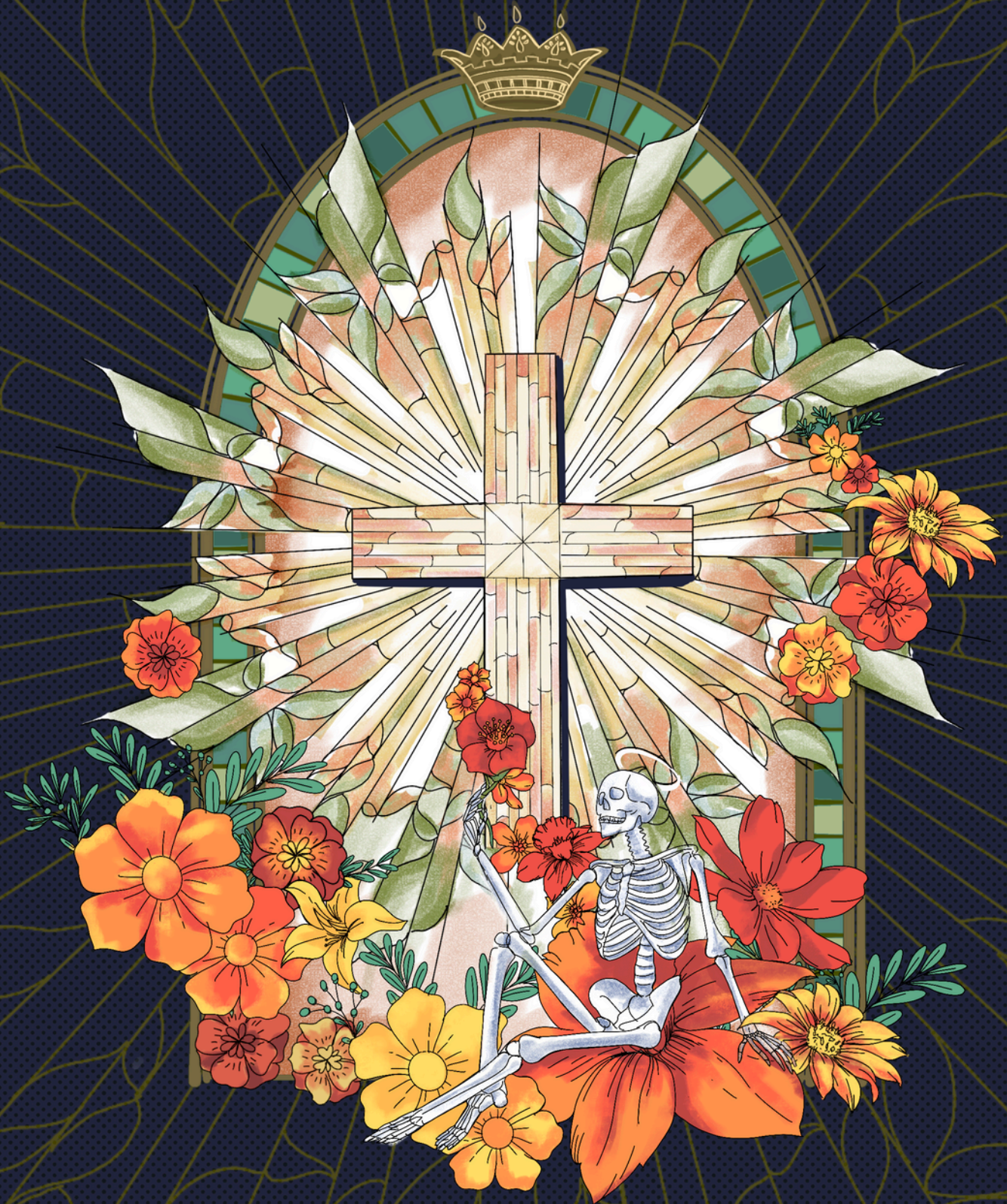


PHILIPPIANS

STUDY GUIDE



TO LIVE IS CHRIST AND TO DIE IS GAIN

This cover art is inspired by the words in Philippians 1:21,
“For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.”

Jesus’ cross is the central message I wanted to portray,
shining through a stained glass window giving us hope
and light. Around it are plants and colorful flowers
representing the growth and beauty that comes from
living a life with Christ at the center.

At the bottom is a skeleton that reminds us of the reality
of death, but it is surrounded by vibrant colors of flowers,
meaning that even in death, there’s beauty and victory
through Christ.

This art piece is a reflection that life is a chance to live for
Christ and that death is not the end, it can even be a gain!
I pray that this imagery can remind you of the hope, the
joy and the purpose we can have in Jesus.

- Stephanie Mendoza

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EPISTLE TO THE PHILIPPIANS

6-WEEK STUDY GUIDE

Theological Focus

The epistle to the Philippians was written by the Apostle Paul from prison to the church in Philippi. This letter is highly practical and doctrinal, specifically regarding Christology, a branch of theology that focuses on Jesus. It offers foundational principles for Christian living, modeling a life of suffering and humility as exemplified by Jesus, and provides insights to encourage the spiritual growth of the believers.

Several key themes addressed in this letter are:

1. perseverance in faith and living worthy of the gospel (Philippians 1:6, 2:12-13, 3:12-13),
2. unity and humility, following the example of Christ (Philippians 2:1-11), and
3. joy in Christ even in the face of trials (Philippians 4).

Background

The church in Philippi holds significant historical and spiritual importance as the **first church** established in Europe. It was founded by the Apostle Paul at around A.D. 50 during his second missionary journey. The church began with a small group of believers, primarily Gentile women, who gathered for prayer by the riverside due to the absence of a synagogue in the city. Among the first converts was **Lydia**, a wealthy dealer in purple cloth from Thyatira, who welcomed Paul and his companions into her home (Acts 16:13-15).

The church's growth was marked by notable events, including Paul's miraculous imprisonment and the conversion of the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:25-34). As the church matured, it established structured leadership with overseers and deacons (Philippians 1:1). Over time, Paul continued to maintain a close relationship with the Philippians, expressing gratitude for their support in his letters. This enduring bond highlights the church's role as a vital partner in Paul's ministry and reflects its significance within early Christianity.

Key Verses

Philippians 1:6

Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

Philippians 1:21

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

Philippians 2:5-8

In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!

Philippians 4:6-7

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:8

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.

Philippians 4:12-13

I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

How to Use

This study guide is designed to include smaller portions of Scripture reading each week, allowing for deeper discussion of the passages and other cross-references. We also want to emphasize community time to help members get to know one another more deeply. This guide will include optional exercises to build deeper relationships within the community, such as testimony sharing and various prayer exercises.

WEEK 01 · PHILIPPIANS 1:1-11

Paul prays for all believers to grow in love that continually increases in knowledge and understanding so they can live pure and blameless lives that glorify God.

Preface

Background: Paul wrote this letter while imprisoned with Timothy in Rome, around AD 60-63. By that time, the events recorded in the Book of Acts, which documents the formation of the early church, had already occurred. In this letter, Paul frequently uses the word "rejoice" and places significant emphasis on partnership and sharing in the preaching of the gospel, considering the Philippians had supported his ministry extensively.

Warm-up question: Who do you feel thankful for right now, and why?

Study

Read Philippians 1 in its entirety to grasp the overall idea of Paul's relationship with the church in Philippi.

1. What is the overall tone or emotion that Paul conveys in this letter?
2. How did Paul refer to himself and the believers in Philippi? (1:1-2)

Notes:

- **Bond-servants**, or **servants**, in the Bible come from the Greek word *doulos*, which means 'one who is subservient to, and entirely at the disposal of, his master; a slave.' Unlike the modern context of slavery, in ancient Hebrew or Roman times, the term bond-servant or slave could refer to someone who voluntarily served others.
- **Holy people**, or **saints**, means being 'separate' or 'set apart.' This does not imply perfection nor favoritism; it simply means set apart for a purpose.

3. How would you describe Paul's relationship with the Philippians?

Read Philippians 1:1-8 to answer the following questions.

4. What "good work" did God begin among the Philippians? (1:6)
5. What do Paul and the Philippians have in common that makes them partners? What are the goals of their partnership? (1:6-7)

Notes: **Partnership**, **participation**, or **sharing** comes from the Greek word *koinonia*, which is also translated as '**fellowship**'. This word encompasses a broader meaning than simply sharing food, as exemplified by the Philippians' support for Paul's missionary work through their prayers and financial contributions. The goal of their partnership is to defend, confirm, advance, and live out the gospel.

6. What is God's promise to those in whom He has begun a "good work"? How might these verses build our confidence as we suffer for the gospel or pursue spiritual growth in Christ?

Read Philippians 1:9-11 to answer the following questions.

7. How did Paul show his partnership or support for the Philippians? (1:4-6, 1:9-11)

8. What things did Paul ask God for concerning the Philippians? (1:9-11)

9. What is the “knowledge” and “depth of insight” that Paul was referring to?

Notes:

- The word **knowledge** comes from the Greek word *epignōsis*, that often refers to knowledge of the things of God, religious, spiritual, theological knowledge.
- In other English translations, **depth of insight** is also translated as **all discernment**. The original Greek word *aisthēsis* is only found once in the New Testament, and a variant of this word is translated as ‘**faculties**’ in Hebrews 5:14. Scholars define this word as one’s ability to make a moral decision.

10. Why is it important that our love may abound more in “knowledge and depth of insight”? What is the purpose of having that kind of love?

Application

1. What specific actions can you take this week to cultivate a love for God that abounds more and more in knowledge and depth of insight?

2. In what areas of your life do you need greater discernment to distinguish between what is good and what is best? How can you involve prayer, Scripture, and your community in this?

3. How can you actively participate in the partnership of the gospel with your community?

Optional Follow-up Exercise: Spiritual Life Mapping

No matter where we are in our spiritual journey with God, we all started somewhere and should aim to continue growing. Just as Paul prayed for the Philippians that their love might abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, we, too, must strive for a greater love toward God and one another within our community.

This week, to foster deeper connections with one another and to appreciate those who have contributed to your spiritual growth, take some time to create a spiritual life map and dedicate time to share within your group. A spiritual life map is a visual tool that reflects your journey with God, highlighting key events that shape your faith.

Instructions:

- Draw a timeline of your life, beginning with the year you were born and ending with today’s date.
- Identify the major events in your life that may have impacted your spiritual formation, beliefs, or relationship with Christ, including both the good and the bad times.
- As you reflect, think of the people who have contributed to your spiritual growth, and consider those whose spiritual growth you can encourage.
- Share within your small group, ensure that you allocate enough time for each person. If time is limited, focus on a few significant moments that have impacted your relationship with God.
- At the end of the sharing session, set aside some time to pray for those who have invested in you and for those whom you can disciple.

WEEK 02 · PHILIPPIANS 1:12-26

God can use our suffering and our attitude towards it to advance the gospel and embolden others to suffer alongside Christ.

Preface

Last week, we learned from Paul's prayer that all believers ought to grow in love that continually increases in knowledge and depth of insight so they can live pure and blameless lives that glorify God.

This week, we will read about Paul's confidence in the gospel, how much he treasures it, and his deep commitment to advancing it, even if that means enduring suffering or imprisonment.

Background: It is largely believed that Paul wrote the letter to the Philippians when he was under house arrest in Rome. In this letter, Paul is trying to encourage the church that the gospel is spreading, not despite his imprisonment, but through it.

Warm-up question: What is one topic that you are very passionate about that you would defend no matter what?

Study

Read Philippians 1:12-14 to answer the following questions.

1. How did Paul view what had happened to him? What happened as a result of Paul's imprisonment? (1:13-14)

Notes:

- The palace (praetorian) guard and everyone else knew he was in chain for Christ.
- Most of the brothers and sisters have (1) become confident in the Lord, and (2) dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear.

2. What is the gospel as described by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:1-8? What are the four verbs that Paul used to explain what the gospel is, concerning what Christ has done or overcome?

Notes:

1. Christ **died** for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures (1 Cor 15:3)
2. Christ **was buried** (1 Cor 15:4a)
3. Christ **was raised** on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures (1 Cor 15:4b)
4. Christ **appeared** to Cephas, then to the twelve, then to many, then to James and other apostles, and finally to Paul (1 Cor 15:5-8)

Read Philippians 1:15-18 to answer the following questions.

3. Compare and contrast the two inner motivations from which some preach Christ. How does Paul view those who preach Christ out of selfish ambition? (1:15-18)

4. What is one thing that Paul was concerned about that made him rejoice? (1:18)

Read Philippians 1:19-26 to answer the following questions.

5. What were the two things that Paul relied on during his imprisonment? What outcomes was Paul anticipating? (1:19-20)

Notes:

- Key ideas: **the church's prayers** and **God's provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ**
- Paul was anticipating his deliverance and that he would not be ashamed but would have the courage to exalt Christ in his body, whether through life or death.
- Side note: The word **deliverance** can also be translated as **salvation**. This word can mean Paul's release from prison, his deliverance from affliction by death, or his spiritual salvation.

6. What dilemma was Paul facing during his imprisonment? (1:21-24)

7. What was Paul's conclusion? How will Christ be exalted whether he lives or dies? (1:21-26)

Application

1. How does Paul's attitude towards his suffering encourage us? How can we follow Paul's example?

2. How have you encountered God's presence and guidance during difficult circumstances? How might you advance the gospel as a result of that experience?

3. It is easy for us to think of salvation as a gift, but do we think of suffering for Christ as a gift?

Optional Follow-up Exercise: Testimony Sharing and Evangelism

This week's study shows how Paul was unashamed of the gospel and encourages us to adopt the same mindset, so more people may come to know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. As believers, we are called to share the gospel and make disciples of all ethnic groups (The Great Commission). Sharing the gospel with strangers or friends can be daunting, but we can start small by initiating spiritual conversations that may lead to sharing the good news.

A key part of sharing the gospel is being able to share the testimony of God's active and transforming grace in our lives. We are called to be God's witnesses and we must be equipped to share the gospel in a way that is understandable to those who have never heard it before.

Instructions:

- Think of one person to have a spiritual conversation with, or choose a specific time and location with your group to do evangelism.
- **Practice sharing your testimony in your small group.** Reflect and share about: "What was your life like before you met Jesus?" "How did you commit your life to Jesus?" "What difference has Jesus made in your life?"
- Familiarize yourselves with the gospel message. Several useful tools are the resources from **Cru**, called "**Knowing God Personally**" or "**Four Spiritual Laws**".
- Pray earnestly for God to soften the hearts of those you will talk to.
- When you have your spiritual conversation, ask deeper questions, such as, "What is the nature of God?" "What is the meaning and purpose of life?" "How would you describe human nature?" "Who do you think Jesus is?" "Where is your source of spiritual truth?" (Adapted from **Cru's Perspective Cards**)
- In your small group, share what the experience was like and pray that God will continue to grow the seed of the gospel in the hearts of the people you talked to.

WEEK 03 · PHILIPPIANS 1:27-2:11

God desires us to live in unity with one another, and this can only be achieved when we humble ourselves and consider others as more important than ourselves.

Preface

Last week, we learned from Paul’s example that God can use our suffering and our attitude toward it to advance the gospel and embolden others to suffer alongside Christ.

This week, we will read about the importance of unity. The key to this is demonstrated in Christ and His humility.

Background: The Philippian church was composed of diverse backgrounds and cultural practices, which certainly contributed to divisions and misunderstandings within the community. Philippians 1:15-17 also tells us that some were preaching out of selfish ambition and rivalry, which likely contributed further to the division.

Warm-up question: What is the most divided community (outside of church) you have been a part of? What made it so divided?

Study

Read Philippians 1:27-30 to answer the following questions.

1. What was Paul’s desire for the Philippian church? What value did he emphasize for believers to live in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ? (1:27)

Notes: Paul emphasized **unity**—“**one spirit**” and “**one mind**”—in striving for the gospel. A life worthy of the gospel of Christ is one that strives for the unity of the church.

2. Who are the “opponents” Paul refers to, and what might their opposition look like to the Philippian church? (1:28)

Notes: Paul warned the Philippian church against **those who attack its unity** and **those who are divisive**.

3. How does Paul encourage the Philippians to perceive suffering? (1:28-29)

Read Philippians 2:1-4 to answer the following questions.

4. Based on this passage, how does being like-minded and of one mind look in practice? (2:1-4)

5. How would you define “selfish ambition” and “vain conceit”? What do the two share in common and what makes them distinct? (2:3)

Notes: **Selfish ambition** refers to **selfishness**, while **vain conceit** involves the idea of **self-importance**—how we view ourselves in the eyes of others.

6. What is the difference between unity and conformity, especially in the context of a community?

Read Philippians 2:5-11 to answer the following questions.

7. What was the mindset of Christ Jesus that we should embody in our relationships? (2:6-8)

8. What do you think it means when it says that Jesus “made himself nothing”? The ESV uses the phrase “he emptied himself”. What exactly did Jesus lay aside? (2:7)

Notes: Jesus did not give up His divinity, nor did He give up His divine attributes. Instead He laid aside the glory and freedom.

9. What is the ultimate end goal of humility? (2:5-11)

Notes: Humility brings **unity**. The unity of the church testifies to and exemplifies Christ’s humility, declaring the **Lordship of Jesus Christ** and **bringing glory to God the Father**.

Application

1. Paul emphasizes living a life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. What does that look like in practical terms for believers today?

2. How can we demonstrate the unity that Paul encourages in our community?

3. In what ways can we embody Christ’s humility in our everyday life?

Optional Follow-up Exercise: Sharing of Burdens

This week’s study talks about unity. We often think that unity is achieved when we can all think and act alike. However, the passage today teaches us that unity is achieved through humility. Humility does not mean to think less of oneself, but rather to consider others more. Many times we do not think of other people because we are too self-involved in our own issues.

This week’s activity involves listening to each other’s burdens and remembering them throughout the week. Oftentimes, we limit sharing our burdens to a short prayer time to close a Care Group night, but it is in **remembering it throughout the week** that we truly cultivate a culture of caring for one another.

Instructions:

- Go around the room and have each person share a particular burden in their lives. Assign a scribe to write down all the burdens.
- Together with your group, open your calendar app or any reminder app you use, and set a reminder for the middle of the week to check in with one another.
- Assign members into pairs or trios to hold each other accountable throughout the week.
- After the meeting, have the scribe copy those burdens into a text message or email and send it to the whole group. Remind members to pray over these burdens every day.
- In the middle of the week, check back with one another on how everyone is doing. Prompt each person to update the rest of the community on their progress.

WEEK 04 · PHILIPPIANS 2:12-30

A true understanding of salvation will lead us to work it out with reverent fear, evident in our selflessness and readiness to endure suffering.

Preface

Last week, we learned about the importance of unity. The key to this is demonstrated in Christ and His humility.

This week, we will read about the need to work out our salvation with fear and trembling. This is illustrated in the characters and actions of Timothy and Epaphroditus.

Background: This passage highlights two significant figures: 1) Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman and a Greek father, who was chosen to accompany Paul on his second missionary journey due to his strong character (Acts 16:2) and later led the church in Ephesus.

2) Epaphroditus was likely a leader in the Philippian church. He brought Paul a gift during his first imprisonment in Rome and intended to assist him there, but he fell seriously ill. Though the Bible does not specify his illness, it nearly caused his death.

Warm-up question: If you could have a meal with any person in history, who would it be and why? (Cannot choose Jesus)

Study

Read Philippians 2:12-18 to answer the following questions.

1. What does Paul's instruction to the Philippian church to "work out their salvation with fear and trembling" (2:12) reveal about our relationship with God and the value of our salvation?

Notes: The attitude of fear and trembling arises from the awareness of **God's greatness and holiness** compared to **our sinfulness and limitations**, as well as the **value and cost of His salvation plan** fulfilled in Jesus Christ. This posture is not inconsistent with having **joy and confidence in the Lord**.

2. Do you think Paul's statements, "it is God who works in you" (2:13) and "continue to work out your salvation" (2:12), are contradictory? What is Paul teaching about the relationship between God's work and our efforts? (2:12-13)

3. What attitude did Paul encourage the Philippian church to adopt? How did he exemplify it, and how was Paul able to have that resilience? (2:14-18)

Read Philippians 2:19-24 to answer the following questions.

4. Paul says he has "no one else" like Timothy, what specific character traits does Paul commend in him? (2:20-22)

5. What do you think are the "interests of Jesus Christ" that Paul refers to? (2:21)

Read Philippians 2:25-30 to answer the following questions.

6. How did Paul speak of Epaphroditus? What is the purpose of Paul describing him this way, and why is it important for the church to honor those who serve sacrificially? (2:28-30)

7. In what ways do the examples of Paul, Timothy, and Epaphroditus illustrate their reverent attitude toward salvation? How do these individuals reinforce the command to “work out your salvation with fear and trembling”?

Application

1. What specific actions can we take to cultivate a greater awareness of His workings in us as we work out our salvation with fear and trembling?

2. What situations or circumstances tend to provoke your grumbling and complaining? Can you share examples, and how do these reactions affect your relationships?

3. How can we learn from the examples of Timothy and Epaphroditus? What is one character trait in them that you would like to develop further?

Optional Follow-up Exercise: Learn from the Saints

Paul encourages the Philippian church to honor individuals like Epaphroditus and Timothy, who suffered for Jesus Christ. A common leadership principle states, “celebrate what you wish to replicate.” By honoring our faith heroes, we cultivate the traits that helped them remain faithful in adversity.

This is why the Catholic Church honors and celebrates saints, designating specific days for various saints and a day for all unsung saints (All Saints’ Day). On these occasions, services include scripture readings, hymns, prayers, and reflections on the deeds of specific saints. In this activity, your group will engage in a mini version of this tradition by teaching each other about various saints.

Instructions:

- Assign different saints to people in your group. Here are a list of notable ones that you can assign:
 - Saint Sebastian (celebrated Jan 20)
 - Saint Valentine (celebrated Feb 14)
 - Saint Patrick (celebrated Mar 17)
 - Saint Mark (celebrated April 25)
 - Saint Catherine of Siena (celebrated April 29)
 - Saint Joseph the Worker (celebrated May 1)
 - Saint Anthony of Padua (celebrated June 13)
 - Saint Jerome (celebrated Sept 30)
 - Saint Therese of Lisieux (celebrated Oct 1)
 - Saint Nicholas (celebrated Dec 6)
- Give each person 5-10 minutes to do a quick research on their assigned saint with specific instructions to figure out why they received sainthood.
- Go around and have each person present on their assigned saint and share one lesson they learned from researching them.
- Conclude your time with prayer.

WEEK 05 · PHILIPPIANS 3-4:1

We are made righteous not by our achievements and works but by God through faith in Christ (salvation).

We should not boast of our merits, but should press on to know and conform to Christ (sanctification).

Preface

Last week, we read about the need to work out our salvation with fear and trembling, illustrated in the characters and actions of Timothy and Epaphroditus.

This week, Paul warned against putting confidence in one's works. He used himself as an example—that even his unquestionable heritage and works would not save him, and that even he had not fully achieved the goal and would press on towards sanctification.

Background: Having set out the positive examples of Timothy and Epaphroditus, Paul then turned to negative examples, particularly the Judaizers who overly emphasized circumcision, heritage, and works (3:1-11), and the antinomians who advocated self-indulgence (3:15-21), which were both prevalent at that time.

Judaizers are individuals who sought to impose Jewish laws, especially circumcision, on Gentile Christians.

Antinomians are believers who rejected the moral law, claiming that faith alone frees them from following it.

Warm-up question: Share your most memorable “race” or “competition”. Did you win or lose? What was the prize?

Study

Read Philippians 3:1-3 to answer the following questions.

1. What are the qualities of people Paul warns us to watch out for in 3:2? How may these qualities manifest in the present day or in our everyday life?

Notes: “**Dogs**” were often used to describe the opponents of God’s truth. “**Mutilators of the flesh**” is also translated as “concision” or “false circumcision”, i.e., circumcision for the wrong reasons; the wrong teaching that circumcision is the only way to become a Christian.

2. In contrast, what are the qualities of people in 3:3 that Paul affirmed? What is the difference between the “circumcision” in 3:2 and in 3:3? What implication does it have for our salvation?

Notes: The word “circumcision” (3:3) refers to the **circumcision of the heart** that takes place when a person trusts in Jesus Christ. They serve God by his Spirit, and boast only in Christ Jesus.

Read Philippians 3:4-11 to answer the following questions.

3. Summarize the “gains” that Paul possessed or achieved (3:4-6). What was Paul trying to convey by mentioning these in relation to one’s righteousness and achievements?

Notes: In Paul’s self-description, the first four items were inherited (3:5), while the last three were things that he did (3:5-6), establishing his nearly **unquestionable status from a Jewish perspective**. He aimed to show how much his perspective changed upon following Christ, implying that the gains are far greater.

4. How did Paul view his “gains” then? What changed his perspective, and what were his new goals (3:7-11)? How does this inform us about living a faithful life as followers of Christ?

Notes: Observe the **downward progression** of Paul's view of his **achievements** and the **upward progression** of his **knowledge of God**. He suggests that some achievements may not only be **useless** in God's eyes but could even be **against** Him. Paul emphasizes that we stand before God based on Christ's merit, not our own.

Read Philippians 3:12-4:1 to answer the following questions.

5. In the previous section, Paul was discrediting his own works and actions. Yet in this section, Paul became very action-based (“press on”, “strain toward”). How can these be reconciled?

Notes: **Salvation** is by grace through faith not by works, but **sanctification** does not come automatically by faith and has to be pursued diligently by the believer as the Spirit continues to work in the believer.

6. What is “the goal” and “the prize” in 3:14? How can one attain that? (Refer to 3:8-11, 15-16)

7. What is the destiny of those who set their minds on God, not on earthly things? (3:18-21)

8. How do those with “citizenship in heaven” live differently from those who are “enemies of the cross of Christ”? Why are they able to live this way? (3:20-4:1, also refer to 3:5-11)

Application

1. What were the things or qualities that you considered as “gains” in your life before knowing Christ? How has that changed after you have known Christ? Is there anything that you should count as “loss” or “garbage” now in order to pursue a closer relationship with God?

2. Do you see yourself as “righteous” or not? Do you find it easy or hard to understand and attain the “righteousness” described in 3:9-11?

3. What practical steps can you take to “strain toward what is ahead” and “press on toward the goal” (3:13-14) in your spiritual journey? How can you involve your Christian community?

Optional Follow-up Exercise: Count as Gain or Loss?

While Paul counted his heritage and works as “loss” and “garbage” (3:4-8), he was referring to the basis of his salvation. It does not mean all gifts and achievements are worthless—those are also given by God to us, and we are called to use them wisely. In this week's activity, let us reexamine our gifts and achievements, share with our small group, and keep each other accountable for how we steward them.

Instructions:

- Write down: (i) 3 positive characteristics of yourself; (ii) 3 achievements in your life (e.g., work, study, family); and (iii) 3 contributions or roles in your church/spiritual community.
- Reflect on whether these traits, achievements, and contributions have helped or hindered your spiritual growth and your relationships with God and others. Share your thoughts with your group.
- Respond to each other's sharing: Do you agree with their self-assessments? Should you warn them of anything (e.g., legalism, pride)? What can you encourage them about (e.g., faithful use of talents)?
- Pray for one another in light of Paul's reminder: forget what is behind, strain toward what is ahead, press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called us heavenward in Christ Jesus, and stand firm in the Lord. (3:13-14; 4:1)

WEEK 06 · PHILIPPIANS 4:2-23

We are called to rejoice amidst trials by keeping our hearts and minds on Jesus, focusing on the peace, grace, and strength that come from Him.

Preface

Last week, we were taught not to put our confidence in heritage or achievements, thinking we are saved by our works, but to press on to know and conform to Christ.

This week, we will learn how to remain joyful amid continual challenges, as Paul urges believers to rejoice despite interpersonal and financial struggles by relying on the God who guards, strengthens, and provides for those in Christ Jesus.

Background: No believer is exempt from trials and challenges. In the first three chapters of the epistle, Paul describes various difficulties faced by himself and early Christians, including imprisonment and persecution (1:12-14), strife and disunity (1:15-17), self-serving interests (2:21), and those who oppose the cross of Christ (3:18). These conflicts and ungodly behaviors within the church discouraged Paul because they could lead the faith of many astray. Yet despite all the challenges, Paul urges believers to rejoice in the Lord always (4:4).

Warm-up question: Are you currently facing challenges in your life and/or in your Christian walk? What are the challenges and how have you been tackling them?

Study

Read Philippians 4:2-3 to answer the following questions.

1. What additional issue was Paul addressing, and what was his request? (4:2-3)

Notes: He urged the two sisters in Christ to live in **harmony** and **unity**. He also asked the Philippian believers to **help resolve their conflicts**. Once again, Paul emphasized the importance of **unity**.

Read Philippians 4:4-9 to answer the following questions.

2. Despite all of the issues faced by the Philippian believers, what kind of attitude did Paul encourage them to have? Why did Paul ask them to adopt this attitude? (4:4-5)

Notes:

- In the original Greek, the word “**rejoice**” (4:4) is in the imperative form, indicating a command. Paul urged believers to rejoice twice, highlighting its **importance** and **their need for this reminder**, as **joy does not come naturally** during difficult times. In 4:5, Paul urged them to **let their gentleness be evident to all**. This attitude should be so **obvious** that everyone can see it.
- Paul asked them to adopt this attitude because “**The Lord is near**”. Jesus would soon return and therefore it was time to **strain toward the prize** awaiting them when Jesus returns (3:13-14).

3. What else does Paul urge believers to do in 4:6-9?

Notes: Notice the imperative verbs used in these verses: **not be anxious** and **present your requests** to God (4:6), **think about / count / keep in mind** (4:8), and **put it into practice** (4:9)

4. What are the two things promised when we follow Paul's instructions?

Notes: 1) **The peace of God** that transcends all understanding, will guard our hearts and minds (v.7); and 2) **God of peace being with us** (v.9). Notice the beautiful transition from **God's blessing** (peace of God) to **God Himself** (God of peace being with us) in these verses.

5. How will the actions Paul prescribed in 4:6-9 and God's promises enable us to rejoice and remain gentle amid hardships?

Read Philippians 4:10-23 to answer the following questions.

6. According to 4:10-15, what difficulty did Paul face, and how did he overcome it?

7. What is the secret (4:12) that he learned, and how did he come to learn it?

Notes: The secret is that he can do all things—in this case, **being content**—through God who gives him strength (4:13). These verses suggest that the secret comes from his **true experience** of having plenty or being in want in worldly aspects, yet **God was always there to strengthen him**.

8. Based on 4:14-16, what did Paul affirm the Philippian church for? What was the reason for Paul's rejoicing regarding the church's generosity? (4:17-19)

Notes: Paul affirmed the Philippian church for **sharing in his troubles** (4:14) and for their **generosity** in supporting him (4:15-16). The reason for his rejoicing was **not simply that his needs were met**, but because they were **storing up treasures in heaven** (4:17) and **offering a sacrifice that is pleasing to God** (4:18). Paul reaffirmed their generosity **with confidence in God's promise** to meet their needs (4:19).

Application

1. Of everything Paul commanded in 4:4-9, which is the most challenging to you? Why? What is something that you can do differently in light of Paul's commands?

2. Paul said, "I can do all this through him who gives me strength" (4:13). How have you experienced God giving you strength? Do you know how to seek strength from God?

3. Do you struggle with giving? How does 4:17-19 encourage you to give generously to help those God places in your life?

Optional Follow-up Exercise: Affirmations

When we are in the midst of hardships and challenges, it can be difficult to see the good and beautiful things in life. There are times when we may lose sight of God and fail to recognize the goodness He has placed in us. In this letter, Paul affirmed the Philippian believers, as well as Timothy and Epaphroditus, and genuinely rejoiced in them. This week, take time to affirm one another and recognize the positives in ourselves and others. Be sure to write down the affirmations you receive to remind you of how uniquely God has made you when you need it.

Instructions:

- Choose one person to receive affirmations. Before affirming, pray and ask God for ways to encourage them. As leaders, remember to model both giving and receiving affirmations.
- The person receiving affirmation should focus on receiving and be mindful not to deflect the affirmations.
- Continue until everyone has received an affirmation.
- End your time in prayers, praising God for one another.

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