

PHILIPPIANS

JESUS IN ALL THINGS

BY
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rooted | reservoir

PHILIPPIANS

Introduction to the Book of Philippians

Author

Paul of Tarsus

Paul was the former Pharisee and persecutor of the church who became a Christian on the Damascus Road after an encounter with the risen Jesus.

Date and Place

Paul most likely wrote his letter to the Philippians from his prison cell in Ephesus between 52 and 55 A.D.

Original Audience

The original audience of Paul's letter to the Philippians is the church at Philippi.

Purpose

The purpose of the letter is to direct believers away from theological error and to encourage them to stand firm in the face of opposition.

Anchor Verse

"And I am sure of this, that He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ".

Philippians 1:6

Where are we?

The book of Philippians was written after the incarnation, life, death, resurrection and ascension of Christ, and yet, before Christ has returned to judge the living and the dead on the Last Day. This means that Philippians deals with the experience of the church in the world between Christ's two advents. So, the letter looks back to Christ's victory over sin and death at the cross and to what the church is to look like as we wait on the second advent, the return of Christ.

Who wrote Philippians?

Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, begins his letter to the Philippians with these words: "Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi." The early church assumed Paul, along with his assistant, Timothy, to be the authors of the book of Philippians, and modern scholars generally agree with this opinion.

When and where was it written?

It is clear that Paul wrote Philippians while he was in prison (1:13-14), perhaps either in Ephesus (52-55 A.D.), Caesarea (57-59 A.D.) or Rome (61-62 A.D.). An Ephesian origin of the letter is most convincing because of the two groups about whom Paul is worried in 3:1-4:1. Paul's warnings coupled with his praise of the Philippians (4:1) make much more sense if he wrote Philippians right after his letter to the Galatians and his first letter to the Corinthians, and before the Philippians could fall into the errors of these two churches; thus, making an early Ephesian origin most likely.

To whom was it written?

Paul has addressed this letter to "all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons" (1:1). Paul is writing this letter to the church at Philippi—an important, fertile city just inland from the port of Neapolis through which the Egnatian Way, a critical trade route, went. These factors make it an obvious choice for Paul's first missionary work in Macedonia. Acts 16:12 indicates that Philippi was "a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia." The Philippian church was probably both Paul's favorite and his most diverse household of faith, hence his affection for the church at Philippi (4:15-16; 2 Cor. 8:1-7).

Why was it written?

Paul wrote his letter to the Philippian church for a number of reasons. However, two in particular stand out. First, Paul wrote this letter in order to direct the Philippians away from theological error (3:1-4:1). On the other side of the same coin, Paul wrote Philippians to encourage the Philippian church to stand firm in the Spirit in the midst of the Roman opposition of the day (1:27).

Why does this matter for our students?

Philippians is especially relevant to our students who are coming of age in an environment characterized by faulty ideas of God as a divine wish granter on the one side, and as a tyrannical dictator on the other. Paul's encouragement to avoid theological error is an invitation to think about God as He has revealed Himself in the Bible, rather than as we imagine Him to be. Second, Paul's encouragement to stand firm in the Spirit in the midst of opposition matters for our students because they, like the Philippians of the first century, are confronted, in some cases, with very real religious persecution and, in others, with temptations to worship modern equivalents of false gods such as success, money and power.

What are the main themes?

- **Justification and Sanctification:** God is the one who began a good work in these Philippians at their justification (the moment at which they were declared to be righteous before God), and He is also the one who will bring it to completion at the day of Christ (1:6ff). Paul exhorts the Philippians to continue to grow in love, knowledge and discernment (1:9-11). In 2:1-11, Paul gives more practical examples of just what this growth is to look like, and he continues to stress the importance of pressing on toward the goal in 3:12-16. Yet, this sanctification, or growth in relationship with God, can only take place after the believer has been justified, or given Christ's righteousness as a gift, as Paul states in 3:3-10.
- **The Supremacy of Christ:** Paul makes clear his desire for Christ above all else in this world in 1:21-24. Christ, to the believer, is better, more glorious, more beautiful and more captivating than anything this world has to offer. The Christian is encouraged, then, to cultivate his/her affections for Christ by meditating on His example (2:1-11). Christ is the one who came down from heaven, "not counting equality with God a thing to be grasped" (2:6ff), in order to win salvation for His people. It is this Christ who reigns supreme in the world and in the heart of the believer.
- **The Importance of Community:** The Philippian believers are encouraged to stand firm in one mind and one spirit, "striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, and not frightened in anything by your opponents" (1:27-28). Community not only enriches the lives of believers, but it also enables believers to mutually encourage and bind up one another when they are in the midst of trials and temptations.
- **Suffering and the Christian Life:** Paul is writing this letter from prison, amid a great deal of persecution. And yet, what Paul is at pains to note is how his suffering has served to advance the gospel. Paul's suffering, the suffering of the Philippian church and our suffering is not in vain. In fact, our suffering is eternally oriented if it is used to preach Christ. Paul even encourages the Philippian believers not to be nervous about anything. He tells the church about the importance of prayer, and about how believers experience the peace of Christ through their own communion with God amid their suffering (4:5-7).

Outline

Lesson 1: Greeting the Philippians (1:1-11)

- Paul greets the Philippian church in the name of Christ (1:1-3).
- Paul prays for continued growth in grace in the lives of the Philippians (1:4-11).

Lesson 2: Encouraging the Philippians (1:12-1:26)

- Paul's imprisonment has actually served to advance the gospel (1:12-18).
- Paul's suffering reveals the supremacy of Christ (1:19-26).

Lesson 3: The Identity of the Philippians (1:27-2:4)

- Stand firm alongside one another in defense of the gospel (1:27-30).
- Believers are encouraged to follow Christ's example of humility (2:1-4).

Lesson 4: The Savior of the Philippians (2:5-30)

- The Philippian believers' growth in their relationship with God is helped along by God Himself (2:5-18).
- Paul encourages the believers in their pursuit of godliness with the images of Timothy and Epaphroditus (2:19-30).

Lesson 5: The Salvation of the Philippians (3:1-21)

- Justification is by faith, apart from works (3:1-11).
- Sanctification, as well, is through Christ, not works (3:12-21).

Lesson 6: The Community of the Philippians (4:1-23)

- Paul asks the Philippians to stand unified in the Lord for the sake of the gospel (4:1-3).
- Paul encourages the people to rejoice in the Lord (4:4-9).
- Paul is thankful for the church's provision and the Lord's provision (4:10-20).
- Paul gives his final greetings (4:21-23).

PHILIPPIANS 1:1-11

Greeting the Philippians

Memory Verse

"And I am sure of this, that He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ".

Philippians 1:6

Real-life Problems

Sometimes, the Christian life can feel joyless and discouraging. Suffering abounds, sin is crouching at the door, and sometimes our local cultures ridicule us for our Christian witness. Paul knew this well, and he confronts these feelings in the first 11 verses of his letter to the Philippians.

The Good News

Jesus, through His life, death, and resurrection, has already made us right with God. In addition, Jesus also sanctifies us, or makes us holy like He is. The good news here is that the Christian life is all about Jesus. When we feel discouraged, Christ is causing us to grow, not asking us to frown our brows and gain merit for ourselves to get into heaven.

I. Introduction

OPENING QUESTIONS

Idea #1: What are some movies which bring you joy? How about songs, activities, or people?

★ **Idea #2:** What discourages you?

Idea #3: Who was the last person to whom you wrote a real live snail-mail letter? Does snail-mail feel different than a text message to you?

PRAY

Open your time together in prayer.

REHEARSING THE GOSPEL

What does gospel mean?

Good news

What's the good news?

Jesus died for my sins

Why did He die for your sins?

So that I can have abundant life in relationship with Him now and forever

What is grace?

God's love for undeserving sinners

REVIEW

1) Who wrote the book of Philippians?

Paul of Tarsus, the persecutor of the church who was converted on the Damascus road

2) Who was the original audience of this book?

The church in Philippi, which Paul planted

3) Why was the book of Philippians written?

To help us understand that "He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Christ Jesus" (1:6)

What's going on?

REMIND

The book of Philippians is a letter that was originally written to one of Paul's favorite churches from his prison cell. Paul was concerned, on the heels of the gospel misunderstandings that happened in Galatia and Corinth, to make sure the Philippians didn't fall prey to the same problems. Paul wanted to be sure that they understood in their context that Christ fuels the Christian life from beginning to end.

TODAY WE'LL LEARN

- 1) Jesus is working even in our suffering.
- 2) Christ is the one who causes us to grow in our relationship with Him (1:6).
- 3) Our growth in grace is to the glory of God.

Read

Read **Philippians 1:1-11** aloud in your group.

II. Questions for Discussion

A. WHAT?

1) In verse 1, to whom does Paul say he is writing this letter?

Paul is writing this letter to the saints at the Philippian church, along with the overseers and deacons. In the New Testament (NT), Christians are most often called saints, literally meaning "holy ones," which emphasizes their righteous identity given to them through Christ's work, rather than their own sinfulness.

2) Why is Paul so thankful for the Philippian church?

Because of their collaborating in the gospel, Paul, from the very beginning of his relationship with the Philippians, has been able to count on them to engage in partnership for the sake of the gospel, which could have included things like praying for him and sending him money to support him (4:16; 2 Cor. 8).

★ 3) Paul seems to have a lot of concerns, but in verse 6 he says there is one thing about which he is not concerned. What is it?

Paul is certain that the "One who began a good work in the Philippians will bring it to completion at the last day." In other words, Christ, the one who saved the Philippian believers, will ultimately be the one to bring them into deeper relationship with Himself and bring them to glorification in heaven.

4) What are Paul's feelings toward the Philippian church, as he states in verse 8?

Paul obviously has a great deal of affection for the Philippian church. In fact, he says, "I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus" (1:8). Paul rejoices in the work Christ is doing at the church in Philippi. He is glad to see his brothers and sisters in Christ growing in their love for Him.

5) What is Paul's prayer in verses 9-11 for the Philippian church?

"That their love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that they may approve what is excellent and be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God" (1:9-11).

★ 6) Based on the beginning of the sentence (1:9-10), what is the fruit of righteousness Paul mentions in verse 11?

In the same sentence, Paul prays that the Philippians would increase in love, knowledge, and discernment—or being able to identify and choose what is good ("excellent")—with growing confidence in their status before God. This fruit of righteousness is the outworking of Christ's work in the believer's life.

★ 7) From where does the fruit of this righteousness come?

The fruit of the righteousness that Paul desires for the Philippians is righteousness that is given to them by Christ and is not something they earn. As Paul said earlier, the one who began a good work in the Philippians will bring it to completion. In the same way, Christ causes this fruit of righteousness to bloom in the Philippians.

B. SO WHAT?

1) In verse 9, what do love and knowledge have to do with one another? Why has Paul linked them in his prayer for the Philippians?

Paul has put these two qualities next to each other to encourage the Philippian church to continue to test the ideas which come into their midst. As they grow in love for Christ and for one another, they will have to be continually discerning whether or not new ideas—like earning God's approval by works—are present and taking their eyes off of Christ and His work for them. Love for Christ and His people increases as the amount of knowledge about Him and what He has done for us increases.

Roots and Fruits

Have a cluster of grapes to show the students. With the grapes on display, ask the following questions:

Where is the root of this plant when it is in its natural habitat? What role does the root play in the growth of these grapes?

The root is underground, and it produces the fruit, the grapes, on the other end of the plant.

How do grapes develop on a plant?

The grapes grow as a result of something happening in the root, below the ground.

Does this image shed any light on the fruit of righteousness that Paul mentions in verse 11? What is Paul saying about this righteousness?

For the Christian, Christ and what He gained for us on the cross is the root and the source of all "fruit," like obedience, love, and wisdom. Not the other way around. Our works cannot produce our righteousness.

★ **2) Think about what Paul says about the "fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ." How is that different than having to earn your own righteousness?**

Being given righteousness from Jesus is like being given a gift. We don't owe the person who gives us a gift; we simply get to enjoy the gift. But if we want to buy something ourselves, we have to earn it by paying for it ourselves. Relative to our relationship with God, this can be incredibly discouraging since we can't earn the gift of salvation because the price is far too high. Jesus has paid that price for us and given us His righteousness as a gift.

3) What does verse 6 tell us about the fruit of righteousness? What does it tell us about our growth in grace?

Verse 6 tells us that our growth in grace is not solely dependent upon us. In fact, it is Christ who drives the completion of the work which He started at our conversion. Of course, this truth does not give us license to sin. It does, however, keep our eyes on Christ rather than on ourselves, since we do not have to strive for our salvation. Christ is making us new and causing us to grow Himself.

★ **4) Given what Paul has said in verse 6 and what we have learned about the way fruit is produced, what do you understand Paul to be saying in verse 10, when he prays that the Philippians "may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ"?**

Paul has already been clear that Christ is the one to initiate and bring to completion the work of producing fruit in our lives. Paul cannot mean that one must work their way into purity and blamelessness for the day of Christ by their own strength—in fact, relying on our own strength becomes its own form of pride. The paradox of Christianity is that the only way that the Philippian believers can be considered pure and blameless is if they abandon their self-justifying efforts to earn purity and blamelessness. The only way they can be righteous is through the gift of Jesus's righteousness.

C. NOW WHAT?

1) Have you ever felt discouraged in your growth as a Christian? Talk about that as a group. What does this passage have to say to you in that moment?

★ **2) One fruit of righteousness is learning to recognize, name, and choose what is good, or to "approve what is excellent." What might it look like to "approve what is excellent" in your own life?**

★ **3) What do you feel like the world or your culture demand of you? Does this discourage you? And how might you "approve what is excellent" or grasp hold of the gospel in that situation?**

Our culture often evaluates us on the basis of our works, on our appearance, on our perfection. The world's messages to us never give life, but rather take it from us. On the other hand, the gospel tells us that God does not judge you based on your works. Because of the gospel, we are judged based on Christ's works. Because of Christ's works, you are, in fact, enough. Christ, through the gospel, tells you that He loves you so much that He left perfect goodness in heaven to come to earth and die so that He could save you.

Main takeaway

From the beginning of the Christian life to the end of it, all is Christ. Our strivings have ceased; we need only fix our gaze on Christ, and He will give to us and work in us all that He desires of us.

III. Closing

REMEMBERING THE GOOD NEWS

Jesus, through His life, death, and resurrection, has already made us right with God. In addition, Jesus also sanctifies us, or makes us holy like He is. The good news here is that the Christian life is all Jesus—Christ is causing us to grow, not asking us to furrow our brows and gain merit for ourselves to get into heaven.

Christ does not save us to simply give us a clean slate which we must fill up with our own good works. Rather, Christ gives us all of his righteousness and then directs our lives toward Him. He Himself causes us to grow into His image—this is not something we are forced to earn. So rest in the righteousness of Christ's work for you.

CLOSE IN PRAYER

Lord, we have tried to earn our own righteousness and we have tried to become more like You on our own. Neither of these things work. Would You help us to remember that it is You who gives us righteousness, and it is You who cause us to grow into your image? Help us to rejoice in the work You're doing in our lives; help us to recognize it and to give You glory for it. Amen.

Supporting Resources

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- 1) What are the fruits of Christ's righteousness that you have been surprised to see growing in your own life? What about in the lives of people around you? How do you know these gifts are from God?
- 2) How do these fruits of righteousness bring glory to God?
- 3) Talk to God about areas where you need Him to change you. Tell Him about areas where you feel you are not growing as you would like to.

QUESTIONS FOR PARENTS

- 1) What are areas in your life in which Christ has caused you to grow?
- 2) What are some important ways in which you "approve what is excellent"?
- 3) Tell your student what Christ, in the gospel, says about who they are already, against what, for example, a performance-based culture might say about them.

PHILIPPIANS 1:12-26

Encouraging the Philippians

Memory Verse

“And I am sure of this, that He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ”.

Philippians 1:6

Real-life Problems

Every now and then, it seems like bad things keep happening to us. Paul is writing this letter with the same hands which are bound by prison chains. Everyone experiences some kind of suffering, though our experiences are different. The gospel of which Paul speaks in 1:12-26 has a great deal to say to our suffering, no matter what it looks like in our particular experience.

The Good News

Even in the midst of suffering, the gospel gives us joy and hope! Because of the death and resurrection of Jesus, Paul can endure what is hard now because he trusts that there is an even greater joy to come.

I. Introduction

OPENING QUESTIONS

Idea #1: Talk about a day that started out poorly and just kept getting worse, or a season of life when it seemed like you just couldn't catch a break.

Idea #2: What are some examples of suffering you've seen on TV or in the news?

Idea #3: What do you think it means to suffer?

PRAY

Open your time together in prayer.

REHEARSING THE GOSPEL

What does gospel mean?

Good news

What's the good news?

Jesus died for my sins

Why did He die for your sins?

So that I can have abundant life in relationship with Him now and forever

What is grace?

God's love for undeserving sinners

REVIEW

1) Who wrote the book of Philippians?

Paul of Tarsus, the persecutor of the church who was converted on the Damascus road

2) Who was the original audience of this book?

The church in Philippi, which Paul planted

3) Why was the book of Philippians written?

To help us understand that "He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Christ Jesus" (1:6)

What's going on?

REMIND

The letter to the Philippians was written to encourage the Philippians to hold fast to the knowledge that the work of Christ is the beginning, middle, and end of their Christian faith (1:6). Indeed, God is the one holding them fast and will be the one to produce the fruit of righteousness in their lives (1:11).

After laying that strong foundation, Paul talks in today's passage about his own suffering and the suffering of the Philippians, reminding them that even in suffering the gospel gives us eternal peace.

TODAY WE'LL LEARN

- 1) How can we have joy even in suffering?
- 2) How is God working in the midst of our suffering?
- 3) How can we grow in our relationship with God?

Read

Read **Philippians 1:12-26** aloud in your group.

II. Questions for Discussion

A. WHAT?

1) What is Paul's primary concern at the very beginning of this passage (1:12)?

First and foremost, Paul wants the Philippian church to know that instead of giving people a reason to doubt God because one of His servants is in jail, Paul's imprisonment has given him an opportunity to share the gospel with even more people. Paul wants to put to rest their concerns, while also encouraging them with what God is doing in and through his life.

2) What are some of the results of Paul's imprisonment as he sees them (1:13-14)?

Paul's imprisonment has allowed, at the very least, the entire imperial guard to know the name of Christ (v. 13). Additionally, most of the Christians around Paul have gained strength and confidence through his imprisonment and are more ready to preach the gospel boldly (1:14).

3) Paul mentions two motives for the preaching of the gospel in verses 15-17. What are they?

Paul notes that some Christians are preaching the gospel sincerely and out of a pure heart, but some are preaching the gospel out of envy and strife, perhaps to gain recognition for themselves.

4) What is Paul's response to those who preach Christ from selfish motives (1:18)?

Paul obviously would prefer these folks to preach Christ from a heart filled with good will. However, despite their heart condition, Paul feels comforted that the name of Christ is proclaimed, even if it is from poor motives.

5) Why is Paul rejoicing in verses 18-19?

First, Paul is rejoicing because Christ is being preached. Second, Paul is rejoicing because he knows that the adversity which he experiences will lead to his salvation. Paul is not merely saying that things will turn out okay in spite of his problems, but that his problems assist him in his Christian experience (Moises Silva, *Philippians*, p. 74).

6) What is the deliverance of which Paul is speaking here in verse 19?

Paul names both life and death as possible outcomes of his time in prison in verses 20-21. Thus, it is unlikely that he is speaking of physical deliverance in the form of being released from jail, since there is no way he can be sure of whether or not that will be the outcome. Rather, he is speaking of his eternal destiny—he knows that this suffering is serving to confirm the salvation which God has already given him in Christ.

7) What do you think it means when Paul says, "to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (1:21)?

He elaborates on this in the following verses. He notes that as long as he is on earth, he is engaging in fruitful labor for Christ. And yet, for him to die would be an incalculable gain, for he would be with Christ face to face.

Upgrade

Show the kids pictures of an old video gaming system (like Atari or Sega Genesis) and a new one (like Xbox), side by side.

Are either of these things bad?

No! They both have allowed people like us to play fun games in their own times.

What's the difference between them?

The Atari was good in its time, and it fit the purpose it was meant to serve. But the Xbox is more advanced than the Atari. It's a major upgrade!

How does this relate to what Paul is saying here?

Paul says that both to live and to die, and thus be with Christ, are both good things, serving the purpose of their time and season. Once the time comes, to die and be with Christ is the better experience—like the Xbox. But to stay and work with the Philippians is what is available to him now.

8) What are the benefits for the Philippians of Paul remaining alive in prison (1:24-26)?

The longer Paul remains in his earthly body, the more work he can do for Christ and the more he can preach the gospel. As he notes, as long as he is in the flesh, he can help encourage and facilitate the joy of the Philippians, and their ever deeper experience of the grace of Christ (vv. 25-26).

B. SO WHAT?

1) God chose to use Paul, a very emotional man, to write so much of the New Testament. What does this tell us about how God views our own strong emotions?

Paul talks a lot about emotions (fear, 1:12-14; jealousy, 1:15-17; joy, 1:18-26), and he shows his own emotions. In all of this, he is acknowledging that humans are made to be emotional creatures and that our feelings are legitimate. Our strong emotions are part of our nature as bearers of God's image—emotions are not sinful in and of themselves, although sometimes they can lead to sinful responses. In fact, our relationship with God should be characterized by an emotion: joy!

2) Why do you think it is important that Paul has said that no matter the motivation, the preaching of Christ is a good thing? Doesn't the posture of the heart matter?

Of course the posture of one's heart matters. However, some mention of Jesus is better than no mention of Jesus, and the Holy Spirit can still save people even through the mouth of a self-interested preacher.

3) What is Paul's attitude toward adversity or suffering in this passage?

For Paul, suffering is a bummer. He is truly suffering and his joy does not diminish that. However, it serves to strengthen our relationships with Christ (1:19-20). What is more, it serves to focus the eyes of the Christian upon Christ, and upon our seeing Him face to face someday soon, no matter what our situation looks like at the current moment (1:21-26).

4) What does Paul mean in verse 19 when he says, "I know this will lead to my salvation...?"

It might sound like Paul believes his imprisonment is a hoop through which he must jump in order to earn his salvation. However, Paul begins this verse by saying, "I know that this will lead to my salvation..." For Paul, this imprisonment serves to advance his greatest good, the glorifying of Christ in his body (1:20). Paul's certainty that "he who began a good work in [him] will bring it to completion" (1:6) is what gives him the security to

continue to suffer well. He no longer must earn his salvation, but rather he is free to encourage others and to preach the gospel because the chains of the law are no longer on him. It is God who will sustain him and complete the work He has begun.

C. NOW WHAT?

1) Talk as a group about the emotions that are a part of your Christian experience. How have they, or how do they, serve to enhance your understanding of yourself and of God?

2) What would it look like in your own life if you truly believed that “to live is Christ, and to die is gain”?

First, we would probably deal with much less fear. If the worst thing that this world can do to us is destroy our bodies, which would give us an incredible gain in that we would see Christ face to face, we would have no reason to fear anything that could happen to us on this earth. Thus, we would be free to do whatever the Lord has called us to, wherever he has called us.

Second, we would treasure Christ above all else. This would free us from 1) earning our own salvation, for we have Christ, the one who is our salvation Himself, and 2) from finding our identity in grades or possessions or anything else, for Christ is the ultimate identity maker for us.

3) Where can we get this confidence in the gospel that Paul hopes to give the Philippians?

Perhaps regular communion with God through His Word and prayer, or regular communion with His people. Often, we are also encouraged by thinking back on all the good things God has done for us in our lives, or all of the good things God has done for others in their lives.

Main takeaway

Suffering serves to purify our joy in Christ and our desire to see Him face to face. Sometimes life can be truly excruciating, yet God is compassionate to us in those moments because He knows our experience well. But God also wants to remind us that all pain in this life is redeemed our good and for His glory (1:19-21). Suffering does not have the last word in God's creation.

III. Closing

REMEMBERING THE GOOD NEWS

Because of the cross and the resurrection, we can rest assured that even our suffering doesn't have the last word—God does. Christ does not save you only to leave you to fend for yourself. Christ saves you, and then keeps you through all of your experiences, both good and bad. Go in peace of the knowledge of that fact.

CLOSE IN PRAYER

Lord, we have not followed You as we ought. We've been more concerned with what we think of ourselves than about who You've said we already are. Give us a new heart to see Your beauty, and to live joyfully and intentionally with You in this world. Help us see Your love for us and Your faithfulness to us everywhere we look.

Supporting Resources

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- 1) What are some ways in which you have suffered?
- 2) How has God been faithful to you throughout your life?
- 3) Pray that God would grow the fruit of joy in the midst of suffering in your heart.

QUESTIONS FOR PARENTS

- 1) What are some areas in your life in which God has been faithful to you over the course of your life?
- 2) What has "to live is Christ and to die is gain" meant to you?
- 3) Tell your child often that if Christ is all for him or her, there is nothing that the world can, in a final sense, do to hurt them, and that they will always find joy no matter what their wardrobe or report card looks like.

PHILIPPIANS 1:27-2:4

The Identity of the Philippians

Memory Verse

“And I am sure of this, that He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ”.

Philippians 1:6

Real-life Problems

If we're honest, we're usually much more interested in our own good than the good of others—we're more concerned about protecting ourselves, our possessions, or our egos than about anyone else. But the gospel frees us to no longer be selfish or self-important.

Paul, in this passage, makes clear to the Philippians what the Christian life is supposed to look like (2:1-4). He indicts the selfishness he spoke of in 1:15ff, and he tells the Philippians to lay down their own self-importance for the sake of others.

The Good News

Paul says that the gospel speaks directly to our selfishness. Because we are citizens of heaven, we are free from the need to protect our own interests and free to give our lives for others.

I. Introduction

OPENING QUESTIONS

Idea #1: If you brought your passport, show the group the most interesting part about it (your favorite stamp, for example).

Idea #2: What are rights and privileges that come along with citizenship in the United States (or any other country)?

★ **Idea #3:** Tell a story from your life or from a book or movie when someone sacrificed their own self-interest for the sake of another.

PRAY

Open your time together in prayer.

REHEARSING THE GOSPEL

What does gospel mean?

Good news

What's the good news?

Jesus died for my sins

Why did He die for your sins?

So that I can have abundant life in relationship with Him now and forever

What is grace?

God's love for undeserving sinners

REVIEW

1) Who wrote the book of Philippians?

Paul of Tarsus, the persecutor of the church who was converted on the Damascus road

2) Who was the original audience of this book?

The church in Philippi, which Paul planted

3) Why was the book of Philippians written?

To help us understand that “He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Christ Jesus” (1:6)

What’s going on?

REMIND

Paul has spent the first several verses bringing the Philippians up to speed on his imprisonment and why he has so much hope in the midst of so much suffering. Paul has told them, in effect, that no matter what suffering might come his way, the only two options are continuing to labor for Christ on earth or being with Christ in heaven. Paul’s eternally oriented mindset gives him hope for the future in the midst of the present. Now, Paul moves to encourage the Philippians to see their world through the same lenses.

TODAY WE’LL LEARN

- 1) Paul encourages the Philippians to live into their God-given identity: as citizens of heaven. It is this status of the Philippians which motivates their habits and actions, not the other way around.
- 2) Paul tells the Philippians what living into their identity looks like—encouragement in Christ, and consolation in love, affection, mercy, and fellowship with the Spirit. This is acted out in selflessness and in considering others more important than oneself.

Read

Read **Philippians 1:27-2:4** aloud in your group.

II. Questions for Discussion

A. WHAT?

★ **1) In vs.27, what does Paul encourage the Philippians to live a life worthy of?**

Paul encourages the Philippians to live a life worthy of the gospel of Christ. He is quick to establish the citizenship of the believer in heaven. What this means is that the believer's inheritance is not of earth—we need not acquire things for selfish gain, since everything that belongs to us is of a different and eternal world.

2) What are some rights, privileges, and responsibilities of a life as a citizen of heaven, or a life worthy of the gospel?

Since believers are citizens of heaven and not this earth, they are to live in a manner that reflects that citizenship. They'll live as people whose inheritance is not of this fading earth, but is rather of a much more glorious and eternal realm. This includes standing firm in one spirit, contending together for the faith of the gospel, not being frightened in any way by your opponents, and even suffering for Christ.

Because of our status as citizens, we have assurance that there is encouragement, consolation of love, fellowship with the Spirit, affection, and mercy in Christ (2:1).

Further, we get the benefits of unity and fellowship with our fellow citizens—being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord, and of one mind (2:2). This means that, since we are citizens of the

Kingdom Citizenship

Bring your passport, or a picture of a passport, with you to small group. Pass it around, asking the following questions.

Take a look at this passport. What's on the front page?

Your identification, which tells everyone your national identity: your citizenship.

What's on the other pages?

Stamps and visas tell government officials where you've been and where you're permitted to go, but these don't reflect your permanent citizenship.

What rights or privileges does our citizenship grant us?

Our earthly citizenship tells us which country we belong to; it gives us certain rights within our own country. The kingdom of heaven is the country of identification on the front page of our eternal passport, and the world as we live in it now is only a stamp on the following pages. What really matters, permanently and eternally, is where our

★ same heavenly place, we should look to be on the same page as our brothers and sisters in Christ.

3) What does it mean to be conceited or to have selfish ambitions (2:3)?

To be conceited or have selfish ambitions is to place yourself before the needs of others. To be conceited

★ or selfishly ambitious is to be, in a word, selfish.

4) Whose interests are Christians supposed to look to according to verse 4?

They are to look not only to their own interests, as if they were to be completely selfish, but to the interests of others.

B. SO WHAT?

1) Why is it important that Paul mentions to the Philippians that they will suffer for Christ (1:29)?

★ Paul knows that his suffering for his faith in Christ is not an isolated incident. In the coming years, more and more Christians will be persecuted for their faith. Thus, it is important that they know that this can (and probably will) happen to them as well. Christians are citizens of a different kingdom; this world is not our home.

2) In verses 27-29, there is a lot of talk about parts of the Christian life which aren't necessarily fun, like suffering and attacking of the faith. What does Paul say to reassure the Philippians?

★ Paul speaks very certainly in this passage. He assures the Philippians that their faith comes from God, as does their suffering. So, God is in control of even the things they will suffer. None of this surprises God and He has deemed it ultimately good for their salvation (1:6).

3) Does this mean we should completely abandon ourselves and our own well-being (2:4)?

Paul says in verse 4, "Everyone should look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others." There is a sweet spot here in which one is still looking out for his or her own interests, and is also doing the same for others.

4) How might the unity of Christians and their citizenship in heaven be related?

Paul connects the unity in verse 27b to the heavenly citizenship individual believers have in verse 27a. Imagine if you met someone on a plane in a foreign country from your hometown—you would have an instant connection! You would probably share an accent and know at least a few people and places in common. The same is true for Christians; because the world they're living in isn't their ultimate place of residence, Christians have a special understanding of one another.

But for Paul, the issue is even deeper than that—unity is what completes Paul's joy (2:2). The fellowship of God's people is an avenue to experiencing God and finding joy in Him as He is glorified by His church, so
★ this unity both glorifies God and is exceedingly better than discord within the community.

★ C. NOW WHAT?

1) Paul is warning the Philippian church of coming persecution in verse 29. How do you see or experience persecution in your own life?

2) What are some ways we might consider others more important than ourselves in our day to day lives? How has Christ freed us to care for others, more than we care for ourselves?

Christ has freed us from the need to save ourselves, to justify ourselves, or to prove ourselves. Christ has provided us with everything we need, so we no longer need to live for ourselves. We can live for Christ by looking out for the interests of others.

3) What does it mean for us that our citizenship in heaven comes before our acting in line with that citizenship? What emotions does this truth evoke in us?

Main takeaway

God's salvation of us, His granting us citizenship in heaven through Christ's work, is the source of our selflessness, our unity, and our security in the midst of persecution.

Paul uses this citizenship remark to set the table for the next several points he will make (like his appeals to unity and selflessness), but first and foremost, it is as if he is saying, "You're in Christ! None of your sins count against you anymore. You don't have to earn love or acceptance anymore—God has freely given it to us! Let that truth soak through all of your actions!" Because our destiny isn't dependent on us, we should feel free and filled with joy as a result!

III. Closing

REMEMBERING THE GOOD NEWS

Our own selfishness is a constant reminder of our own sin. And yet, Paul says that the gospel speaks directly to our selfishness. A great deal of our selfishness comes as a result of protecting ourselves, our possessions, or our egos, and Paul says we don't need to worry about that any longer! We are citizens of heaven and are free to give our lives for others.

Jesus Christ lived a perfect life, died a terrible death, and rose again not just so that you would go to heaven when you died. He did these things so that you might have a full life now, so feel free to stop earning your salvation. You no longer have to earn God's approval; you're free to love freely since you have been loved freely.

Supporting Resources

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- 1) Where are you being selfish in your life? Where are you working for your own vain ambition (2:3)?
- 2) How does God's new citizenship for you change how you feel and what you do (1:27)?
- 3) How does Paul's picture of this Christian community make you feel? What does it make you think of (2:1-4)?

QUESTIONS FOR PARENTS

- 1) Share with your child a time during which you were selfish.
- 2) What does being a citizen of God's kingdom mean to you?
- 3) Have there been any groups of people which have been particularly impactful for you? Which ones and why?

CLOSE IN PRAYER

Lord, we have been selfish and have saved our best for ourselves. We have not believed You when You've told us that we are citizens of Your heavenly kingdom. Help us to understand that identity You've given us more deeply each day and help us to walk in a manner worthy of it, for it is only with Your help that we can even begin to stumble toward that.

PHILIPPIANS 2:5-30

The Savior of the Philippians

Memory Verse

“And I am sure of this, that He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ”.

Philippians 1:6

Real-life Problems

We all fail to measure up to God's standard. None of us lives the Christian life which Paul encourages us to live. We aren't blameless and innocent (2:15), and we certainly don't do things without grumbling (2:14). Sometimes we get tired or we lose sight of the goal for which we are working. We get complacent—we go through the motions, check the boxes of prayer and Bible study, and go about our lives without much affection for Christ.

The Good News

Even in our complacency, even when we fail to measure up, God still loves us. Christ paid for all of your failures to measure up on the cross, not just the times you failed before you became a Christian. What's more, Christ continues to pursue you through His Spirit in His Word, through prayer, and through His body, the church!

I. Introduction

OPENING QUESTIONS

Idea #1: Who do you think the most famous person in the world is? What qualities or attributes make you gravitate toward some celebrities over others?

Idea #2: What are some material things in your life that you hold really closely—that would be really, really hard to give up?

Idea #3: Talk about a time when you were truly stuck (in a physical place or in a situation) and couldn't get out on your own.

PRAY

Open your time together in prayer.

REHEARSING THE GOSPEL

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Good news

What's the good news?

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Why did He die for your sins?

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REVIEW

1) Who wrote the book of Philippians?

Paul of Tarsus, the persecutor of the church who was converted on the Damascus road

2) Who was the original audience of this book?

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3) Why was the book of Philippians written?

To help us understand that "He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Christ Jesus" (1:6)

What's going on?

REMIND

Paul, after encouraging the Philippian believers to be unselfish toward one another and to live among each other as citizens of heaven, grounds that encouragement in Christ's unselfishness to us. Paul then makes the explicit connection again, as he did in 1:27-2:4—Christians act the way they do because of who Christ is to them.

TODAY WE'LL LEARN

- 1) Jesus humbled himself, taking on human flesh and giving up His seat at the right hand of God, in order to be Emmanuel, God with us. He died for our sins to make us acceptable before God.
- 2) Because Jesus gave up what He had to secure our status as children of God, we also should live in light of what He has gained for us, being lights to the world.

Read

Read **Philippians 2:5-30** aloud in your group.

II. Questions for Discussion

A. WHAT?

1) What does Paul mean when he says, "Have this mind among yourselves" (2:5)? To what does "this mind" refer?

Paul is connecting this new section to the one just before it (1:1-4). The mind that he is referring to is one that is unified with the body of Christ in love, mutual support, and affection. He goes on to say, though, that believers only have this mind in Christ. This statement segues into Paul's meditation on who Jesus is, so this command serves as the link between these two sections.

2) In what two "forms" does Jesus exist (2:6-7)?

Jesus first was in the form of God, but at the fullness of time, He took on the form of a servant. The word "form" here essentially means something like having all the qualities that this thing (God, or a servant) would have. Paul says that Jesus really became a servant—He really took on our real nature. And if He did that, the same meaning holds for the parallel statement: Jesus really is the one true God, the creator of the universe.

3) What does it mean that Jesus "did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped" (2:6)?

While Jesus was equal to the Father in all ways—enjoying all the rights and privileges of that equality—He did not consider those privileges something to be held onto tightly; rather, He was willing to give all of that up for the sake of the whole world.

4) What does Paul mean when he says that Jesus humbled Himself (2:8)?

Jesus left His throne above and took on a human body. He left His heavenly glory and came to earth in order to die a sacrificial death for us, and, what's more, He died that grisly, ugly death on an old, rugged cross.

5) What is the result of this humbling (2:9-11)?

God has bestowed upon Him the name that is above every name (the name Yahweh, God's proper name), so that the whole world would know that Jesus is Lord. Of course, Jesus already had this name as a member of the Trinity, but now it is undeniable that Jesus is Lord.

6) What is the meaning of "Therefore" in verse 12?

Paul is saying, "because this is the case..." For example, because Jesus is who He is and has done what He has done, you ought to respond by living in a certain way.

7) How does Paul suggest that we live the life he has set out for us in verses 14-15?

The answer to this comes in verse 16. Paul says, "among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast to the word of life..." Thus, it seems that the way we live this life of harmony and selflessness is by clinging to the gospel, the word of life, which will make us lights in the world (cf. Berkouwer, *Faith and Sanctification*, 91).

B. SO WHAT?

1) Why does it matter that Jesus was, is, and always will be fully God (2:6)? Would it change things if he were a really wonderful human, but not God?

If, and only if, Jesus is God, His sacrifice is infinitely worthy to save all of His people. In other words, if Jesus is merely a man, He can't even save one other person. He would only have saved himself, because a perfect life is what God requires of us anyhow. But if He is God, His life is worthy to save all of those who come to Him.

2) Why is it important that Jesus is also a man (2:7-8)? Would it change things if He were God living on earth, but without taking on humanity?

In order for Jesus to redeem our nature, He must take it on. Jesus could not have saved humans if He had not lived a human life. Humans have sinned against God, so the one who redeemed humans must be human Himself.

In the Well

Show the students a picture of a well. Ask them to imagine being stuck at the bottom of it, and to describe what they think that would feel like.

When you're stuck in the bottom of that well, how can you get out?

You can't climb out yourself, you need some help from someone else who is not in the well.

Who/what can help you, a dog or maybe a horse?

No, you need a human, someone like you, who can think of a way to get you out and to pull you up.

What position must that human be in?

That person can't be in the same position as you, they have to be above you to pull you out. Similarly, Jesus has to be a man so that He can redeem us humans, but also He must be God, so that He has the power to pull us out of this well.

3) Why do you think Paul includes the bit about Timothy and Epaphroditus after 1:27-2:4?

Timothy and Epaphroditus are two of Paul's ministry or church planting apprentices. Paul updates the Philippians on his two counterparts with the idea that they will all rejoice with news of each other. These two are an example of what living in a manner "worthy of the gospel of Christ" that Paul described in 1:27-29 can look like. It is also an example of what it means to be lights in the world, as he references in 2:14-15.

4) Why is Paul concerned that Christians be lights in the world (2:14-15)?

Paul notes that Christians are to be lights amid a crooked generation. Christians, then, constantly show forth God's love and the beauty of Christ to the world around them.

5) What does it mean to work out one's salvation with fear and trembling (2:12)?

It's important to read this phrase in the context of 1:6, where Paul has already made clear God's indispensable role in saving us and shaping our lives so that they are "worthy of the gospel of Christ." It's clear in 2:13 that God's work is what causes and empowers us to work out our salvation. That said, "salvation" here is not only referring to justification, but to the whole of the Christian life, which includes our own growth in holiness. That growth requires effort on our part, but not to earn God's favor (Silva, 140). In fact, the issue is not even one of cooperation, as if God does His part and we do ours. Rather, "the relation is that because God works, we work" (Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, 148ff). The Christian can't bring about his/her own

justification. However, he/she can, by God's grace and the power of the Holy Spirit, grow in his/her love for the person of Jesus, and thus become more like Him.

C. NOW WHAT?

1) When you read 2:5-11 and meditate on Jesus' person and work, how does it make you feel? What thoughts and emotions does it evoke?

2) What are some ways that God is working in you for His good pleasure (2:13)?

3) Paul speaks with the Philippians about being a child of God in the midst of a crooked generation. How does your identity as a child of God influence the way you live in your current generation?

For Paul, this meant persecution in the form of prison sentences and physical punishment. For many of us throughout the world, it means those things as well. For some of us in the West, though, it likely means that we might be made fun of for refusing to drink before we turn 21 or abstaining from sex before marriage. In either case, Paul says the same thing: the problems we experience in this life are nothing compared to the joy we have in Christ.

Main takeaway

Because of Christ's person and work for us, we are able to respond to Him in gratitude by living as lights in the world.

III. Closing

REMEMBERING THE GOOD NEWS

Jesus, through His life, death, and resurrection, has already made us right with God. In addition, Jesus also sanctifies us, or makes us holy like He is. The good news here is that the Christian life is all Jesus—Christ is causing us to grow, not asking us to furrow our brows and gain merit for ourselves to get into heaven.

Jesus Christ came to earth in love for you personally (insert names of students here). He has done everything to ensure your salvation, so go forth, bask in His love and grace, and respond to Him in gratitude, as lights in the world.

CLOSE IN PRAYER

Lord, You have loved us with a great love. You left your glorious throne to come to earth and live and die for us, Your ungrateful creatures. But now, You've brought us back to Yourself. Give us a spirit of joy and help us to live our whole lives as if we're living them to You.

Supporting Resources

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- 1) How is God working in your life right now (2:13)?
- 2) How can you be a light in this crooked generation (2:15)?
- 3) What does "holding fast to the word of life" mean to you (2:16)?

QUESTIONS FOR PARENTS

- 1) In what areas of your life has God been at work?
- 2) Who is Jesus to you?
- 3) How do you experience joy and gratitude in Christ?

PHILIPPIANS 3:1-21

The Salvation of the Philippians

Memory Verse

"And I am sure of this, that He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ".

Philippians 1:6

Real-life Problems

All of us have a tendency to want to work for our own salvation. When we sin, we think, "I'll make this right by praying more, reading the Bible, and going to church as often as possible." For example, after we hurt someone, we often try to be as nice to them as possible. We try to make up for what we have done. Sometimes, we try to do the same thing with God.

The Good News

When we sin, or do something God tells us not to do, we can't just be nice to Him, or pray more, or do good things to make things right. But God can! When Jesus died and was raised for us, He took our punishment on Himself and made things right between us and God!

I. Introduction

OPENING QUESTIONS

Idea #1: Name one thing about yourself that you are proud of—your grades? An athletic accomplishment? Your kindness? An award you received?

Idea #2: Who are some of your favorite "good guys" from movies or TV shows? What makes them "good guys" as opposed to "bad guys"?

Idea #3: Do you remember a time when you wanted to be just like someone else? Who was it and what did you do to imitate that person?

PRAY

Open your time together in prayer.

REHEARSING THE GOSPEL

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1) Who wrote the book of Philippians?

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The church in Philippi, which Paul planted

3) Why was the book of Philippians written?

To help us understand that "He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Christ Jesus" (1:6)

What's going on?

REMIND

For the bulk of chapter 2, Paul makes much of Jesus Christ, who is the Savior of His people. Now, Paul moves on to describe exactly what type of salvation that Savior achieved for His people. He talks about the Philippians', and our, justification (when God sees us as if we've done everything we should've done, and nothing we shouldn't have done) and sanctification (the growth in our knowledge of and love for God), both of which we receive through the work of Christ.

TODAY WE'LL LEARN

- 1) We must seek a righteousness from Christ in order to be saved.
- 2) As a result of receiving that righteousness, we press on in gratitude.
- 3) Though we will never be without sin in our lives, we look forward to a day at the end of time in which that will be so.

Read

Read **Philippians 3:1-21** aloud in your group.

II. Questions for Discussion

A. WHAT?

1) How does Paul describe himself and the Philippians in 3:3?

He says that they are the "circumcision"—the ones who worship in the Spirit, glory in Christ, and put no confidence in the flesh.

2) What does Paul mean when he says "put no confidence in the flesh" (3:4)?

When he says "flesh," Paul means the remnants of our sinful nature which we got from Adam. This nature is unable to fulfill God's law and, as a result, is unable to earn for us salvation. Thus, when Paul says this, he means that we must have no confidence that the flesh can earn anything for us before God—no good works, no gaining of merit earn us anything in regards to our salvation.

3) What does Paul say about himself when he recounts his life experiences for us in 3:4-6?

Paul was circumcised on the eighth day, he is from the tribe of Benjamin, he was a pharisee, and he persecuted the church. Paul is establishing here that he, by Jewish society's standards, he has done the things he needed to do to be considered righteous by his own work.

4) Where does Paul look to find his righteousness (3:8-10)?

Paul explicitly says that he is looking outside of himself for righteousness. Indeed, he finds his righteousness in Christ which he is given by faith. Faith, a gift from God (Eph. 2:8-9), is the thing which unites Paul to Christ.

The Claw

Show the students a clip of "The Claw" from Toy Story ([youtube.com/watch?v=N-Esh4W3dfI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N-Esh4W3dfI)) and ask them the following questions.

What exactly does the claw do?

It reaches down and grasps the aliens, pulling them out of the cage.

Does the claw have to be super strong to get the aliens out?

Not really, the aliens are really light. All that matters is that the claw is there.

The claw can be compared to our faith. Faith is simply the instrument that joins us to Christ and gives us His benefits, like justification and sanctification. Like the claw, it doesn't really matter how strong our faith is. Really what matters is that our faith exists.

5) Why does Paul continue to strive in verse 12 if he already has a righteousness from Jesus?

Paul says "I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me His own." Paul is working for Christ, not out of a legalistic spirit that makes him feel like he has to earn his salvation. Rather, he is working out of gratitude. Christ has saved Paul and given him the best gift ever (Himself), so Paul responds in love and gratitude to Christ. The growth in this love, gratitude, holiness, and our experience of God is called sanctification.

B. SO WHAT?

1) Why does Paul consider his personal attributes and accomplishments to be as insignificant as garbage (3:5-7)?

Paul knows that no matter how righteous he is, he is not perfect. He has committed sins. Additionally, Paul has failed to do all that the law requires of him. Paul needs to be perfect to gain salvation on his own, and he has no claim to it. He needs Christ's righteousness in order to be justified.

2) What does knowing Christ do for Paul (3:7-8)?

Knowing Jesus is the ultimate experience for Paul. That becomes the baseline for determining the worth of anything else in his life. All of these things he earned, all of the things he did to make himself righteous as a Jew—none of these mean anything when compared to knowing Christ. Paul would, and, in fact, has, given up all of these things just to know Christ better.

3) Paul claims that he is not already perfect (3:12), which is surprising given all of his accomplishments. Why is this significant?

After all of Paul's accomplishments, it might be easy to think of him as some sort of super-Christian. However, that is not the case. He says, "Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect..." Paul won't be perfect in this life. There will always be the stain of sin upon him, but he responds to God's work in gratitude and love and continues to try to know God better.

4) What do you think Paul means when he talks about "straining toward the goal (3:14)? What is the goal? What might that "straining" look like in Paul's daily life?

Paul seems to be working with hope toward the ultimate goal of living with God at the end of things. In Paul's daily life, that might look like reading God's Word, spending time with God in prayer, or worshiping God with other Christians.

5) In verses 20-21, Paul talks about heavenly citizenship again. What does this heavenly citizenship mean for us?

Paul encourages the believer to look to heaven, the place where their citizenship is, because that is also the place from which our Savior, Jesus Christ, will come to transform our bodies to be like His. Paul is telling us that this world, the things that surround us, matters. Jesus is coming back to make all the bad things untrue and to get rid of sickness and death. He's coming to remake this world, not take us to a heavenly cloud world forever.

C. NOW WHAT?

1) When Christ justifies you by faith alone, He doesn't only forgive you of your sins—He also makes you fully righteous! Does this change the way you see your day-to-day life?

2) In what ways are you, like Paul, tempted to count your own qualities and accomplishments as more valuable than your salvation through Jesus?

3) When Paul uses language like "striving" and "pressing on," what kind of feelings does that evoke?

It's normal if this makes you feel like you're under a little bit of pressure. However, Paul is not using that language as if to say that we must strive to a certain point or press on to a fixed finish line or else we won't be

saved. What he is saying is that the Christian, as a result of Christ's love for them, will naturally want to press on toward God and strive for Him. This striving is the fruit, not the root, of our salvation.

4) What do you think it looks like to imitate Paul or other Christian role models?

Paul isn't asking that we model our lives after him in the specifics, such as the way we dress or what job we do. Instead, when he encourages us to imitate him, he is encouraging us to glean from his faithfulness. We can look to Paul and other Christian role models and ask them to guide us and teach us what it means to follow Jesus every day of the week.

Main takeaway

Christ has justified us, will sanctify us, and will bring us to new life at the last day, and none of this is contingent upon our works.

III. Closing

REMEMBERING THE GOOD NEWS

Jesus, through His life, death, and resurrection, has already made us right with God. In addition, Jesus also sanctifies us, making us holy like He is. The good news is that the Christian life is all Jesus—Christ is causing us to grow, not asking us to furrow our brows and gain merit for ourselves to get into heaven.

Jesus Christ did not just come to forgive your sins, to give you a blank slate. He came to live a perfectly righteous life and to give you the merits of that life so you would be counted not just sinless, but perfectly righteous before God.

CLOSE IN PRAYER

Lord, You have loved us with a great love. You lived and died to forgive us and make us righteous. Give us a deeper knowledge and affection for Your work in our lives. Help us to love You more, to know You better, and to desire to spend time with You. Amen.

Supporting Resources

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- 1) What are one-to-two specific ways that God might be calling you to "press on toward" Him in your day-to-day life (3:12)?
- 2) In what ways are you, like Paul, tempted to count your own qualities and accomplishments as more valuable than your salvation through Jesus (3:7-10)?
- 3) Do you have a mentor or role model to imitate, like Paul was for the Philippians? If so, who is it? Why do you think he/she is a good person to imitate? If not, ask God to help you find someone from whom you can learn.

QUESTIONS FOR PARENTS

- 1) What does it mean to you that you're righteous before God apart from your works? How does that make you feel?
- 2) What does it look like for you to press on toward God?
- 3) Who are some people who you would like to imitate?

PHILIPPIANS 4:1-23

The Community of the Philippians

Memory Verse

“And I am sure of this, that He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ”.

Philippians 1:6

Real-life Problems

We live in a very unstable time, just as Paul did. For each of us, that instability looks different. For some, it's family conflict. For others, it's persecution. No matter the instability, it sometimes feels as though we can't really count on much in our lives, which might lead to some hopelessness every now and then.

The Good News

God is a God who delights in providing for His people. Even in the midst of uncertainty, we can rest in the peace of Christ (4:7) and in the hope that God will restore all things to perfection (3:20-21) some day.

I. Introduction

OPENING QUESTIONS

Idea #1: When you think of God, what words and images come to mind? When God thinks about you, what words or images do you imagine come to His mind?

Idea #2: What causes you anxiety or worry in your life? What are common sources of anxiety for your friends or classmates?

Idea #3: What are the qualities that make some of the great movie heroes (Optimus Prime, Dumbledore, Gandalf) so great?

PRAY

Open your time together in prayer.

REHEARSING THE GOSPEL

What does gospel mean?

Good news

What's the good news?

Jesus died for my sins

Why did He die for your sins?

So that I can have abundant life in relationship with Him now and forever

What is grace?

God's love for undeserving sinners

REVIEW

1) Who wrote the book of Philippians?

Paul of Tarsus, the persecutor of the church who was converted on the Damascus road

2) Who was the original audience of this book?

The church in Philippi, which Paul planted

3) Why was the book of Philippians written?

To help us understand that "He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Christ Jesus" (1:6)

What's going on?

REMIND

The letter to the Philippians was written to encourage the Philippians to hold fast to the true gospel in light of people who wanted to teach them a false one. Indeed, God is the one holding them fast and will certainly bring them to growth in grace.

Paul has given us a lot of doctrine over the course of the first three chapters of this letter. He has talked a lot about Jesus, justification, and sanctification. Now, as he closes the letter, he's going to bring this to bear uniquely onto the community of the Philippians. He is going to put legs on the doctrine he's given us and show us what Christian community is supposed to look like.

TODAY WE'LL LEARN

- 1) What we believe about God really matters for our daily lives.
- 2) In order to know Jesus better and to love Him more, we should concentrate on things that are good, true, and lovely.
- 3) God is our Father, and He delights in providing for His children. He will always do so.

Read

Read **Philippians 4:1-23** aloud in your group.

II. Questions for Discussion

A. WHAT?

1) What does Paul say about the brothers at Philippi in verse 1?

That he loves them and longs for them, that they are his joy and crown, and, finally, he encourages them to stand firm in the Lord.

You Get a Car!

Show students the Oprah meme where she says, "You get a car! You get a car! You get a car!"

What is Oprah doing here?

In a way, she's encouraging the folks in her live audience by blessing them with a car.

How is this like what Paul is doing in this passage?

Similarly, Paul is exhorting the Philippians. As he closes his letter out, he's making sure to say, "You have Christ! You have Christ! You have Christ!" In fact, he's saying the same thing to us even today.

2) What does Paul mean by "reasonableness" (4:5)?

He means the charity of the Philippians, or the ability they have to make sure everyone is heard, accounted for, and dealt with how they ought to be dealt with—reasonably.

3) What does Paul tell believers to meditate on and practice in verses 8-9?

He says to meditate on (or think about often) "whatever is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent, or praiseworthy." He also says to practice (make a habit of doing) what they have learned from Paul and seen him doing.

4) How has the Philippian church embodied the idea of Christian community Paul spoke of earlier (4:14-20)?

They shared his trouble, they partnered with Paul when nobody else would, they sent help for his needs, and he is supplied sufficiently because of them.

5) What does God think of the Philippians?

Paul says that "my God will supply every need of yours according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus." Thus, we see that God is one who supplies not only Paul through the Philippians, but also the Philippians, with everything they need.

B. SO WHAT?

1) What is Paul asking of the Philippians in verses 2-3? What does it mean to agree "in the Lord"?

He is exhorting the Philippians to resolve their conflicts with members of the community, namely between Euodia and Syntyche. Here, Paul is applying his teaching on Christian community from 1:18-2:4 directly to the issues the church is facing right now. These sisters are to agree "in the Lord," meaning they are to agree because of their common identity as Christians.

2) In verse 4, Paul tells the Philippians to rejoice—not once, but twice. What do you think the repetition means?

Paul, after just finishing writing of who Christ is and what He has done, sees fit to encourage the Philippian church to rejoice. However, he says “rejoice” twice, which makes clear that this rejoicing is not to be simply a one-time thing, but rather the lives of the Philippians are to be characterized by a habit of rejoicing.

3) How do you think Paul has embodied the command to rejoice in verse 4?

Paul, regardless of the position he’s in, always rejoices. He starts all of his letters off with the words or some variant of “grace and peace,” and he often tells the recipients of his letters of his joy in them. Paul’s joy is rooted in Christ, not in his circumstances.

4) What is the significance of Paul’s saying that the Lord is at hand in verse 5b?

The fact that the Lord is at hand is the ground or rationale of everything that comes after. Paul encourages the believers not to be anxious and to let their requests be known to God. They are to do these things because the Lord is at hand! After the resurrection of Jesus, the age to come has dawned. The earth is being recreated. So, don’t be anxious and experience the peace of Christ, because God has done what He promised.

5) What do we know about Paul’s circumstances when writing this letter that make it particularly meaningful that he is the one commanding them not to be anxious (4:6)?

If anyone has a right to be anxious, surely it is Paul. He has been through terrible punishment over the course of his life and he is currently in jail. Yet, he knows that his captors don’t hold the final word, but Christ does and Christ loves him so much that He died for him. Paul trusts in the Lord’s control and power over his own.

6) How is Philippians 4:13 often used? Reading it in the context of verses 11-12, what do you think it means?

Philippians 4:13 is often used as a sort of mantra, to encourage us that we can accomplish any goal that we set our minds to because Jesus is with us—He will give us an A on a test, allow us to win the 4x400m relay, or help us to get the job we want. In verses 11-12, Paul is talking mainly about how he is able to be content even when he is in great need. Verse 13 makes it clear that he is able to remain content in spite of hardship and need because Jesus gives him the strength to do so. So Paul is not so much talking about performance on a test he didn’t study for, but more to his ability to live to the glory of God in any situation.

C. NOW WHAT?**1) What does it look like for you to meditate on things which are just and lovely (4:8)? What are those things?****2) What does it feel like to hear “do not be anxious” from Paul? Have you ever struggled with worry or anxiety?**

Anxiety is extremely common today, especially among teenagers. Sometimes it can be our body’s natural and good reaction to truly scary things. There is no shame in that. However, sometimes we can increase our own worry and anxiety by trying to be our own savior, trying to control what we cannot control, and by refusing to rest in the Father’s love. It might feel trite on one level, because it might seem like your anxiety is being made light. But on another level, Paul is telling us that we can rest because God is in control of all things.

3) What is Paul's main concern for the broader church in this chapter?

Some of Paul's advice is pretty Philippi-specific. Yet, we can still glean a lot from this chapter. We know that conflict resolution in the Lord is important (4:2-3); that we should rejoice and not be anxious (4:4-7); that we should think on things that are good and God-honoring (4:8-9); and that we should help those in need (4:10-20).

Main takeaway

What we believe about God will really influence how we live our lives. All of Paul's practical advice in chapter 4 flows from his doctrine in chapters 1-3.

III. Closing

REMEMBERING THE GOOD NEWS

God is a God who delights in providing for His people. Even in the midst of uncertainty, we can rest in the peace of Christ (4:7) and in the hope that God will restore all things to perfection (3:20-21). God knows you and loves you so incredibly much, and this is no less true during times of anxiety or uncertainty.

CLOSE IN PRAYER

Lord, You have come to us, saved us, sent us Your Spirit, and given us Your Word. Give us the desire to look into it to know more about You and help us to avoid neglecting it. Help us to live to Your glory and for a relationship with You. Amen.

Supporting Resources

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- 1) What things should you concentrate on that are true and lovely (4:8)?
- 2) Where are some areas in your life where you are anxious or stressed (4:6)?
- 3) Where can Christ strengthen you (4:13)?

QUESTIONS FOR PARENTS

- 1) What lovely or just things related to Christ do you meditate on (4:13)?
- 2) How do you rejoice always in Christ (4:4)?
- 3) How has God provided for you over the course of your life (4:10-20)?