

## Introduction

### The Book Of Philipppians

In an era marked by frustration, could you use more contentment? In a world filled with anxieties, worries, and fears, could you stand to have a bit more joy?

Come with me back in history a couple of thousand years. We're headed for the city of Rome, that thrilling metropolis of gladiators, chariots and empires. But we won't stop at the coliseum or palace. We'll travel rather to a drab little room surrounded by high walls. We'll imagine we can peak into the room. There we'll see a man seated on the floor. He's an older fellow, balding, with shoulders stooped. Chains encircle his hands and feet. And, chained to him is a burly Roman guard.

This is the Apostle Paul. The tireless church planter who has traveled all over the world. The preacher who has liberated people in every port. The servant of God bound only by the will of God is now in chains—stuck in a dingy house—attached to a Roman officer.

Surely, this is a fellow who has every reason to be in a slump!

He is restricted by walls and is "in chains" (**Philippians 1:13**). He is afflicted by those who want to "stir up trouble" (v. 17). He is conflicted by the dangers he is facing—"For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain" (v. 21).

Look closely. He appears to be writing a letter. No doubt, it is a complaint letter to God. No doubt, it is a list of grievances. No doubt, he is writing the New Testament version of Lamentations. After all, he has every reason to be bitter and to complain. But Paul isn't writing such a letter... and he doesn't complain. Instead, he writes a letter that 2,000 years later is still known as a treatise on contentment.

Sound interesting? Of course, it does. Who couldn't use a guide to joy in this world? Let's follow Paul as he guides us down the trail to unearthly joy and otherworldly peace.

#### AUTHOR AND DATE

Paul persecuted the early church before his life was radically altered by meeting the risen Jesus on the road to Damascus (see **Acts 9:1-31**). The church at Philippi, located in the Roman province of Macedonia, was the first congregation Paul founded in Europe during his second missionary journey (AD 50—see **16:6-15**). Paul and Silas were beaten and imprisoned there, but God miraculously sent an earthquake to open the prison doors. After leading the jailer to Christ, they departed for Thessalonica (see **16:16-40**). Paul likely wrote the letter (AD 60) from Rome, where he was imprisoned at the time. It was delivered by Epaphroditus, who had come to Paul at some personal risk with financial help from the church (see **Philippians 2:25-30**).

#### SITUATION

Paul had three purposes for writing the letter of Philipppians. First, he wanted to acknowledge the believers' gift to him and express his joy in their continued partnership in sharing the gospel of Christ. Second, Paul wanted to explain the purpose and significance of his imprisonment—as it appears the Philipppian believers were discouraged to hear of this latest development. Third, Paul wished to address the issues of disunity that Epaphroditus had informed him were arising in the church among

the believers. Paul repeatedly encourages them to model Christ's example and try to see things eye-to-eye so peace and harmony will prevail in their fellowship.

### KEY THEMES

- By faith we have Christ in us because of the spirit of God.
- Only Christ can bring salvation.
- Christian unity encourages our faith.

### KEY VERSES

In your relationship with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: who, being in the very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage (**Philippians 2:5-6**).

### CONTENTS

- I. Paul's Circumstances (**1:1-30**)
- II. Christ's Example (**2:1-30**)
- III. Living for Christ (**3:1-4:23**)

## LESSON ONE PRAYING FOR OTHERS

### REFLECTION

*Prayer.* You hear sermons about it. You might talk about it with people at church. Perhaps, you even read books about it. But, when it comes to conversing with God, one on one, what are your actual habits? How much time do you spend in an average day actually talking to the Lord?

### SITUATION

Paul generally begins his letters with an expression of thanksgiving for the recipients. However, his letter to the Philippians is unique in that he emphasizes the believer's partnership with him in sharing the gospel and expresses his confidence that this continuing partnership—in spite of the fact he is in chains—will culminate as God intends when they stand together before Christ. Paul clearly has a deep affection for this Macedonian congregation, which he demonstrates through his faithfulness in prayer for them.

### OBSERVATION

Read **Philippians 1:1-11** from the New King James Version.

### EXPLORATION

1. Paul was thankful for the Philippian believers for their financial aid as well as fellowship/partnership in the gospel. They had been with him from the first day they met.

2. Paul was confident that God, who had begun a great work in them would continue it throughout their lifetime and will finish it when they meet Him (Christ) face to face. This promise is to believers today. When God starts a project or work, He will complete it. He doesn't give up on us. When we are discouraged and it seems like we are getting nowhere, we need to remember that God is with us.
3. Paul uses descriptive words such as "joy," "I have you in my heart," "I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ," and "you are partakers with me" as he describes his attitude for the church in Philippi.
4. Paul prayed specifically for the Philippians that their love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment. He also prayed that they may approve the things that are excellent, that they may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ. Finally, Paul prayed that they be filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ.
5. Compared to the prayers that we tend to pray, Paul's prayer is more other-centered than ours. Paul prays an intercessory prayer.
6. Increasing in knowledge and insight (discernment) helps in ones spiritual growth because one can better determine what is true and what is false in spiritual matters. Also, more knowledge and insight can help in the development of the fruit of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control).

## INSPIRATION

I'd like you to think about someone. His name is not important. His looks are immaterial. His gender is of no concern. His title is irrelevant. He is important not because of who he is, but because of what he did.

He went to Jesus on behalf of a friend. His friend was sick, Jesus could help, and someone needed to go to Jesus, so someone went. Others care for the sick man in other ways. Some brought food, others provided treatment, still others comforted the family. Each role was crucial. Each person was helpful, but none was more vital than the one who went to Jesus.

He went because he was asked to go. An earnest appeal came from the family of the afflicted. "We need someone who will tell Jesus that my brother is sick. We need someone to ask him to come. Will you go?"

The question came from two sisters. They would have gone themselves, but they couldn't leave their brother's bedside. They needed someone else to go for them. Not just anyone, mind you, for not just anyone could. Some were too busy; others didn't know the way. Some fatigued too quickly, others were inexperienced on the path. Not everyone could go.

And, not everyone would go. This was no small request the sisters were making. They needed a diligent ambassador, someone who knew how to find Jesus. Someone who wouldn't quit mid-journey. Someone who would make sure the message was delivered. Someone who was as convinced as they were that Jesus must know what had happened.

They knew of a trustworthy person, and to that person they went. They entrusted their needs to someone, and that someone took those needs to Christ. “So, Mary and Martha sent someone to tell Jesus, ‘Lord, the one you love is sick’”(John 11:3 NCV).

Someone carried the request. Someone walked the trail. Someone went to Jesus on behalf of Lazarus. And because someone went, Jesus responded. (From *The Great House of God* by Max Lucado.)

## REACTION

7. How would you describe your willingness to carry out request for others when asked?
8. How faithful are you in praying for others when they request such spiritual support?
9. If you were to receive a letter from the apostle Paul today, which of your qualities or habits do you think he would praise?
10. In what area of your life do you need greater spiritual insight and discernment?
11. What elements from Paul’s prayer do you need to incorporate more into your life?
12. Who is a Christian friend or relative you could write a short note or email to today for the purpose of providing encouragement?

## LIFE LESSONS

Someone observed that joy is found in focusing on Jesus first, others second, and ourselves last. These were Paul’s priorities, so it’s no wonder he could write such an upbeat epistle even when he was incarcerated! Paul begins his letter with an excited, Christ-centered description of his habits of intercession. As he talks to the Lord about his Macedonian friends, he not only remembers their past acts of love with thanksgiving but also requests heavenly wisdom for their certain maturity. Paul prays with faith and assures the believers of his spiritual support. The result is a contagious joy—for both them and for him. As King David wrote to the Lord “You will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand” (**Psalm 16:11**).

## DEVOTION

*Father, thank you for the reminder that we can pray for others no matter where we are and no matter what our circumstances are. Help us to develop a more consistent ministry of interceding for our family members, friends, coworkers, and neighbors. Give us joy as we pray—and let us always see prayer as a privilege and not a duty.*

## JOURNALING

What are specific areas of spiritual growth you would like to see God make in your family members? How will you pray for God to bring about these changes in his way and his timing?

**Next Week:** Lesson Two: Triumph In Trouble **Philippians 1:12-18**