

Paul's Letter to the Philippians

Chapter 1

Nine miles inland from the Aegean Sea in eastern Greece's Macedonian region are the ruins of the once-wealthy city of Philippi, named for himself by Philip II, Alexander the Great's dad. Traveling Caesar-built roads as he moved the center of civilization from Asia to Europe, Paul, God's envoy to the Gentiles, founded Europe's first Christian church in this Roman colony in AD 49-50. Let's read this story in Acts 16:12-40 (p. 998, GNB).

We find Paul and Silas jailed in Philippi for preaching the Gospel which Paul had received in person from the resurrected Christ. An earthquake jars open their cell, but they stay put. Facing death if they escape, and ready to take his own life, the jailer panics, "How do I get saved?" Paul's reply: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ!"

This letter, written from Rome ten years later, is Paul's thank-you note and call to believers to be united as they face Caesar's persecution. Chained 24/7 for two years to an elite soldier in the Praetorian Guard, he also pens New Testament letters to Ephesus, Colosse and Philemon. Adversity creates opportunities for evangelism, making him better, not bitter. Arrested in Jerusalem, he's shipped in chains to Rome where he was beheaded in AD 67.

Paul's default is joy, a supernatural mindset God gives those who make Christ the center of their life. Paul is proof that nothing else matters. Let's read Philippians 1:1-30 (p. 1066, GNB).

Jail Mail

Philippians 1:1-2

In the Bible *grace* (Gentile greeting) always precedes *peace* (Jewish greeting). There's no peace (*shalom*) until you accept God's forgiveness for your sin which is a free gift of His grace (*charis*).

Imagine meeting Paul after reading his bio: "Ruthless zealot, Jesus-hater, leader of jihad against Christians." BUT CHRIST enters his life, becoming his reason for living and his hope after dying.

A Little Help From Our Friends

Philippians 1:3-8

You and I need a friend who accepts and believes in us. Paul did that for the Philippian believers. These intimate friends are unified by the Holy Spirit in actively loving each other. Grateful for that and their financial backing, Paul affirms that God will, until Jesus returns, complete the transformation He's begun in them.

DISCUSS: **Who encourages you, and how do they do it?**

The believer is on God's potter's wheel, being shaped into the man God sees that he'll *become*. We have the consoling comfort of God's presence in this often-painful process (Romans 8:28-29; 12:1-2).

DISCUSS: Artisans push, chisel, even put their *objects d'arte* under intense heat or pressure. How is God sculpting you?

Fruit Loops

Philippians 1:9-11

Paul's prayer is the roadmap to being all we can be by relying on God, not ourselves (Proverbs 3:5-6). He yearns for his readers to love more people more deeply, longing to see them develop spiritual maturity in their discernment and conduct.

When you say "yes" to Jesus, God downloads to you **ALL** the "fruit of the Spirit" -- all you'll ever need to handle anything life throws at you. It's God's gift that keeps on giving, energizing others and us in a continuous loop. Let's read Galatians 5:22-23).

DISCUSS: How could just one of those nine pieces of fruit, if fully drawn upon, impact your life?

Lemons from Lemonade

Philippians 1:12-14

Paul lives to convey the truth of Christ's love and forgiveness, regardless of his welfare. He saw guards and Caesar's staff become Jesus' followers, and prison was his platform to embolden believers.

Calamities give us a glimpse of how Christ suffered for us. We can trust God's purpose in hardships. Character shines in conflict. Trials don't make us *what* we are; they reveal *who* we are. Let's read 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 (p. 1077); 2 Timothy 3:1-17 (p. 1085).

DISCUSS: How can you face adversity as a victor, not a victim?

That's Life?

Philippians 1:15-30

Notice the gracious humility in Paul's comment about preachers whose message is right but motives are wrong. As long as the Gospel is aired, Paul is happy, praying for his readers as he draws comfort from the Holy Spirit's presence in his own life.

He's content to die or stay and preach Christ. Life and death, from God's perspective, are both desirable. What's your core? Can you say, "Jesus Christ *IS* my life?" Let's read Mark 10:17-27, (p. 901).

Knowing who God says you are as a citizen of heaven, why you're here and where you're going breeds confidence. But life without Christ leads only to everlasting torment. Let's read Jesus' straight talk in Matthew 25:31-34, 41-46 (p. 881) and John 3:34-36 (p. 954).

Why Do Fools Fall In Love?

Missionary Jim Elliott was killed in a 1956 plane crash in Ecuador. He'd written, "He is no fool who *gives* what he cannot *keep*, to *gain* what he cannot *lose*." God's love sent His only Son to die in your place as *full* payment for all of your sins, forever erasing a debt you could never pay to become forever right with God. Have you, in faith, accepted God's pardon? Why not do that now?

His Deal

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“NO WORRIES” VERSES FROM PHILIPPIANS

God, who began this good work in you, will carry it on until it is finished on the Day of Christ Jesus. **Philippians 1:6**

Your lives will be filled with the truly good qualities which only Jesus Christ can produce, for the glory and praise of God. **Philippians 1:11**

I want you to know that the things that have happened to me have really helped the progress of the gospel. **Philippians 1:12**

My deep desire is that I shall never fail in my duty, but that at all times, especially now, I shall be full of courage so that with my whole being I bring honor to Christ whether I live or die. **For what is life? To me, it is Christ. Philippians 1:20-21**

Don't be afraid of your enemies; always be courageous, and this will prove to them that they will lose and that you will win because it is God who gives you the victory. For you have been given the privilege of serving Christ, not only by believing in Him but also by suffering for Him. **Philippians 1:28,29**

Your life in Christ makes you strong, and His love comforts you. You have fellowship with the Spirit, and you have kindness and compassion for one another. **Philippians 2:1**

Do nothing from selfish ambition or a cheap desire to boast, but be humble toward one another, always considering others better than you. Look out for one another's interests, not just your own. Have the attitude that Christ Jesus had: He always had the nature of God but did not think that by force He should try to remain equal with God. Instead, of His own free will He gave up all He had and took the nature of a servant. He became like a human being and appeared in human likeness. He was humble and walked the path of obedience all the way to His death on the cross. **Philippians 2:3-8**

God is always at work in you to make you willing and able to obey His purpose. **Philippians 2:13**

I reckon everything as loss for what is much more valuable, the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord. For His sake I have thrown everything away; I consider it as mere refuse so that I may gain Christ and be completely united with Him. I no longer have a righteousness of my own that is gained by obeying the Law. I now have the righteousness that is given through faith in Christ, that comes from God, based on faith. All I want is to know Christ and to experience the power of His resurrection, to share in his sufferings and become like Him in His death, in the hope that I myself will be raised from death to life. **Philippians 3:8-11**

I do not claim that I have already succeeded or have already become perfect. I keep striving to win the prize for which Christ Jesus has already won me to Himself. Of course, I really do not think that I have already won it; the one thing I do, however, is to forget what is behind me and do my best to reach what is ahead. So I run straight towards the goal in order to win the prize which is God's call through Christ Jesus to the life above. **Philippians 3:12-14**

There are many whose lives make them enemies of Christ's death on the cross. They are going to end up in hell because their god is their bodily desires. They are proud of what they should be ashamed of, and they think only of things that belong to this world. We, however, are citizens of heaven, and we eagerly wait for our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, to come from heaven. He will change our weak mortal bodies and make them like His own glorious body, using that power by which He is able to bring all things under His rule. **Philippians 3:18-21**

May you always be joyful in your union with the Lord. Rejoice! Show a gentle attitude toward everyone. The Lord is coming soon. **Don't worry about anything**, but in all your prayers ask God for what you need, always asking Him with a thankful heart. And God's peace which is far beyond human understanding will keep your hearts and minds safe in union with Christ Jesus. Fill your minds with things that are good, that deserve praise, that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely and honorable. Put into practice what you learned and received from me, both from my words and from my actions. And the God who gives us peace will be with you. **Philippians 4:4-9**

I have learned to be satisfied with what I have. I know what it is to be in need and what it is to have more than enough. I have learned this secret so that anywhere, at any time, I am content whether I am full or hungry, whether I have too much or too little. I have the strength to face all conditions by the power Christ gives me. **Philippians 4:11-13**

With all His abundant wealth through Christ Jesus, my God will supply all your needs. To our God and Father be the glory for ever and ever! Amen. **Philippians 4:19-20**

SUGGESTION: If you read one of the 14 passages above each day in two week cycles, you will be amazed at the increased peace and power God will deliver to you in most unexpected ways.

PAUL'S PARADOXES in PHILIPPIANS ch. 1

1:3-4 "I thank my God for all the memories I have of you. Every time I pray for all of you, I do it with joy." **PARADOX:** *Despite being under house arrest, Paul abounds in gratitude and exhilaration.*

1:7 "Together we share God's favor whether I'm in prison or defending and confirming the truth of the Good News." **PARADOX:** *Paul guarded and established the Gospel even while jailed.*

1:12 "I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what happened to me has helped to spread the Good News." **PARADOX:** *His woes have been assets in advancing Christ's message.*

1:14 "So through my being in prison, the Lord has given most of our brothers and sisters confidence to speak God's word more boldly and unafraid than ever." **PARADOX:** *Paul's effectiveness inspired others to preach fearlessly.*

1:18 "Nothing matters except that, in one way or another, people are told the message about Christ, whether with honest or dishonest motives, and I'm happy about that." **PARADOX:** *Paul is joyful to have even his detractors preach the good news about Jesus.*

1:21-24 "For what is life? To me, it is Christ. Death, then, will bring more. ... I am pulled in two directions. I want very much to leave this life and be with Christ, which is a far better thing; but for your sake it is much more important that I remain alive." **PARADOX:** *Paul is equally content to do his worthwhile work on earth, or to die and be forever with God who had dramatically salvaged his life.*

1:28 "Don't be afraid of your enemies; always be courageous, and this will prove to them that they will lose and that you will win, because it is God who gives you the victory." **PARADOX:** *Persevering gallantly while being persecuted will conquer your enemies.*

1:29 "For you have been given the privilege of serving Christ, not only by believing in him but also by suffering for him." **PARADOX:** *Trusting in Christ and suffering for Him are equal blessings.*