to Jesus and to His Word. There is a day that's coming—a glorious, wonderful, victorious day—when all that's wrong will be made right. Until then, persevere. Press into obedience even when it's tough. Dig into the Word, not just now and then, but day after day after day. Commit to being authentic within a community of brothers and sisters who can love you and walk with you. Be committed to obey Jesus, both when people are looking and especially when they aren't. As Eugene Peterson said, commit to that long obedience in the same direction. And as you do, He will change you. One day you'll look in the mirror and realize that you look quite a bit like Him.

It gives me great joy that we get to do this together. With all the ups and downs, all the frustrations, all the dry spots, and all the craziness, I'm thankful that we get to travel this journey together. I'm certain there are days that you are weary. Me too. But it's worth it. Let's keep growing into joy together.

Thoughts about this letter:

What's a practical way that this applies to my life?

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LIFE Group Facilitation Sheet

Welcome one another in Jesus' name!

Icebreaker: "What was your first job?" (Or, for kids—"What would you like your first job to be?")

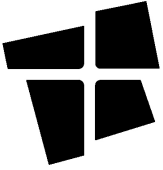
Worship Jesus through Scripture, music, singing, and prayer. Be creative! Invite Him to the center of your gathering.

Word: Philippians 2:12-18

- Where is Jesus working in your life?
- Has anything specific jumped out to you, either in this passage or in the study guide this week?
- In what kind of situations are you most likely to complain?
- Why might not grumbling or complaining lead to being blameless and innocent?
- Does obedience feel more like your work or God's work to you? Why?
- Have you ever been singled out because of your positive attitude? How did you respond?
- What makes having a righteous attitude difficult in the world around us? What might you do about that?
- How can we help one another in the sanctification process?

Works: If your group has been active over the last few weeks, take a week to simply pray. Share the first names of people who are in your life that you are praying for, and take time to truly lift those folks up before the Father. Pray specifically that they would recognize the work of Jesus in your life and start to ask questions, and that you would have the boldness to give an answer for the hope that you have. As you pray, be sure to keep your eyes open for the way that God may be answering those prayers!

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Joy in Working Out Philippians 2:12-18

Sermon Notes:

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Two Models

Jim Dixon changed my life. Now, if you knew my connection with Dr. Dixon, you might think that's an odd statement. He was one of my Literature professors at Grove City College, where I graduated as a Marketing major. He also directed a few of the plays that I acted in and worked on as a part of the crews. I can't remember even one intentional or formational conversation with Dr. Dixon—sure, we talked practical theatre stuff, and I'm certain those conversations evolved into other topics, but honestly, I can't remember any of them.

So, how did he change my life? I was starting the process of truly walking into my new Christian faith during my college years. However, I was frustrated—it seemed to me that the way God had wired me simply didn't fit in the Kingdom as I had experienced it. I loved to think deeply and to question things, and all the Christians I knew seemed to be afraid to ask difficult questions or wrestle with faith intellectually. Furthermore, I loved drama and the arts, and my experience in that realm of life had introduced me to a wide variety of people—but not Christians. That is, until I had the opportunity to work with Dr. Dixon. As I worked with him, I saw that an intellectually robust, artistically-oriented faith was not just possible, but that it could be authentic and attractive. Theoretically, I had always believed that to be possible—but up to the point when I saw it exemplified to me, I had just about given up on its reality.

I say all of that by way of introduction of an odd passage in Philippians 2. Read Philippians 2:19-30.

- Who are the two primary people that Paul is talking about in this passage?

At first glance, this seems to be an unremarkable description of the travel plans of two men within Paul's support network. However, as we see this passage in the context of the letter thus far, it begins to make more sense.

- In Philippians 1:12-30, after whom is Paul implicitly telling the Philippians to model their lives and conduct?
- In Philippians 2:5-11, after whom is Paul explicitly telling the Philippians to model their lives and conduct?

- In Philippians 2:12-18, after whom is Paul implicitly telling the Philippians *not* to model their lives and conduct? (see “*Shining Like Stars*” from *Week Five*.)

With this pattern, it makes perfect sense that Paul is including a travelogue for two of his most trusted and valued companions. He’s clearly saying to the Philippians, “Act like these guys!”

- Look at Philippians 2:19-24 closely. What character traits does Paul point out in Timothy’s life?
- Look at Philippians 2:25-30 closely. What character traits does Paul point out in the life of Epaphroditus?

Paul uses a form of the Greek word *doulos* in vs. 22 when he says that Timothy has served with him, which we looked at during Week One in the opening verse of the letter. The word literally means “slave.” Paul is saying is that Timothy has become a “co-slave” with him in the gospel. Epaphroditus has “risked his life” to serve Paul and the gospel (vs. 30). Look at the following words from Jesus from Luke’s gospel: Luke 9:24, 14:26, 14:31-33.

- What teaching of Jesus are Timothy and Epaphroditus clearly examples of?

It’s vital for us to have role models who embody for us what it really means to follow Jesus. Timothy and Epaphroditus are clearly great role models, both for the Philippian church, and for us!

Application:

- Who is a role model in the faith for you? What specific Godly characteristics do they model for you?

Worship Like Epaphroditus

When we think of Scriptural passages that direct us in our worship, we quickly think of passages like 1 Corinthians 12 and 14 that give instruction for the use of gifts in public worship, or like 1 Corinthians 11 which talks about the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. We might think of the challenging critique of Malachi or the careful description of the sacrificial system in Leviticus.

Read Philippians 2:25-30. Do you see this as a passage that directs us in our worship? Why or why not?

Read Romans 12:1-2. With this definition of worship, does this passage come a bit more into focus?

D.A. Carson says it this way: "Worship is the consistent offering of all of one's life and time and energy and body and resources to God; it is profound God-centeredness."¹⁹

Re-read Philippians 2:30. The word "service" is the Greek word *leitourgía*, from which we get the English word "liturgy." It's a word with profound implications for worship.

- Based on Philippians 2:25-30, what act of worship was Epaphroditus doing on behalf of the Philippians?

Whatever he was bringing to Paul, whether money, prayers, physical help, or moral encouragement, Paul clearly saw it as an element of their worship.²⁰ In the process, he got very ill and nearly died. This, too, was a part of his worship.

¹⁹ D.A. Carson, *Basics for Believers*, (Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, MI., 1996.), pg. 77.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pg. 78.

It's clear that Paul saw worship on a much larger scale than what happens on a typical Sunday morning! As he states in Romans 12:1-2, our entire lives are offered on God's altar. That's real worship.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:14-20.

- What portion of our life should the love of Christ effect? (vs. 14-15)

- What's the first thing that changes after our lives are controlled by the love of Jesus? (vs. 16)

- Why does our view of the world around us change? (vs. 17)

- How do we respond to this transformation within us? (vs. 18-20)

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Worship is intended to be a whole life activity! Paul holds up Epaphroditus as an example to remind us that the entirety of our lives are to be lived in worship.

Application:

- Are there areas of your life that you see as removed from activity of worship?

- When do you feel most like you are worshipping? (*Hint: It might not be while singing songs in church!*)

Meditation: A Letter on Heroes of the Faith

I'm deeply thankful for so many of you.

In various ways, dozens of you have shown me what it means to follow Jesus in the details of daily life. You have invited me into your lives and have been bold enough to speak into mine and because of that, I'm a better follower of Jesus today. As a local church, we are incredibly blessed with an older generation of folks that have lived passionately, loved their spouses faithfully, and served their church consistently. There is much for our younger generations to learn.

I'm concerned, however, that we've largely stopped having heroes. Study after study has shown that the heroes of our coming generations are mainly fictional characters created through Hollywood blockbusters—that is, if they admit to having any at all. For the most part, the question of heroes is met with blank stares. In an age where available information grows exponentially each year, the study of history has become a lost art.

When our faith journey is isolated to ourselves and our peers, we are condemned to spend our energies and passions making the same mistakes that have been made for hundreds and even thousands of years, throughout the history of Christendom. Our growth toward maturity is, at best, delayed and, at worst, short-circuited altogether. It's certainly not practical for all of us to become experts on church history. However, if our lives are void of the influence of men and women like Augustine, Catherine of Sienna, Francis of Assisi, Martin Luther, Charles Wesley, A.B. Simpson, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Billy Graham, and Mother Theresa, can't we agree that we are unnecessarily poorer because their rich lives aren't part of what influences ours?

But our heroes mustn't be limited to great historical figures. The call of Jesus is to live a life that is wholly devoted to Him, not divided up into various loyalties and passions. We must seek out men and women who seek the interests of Jesus, not their own interests—those who have willingly become slaves to the gospel, laying down their lives to see the cause of Jesus advance, even within their small sphere of influence. When we find such people, may we do all we can to pattern our lives after theirs, to talk with them, ask questions, listen well, and mine their hearts for the pure gold of the gospel that has emerged through years of faithful pursuit.

Of course, they won't be perfect. Part of our hesitation in having heroes is the frequency with which we've seen them fall from grace. Many years ago I attended a conference in Indianapolis and was mesmerized by the passion and deep spirituality of a young pastor from Colorado. I remember being amazed at his self-discipline, his ability to hear from the Spirit, and his passion to see the gospel go forth. That young pastor's name? Ted Haggard.²¹

However, that doesn't mean that we should reject heroes altogether. As I go back to my notes from that conference, I recognize that there was great truth that Haggard spoke that day, even if he was unable to live it out as fully as he proclaimed it. Our heroes *will* be flawed this side of heaven. Most of them, of course, won't fall in the way that Ted Haggard did—but they won't be perfect either. Someone may become a hero to you because of a portion of their life. The man you model your business ethics after might not be the same man you see as a model husband and father. The woman who has a deep passion for evangelism might be a bit shaky when it comes to discipleship; and vice-versa. We are not to idolize the broken humans around us, but we certainly can, and should, follow them as they follow Christ. (See 1 Corinthians 11:1)

Each one of our lives is a model for someone else. May we model after Jesus, and model Him well.

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²¹ If you are unaware of Ted Haggard's story, you are welcome to Google him. It's a tragic story of a very flawed man who was unable to be honest about his sin.

Thoughts about this letter:

What's a practical way that this applies to my life?

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LIFE Group Facilitation Sheet

Welcome one another in Jesus' name!

Icebreaker: "Do you have a hero? Who is he/she?"

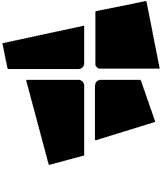
Worship Jesus through Scripture, music, singing, and prayer. Be creative! Invite Him to the center of your gathering.

Word: Philippians 2:19-30

- How have you seen Jesus this week?
- Has anything specific jumped out to you, either in this passage or in the study guide this week?
- Look around the room. What are some "God-traits" that you see in the people within this group? Take time to encourage one another with the ways you've seen God work in each individual life.
- Why is it important to have people to model our lives after, not just a theoretical way to live?
- When do you most feel like you're worshipping God?
- Are there areas of your life that you see as outside of the "spiritual" realm—that somehow don't count as worship? Why?
- How do we make an impact on one another's lives within this group?
- Hard question: does this group make any impact on the world around us? In what ways? Why or why not?

Works: As we move into the fall, the holidays will be upon us before we know it! Take some time this week to look ahead on the calendars and plan for ways to use the holiday season to make an impact on the world around you. The ideas are endless: a harvest picnic, a pre-Thanksgiving cooking party, a neighborhood thankfulness dinner, serving opportunities throughout the holidays, adopting a family with gifts and food throughout the holidays, cookie exchanges, and the list goes on and on. Whatever you do, do something! Start to talk and pray, and within the next few weeks *get it on the calendar* before the schedules are full.

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Joy in Co-Pilgrimage Philippians 2:19-30

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Week Seven: Joy in Rejecting Religion

Philippians 3:1-11

One of the most difficult aspects of joy is our constant propensity to seek it in the temporal, not the eternal. External religion grounds our joy in our performance. Materialism, pleasure, worldly success, and relationships ground our joy in our circumstances. However, the temporal can never truly satisfy us. As we hold all of the external trappings loosely but cling tightly to Jesus, we can truly find joy.

Memorization:

"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." (Philippians 3:7-11)

Movement:

How do we willingly share in the sufferings of Jesus, as Paul calls us to do?

This week, think about ways that you can choose to deny yourself for His sake. Be careful—this is not about earning anything from Him or proving anything to Him! Rather, it's about a willful sacrifice in order to identify with His suffering. Jesus chose to suffer—to die—for the sake of the world. How can you deny yourself in such a way that it could make an impact on the world around you? Maybe you skip a meal, but buy a meal for someone else. Maybe you eliminate something from your schedule and use that time to reach out to someone who needs to know Jesus, or to encourage someone. There are lots of possibilities!

The Dogs

We saw earlier in Paul's letter how he graciously responded to those who were opposing him and seeking to afflict him while he was in prison. Shockingly, he affirmed their preaching, rejoicing that Christ was being proclaimed! (See "Two Groups, One Result" from Week Two.)

That surprising response at the beginning of the letter makes Paul's very direct language all the more shocking as he opens chapter 3. Read Philippians 3:1-3.

Paul says that he is reminding them of something that he's already taught them, presumably when he was with them in person. And then he warns them to "look out for those dogs... the evildoers... those who mutilate the flesh." (vs. 2) For some background, read Galatians 5:1-12.

One of the problems that Paul faced in nearly every church he founded was a portion of Jewish Christians who understood the Hebrew Bible (what we call the Old Testament) to say that Gentiles who wanted to become Christians needed to become Jews first. One of the outward signs of such a conversion would be circumcision, which this sect, often referred to as "Judaizers," taught was necessary. Paul disagrees, and he does so in very strong terms!

Isn't this just a finer point of theology? Isn't Jesus still proclaimed? D.A. Carson says it this way: "The old-covenant Scriptures do not establish eternal structures of religious observance that are capped by the coming of Jesus. Rather, they anticipate his coming, they look forward to his coming, they announce his coming, but it is his coming that is the ultimate hope."²²

Consider these practical examples:

- The temple was understood to be the place of sacrifice and the place where God would meet with His people. Read John 2:21. What does Jesus say about the temple?

²² Carson, pg. 81.

- Priests were to be the mediators between God and man. What does 1 Timothy 2:5 and Hebrews 5:7-10 say about the priesthood?
- Sacrifices were to be offered for the sins of the people as a continual representation of their sinfulness before God. What does Hebrews 9:11-28 say about the sacrificial system?
- Finally, the Passover celebration was a reminder of God's work in freeing His people from Egypt, and it was celebrated each year to look back at God's work in Israel. However, in 1 Corinthians 5:7, what does Paul himself say that the Passover lamb represents?

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These teachers were saying that Jesus *plus a little extra dose of the Jewish law* was what was necessary for salvation. However, Paul was saying that a gospel that declares there is *anything* necessary in addition to Jesus is no longer the gospel! As one contemporary writer put it: "Jesus + Nothing = Everything"²³

Application:

- Think about the way that you understand the gospel. Is there *anything* besides Jesus that you see as necessary?

²³ Tullian Tchividjian, *Jesus + Nothing = Everything* (Crossway, Wheaton, IL. 2011.)

What Kind of Righteousness?

We recently broke down and got an iPhone for Amanda. After a close reading of Genesis 3, I'm still concerned about any line of products that features a glowing apple with a bite out of it but, after a few months of using the iPads that we were given for Christmas, we decided that the iPhone was simple enough that we'd actually be able to figure it out. My hope was that, if Amanda had an iPhone, she might trade-up to an electronic calendar instead of the purple Day Timer that sits on our counter—which, no matter what trick I use, I can't read from my office!

However, I think it's fair to say that Amanda doesn't have a stellar track record with phones. She tries—tries hard!—but they always seem to die brutal and bizarre deaths. Dunked in a cup of coffee. Flushed down a toilet. Dropped in the yard...for two weeks...in the winter. Yes, all true stories. So, with this new investment, we knew we needed some kind of protective covering. After some research, we found a case called "Life Proof." Sounded like what we needed. But they were expensive! So, being a resourceful husband, I looked on eBay. And I found one! Less than a third of the price! What a deal! Until it came... Oh, it works OK. But not great. Why? Because it's a fake. So much for my deal.

In Philippians 3, Paul contrasts two different kinds of righteousness. We might call one "fake" and the other "the real deal." Read Philippians 3:7-9.

- What kind of righteousness is Paul rejecting?

- What kind of righteousness is he willing to lose everything for?

Sounds like there's a pretty sizable difference! But what *is* the difference?

Righteousness of my own

- Where does Paul say it comes from? (vs. 9)

- Once we have this righteousness, how could we keep it?
- What confidence can we have in our own righteousness?

Christ's Righteousness

- Where does Paul say it comes from? (vs. 9)
- Read 2 Corinthians 5:21. Whose righteousness are we given?
- Read Romans 5:19. How do we maintain this righteousness?
- Read 2 Corinthians 5:17 and Romans 13:14. How do we have confidence in Christ's righteousness?

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Paul knew that, no matter how good it looked, a righteousness that came from him would be a fake. Real righteousness could only come from one who was truly perfect, and real confidence could only come from knowing that the work was already done.

Application:

- Do you have portions of your own righteousness to which you still cling?
- How does an acceptance of the gift of righteousness (grace) not turn into license to sin? (*See Romans 6:1-14 if you need help!*)

Meditation: A Letter on Religious Activity

My dear friends, may our joy only ever be in Him and in Him alone.

Living in a nation that claims both Christianity and religious freedom as its dueling roots of faith can, at times, be a challenging thing for a follower of Jesus. It seems that everywhere we look, there is an offer of “Jesus plus something” that will bring us the joy for which we’re longing. Consider *just some* of the various options:

- **Jesus plus financial success will give you joy.** In one camp, God has willed you to be an overcomer, and who has ever heard of a poor overcomer? In the other camp, God has made you a steward, therefore, you have an inalienable right to emerge from debt (a good idea!) and then to amass a small fortune so that you can always have control of your life and security for your future.
- **Jesus plus the right second-tier theology will give you joy.** Real Christians have joy, right? Right! And real Christians believe in the rapture. Or they don’t. Real Christians embrace Calvinism. Or they don’t. Real Christians believe in eternal security. Or they don’t. Real Christians speak in tongues. Or they don’t. You get the idea.
- **Jesus plus the right ministry program will give you joy.** “Hey, did you hear about Second Church of the Keeping up with the Joneses? They have an incredible ministry of feeding the homeless (or have a children’s outreach, or a prison ministry, or small group structure, or a high-tech worship band, or _____ You can fill in the blank.). I bet that would give us exactly what we need! I wish someone would do that...”
- **Jesus plus the latest Christian merchandise will give you joy.** No one says it this way, but if you listen carefully—whether it’s a Beth Moore Bible study, the music from a specific artist, the latest book from a certain author, or the latest conference—there’s almost an undertone of hurried panic as we strive to get our fix from some “Christian” consumer product.
- **Jesus plus an organized life will give you joy.** Organization to the glory of God, of course. We maximize time because we can make a bigger impact in the world. We maximize resources because we can be a blessing to the poor. We maximize space because then we can fit more stuff. (OK, it’s hard to find redeeming value in that, but we all seem to do it!) Type A’s always seem to be happier, right? Except no one’s quite as organized as they’d like to be...

- **Jesus plus a great family will give you joy.** James Dobson has produced lots of great material that has been helpful to me over the years. However, can't we agree that focusing on *anything* other than God, by Biblical definition, is idolatry? If we're only ever as happy as our least-happy child, aren't we unnecessarily giving away our joy? Families are a wonderful blessing from the Lord, but they aren't the key to our joy.

And here's the one that, by my own admission and my own observation, seems to most often capture our hearts...

- **Jesus plus comfort and safety will give you joy.** Almost every decision that we make in our lives revolves around these two things. What's worse is that almost every radical move of faith that we *don't* make has one of these factors, if not both, at its root. Whether it's our comfort zone in relationships with people, or the comfort that we expect within the more than adequate square footage in our houses, comfort drives our decisions. From the safety we feel among our friends who are just like we are, to the lack of safety we fear for our kids or ourselves as we think about relocating to a new school district or to a new country, we are addicted to being safe. Interestingly, comfort and safety were never priorities for Jesus—and the gospel seems to spread most rapidly and effectively in their absence.

Please hear me, my dear friends: I'm not opposed to any of these things *per se*. Financial freedom is a positive thing. I'm pretty passionate about both good theology and good ministry practice. I'm completely sold on good, redemptive art being produced by Christians. (Which is different than the majority of "Christian" merchandise, but that's a different discussion for another day.) If I'm honest, I love and crave organization *almost* as much as I love and crave my family. And, like all intelligent folks, I'm partial to comfort and safety over, say, discomfort and danger. *But these things, no matter how good, are not Jesus. They cannot replace Him, and they can never add anything to what we already have in Him.* They never have, nor ever will, give us enduring joy. And if we're not careful, they can become so important to us that they actually can rob our joy. May we seek His righteousness alone, that we might actually be willing to share in His sufferings, sacrificing our comfortable and safe lives for the world around us—just as He did.

Thoughts about this letter:

What's a practical way that this applies to my life?

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LIFE Group Facilitation Sheet

Welcome one another in Jesus' name!

Icebreaker: "What was church like for you growing up?"

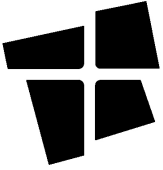
Worship Jesus through Scripture, music, singing, and prayer. Be creative! Invite Him to the center of your gathering.

Word: Philippians 3:1-11

- Where has Jesus been at work around you?
- Has anything specific jumped out to you, either in this passage or in the study guide this week?
- What are some activities that you, either consciously or unconsciously, think earn you "points" with God?
- Do you hesitate in saying with Paul that you consider your spiritual "achievements" as trash? Why or why not?
- Are there aspects of your life that you feel like you need to fix before you can come to God?
- What do you tend to cling to in addition to Jesus for joy?
- Is this group a place that you feel like you can come just like you are, without adding anything to your life? Why or why not?
- What does it look like in your life for you to share in the sufferings of Christ, becoming like him in his death? What about for us as a group?

Works: When we fully embrace the gospel, we can get our focus off of our own lives and focus on the lives of those around us. As we realize that we are accepted by Jesus only through His grace, we also tend to approach others with much more grace. Allow the truth of this passage to sink into your hearts this week, and then turn out to the world around you with the message! Pray very intentionally for those people with whom your life intersects who seem to be in the greatest need of the grace and blessing of God. You may be the only one willing to offer that to them—so do it with joy!

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Joy in Rejecting Religion Philippians 3:1-11

Sermon Notes:

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Week Eight: Joy in Maturity

Philippians 3:12-16

Paul urges all of us to continue to grow through two key admonitions: forget what is behind, and strain forward for what lies ahead. Because of the joy of the gospel, we are not stuck in the past, and because of the indwelling of the Spirit, we know that we have hope for the future! However, as we live in the present, we are called to hold true to the measure of truth we have already attained, never being stagnant, but always straining for God's best for us.

Memorization:

"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." (Philippians 3:7-11)

Movement:

The process of sanctification was never meant to be easy. As Dallas Willard said, "Grace is not opposed to *effort*, but to *earning*."

Identify an area in your spiritual life where you feel especially weak. E.g., in Bible reading, prayer, serving others, evangelism, etc. Then, determine *one thing* that you can do each day this week that will develop that area of your spiritual life. As Paul admonishes, forget about all of the struggles you've had in that area in the past, and really work at it this week! Journal your thoughts along the way and take note of how you feel after you've accomplished that thing for a full week.

Forgetting

Do you remember your first day of work—not when you were 15 at the local fast food joint, but your first day of working as a career? It may have been post-high school or college or grad school, but at some moment in time, you started the rest of your life. (If you haven't gotten there yet, just imagine for a moment!) What did it feel like? I remember it being both humbling and exhilarating—the slate was clean! Suddenly, no one cared about test scores or GPA's, which had been the language of achievement for over a decade—so that (a) meant that I couldn't fall back on those things anymore, and (b) I was no longer identified by those things. I now had the opportunity to start to write the next phase of my life.

That's a bit of the sense of what Paul is talking about in Philippians 3:12-14.

- What does Paul say we are to do with the past?

This admonition will take a bit of work if we're to understand what Paul is asking of us. What does he mean?

- Go back to Philippians 3:7-11. Summarize what is Paul talking about in those verses.

So, he can't be asking us to forget the mercies of God...

- Go back a bit further to Philippians 3:4-6. Summarize what is Paul recounting in those verses.

Equally, he can't be talking about past behaviors or sin, since he's just "remembered" those as well.

- Now, read Ezra 3:10-13. How did the people react to seeing the foundation of the temple being laid?

Most commentators agree that the weeping was because there were many who remembered the past glory of the temple and were dissatisfied with the present work of God. The grace of God from the past was so defining their present that they were unable to see God's grace toward them in that moment.

- Read 1 Corinthians 10:12. What is Paul's warning for those who feel confident based on past victories?

Some of us have experienced God's grace in such profound ways in the past that we can easily be tempted to either be prideful as we recount them or lazy as we rest on those achievements. However, Paul is not only concerned with the glowing aspects of our past.

- Read 1 Timothy 1:12-16. Summarize how Paul recounts his past sin in light of the grace of God.

- Now, read 2 Corinthians 11:30. What does Paul say he will boast in?

Paul is using a Greek word that was "an ancient athletic term used of a runner who outran another in the same race: Once he got into the lead, he would never turn around and look back; he would *forget* about the other runner."²⁴ Whether it's past victory or past failure, Paul says, "Deal with and then forget about it! The race we're running is too important to be distracted."

Application:

- What's an area of your past that you can tend to dwell on? What would it take to truly "forget" that event so that you can focus on what's ahead?

²⁴ Swindoll, pg. 148.

Practice Makes (Not Quite) Perfect

Sanctification has been the subject of countless debates over the past several centuries, with this passage often being at the center of the discussion. In 1741, John Wesley preached a sermon titled “Christian Perfection” using this passage, which has become “a landmark within Protestant Christianity of the great divide between Reformed and Wesleyan groups on the doctrine of sanctification.”²⁵

I know what you’re thinking: “Oh boy, I can’t wait to jump into a 300 year old theological debate! That should have great application to my life!” Don’t worry—we don’t need to get in the middle of the debate. But how does Paul tell us to pursue holiness?

Read Philippians 3:12-16.

- What does Paul begin by saying?
- However, what does he tell the Philippian church in vs. 15, and then again in vs. 17?

While Paul doesn’t claim perfection, he recognizes that his maturity and apostolic lifestyle make him a model that the Philippians can imitate. We’ll look at in greater detail in next week’s study. However, Paul doesn’t force a rule of life on them. Read Philippians 3:16 again:

- What is he asking them to put into practice within their lives?

²⁵ Theilman, pg. 209.

The verb that is translated “hold true” is one that Paul only uses a handful of times in the New Testament. Read the other three usages, write them in your own words, and then try to determine a fuller meaning behind the verb:

- Romans 4:12
- Galatians 5:25
- Galatians 6:16

What do you think Paul is saying when he say we are to “hold true?”

Effectively, it seems that Paul is saying: “Practice what you know! The rest of it will come.”

Martyn Lloyd-Jones said it this way:

Practice! Put into operation the central things about which you are certain and if you do that, God will then reveal unto you the truth concerning those other things. Do not spend the rest of your life arguing about things which are not clear to you.²⁶

That sounds like a great way around a big theological debate. What you know you’re supposed to do—do it! God will reveal the rest when you need to know.

Application:

- What area of the gospel do you believe as true but struggle to put into practice in your life? Why is that? What would it take to put it into practice?

²⁶ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *The Life of Peace: An Exposition of Philippians 3 and 4* (Baker, Grand Rapids, MI., 1992.), pg. 107.

Meditation: A Letter on Growing Into Maturity

I think it goes without saying that none of us are perfect. There are many ways that we fall short, and many things which are far from God's best but which we cling to anyway. And, to some degree, that will always be the case. So why put all the effort into growing in our faith?

The best answer might be the shortest one: joy. We pursue maturity in Christ—Christian perfection—because Jesus has invited us to! That invitation from Him is an invitation into joy. The sin that so easily trips us up might masquerade as joy but, when we grab hold of it, we find out that *it* has really grabbed hold of *us*. We are so eloquently reminded, "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free!" (Galatians 5:1) So, rather than settle for less than God's best for us, we continually strain for more—more of Him.

How do we get there? Paul tells us three things that he's constantly doing as he pursues maturity in Christ, and we would do well to model ourselves after him, just as he invites us into that pursuit.

Forget what is behind. Many of us are caught in the past. We're victims of our own rear-view mirrors, constantly evaluating what might have been or what ended up to be. For some, this is a constant cycle—we evaluate the conversation from an hour ago, the email we sent this morning, the decision we just made... or didn't make... or needed to make. The constant cycle of self-evaluation has us completely immobilized.

For others, however, the rear-view mirror is narrowly focused and well-polished, reflecting back on just one key event, or maybe a handful of events, which we imagine must define the entirety of our lives. Mistakes we made. Sins committed against us. Opportunities missed. Betrayals. Disappointments. They are all clearly seen, and regularly re-lived.

Still others of us emphasize the past in a totally different way—we completely, obsessively, stubbornly ignore it. The topic can't be truly forgotten, at least in the way that Paul intends, because it can't even be discussed. If someone brings it up, the subject is quickly changed. Maybe it's a past sin, a past hurt, or a dark phase of life. Whatever it is, because it's never been properly dealt with, it effects every decision we make, even though it's never ever brought up.

Forget the past. Leave it there. Repent. Forgive. Release. *Move on.*

Strain forward to what lies ahead. Strain. Push for it. Real effort. For many of us, we live with this idea that one day we will wake up, and we will suddenly be mature in our faith. Of course, we never say it like that, but we live that way. We long to have a deep knowledge of the Bible... but we rarely read it, and we never study it. We want to be great prayer warriors... but we never set aside time to pray and never sit with, and learn from, other prayer warriors. We want to be generous and gracious stewards of what God's giving to us... but we continue to spend more than we have and find ourselves deeper and deeper in debt.

Sanctification will always be work. There won't come a day when we'll simply wake up and find ourselves in the midst of the *shekinah* glory of God, having done nothing but eaten potato chips and read the *Left Behind* series. (*Shekinah* is a Hebrew term for the glory of God physically manifested in the world.) We need to strain for it with intentionality. We need to evaluate our lives, and train in the areas we lack. We need to develop our strengths and practice our weaknesses. Just like an athlete preparing for an elite competition, holiness will take everything that we have.

Keep our eyes on the goal to receive the prize. This world has much to offer. Not that any of it will truly satisfy us, but we can sure waste a lot of time figuring that out. In the midst of cars, homes, families, jobs, and youth sports leagues, it's pretty easy to forget the reality: Jesus is coming back. This is not the end and, someday, the things of this world will all be meaningless. Sure, it feels pretty real right now. It has weight. It has shine. Some of "it" even has buttons or touch screens, which seem to be of particular interest to men. But it's all going away.

We don't talk enough about eternity. We don't think enough about it. Early Christians spent their lives focused on the next life and, in doing so, they turned this world upside down. (See Acts 17:6) Instead, we tend to focus on this world and all there is to do in it—people to feed, injustice to fight, slaves to free, political battles to be won—and we find ourselves having very little impact on that which consumes our focus. We need to stay focused on the unseen reality that is more real than anything we can see with our eyes.

For those who have attained some measure of spiritual maturity, this is the road that they took to get there. We would do well to follow.

Thoughts about this letter:

What's a practical way that this applies to my life?

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LIFE Group Facilitation Sheet

Welcome one another in Jesus' name!

Icebreaker: "What's your favorite board game?"

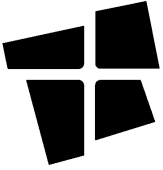
Worship Jesus through Scripture, music, singing, and prayer. Be creative! Invite Him to the center of your gathering.

Word: Philippians 3:12-16

- How have you experienced Jesus' presence this week?
- Has anything specific jumped out to you, either in this passage or in the study guide this week?
- Which one is the biggest struggle for you: forgetting what's behind, straining toward what's ahead, or focusing on the prize?
- Is there an aspect of the gospel that you know intellectually, but which you struggle to put into action practically?
- What's one activity that you feel most helps you to grow spiritually?
- Looking back at the past year, what's an area in which you've seen yourself grow spiritually? The past five years? *This is also a good exercise to do with one another, using the length of time the group has been together.*
- What's an area that you're hoping to grow in during the next year? What are you doing to achieve that goal?
- Does this group help you to grow into maturity? Why or why not? In what ways?

Works: Have everyone turn in their Bibles to Paul's shortest book: his letter to Philemon. (You can find it before Hebrews, near the back of the New Testament.) Read vs. 6. What do you think Paul's saying? This is one of the clearest admonitions to evangelism in the Bible—he basically says that it's only through sharing your faith that you become spiritually mature! Determine *this week* that you are going to have a spiritual conversation with someone who needs to encounter Jesus. Pray for that person and pray for an opportunity to share your faith this week!

Note: Please check the website for any announcements and upcoming events!
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Joy in Maturity

Philippians 3:12-16

Sermon Notes:

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Week Nine: Joy in the Kingdom

Philippians 3:17 – 4:1

Those who are in Christ are citizens of the Kingdom of heaven. In the Kingdom, values, perspectives, and motivations are all dramatically different than within this present kingdom on earth. How do we learn to live in this Kingdom? Following good role models, like Paul, by being men and women of the Word.

Memorization:

"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." (Philippians 3:7-11)

Movement:

A few weeks ago, we looked at connecting our lives to those with whom we could intentionally journey alongside as we pursue Jesus. As Paul continues to encourage us to have good role models that reflect Jesus to us, we'll look a bit further back in history.

Find someone from church history and read their biography. If you're not sure where to start, there's a list of possibilities on pg. 77. If tackling a biography in a week is too aggressive, choose two figures from the list and research their lives. As you read/research, answer the following questions: Was there a specific event that drove them towards Jesus? Is there a specific thing that characterized their life? In what ways could you model your life after theirs?

Good models, bad models

As a parent, one of the things I'm most thankful for is the fact that my kids have great friends—it's one of the things for which I continually pray! Why? Because I know that there will be a time, which is coming very soon, when, for a period of time, their friends will exert a greater influence on the decisions they make than I will. When that time comes, I'm praying that they have godly friends who model the right things for them.

Although Paul is quite an expert in doctrine (check out the book of Romans!), he seems to clearly understand that the Christian life is better "caught" than taught. For the second time in this short letter, he speaks of following good models.

Read Philippians 3:17-19.

- Paul lists himself and "those who walk according to the example you have in us" as good examples. He seems to be referencing back to vs. 12-14 to describe those they are to follow. What characteristics do they have?
- What about the bad role models? How does Paul identify them?

These men, it seems, have encountered the cross of Jesus, but have remained hardened to its message and power. Through their lives, and maybe even through their teaching, they are leading others astray as well.

- Read Titus 1:16. How are these enemies of the cross diagnosed?

- Now, read Titus 2:10. How are true Christians to be identified?
- Read James 2:14 and Ephesians 2:8-9. How can these things both be true?

We are never saved by our works, but the way that we act is a clear indication as to whether God has truly saved us! Paul is giving the Philippians a clear example of who they *shouldn't* be following.

- Now, read Philippians 3:12, Romans 7:18-19, and 1 Timothy 1:15. What does Paul seem very intent to tell us about himself?
- Read Philippians 3:17, 1 Corinthians 11:1, and 2 Timothy 3:10. Although he is fallen and sinful, what does Paul tell us we should do?

Wouldn't we expect that any man who wrote Romans 7 would say that we *shouldn't* follow him? However, go back to Philippians 3:13-14. What is Paul saying we are to model our lives after?

Paul hasn't arrived, but he's modeling for us what it means to pursue Jesus!

Application:

- Who is someone that you know that is pursuing after Jesus in a way that you could model your life after?

The Power of Citizenship

Who are you? No, I don't mean your name; rather, your identity. Are you your job? Are you your role as a spouse, parent, or grandparent? Are you your hobbies? The group you hung with in high school? Are you a member of a certain club, a certain ethnic group, or even a certain theological position? What is it that defines you?

At the end of Philippians 3, Paul is pressing on our identity—who we really are. Read Philippians 3:18-21.

- How does Paul describe the “end” of those who are enemies of the cross? What are their minds set on?
- But how does he describe the faithful in vs. 20?

The idea of “citizenship” is one that denotes identity. Just as some would identify themselves with a certain nationality or ethnic group, Paul calls us citizens of heaven. “Thoughtful Christians will not see themselves first of all as citizens of Great Britain or the U.S. or Canada or Pago Pago. We are citizens of heaven. Only that citizenship has enduring significance.”²⁷

But why is that true?

- Read Colossians 3:3. What does that say is true about those who are in Christ?
- Read Ephesians 2:6. What does that tell us about the eternal status of Christians?
- Finally, read Colossians 1:13. Where does Paul “place” us in this verse?

²⁷ Carson, pg. 93.

Now, go back and look at those three verses one more time. Does Paul describe that reality in the future tense, or in the present tense?

Paul says that our citizenship is in heaven—that it's a done deal, and that we are not members of another Kingdom. That Kingdom has been described as an “upside-down” Kingdom because the values are so dramatically different than the values of this present Kingdom.

- Read Luke 6:20-26. Fill out the chart below:

| Blessed are you... | Woe to you... |
|--------------------|---------------|
| | |

Now, look at the list you just made. Jesus seems to teach that everything that is valued in the Kingdom of God is devalued in the kingdom of this world, and vice-versa. Why? A partial answer can be found in Paul's description of the enemies of the cross. Read Philippians 3:18 again. How does Paul respond as he describes these men?

The reality of this broken world creates passion in us to make an impact. Paul felt this deeply, which is why he wept. Can you and I say the same?

Application:

- How might the reality of our citizenship in heaven change the way that you live in your everyday life?

Meditation: A Letter on Not Settling

Brothers and sisters, think about your perception of the average Christian life. Not just that one exceptional guy or gal. We're so thankful for those who set a high standard before us, and there is certainly much that we can learn from them, but their lives seem to feel largely unattainable to the rest of us. No, I mean the *average* Christian—the “normal” Christian, if there is such a thing.

As I write this, I find myself in the same state the apostle was in as he wrote—grief over the state of being in which we find ourselves as the Church. What might it mean to walk as “enemies of the cross of Christ?” The cross is the ultimate symbol of self-sacrifice, a willing and humble choice to subjugate the desires of the flesh to the will of the Father. Throughout the history of the church, faithful Christians have sought to “mortify the flesh” in that same way. This always has been, and is today, the way of Christ. And, as counter-intuitive as it might seem, this is the also pathway to joy.

However, in our modern era, the language of the church seems to have changed. Christ-likeness, while certainly a Scriptural ideal (see Romans 8:29), has fallen on hard times. Rather, we have adopted a need-based mentality, where we pursue Jesus because of the needs we have for Him. Instead of striving to be like Him, we strive to be near to Him. A subtle difference, maybe, but our lives would say a significant one.

Is the “average” Christian life still fresh in your mind? Compare it to this:

- **Their god is their belly.** They are driven by their appetites, whether they are for food, drink, sex, or material gain. Life decisions are driven by comfort and pleasure. A great steak, maybe some good wine (or a nice cup of coffee), a lazy morning of sleeping in—more than blessings to be enjoyed, these are goals to be attained. “Far from being drawn to suffering for Christ’s sake, they are endlessly drawn to creature comforts.”²⁸
- **They glory in their shame.** The stories that are re-told again and again are not of the glory and work of God. Rather, they constantly re-live the depraved and broken parts of life. Not only is there a pursuit of the sensual appetites, but that pursuit is justified and even glorified. The standard of morality is found in such ideas as “not getting caught” and “not hurting

²⁸ Carson, pg. 92.

anyone” rather than in emulation of Jesus’ life and following His calling.

- **Their minds are set on earthly things.** Everything in life seems to have a price tag. There is a constant longing for more, paired with a dissatisfaction with what they already have. While their focus might not be on the explicitly wicked, all that they strive for is tied to this physical earth. “Their whole attention, their point of view or way of looking at things, their general frame of mind, their customary objects of study—all these are earth-centered and bounded by the horizons of this world.”²⁹

Sadly, that sounds all too familiar. Some might say a lot like the average Christian life in this broken world. Could it be that our struggle to live with joy is directly related to those we model our lives after, and to the ways we pursue false joy day after day?

Brothers and sisters, we are rightful citizens of heaven. Yes, we are currently residing on the earth, but we don’t ultimately belong here. Our citizenship in heaven grants us rights and privileges, and chief among them is the hope that drives us. Someday we will be like Him! Yes, we are given all things during this temporary stay on earth for our enjoyment. (1 Timothy 6:17) It’s perfectly appropriate for us to enjoy a good steak—in fact, it should lead us to worship! However, the things of this earth mustn’t be the driving factor of our lives.

We must find those around us whose appetites are subject to their appetite for Christ, whose glory is found in Him alone, and whose gaze is firmly fixed on the horizon of the world that is one day coming. And when we find them, we must pattern our lives after theirs.

²⁹ Motyer, pg. 186.

Thoughts about this letter:

What's a practical way that this applies to my life?

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LIFE Group Facilitation Sheet

Welcome one another in Jesus' name!

Icebreaker: "What's your favorite Olympic sport?"

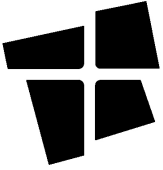
Worship Jesus through Scripture, music, singing, and prayer. Be creative! Invite Him to the center of your gathering.

Word: Philippians 3:17 – 4:1

- Where have you seen Jesus at work recently?
- Has anything specific jumped out to you, either in this passage or in the study guide this week?
- Who are some of the models that you have in your journey with Christ? Why are they your models?
- How does living as a citizen of heaven change the way you might make day to day decisions?
- Is there an effective way to balance the enjoyment of the things of this world without making them a goal to be pursued?
- How can we as a group help one another to live as citizens of heaven?
- What's *one thing* that you can change about your life that places your focus more on the eternal than the temporal?

Works: Eternity is rarely our focus when our lives are so closely connected to the temporal. However, when our focus is in eternity, our joy isn't dependent on the circumstances around us, but on Jesus and the hope we have in Him! That joy is both attractive and contagious to the world around us, and it keeps our focus on the reality of eternity in the lives of those with whom we come into contact. Pray intentionally about *one* of those people with whom you will be in contact with this week. Pray God's blessing in their lives, and pray for an intentional opportunity to share with them the hope that you have in Christ.

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Joy in the Kingdom

Philippians 3:17 – 4:1

Sermon Notes:

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Week Ten: Joy in Thanksgiving

Philippians 4:2-7

Worship—real worship—unifies us around the most important things. When we are focused on the main thing, the minor things fade into the background, and we find unity in Christ. Divisiveness and worry have the same root: an unwillingness to trust in the sovereignty of God. It's only when we fully trust Him that we find deep and lasting peace.

Memorization:

"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." (Philippians 4:6-8)

Movement:

As you're likely already doing with the season, take time this week to be thankful. God has graciously given so much, and it's so easy for us to take His blessings for granted.

Start the week with a blank sheet of paper, and over the course of the week, make a list of things for which you are thankful. But here's the catch—*alternate* items on the list between the *temporal* blessings of God (the things of this world that will pass away) and the *eternal* blessings of God (those things which will never pass away). Which one is harder for you? Why do you think that is?

Dealing with Conflict

My boys have recently discovered the joy of Peanuts, the Charles Schulz cartoons. Charlie Brown, Snoopy, Lucy, and Linus have become steady companions, making appearances before bed, on long trips, and any other time when there's nothing pressing to be done. In one of the cartoons, Lucy says to Snoopy: "There are times when you really bug me, but I must admit there are also times when I feel like giving you a big hug." Snoopy replies: "That's the way I am... huggable and buggable."³⁰

And so, it seems, are the redeemed people of God called the church: huggable and buggable! One of the sad realities of church life is that our local communities can be a hotbed for conflict—some spoken and engaged, some which constantly simmers under the surface. Will we always agree? Of course not. But, as Swindoll asks, "Why can't we at least be agreeable?"³¹

Read Ephesians 4:1-3. The Greek word translated worthy is, once again, the word *axios*, meaning to balance or "weigh the same as." (See the "Living Worthy Lives" study during Week Three.)

- What characteristics does Paul list of lives that are "worthy" of the calling to which we've been called? (vs. 2)
- What, then, is the result of living that way? (vs. 3)

Look back at the passage that we've just studied in Philippians 3:18-19. Now, read James 4:1-3.

- What similarities do you see?

³⁰ Quoted in Swindoll, pg. 176.

³¹ Ibid.

Now, read Philippians 4:2-3.

- Does Paul give us the nature of the conflict between Euodia and Syntyche? Why do you think that is?
- Paul calls on his “true companion” to help these women to agree in the Lord. Does he ask Euodia and Syntyche to seek him out, or does he simply call upon his “true companion” to intervene?
- What does that mean for us as the church?
- What phrase does Paul use to end his exhortation to these two believers? What significance might that have?

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It seems that Paul’s concern is not that these two women agree on every finer point of doctrine or practice that may be dividing them. Rather, he is seeking to focus them on their unity “in the Lord” (vs. 2), in the gospel (vs. 3a), and in eternity (vs. 3b). Paul is not calling us as believers to come to “perfect agreement on every subject... [but to] adopt the same basic direction as other believers... the same orientation and priorities—that is, a *gospel* orientation.”³²

Application:

- Is there a conflict, either spoken or under the surface, in your life that you need to deal with? How about within the community around you?

³² Carson, pg. 102.

The Secret to Stop Worry

It's no secret that within our world today that worry is one of the top stealers of joy. Use of anti-anxiety medication, anti-depressants, and visits to counselors and psychologists are all at an all-time high.³³ Worry, anxiety, and depression have emerged as the "unholy trinity" of modern culture and, for far too many, unnecessarily steal our joy.

Read Mark 4:14-20.

- What are the things that Jesus describes as "thorns?"

- What do these thorns do in the life of a believer?

That phrase "cares of the world" is also translated "worries of the world." Jesus tells us very clearly that worry will choke out the truth of the Word and make our lives unfruitful!

Now, read Philippians 4:4-7.

- What does Paul say that we need to do with our worry? (vs. 6)

- Look at Matthew 11:28-30. What is the invitation of Jesus for us as we deal with the challenges and difficulties of this world?

You might be saying, "Well, sure! Of course! But don't you think if it were that easy I would have already done it?"

³³ I'm not opposed to any of these three treatments as viable ways to deal with worry, anxiety, or depression. However, I think that there are many times we use a physical or psychological treatment to treat what is truly a spiritual problem.

However, Paul doesn't simply tell us to do it. He also gives us a process by which we are able to do it! Look again at Philippians 4:4-7.

- What does Paul call us to do in vs. 4?

Rejoicing isn't simply a response to circumstance—it's a discipline to be engaged! Even in the most difficult times, there are reasons to rejoice. Paul is saying that we need to find them, and then rejoice in them.

- What does vs. 5 tell us our attitude should be, and why?

The word translated "reasonableness" is a beautiful Greek word: *epieikes*. This is what it literally means: "the uncomplaining readiness to accept others as they are and to submit oneself to their demands."³⁴ Paul seems to be referencing back to the attitude of Jesus that he laid out for us in 2:5-8. Go back and re-read 4:5 with that definition in mind. Do you hear Paul's call? *Relax!*

- Finally, read vs. 7. What is the result of rejoicing, relaxing, and giving our worry to God through prayer?

Of course, our natural inclination is to start to worry about not worrying. However, Paul calls us to pray. Jesus calls us to lay our burdens on Him. Peter says that we are to cast our anxieties on Him. (1 Peter 5:7) These aren't instantaneous activities—they require time before the Lord in unhurried prayer. As you complete today's study, read Psalm 91:1-2, and take time to rest in Him.

Application:

- Find a 30-minute timeslot in the next few days when no one will interrupt you. (It may need to be early morning or late at night!) *Take your time* and lay your burdens out before God in prayer. One by one, ask Him to take them from you and to replace them with His peace.

³⁴ Motyer, pg. 210.

Meditation: A Letter on the Main Thing

Several years ago, I came across a sermon from C.J. Mahaney in which he repeatedly said: “The *main thing* is to keep *the main thing the main thing.*” I’ve never forgotten that, and I’ve constantly tried (with varying levels of success) to do just that. Brothers and sisters, the main thing that we need to constantly be about in the midst of the wild and crazy world we live in is keeping the main thing the main thing.

What, exactly, is the main thing, you ask? The main thing is the gospel of Jesus Christ. Specifically, the fact that Jesus was God, that He came among us as a man, and that He lived humbly and intentionally among His creation. He perfectly and completely fulfilled the law. He put aside His own desires and comforts in order to take upon Himself our burdens and suffering and sin. He was condemned to a torturous, brutal death on a Roman cross, at which point, God the Father turned His face from Him and He was left utterly alone. He died. He was buried. Then, on the third day, God raised Him from the dead, gloriously signifying that His sacrifice was sufficient, death had been conquered, and the power of sin would ultimately be undone. He ascended to the Father, where He intercedes for us as we join Him in His work of redemption happening in the world. We wait with hope because one day He will come again, in judgment and in glory.

That’s the main thing.

When the main thing remains the main thing, and we are constantly faced with all of the implications of the gospel for our lives, our petty disagreements look... well... petty. We are able to have joy in any and every circumstance, because we know that what Jesus told us is true: In this world, we will have trouble, but we can take heart, because He has overcome the world! (John 16:33) When the main thing remains the main thing, we realize that we have been offered such an incredible amount of grace that we can’t help but engage other people with that same grace, serving them as Jesus has served us. When the main thing remains the main thing, we don’t worry about what has happened, or what is happening, or what might happen—not because we’re oblivious, but because we know that Jesus Himself is interceding for us! When the main thing remains the main thing, we know that all things will work out for the good of those of us who love Him and who are called according to His purpose. (Romans 8:28) Why? Because if the sovereign God has killed His Son for our sakes, we can know with certainty that

His position toward us is love and mercy. (Ref. Romans 8:32) And so, we can rest. We rest in the peace that He gives, which goes beyond anyone's ability to comprehend. Why? Because we know that the main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing.

Dear friends, so many of our problems and frustrations can be traced back to this simple reality. We're focused on something other than the main thing and, because we are, we're missing the joy that God intends for us. Things may not always go as we've planned or as we desire, but when we keep the main thing the main thing, we can find our rest in Him.

Spiritual Retreat by- Ruth Harms Calkin

This was my calculated plan:
I would set aside my usual schedule—
The menial tasks that wedge in routinely.
In the peace and quiet of my living room
I would relax in Your glorious presence.
How joyfully I envisioned the hours—
My personal spiritual retreat!
With Bible and notebook beside me
I would study and meditate—
I would intercede for the needy world.

But how differently it happened, Lord:
Never has the phone rung so persistently.
Sudden emergencies kept pouring in like summer cloudbursts.
My husband came home ill.
There were appointments to cancel, plans to rearrange.
The mailman brought me two disturbing letters
A cousin whose name I couldn't remember
Stopped by on her way through town.
My morning elation became dropping deflation.

And yet, dear Lord
You were with me in it all!
I sense Your vital presence—
Your sure and steady guidance.
Not once did You leave me stranded.
Perhaps, in Your great wisdom
You longed to teach me a practical truth:
When *You* are my Spiritual Retreat
I need not be a spiritual recluse.

Thoughts about this letter:

What's a practical way that this applies to my life?

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LIFE Group Facilitation Sheet

Welcome one another in Jesus' name!

Icebreaker: "What's your favorite thing that happens in your family over the holiday season?"

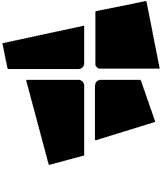
Worship Jesus through Scripture, music, singing, and prayer. Be creative! Invite Him to the center of your gathering.

Word: Philippians 4:2-7

- What are you thanking Jesus for this week?
- Has anything specific jumped out to you, either in this passage or in the study guide this week?
- Have you ever had a conflict with a brother or sister in Christ? Was it resolved and, if so, how?
- Are there times in conflict between believers when pursuing like-mindedness simply isn't possible? What do we do at that point?
- Do you see rejoicing more as a reaction or a discipline? Why? What's the difference?
- Do you find yourself worrying more than you'd like?
- How can your prayer life have a practical effect on your anxiety and worry? Does that happen with you? Why or why not?
- Do we as a group keep the main thing the main thing? In what way?

Works: We are now in the middle of the busyness of the holiday season. Several weeks ago, you may have talked as a group about ways that you wanted to reach out into the world around you during the holiday season. Have you been doing those things? It's not too late to get something planned if you haven't already! Think about those who are in your life. What would be a way that you could be a blessing to them in Jesus' Name during this season? Talk and pray about how you might do that either as a whole group or as several smaller groups.

Note: Please check the website for any announcements and upcoming events!
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Joy in Thanksgiving Philippians 4:2-7

Sermon Notes:

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Week Eleven: Joy in Righteousness

Philippians 4:7-8

Where our mind is free to wander, our lives will always ultimately follow. Paul admonishes us to think about that which is eternally valuable and, as we do, we find that our lives follow that same path. Sin begins with the belief that God is trying to keep us from joy, not lead us into joy. Righteousness comes from a deep trust that my joy is bound up with God's glory.

Memorization:

"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." (Philippians 4:6-8)

Movement:

Training your mind is an act of the will, not something that will happen naturally. If left to ourselves, our minds will wander away from the excellent into either the neutral or the dishonorable or impure.

This week, monitor the "passive input" into your mind. Whether through music, television, movies, websites, social media, or other outlets, make a determination to follow Paul's command in vs. 8. As you go through the week, recognize how difficult it is and, if you're being honest, how restrictive it is! During the week, try to *become* the positive passive input for others—intentionally do things that are true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent and praiseworthy.

The Power of the Mind

Amanda and I have been married for almost 16 years. In that time, I'm certain there are many idiosyncrasies that we've picked up on in each other. However, if you asked her, I'm certain that there's one thing she could easily describe about my personality—I can be just a tad bit obsessive. Here's what I mean: When I get focused on something, whether it's a new hobby, a new gadget, an exercise or diet plan, or any number of other things over the course of the last decade and half, my mind doesn't rest until that thing has fully come to fruition.

Those things which our minds dwell on have incredible power in our lives, which is why Paul admonishes us so clearly not just in how we act, but how we think. Read Philippians 4:8-9.

- List the things that Paul tells us to think about.
- Look back at 4:7. Do you see the phrase that Paul repeats in vs. 7 and, then again, with a slight variation, in vs. 9? What is it?

The word "finally" at the beginning of vs. 8 makes us see a break between that verse and the previous section. However, the Greek word *loipon* doesn't require a break in thought between the two sentences.³⁵

- How might vs. 6-7 relate to vs. 8-9?

³⁵ Motyer, pg. 212.

In Matt Chandler's new book, To Live Is Christ, he ties the two sections together by saying that we are to "worry on these things."³⁶ Just as we are called to *not* mentally focus on the negative things that show a lack of trust in God, we are equally called to focus our mental energy on the things which will consistently draw us back to God.

- In his description of spiritual warfare, what does Paul call us to do in 2 Corinthians 10:5?

Paul clearly sees that there's a war going on for our minds! So, he says, take charge of your mind, making sure *every thought* is captive to Jesus.

Look at Philippians 4:8-9 again.

- Vs. 8 is clearly about the way that we think. As you look at the list, are there any of these admonitions that are distinctly "Christian?"
- If vs. 8 is about thinking, what is vs. 9 about?

While the listing in vs. 8 can easily be seen as a moral imperative, Paul quickly moves to action that is modeled after his apostolic life in the gospel. In fact, even the word that Paul uses for "think" might be better translated "dwell on," with the connotation being this: Allow the way that you live to be shaped by these things.³⁷ He intends no division between how we think and how we act!

Application:

- Are there thought patterns in your life that need to be addressed in order for you to "dwell on" things that lead you back to Jesus?

³⁶ Matt Chandler with Jared C. Wilson, *To Live Is Christ*, (David C. Cook, Colorado Springs, CO, 2013.), location 1856 in pre-release electronic galley.

³⁷ Peter T. O'Brien, *The New International Greek Testament Commentary: The Epistle to the Philippians*, (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, 1991.), pg. 507.

Thinking Holy Thoughts

We often tend to make a false distinction between our thoughts and our actions, as though God is aware of and judging the latter without truly being aware of the former. There are patterns of thinking which we regularly indulge, but we would never think of putting those things into action. Scripture, however, makes no such distinction. Read Hebrews 4:13. What does the writer say is hidden from God?

Now, read Psalm 139:23-24.

- What does David ask God to do?

- Where does he seem to indicate that real transformation begins?

The focus of David's repentance and cry for transformation wasn't first his behavior—it was within his thoughts.

Jesus, Himself, indicated the same reality. First, read Exodus 20:3-17. Then, read Matthew 5:21-22 and 27-29.

- What two commandments does Jesus reference in these verses?

- What does Jesus indicate is necessary in order for God to consider that we have broken these commands?

Finally, read Isaiah 55:7.

- What are the two admonitions within this verse?

With all of that in mind, now re-read Philippians 4:8-9. Can you see the power behind Paul's words? He's reminding us that every aspect of our lives, including our thoughts, are the domain of God, and we need to guard His domain.

So how do we think in that way when so much of our world runs counter to that way of thinking?

- Read Romans 12:2. How does Paul call us to be transformed into the image of Christ?
- Now read John 17:17 and Psalm 119:11. What do these verses indicate to be the source of that transformation?

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It is foolish for us to think that we will have renewed and transformed thinking apart from consistently reading, studying, and learning the Word of God. It is His Word alone that transforms us. If we simply try to think differently, we might succeed for a period of time, but we will find that we ultimately end up back where we began. We each are called to be students of the Word.

Application:

- What is your strategy for knowing the Word of God? If you don't have one, it's vital that you have a plan!

Meditation: A Letter on Avoiding the Line

So, brothers and sisters, our minds should dwell on good things. Things that are true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent and worthy of praise. Straightforward and clear, to the point: Think about good things, not bad things.

But just *how* good? Certainly not evil things, of course, but what about things that are kind of good? Things that have some good in them, although they have some bad too? How about a rated “R” movie (only for language and violence, of course) with redemptive themes? Does it matter that just about every accurate movie about the Bible ever made was rated “R?” What about a great album which is full of inspirational songs, but contains one song with a bad word... used over and over and over again? What’s the most accurate translation for “rubbish” in Philippians 3:8 anyway? Doesn’t Paul tell Titus that to the pure *all things* are pure? (Titus 1:15) That seems a little open-ended, doesn’t it?

Maybe it’s not as straightforward as it seems. Where’s the line? You know, the mythical “line” that separates the good from the bad? For some, the line seems to be etched in stone, painted solid black with a high gloss, outdoor paint that will seemingly never fade and couldn’t possibly move. Bad language? That’s out. Alcohol? That’s out. Rated “R” movies that aren’t about the crucifixion? They’re out too. There are no gray areas. For others, however, the line seems to have gotten lost in a sea of gray. If there’s a line at all, it was faintly drawn with a soft lead pencil and, even now, someone is hovering over it with an eraser, just waiting to move it as necessary. Bad language? Sure—they’re just words, right? Alcohol? Jesus made wine, and half the time the disciples acted like they were drunk—maybe they were. Go for it. Rated “R” movies? Of course—the other ones are lame. I mean... the other ones don’t have good, redemptive themes. And they’re lame.

“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.”

Neither extreme seems to fit the bill. For several decades now, the entertainment industry sought to change the word “Christian” from being a noun, which it has been for almost 2000 years, to an adjective. “Christian” music, “Christian” movies, “Christian” books, “Christian” roller-skating parties. Someone, somewhere in the

back offices of the entertainment industry, was drawing a line. Things that contained the “Christian” adjective... they would be true, honorable, just, etc. Things that didn’t... well, at the very least, proceed with caution. That worked fine for a short period of time, until those things started to be successful from a marketing stand point. As the demand for “Christian” stuff went up, the quality went down. In some cases, dramatically. So now, what is pure might very well not be lovely. What is true might be unjust. And over time, it seemed that what was deemed as excellent was very rarely worthy of praise.

The word “Christian” was given to those in the ancient city of Antioch who were followers of “The Way”—disciples of Jesus. Over time, the name spread, but the meaning remained the same: those who had been redeemed by the blood of Jesus. Jesus didn’t die to redeem the songs from a specific artist, the movies coming out of a specific studio, or the books from a specific publishing house. And certainly not for roller-skating parties. What’s worse, the use of “Christian” as an adjective made those who were followers of Jesus, exhorted to think about things that were true and honorable and pure, lazy. We stopped discerning truth and beauty in favor of mindlessly choosing from something within the label that had been deemed safe. And so, not only are we back to square one, we may have gone backwards a few spaces. *Do not pass “Go” and do not collect \$200.*

So, what to do? The dilemma isn’t easily solved, but consider these thoughts:

- For the most part, if you’re honest, you know where the line is, and you know when you’ve gone over it. You know your heart, you know your mind—and so does God. Be honest with yourself and don’t choose to listen, watch, or do something based on street cred or popular opinion. Guard your own heart.
- God has saved us each individually, but He’s saved us into community. You’re not alone in this. Be honest with one another and wrestle through what’s good and what isn’t. You’ll be shocked at how clear most issues are after an honest conversation with other Jesus followers.
- Model your life after someone who is several years ahead of you, someone whom you want your life to look like. In some cases, that might feel unnecessarily constricting, but no one ever became an enemy of the cross because they missed the latest film, didn’t listen to a certain radio station, or didn’t drink a specific beverage.

May the peace of Christ be with us all, and may we stay away from the line. There’s just no need for us to get so close.

Thoughts about this letter:

What's a practical way that this applies to my life?

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LIFE Group Facilitation Sheet

Welcome one another in Jesus' name!

Icebreaker: "What's your favorite movie?"

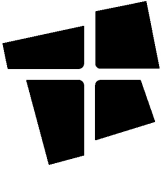
Worship Jesus through Scripture, music, singing, and prayer. Be creative! Invite Him to the center of your gathering.

Word: Philippians 4:8-9

- How has Jesus been working in your life?
- Has anything specific jumped out to you, either in this passage or in the study guide this week?
- As you read Paul's list of words in Philippians 4:8, are there any that jump out to you as especially challenging? Important?
- "Where your thoughts are free to go, your life will eventually follow." Agree or disagree? Why?
- Are there thought patterns in your life that need to be addressed? How can we help one another in this process?
- What role does God's Word play in your daily life? Weekly?
- What's your strategy for reading and knowing God's Word?
- How can we model discipleship for one another in this group?

Works: As we think and live with purity and integrity, the world around us will ultimately notice. How will you respond? Peter admonishes us to be "ready with an answer... for the hope that you have." (1 Peter 3:15) How would you explain your story? Divide into pairs and take a few minutes to explain the gospel to one another. If you're into challenges, set a timer and try to do it in under 3 minutes, and then switch places! Listen carefully and then lovingly critique one another so that we can speak the gospel with clarity into the world around us. Pray for those who need to hear—by name!

Note: Please check the website for
any announcements and upcoming events!
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Joy in Righteousness

Philippians 4:8-9

Sermon Notes:

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Week Twelve: Joy in Contentedness

Philippians 4:10-23

Paul lived a life of drastic ups and downs. His final word to the Philippian church is that, in the midst of that life, he has learned contentment. Contentment is not a state that we stumble into or an emotion determined by our circumstance. Rather, contentment is something that we learn as we mature in Christ through the recognition that He is truly all we need. Only when our only true joy is in Christ are we freed to enjoy the rest of life.

Memorization:

"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." (Philippians 4:6-8)

Movement:

Most of us, if we're honest, are not perfectly content with our lives. Particularly this time of year, we tend to be hyper-aware of what we *don't* have, what we *can't* buy, etc. Paul, in direct opposition to the culture around us, tells us that we should be content in whatever circumstance we find ourselves in. How is that possible? "Through him [Jesus] who strengthens me." (Philippians 4:13)

You're going to make a list again this week. But this time, instead of listing things in your life that you're thankful for, make a list of things that are yours *in Christ* because of the gospel. If you need help, search your Bible—you'll find that it is full of declarations of the riches that we have in Him. Only when we are content in Him will we find true contentment.

Paul's Life Journey

The Bible tends to be full of people who lived life at the extremes. It's not just enough to say that God calls sinners to be used for His glory. Two of the central figures in the Old Testament, Moses and David, were *murderers*. Then, in the New Testament, in order to show that He was still at work on the edges, He makes Paul the central figure in the 1st century church, and he was a *mass murderer*. The Bible Hall of Fame produced such characters as Adam (deadbeat husband, Genesis 3:6), Noah (drunk, Genesis 9:21), Abraham (coward, Genesis 12:13 and 20:2), Lot (drunk and incest, Genesis 19:32-36), and Jacob (conniving weasel, Genesis 27). And that's just the first book of the Bible! There's Eli, the terrible father, Samson, the raging egomaniac, Saul, the king who went nuts, and on and on we could go.

Why did God use such messed up people? Well, apart from it being His only choice, I think He knows of our propensity to say, "I know that's what God did in the Bible, but you don't know my situation..." As He saves people from the extremes, He seems to tell us, "Look how I used that messed up person! Certainly I could do the same with you..."

Read Philippians 4:11-13. What is the bold statement that Paul makes?

As you read that, you probably did either one of two things. Either you just read it and made no connection at all to the areas of life with which you aren't content, or you thought in your head, "Yeah, but Paul was a great apostle of God. If God was using me like that, to write half the New Testament and plant churches in the entire known world, I'd be content too!"

That's fair. So, for the rest of this study, I'm simply going to ask you to read about some of Paul's life. As you do, I'd like you to rate his "worldly happiness index" during that event. Basically, based on the situation he was in at that moment in time, how happy do you think Paul was? At the end, you can decide whether Paul has the right to speak to the question of contentment.

As you read the following passages, list on a scale of 1-10 what you would imagine to be Paul's "WHI" (Worldly Happiness Index) next to the passage:

WHI

- Philippians 3:4-6 _____
- Acts 9:3-9 _____
- Acts 9:17-22 _____
- Acts 9:23-26 _____
- Acts 9:27-28 _____
- Acts 9:29-30 _____
- Acts 13:4-12 _____
- Acts 14:8-17 _____
- Acts 14:19 _____
- Acts 14:24-28 _____
- Acts 15:36-40 _____
- Acts 16:6-8 _____
- Acts 16:13-15 _____
- Acts 16:19-24 _____
- Acts 17:1-7 _____
- Acts 17:10-12 _____
- Acts 17:13-14 _____
- Acts 18:8-11 _____
- Acts 19:11-20 _____
- Acts 21:27-36 _____

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And this is just a survey. In 2 Corinthians 11:16-29, Paul gives a summary of his life as an apostle.

Now, go back and re-read Philippians 4:11-13. Do you think Paul can be trusted to speak into the ups and downs of your life?

Application:

- As you think about Paul's life and compare it to your desires and areas of discontent, are you encouraged or discouraged? Why?

Holding Loosely

Our view of Christian contentment tends to look much more like fatalism than contentment. Fatalism basically just says “It is what it is” and resigns itself to the state of affairs that’s given. Contentment for the Christian is different—as we understand what we are given in Christ, we recognize that we already have all that we could possibly need. Therefore, we are freed to enjoy abundance and endure need, because we have what we need in Him.

Read Philippians 4:11-13.

- How does Paul say he gained contentment?

- In vs. 12, Paul lists two sets of opposite extremes. How does he say that he approaches those extremes?

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Paul “faced” both great abundance and desperate need and, as he lays them out for us, he seems to indicate that both of them can be a challenge to being content in Christ.

- What is the challenge to contentment that being in need might present?

- What is the challenge to contentment that being in plenty might present?

- In vs. 13, Paul gives the “secret” to contentment. What does he say that it is?

Carson says it this way:

The secret of Christian contentment is quite unlike stoic self-sufficiency. Paul is not claiming to be so strong that nothing can move him. Nor is he simply resolving to be independent of circumstances by a superlative act of will. Far from it; he immediately confesses that if he has reached this stage of contentment he owes everything to God.³⁸

However, Paul is not ungrateful for the gift that the Philippians have sent to him. Rather, he just wants to be sure that they understand that his contentment and joy doesn't come from their gift or any circumstance, but from the gospel. He does, however, describe two benefits the gift brings, albeit not to him. Read Philippians 4:17-18.

- What is their generosity producing in the Philippian church?
- How is their offering received before God?

We are called to be both content and generous—content, because we have all that we need in Christ... and generous, because God through Jesus has been generous to us!

Application:

- What's a practical way that you can express your contentedness in the gospel?
- What is a way that you can be generous with what you've been given?

³⁸ Carson, pg. 119.

Meditation: A Letter on Being Truly Content

We have every reason for possessing exceedingly great joy. Were you and I to list the reasons for our joy, they would be long and detailed and would still not cover even half of the reality of the blessing that God has placed in our lives.

And yet, for many of us, we're still in a constant process of striving. We have so much, yet we're constantly looking for the next thing. Sometimes it's for ourselves: an upgrade to our technological toys, a better car, a better house, new furniture, nicer clothes, a larger savings account (or a savings account at all!), or a dream vacation. It can be for others as well: that great toy for the kids, nicer gifts for our family, even things like being able to be a blessing to someone in need. In and of themselves, these things aren't bad. In fact, some of them are quite good! But the end result is the same: We are constantly striving.

I still remember several years ago when I saw the literal translation of Psalm 46:10 for the first time. Like many of you, I knew the verse well: *"Be still and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!"* However, when I saw the word that we often translate as "still" in a literal translation, it opened my eyes to what the psalmist was truly saying:

"Cease from your striving—know that I am God."

Cease from your striving. In my own heart, I was immediately convicted of my constant striving after more, better, other... I was never content to be in the present, but constantly pressing toward some future reality that I just had to make happen. And guess what? When you're living like that, it's impossible to truly rest.

We live in a culture of striving for more. The world around us is constantly doing it and, sadly, as the church, we're typically not much different. Are we truly content with the gospel? Has that even ever been tested? Do we even stop our striving long enough to consider the question?

I just wonder: What would it look like for small gospel communities at York Alliance to stop our striving? I don't mean to stop with the responsibilities of life, work and school and the like, but somehow to stop the constant press for more? What if, as little communities, we banded together and declared 2014 a year of

contentment? Each community might do it a little differently, but what would happen if small groups of people determined that they would make absolutely *no* non-essential purchases in 2014? What if groups of us got together, cancelled our cable service, Hulu and Netflix subscriptions, and just met to hang out together and play games? What would it look like for small groups of people to replace upgrading their homes with upgrading their communities? What if we determined that we—lots of us— would live simply and generously for an entire year? How would it impact the world around us?

Paul's letter to the Philippians brings us back again and again to the joy that we have in the gospel of Jesus. In the end, we're faced with a challenging question: Is that enough for us? Will God supply every need we have according to His riches in glory, or does He need a little help? I'm not advocating being irresponsible, and I certainly recognize that God has called us to provide for our families and to steward the opportunities He's given us. But, if we're being honest, how much of our striving is simply us seeking to provide for ourselves the joy, contentment, and satisfaction which Paul tells us that we'll only truly find in the gospel?

To God be the glory forever and ever. In our lives and in the church. In our workplaces and in our family rooms. On our business trips and in our minivans. In our marriages. In our LIFE groups. Within our circle of friends on Friday night. In the middle of the day and in the middle of the night. And may we constantly know that He is enough for us. As Thomas Watson said, "If God be not enough, we'll never have enough."

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

Thoughts about this letter:

What's a practical way that this applies to my life?

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LIFE Group Facilitation Sheet

Welcome one another in Jesus' name!

Icebreaker: "What's one thing that you'd like to do this Christmas season?"

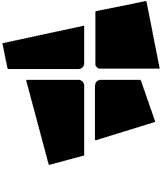
Worship Jesus through Scripture, music, singing, and prayer. Be creative! Invite Him to the center of your gathering.

Word: Philippians 4:10-23

- How has Jesus been working in your life?
- Has anything specific jumped out to you, either in this passage or in the study guide this week?
- On a scale of 1 to 10, how content are you? Why?
- Do you view contentment as something that will happen to you, or something that you need to learn and develop?
- Is prosperity or poverty a greater threat to your contentedness? Why is that?
- What's a practical way that you could be generous with what you've been given?
- What would it look like for this group to "cease our striving" in 2014? Is that even possible?

Works: As we learn joy and contentedness in the gospel, we must continually learn to speak of the work that God is doing in our lives. While our faith is personal, it's never intended to be private! As you approach the Christmas holiday, think of specific ways that you can impact the people with whom your life intersects. Be intentional about praying over these connections. Particularly during this time of year, it's easy to make contact with people without that contact being meaningful. Pray for one another that there would be opportunities for real conversations and meaningful connections.

Note: Please check the website for any announcements and upcoming events!
www.yorkalliance.org



Joy in Contentedness

Philippians 4:10-23

Sermon Notes:

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Acknowledgements

Many of you have told me that Philippians is a favorite book of yours, as it was for me even prior to beginning this study, and is even more so now. My prayer is that we've all grown far deeper in our appreciation of this great letter from the Apostle Paul, and even more importantly, deeper in our faith in Christ. As I've studied, I've been amazed with the incredible gospel-centricity of Paul's writing—his words, and I'm quite certain his life, were completely saturated with the good news of Jesus. I pray that someday the same can be said of me... and of each one of you.

As with each of these projects, there are many voices and gifts that have contributed, and many that have supported in various ways along the journey. First of all, I need to thank the Elders, Governing Board, and staff for giving me the margin to write. Particularly during these summer months, they have allowed me several weeks to be out of the office in order to focus solely on study and writing, and I'm quite certain these studies are richer due to their vision and investment. Specifically, a huge thank you to Nancy and Re for fielding calls and sorting requests while I'm holed up writing, and to Mike and Tim for so capably keeping things moving in my absence.

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It's impossible for me to thank my family enough for the grace that they give me in order to write these study guides. The rest of life doesn't stop when these projects start, so they represent a pretty significant layer on top of normal life. I'm so thankful for the flexibility they give me to add that layer for a few weeks each year. To Tia, Ethan, Josiah, and Micah—thank you for letting me “zone in” during work time, and for always being ready to play when I'm done for the day!

Amanda, thanks for constantly allowing me to bounce ideas off of you, taking the kids for another “adventure” so I can have a few more quiet hours, and for loving me through the ups and downs of study and writing and all of the rest of life. I’m looking forward to laughing with you as we read together this fall.

Finally, I can’t finish the acknowledgements without thanking those bands that made this project so much more enjoyable. Some of the greatest moments of the writing experience were shared with the following great bands: The Gray Havens (support their Kickstarter campaign this fall!), Vampire Weekend, Judah & the Lion, Leagues, Neko Case, the Vespers, the Welcome Wagon, the Lumineers, Loud Harp, Matthew Perryman Jones, Steven Delopoulos, Jenny & Tyler, Sandra McCracken, All Sons & Daughters, and Gungor. Sadly, the new Derek Webb album, as well as the new Civil Wars album, weren’t around until editing time. However, they both made a painful job much more fun. While I recognize none of you will ever read this, thank you for keeping the creative juices flowing and bringing joy to the process.

I pray that we will be people who embrace the joy into which we’ve been invited. May we be the people—at home, at work, in restaurants, and in parks—that everyone else stares at, but secretly wishes they could join.

And may we boldly invite them to join us in our joy.

Grace and peace,

Brian Kannel
August 25, 2013

Joy...

A Study on Paul's Letter to the Philippians

It was from the confines of a Roman prison cell that the Apostle Paul penned this tender letter to what was likely his favorite church—the church at Philippi. Though the great apostle was being imprisoned for his faith and being held for no just cause, his tone betrays no bitterness or frustration. Rather, this great letter is literally filled with joy! Paul lovingly exhorts the church to grow in their maturity, grow in their contentment, and grow in their understanding of the Gospel... to grow into joy.

The letter of Philippians contains some of the best loved verses in the entire Bible. However, Paul's words are much more than a string of well-known sayings—they contain a clear message for the 21st century church, challenging her to grow into maturity and to live lives defined by joy. This twelve week study contains opportunities for memorization, experiential learning, in-depth Bible study, and group discussion questions, as well as a "letter on a letter" that takes Paul's concepts and applies them directly to the modern day church with some of its unique challenges. Along the way, there is incredible insight into the heart of this great apostle as he approached the end of his earthly journey.