



**THRU** the **BIBLE**

with *J. Vernon McFee*

# PHILIPPIANS

BIBLE COMPANION



EPISTLES

# READ THIS FIRST

This Bible Companion is a summary of Dr. J. Vernon McGee's teaching of the book of Philippians heard on THRU the BIBLE. These summarized lessons get to the heart of Bible passages and are intended to stir your own thinking, prayer, and study.



**Begin with prayer.** Dr. McGee said, "We are living in the day of the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the day of grace, when the Spirit of God takes the things of Christ and reveals them to us." Before you start each lesson, ask the Lord to use it to grow you up in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ as He is revealed in that section. Dr. McGee said, "This is the secret of life and of Christian living."



**As you study, read the Bible passage first.** Invite God to open your eyes and deepen your understanding of His Word. That's a request God loves to answer!



**If you want to listen to Dr. McGee's complete teaching on any specific passage, go to [TTB.org/Philippians](http://TTB.org/Philippians)** (or any book of the Bible). The corresponding audio messages are listed at the top of the summaries. You can also use this Bible Companion to follow along and take notes while you listen to Dr. McGee teach a book of the Bible on the radio or online.



**After every lesson, several questions are listed for your personal consideration or, if you're reading this as a group, for your discussion.** Ask the Spirit to help you take to heart what He wants to show you.

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LET THE WORD OF CHRIST DWELL IN YOU  
RICHLY IN ALL WISDOM AND TEACHING....

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COLOSSIANS 3:16<sup>A</sup>

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## LESSON 1

# THE JOY OF TOGETHERNESS



Begin with prayer



Read **Philippians 1:1-13**



Listen at [TTB.org/Philippians](https://www.TTB.org/Philippians) to *Philippians Intro—1:1, Philippians 1:2-6, Philippians 1:6-9, and Philippians 1:9-13*

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Philippians opens with a swirl of joy as the apostle Paul wrote his most personal letter to a group of friends he deeply loved. He wrote to the Christians at Philippi, an ancient city in eastern Europe tucked slightly inland from the sparkling shores of the Mediterranean. Paul visited Philippi on his second missionary journey. This was one of the letters Paul wrote to churches while in a Roman prison. Though chained to guards, Paul shared his heart with his beloved Philippians, reminding them not only of the joy of being together but also the importance of humbly remaining devoted to Jesus Christ even when persecution mounts. The spiritual value of this short letter runs deep for followers of Jesus of all generations.

Philippians is all about finding joy in our relationship with Jesus Christ and with each other. Paul wasted no time in emphasizing that in his opening greeting. We read about joy 19 times in this letter—and also about the person of Jesus Christ (40 times). Jesus is the center of this epistle, and He's the one who is the source of our joy!

Paul loved the people in the church in Philippi. He also mentions his friendship with Timothy, a young pastor. Paul calls Timothy a fellow “bondservant” of Christ. He met Timothy on a visit to Lystra and encouraged him to join him on

his missionary journey (Acts 16:1). It was a friendship of genuine affirmation and mentorship for several years, right up until Paul's death. Timothy remained a faithful and loving apprentice to Paul as his "true son in the faith" (1 Timothy 1:2).

When Paul wrote to the Galatians and the Corinthians, he identified himself as an apostle in order to establish his rightful authority. Yet, he didn't need to defend his authority in this letter. The Philippians' love and admiration for Paul compelled them to honor him as their spiritual authority.

In addition to the Philippians, Paul addressed this letter to all the saints and portrayed every believer as being set apart by God. "Saint" means "holy one," or one who is "set apart for God." Anything holy is separated for the use of God. Even the old pots and pans in the tabernacle were called "holy vessels," and no doubt looked beaten and battered from 40 years in the wilderness (Numbers 7:1). They may not have looked holy, but they were because they had been set aside for God's use. Saints are not considered saints by the church, we *become* saints—made holy—when we put our faith in Jesus Christ. In other words, we are saints not because of our conduct, but because of our position *in* Christ.

To be a saint is to be "in Christ Jesus." In fact, that's what it means to be saved—to be *in* Christ. When you put your trust in the Lord Jesus, the Spirit of God comes to live in you and baptizes you into His body (see 1 Corinthians 12:12-13).

Through the miracle of inspiration, the Spirit of God chose just one little word—the preposition "in"—to explain the nature of salvation. It is to be *in Christ*. How do you come to be *in* Christ? God places you *in Christ* when you trust Him as your Savior.

This letter also addresses church leaders, the ones who oversee the church's great work. "Bishop" means overseer or shepherd. The word "bishop" refers to the office, while the word "elder" (1 Timothy 3) refers to the individual who serves that office—spiritually mature men. "Deacons" refer to spiritual men who perform hands-on acts of service for God's people (Acts 6). Paul blessed these followers of Jesus Christ with a special blessing, "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (1:2).

"Grace," or *charis*, was an everyday word of greeting in the Greek world. If you walked down the street in that day—or even today in Greece—you may hear someone greet a friend saying, "Charis!" It means grace.



In the Bible, “peace” always follows and never comes before grace. While *charis* has its roots in Greek culture, “peace” (*shalom*) originates in the Hebrew language. To this day, it is a common greeting in Hebrew.

But this expression also has a deeply spiritual meaning. This “peace” greeting promised to the believer is only available by the grace of God. In his letter to the believers at Rome, Paul wrote: “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1). The entire teaching of how we are saved by faith flows from the heart behind this simple greeting to the Philippians: The peace we as sinners can have with a holy God is possible because Jesus Christ died for our sin, paid the penalty for it, and made a way for God to offer us His salvation—and it all comes through grace!

Paul wants his friends at Philippi to know every time he thinks about them, he thanks God for them! What a blessing for these Christians to know someone with such stature and grace feels such great affection for them. He also prays for them. The church wasn’t free of conflict to be sure. In fact, later in this letter, Paul asks them to help two ladies in the ministry, Snytyche and Euodia, who had allowed something to come between them. Even in conflict, Paul expresses gratitude and affection for each believer and joyfully prays for them regularly. He got a lot of joy from telling them so.

Why does Paul thank God for them? Because of “your fellowship in the gospel” (1:5). Relationships in Christ are everything for the followers of Jesus. We can celebrate how God does such a work in each other’s lives and how we can share in the things of the Lord *with* them. That’s *fellowship*—the Greek word, *koinonia*. In other words, “sharing in the Lord” means praying for one another, worshipping together, and financially supporting God’s work. All this is “fellowship in the gospel.”

From the first day he met Lydia and the other early believers at Philippi praying by the riverside until now, Paul has enjoyed wonderful fellowship with them. And he is confident in the Lord that God will complete the spiritual work He started in their hearts. That same work continues today in our lives. Our confidence is always in Jesus Christ. His finished work will ultimately be on full display all the way “until the day of Jesus Christ”—the day He will return to call all Christians to be with Him forever. Amazing! No wonder this letter is called joyful.

Yes, joyful ... even when they suffer adversity. (Remember Paul is in prison as he writes this.) That’s when fellowship is even sweeter.

These dear Christians were not only on Paul's mind and their names on his lips in prayer, but they were in his heart. This kind of faithful fellowship sustains us in good times and trials. Does anyone in your life come to mind? We can follow Paul's example and pray for each other to move toward a deeper understanding of the Lord and a wider experience of His love. We can pray for each other to aim towards and experience a life of excellence and sincerity. We can encourage each other to be the genuine item. No pretense. No putting on spiritual airs that a watching world sees right through.

Certainly, the Christian life and the preaching of the Word of God will offend someone, but loving and serving God with sincerity will give us our ultimate spiritual prize: "Being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God" (1:11). The fruits of righteousness is proof the Holy Spirit is growing you up to be like Jesus. The Holy Spirit produces fruit in the life of the believer, that is love, joy, peace, long-suffering—all the things we've talked about so far in this rich little letter. Bearing this fruit is the goal of the Christian life.

Someday, Jesus Christ will return for His children. On that day, we will offer Him the "fruits of righteousness" that brings glory and praise to God alone. Together in the joy of fellowship with other believers, including these choice Christians in Philippi, our lives will be brought to fullness as we share not only the sufferings of Christ but also the joy of sharing the Good News together.

If you remember from the book of Acts, when Paul got saved the Lord Jesus said he was going to appear before kings and authorities. Up until now, Paul had given the gospel to the ordinary citizens in the Roman Empire. But now he is in a Roman prison, be sure on many occasions a Roman soldier would say to the man who relieved him, "Boy, am I glad to see you. This man is about to make me a Christian." In fact, many of the Roman guard did become Christians.

Even in prison, Paul is accomplishing the exact thing Jesus said he would. He has members of the royal guard chained to him. What an opportunity! Can you imagine having your unsaved coworkers chained to you? What would they learn about Jesus? You can further the good news of the gospel—even in hardship. Keep pointing them to Jesus.

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**NEXT: Learn of Paul's unswerving commitment to preach the gospel despite his difficult ordeal.**

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## LESSON 1



# FOR DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

1. How does an apostle, writing while chained to prison guards, write a letter about joy?
2. If you believe in Jesus, you are a saint. How does this reality change how you see yourself?
3. Why do you think we must experience grace before we can experience peace?





7. If you could go back in time and ask Paul, “What is the secret to having joy in suffering?”, what do you think his answer would be?

## LESSON 2

# NO CHAINS FOR GOD'S GOSPEL



Begin with prayer



Read **Philippians 1:14–2:6**



Listen at [TTB.org/Philippians](https://www.TTB.org/Philippians) to **Philippians 1:14-30** and **Philippians 2:1-6**

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*It's all turning out for good ....* Even when Paul sits in prison, he tells the Philippians that a lot of good was coming from his struggle. The gospel is spreading—perhaps even farther—even when he is in chains.

Paul explained the gospel had been shared with the whole palace guard and many others understood he was in prison because of his confidence in Jesus Christ. The palace was actually Caesar's court. While a prisoner, Paul had access to Caesar's family and employees of his house—a direct fulfillment of what Jesus said Paul, the once Christian-killing zealot, would do one day: Stand in His name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. (See Acts 9:15.)

Paul's imprisonment invited him into Caesar's household with the gospel, and it also modeled to the other Christians what confidence in the Lord looked like and how to speak God's Word boldly and without fear.

While Paul suffered in prison, a whole new wave of bold preachers took center stage in their own fearless sharing of the Good News. Likely many people in the new church there wanted to share their faith in Jesus Christ, but they couldn't compare to the apostle Paul. *"Paul is going up and down*

*Roman roads preaching the gospel, and he does it so much more effectively than I can do it. So I won't be going out.*" They probably felt like a lot of people do today. *I'm not worthy. I'm not competent. I'm not trained.*

But now word got out that Paul is in prison. He can't go out as a witness for Jesus Christ. So now hundreds, maybe thousands, hit the Roman road. They really moved out and even went from door to door and began to tell people about Jesus Christ. They said, "*Paul can't go, so I will.*" Paul is being multiplied. He says, "*What has happened to me happened to further the gospel*" (1:12-14).

Paul's prison letters (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon) were also a huge benefit of his prison years. We would be hard pressed to imagine our Christian life without the grace and truth that flow from these important and favorite New Testament letters.

Still, a tragic reality remained: People also got jealous of Paul's effectiveness and started preaching the gospel with spite. Even Christian ministry is vulnerable to envy's subtle attacks. We compare ourselves to others and come up short. An answer to envy within the body of Christ is to remember the Holy Spirit has given each of us a gift to be used to build up the body in love. Every gift is to be exercised in love. If it is, you won't envy somebody else. You'll recognize your gift is from God. "What do you have that you did not receive?" (1 Corinthians 4:7). Everything you've got to serve the Lord today, God gave it to you.

Some had forgotten that in Philippi. Paul mentions "strife" and "envy" several times in this letter—perhaps because it was a real issue in Philippi.

"Strife" means "to stir up." Often it refers to unseen, demonic forces set on stirring trouble among God's people. When you think of opposition to gospel preaching, usually you think of that trouble coming from *outside* the walls of the church, but too often it comes from *within* the church.

In Philippi, some people motivated by envy and strife preached the gospel, but not sincerely. They seemed determined to add insult to Paul's injury of imprisonment. Still, Paul found God's silver lining in all of it. He was grateful that whatever people's motivation for preaching about Jesus Christ, God would honor His *Word*, not the person or ministry sending it out. He was glad for however it went out—that people would hear about Jesus Christ. God's Spirit, the *only* One who can bless, would bless His Word.

Paul counted on that truth for his own release from prison. He had such confidence in the power of the Spirit that was unleashed when God's people prayed that he wrote with an exuberant abandon. He wasn't afraid of anything. He wasn't ashamed of anything. He could be bold in his preaching because he wanted nothing more than to show others how great it was to trust and follow the Lord Jesus Christ. He hoped it led to his release, but even if it meant his death, he didn't want to be ashamed of his witness while he suffered in front of them nor when he stood in front of the Lord Jesus Christ!

## IN LIFE OR IN DEATH

This season of suffering compelled Paul to write one of the most confident statements about God's purpose for his life. Paul said as long as he lived there would be good work for him to do. If he lives, he will share God's message with the world. But if he dies, he gains heaven—and life everlasting. On some days he can't decide which he wants more.

Paul's transparency in letting them know about his internal battle about whether to die and be with Christ or live and serve His gospel, only makes his friends at Philippi love Paul more. And he loves them back and wants to help them grow in this life of trusting God. But he also loves Jesus and longs to be with Him.

It is God's choice in the end, after all. Paul remains practical in his struggle—he still has work to do. The Philippians need his ministry. He wants to get out of prison and go be with them again, but if he doesn't, he wants them to stay unshakable in their faith.

*Stand fast, he tells them. Live worthy of Jesus Christ. Let your reputation be honorable. Let your faith stand the test of time and any adversity that comes your way. Be true to your calling and be united in spirit as you work together to get out the gospel of Jesus Christ (see 1:27).*

Finally, because he knows the Philippians will face all kinds of danger because of their faith, Paul encourages them like a good shepherd to stay strong and to see their own suffering as a badge of honor in reward for their faithfulness to Jesus Christ.

It's a privilege not only to believe in Jesus Christ, but also to suffer for His name's sake. And Paul knows exactly what it means to suffer for Jesus. His life and attitude toward his trial models courage and a buoyant faith to his friends at Philippi. Such courage and faithful endurance encourage us, too.

Do you face what seem to be impossible odds today? Be courageous like our brother, Paul. God has not turned His face away. In fact, this suffering is evidence of God's blessing.

Jesus is at the very center of Paul's life. His summary of what it means to live the Christian life? "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (1:21). In the original language there's no "is"—"For me, to live ... Christ. And to die ... gain." What gain? Paul thinks of them—*If I stick around, it'll be for your gain. I'll get to share more of Christ with you. But if I die, well, I'm going to go be with Him.* You can't hurt a man like that.

The most important thing in our lives as Christians is to have the reality of Jesus Christ in our day-to-day reality—to live in fellowship with Him. Then your joy will be full and you will know His power. Then you will witness for Him. The source of those actions is your love and fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ. You do it because you love Him and want to please Him.

## THINKING LIKE JESUS

What does that look like in a Christian's life? Philippians 2 shows us the *pattern* for godly living—it's thinking like Jesus. So how can we do that?

Jesus—the one God lifted high in glory through suffering and resurrection—was also Jesus, the one who humbled Himself, took on flesh, and became a servant to the needs and brokenness of a sinful world. Even though we can't begin to understand all that it took for God to become a man, we can look at Jesus' very practical and personal model. Jesus made Himself nothing so that He could meet the needs of others.

"Others" is the key. It is the Christian faith which first made that word important. Why did Christ come from glory to this earth? It was for *others*. Why should we carry the gospel and endure the suffering that may bring? For others. To think of others above ourselves is to think like Jesus Christ.

As Paul sits in prison, he is glad in the Lord—why? Because he remembers how Jesus loved and how His example is the perfect call to unity. Is the gospel working in your life? You'll know if you're living like Jesus if you're thinking of others.

Paul never stops thinking about other's spiritual welfare. He wants the Philippians to see what Jesus Christ did when He came to earth was an example of what they can accomplish in living a similar life of sacrifice and service to others.



With the same passion he holds for the gospel, Paul urges his friends at Philippi to stay strong in the face of persecution and to live humbly. Not thinking of their own ambitious plans but to think of others' needs first.

Remember Paul had just called out those who stirred up trouble out of envy. So, in contrast, he calls the Philippians (and us) to adopt a selfless attitude toward meeting the needs of others.

Above all things, he wants every believer to embrace the mind of Jesus Christ and to think like He thinks—not just about your own interests, but about the interests of others.

*Others!* Such an important word in the body of Christ.

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**NEXT: Learn the power of genuine humility  
as it's formed in us by Christ.**

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7. Imagine you were a companion of Paul's. What from his example could you have learned about being selfless?

DO YOU FACE WHAT SEEM TO  
BE IMPOSSIBLE ODDS TODAY?

*Be courageous;*

GOD HAS NOT TURNED  
HIS FACE AWAY.



THRU the BIBLE

## LESSON 3

# HUMILITY PERSONIFIED



Begin with prayer



Read **Philippians 2:5-11**



Listen at [TTB.org/Philippians](https://www.TTB.org/Philippians) to **Philippians 2:5-8** and **Philippians 2:8-11**

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“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus” (2:5). What kind of mind did Jesus have? In a word: humble. Jesus thinks of Himself with humility. He is God, yet He left heaven’s glory where He is worshipped to come to a world that dismissed Him, locked Him out. It’s beyond human comprehension to understand what our Lord did for us. And He did it with delight, no reluctance. He held nothing back but willingly sacrificed for us.

And we can follow His example. In another letter, we are encouraged to walk “with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love” (Ephesians 4:2). To embrace genuine humility is to focus on meeting others’ needs—with delight, even when it requires personal sacrifice. That’s what Jesus Christ Himself did.

On our own we can try, but never live with such humility. Left to ourselves, we demand our rights, we insist on our needs being met, and we easily overlook those around us who need God’s grace. We need the Holy Spirit to form humility in us. Jesus showed us what it looks like to empty our lives of all self-serving bents and habits in order to serve other people.



First, Jesus left His Father to come to earth. Having existed throughout eternity past, He willingly came down to where we are without even a thought of what it would mean to leave the wonder and splendor of heaven. He willingly left His Father's presence and though He remained fully God, He became human so He could be with us and live as we live.

The second step down was when Jesus willingly surrendered His reputation. He didn't give it a second thought to becoming a lowly servant, not demanding people's respect and worship, but joyfully coming to serve. He became a human servant.

Jesus surrendered not His deity, but all the rights and prerogatives He deserved as God. He was 100 percent God when He was a baby sleeping helplessly in His mother's arms. At that moment He could have spoken this universe out of existence. Why? Because He's God. There was never a moment when He wasn't God. (Read John 1:1-3, 14.)

At the end of His earthly ministry, Jesus got His disciples together on His final night on earth and prayed an awesome prayer: "And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was" (John 17:5). He wasn't asking to be restored as God, but instead He asked His Father for *His glory* to be restored. Jesus gave up His glory to serve us as a human, and now He wanted it back.

In His coming, Jesus didn't cling to His rights and privileges. Not like us—we are always pushing for promotion, recognition, and applause. Pause for a moment and praise God for such a wonderful example Jesus is to us—He surrendered heaven so you could know His Father in heaven. He gave up all these rights so you could have a relationship with Him.

Next, the apostle Paul described how Jesus took this humble position to its absolute end in order to fulfill God's purposes. He willingly offered His own life as a sacrifice for our sins by dying on the cross. He chose to come, to be a simple servant, to make Himself a substitute for us. Even in disgrace. Even in all the weak limitations and constraints of the human body. Even with all the frailties of our human emotions. Even willingly as a bondservant, a slave, the lowest of human statuses.

Why? So He could take our place on a cruel cross and pay the penalty of our sin. Someone had to pay—either Him or us. Jesus died in our place.

Death is the most humiliating of all human experiences. Death is not natural. God didn't create humans to die. Death entered the human experience because of sin (read Romans 5:12-21). Death came because one man sinned; because of Adam, death passed down to all humans. Only one man, who had never sinned, could pay sin's price. Only Jesus could die for us.

Yet, when Christ came to this earth, He came so different from the rest of us. We long to live, but Jesus came to die. Why? In order that He might save you when you trust Him with your life. (See John 10:15, 17-18.)

Finally, Jesus stepped down from heaven into the most humiliating forms of death—death by crucifixion. Not only did He obey His Father's directive to die, but He died on the *cross*. This kind of death was an execution—like death through lethal injection, in the electric chair, or at the cruel aim of a firing squad. It was that kind of disgraceful death. He came from the highest glory to the lowest place of humiliation.

Why did He do it? He did it for us. He went to a selfless extreme to secure our spiritual destiny. He was the perfect example of being “others-oriented.”

Let Jesus Christ Himself be your example as to what your attitude should be. Do you share His willingness to give up your rights in order to serve others? This is what Jesus was thinking when He came and died for us.

## THE EXALTED CHRIST

But someday, God the Father will turn it all around. More than anything, His great desire is to put His Son, Jesus Christ, in His proper place. Because of Jesus' obedience to Him, God will make sure every creature in heaven and on earth will bow in worship before Jesus Christ. On that day, we will join with everything that has breath in calling out praise that Jesus—who once was a bondservant—now is Lord and master of all.

God the Father will make sure Jesus Christ will be glorified in the universe He created and be glorified on the earth where all His creation lives and, ironically, on the planet where mankind rebelled against Him.

God gave Him the highest exalted name, the name of Jesus Christ the Lord. His name will be revered in praise and in worship. This is the name in which we pray, the name that satisfies our deepest longings in prayer.

When Jesus' name is mentioned in glory, every person on earth—from every nation, every tribe, everyone from every language—will bow and praise Jesus Christ. We will worship and adore Him. And even those who will not worship Him, will bow in full surrender and submission to His name.

The name Jesus means “Savior” or “Deliverer.” Before His birth in Bethlehem, the angel visited Joseph in a dream and told him to call the baby, “Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.” This also fulfilled prophecy that a virgin will give birth to a son, and they should call Him, Immanuel, which means “God with us” (see Matthew 1:21-23). Before His Father could exalt Him, Jesus came to be with us, one of us.

Now God says Jesus' name would be put in its proper place—above everything else. His lifting up of Jesus would happen in heaven and on earth. Jesus will be Lord of both. At His name, every knee must bow, no matter where you live in the universe—in heaven, on earth, and everywhere in between.

In another of Paul's letters, we learn that in Jesus' victory on the cross, God puts everything in heaven and earth in its proper place—fitting together perfectly, working as it should (Colossians 1:20-21). Jesus' death redeems everything to how it should be. But why isn't hell mentioned as part of Christ's redeeming work?

Jesus brings redemption to heaven and earth—but there is no redemption in hell. Interestingly, even those chained in hell's darkness for eternity will admit that Jesus Christ is Lord—but not their Savior.

This scene prompts each of us to make certain Jesus Christ is Lord of our whole lives. It's easy to call Him “Lord,” but it takes a deep commitment to surrender every area of our lives to make Him Lord. In the end, it's not enough to say we follow Jesus, but we make Him Lord when we surrender control to Him and allow Him to lead (Matthew 7:21-23).

Talk with Jesus about this new picture of His proper place. Ask Him to show you any areas of your life that still need His rule and lead—those places you've insisted on clinging to and try to control. Let Him have all of you; surrender to Him your will and life. He is your exalted Savior. It's time to make Him your exalted Lord.

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**NEXT: Learn the practical ways you can show the mind of Christ in your relationships.**

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7. Think about that day in the future when all of heaven and earth will worship Jesus. What do you think it will be like when believers from east, west, past, present, and future come together to worship their Savior?



## LESSON 4

# FAITH'S WORKOUT



Begin with prayer



Read **Philippians 2:12–3:9**



Listen at [TTB.org/Philippians](https://www.TTB.org/Philippians) to **Philippians 2:12-26**, **Philippians 2:25–3:1**, **Philippians 3:2-6**, and **Philippians 3:7-14**

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*Attitude is everything*—that’s what we learn from Jesus’ example. And it should be for us, too. When Paul wrote, *Think like Jesus thinks*, he pointed us to Jesus’ humble attitude.

But then we get this curious instruction—we are to “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (2:12). What does that mean? What does that look like?

*Don’t be selfish, Paul said. Don’t allow constant complaining, grumbling toward each other, and petty arguments be part of your lives. Instead, let those negative attitudes (and many others) give way to a humility like Jesus showed us. Be like a light in a dark world. You’ve got the word of life—so live like it!* (See 2:12-16.)

With attitudes like that on display in the lives of his friends at Philippi, Paul smiled. His ministry among them had been time well spent. The best kind of life, we learn, is lived in sacrifice and service as Christians joyfully work together for the gospel (2:16-18).

## MODELS OF HUMILITY

Though Paul sits confined to a prison cell as he writes this letter, his love for those Philippian believers only deepens. He wants to see them and serve them as he had done in the past. He also wants them to have an accurate report of his situation. So, instead of him visiting them himself, he sends Timothy—the young man in whom he has invested so much of his ministry. Paul trusts Timothy because he is a man of solid character, who shares Paul's selfless desire to make much of Jesus Christ. Like Paul, Timothy genuinely cares for the spiritual well-being of God's people.

Timothy lives like Jesus in His grace and humility. He shares Paul's passion for the gospel, and—in Paul's mind—has become a worthy partner in ministering to the Philippian church.

Paul's high marks for Timothy remind all of us who follow Christ how to respect and respond to people who serve God with humility and at great personal sacrifice. You've known people who have modeled that for you, right? Take a moment right now and thank the Lord for those among you who serve like Jesus with humility and integrity. Ask the Lord to bless their lives and ministries and to provide for their needs.

Epaphroditus is another Christian, the pastor of the church in Philippi, who follows Jesus' humble example. He and Paul and Timothy are spiritual "brothers," serving the Lord together.

Though Paul founded the church at Philippi, Epaphroditus never showed jealousy or envy of Paul's ministry. Like Timothy, Epaphroditus demonstrates sincere humility and serves the Philippian church at great personal risk to his own health. In fact, Epaphroditus nearly died serving Christ on their behalf, yet God preserved His life.

When Epaphroditus got deathly ill, word reached the Philippian church. That news grieved them. Yet, when he received word back that the church was mourning for him because of his illness, he nearly had a fatal relapse. God mercifully healed him, which was a huge relief not only to Paul personally but also to the Philippian believers.

Paul loves and respects this pastor from Philippi. We should all respect the one who teaches God's Word to us. If he or she has a gift of teaching which God uses in your life, both the gift and the teacher should be respected.

That said, we should focus our primary attention on God's Word and not the person. Epaphroditus models the mind of Christ as one who would pay any price—even death—to teach others this message of grace.

When we yield to God's Spirit at work in our lives, He produces the kind of humility that serves others and helps us think like Jesus. Oh, how desperately we need to yield humbly to God's Spirit at work in us today.

## ENEMIES OF TRUTH

In sharp contrast to Timothy and Epaphroditus, who lived like Jesus and served others like Jesus did, Paul calls out another group of people who threaten the body of Christ with more self-serving and insidious ways. As a shepherd, Paul not only loves the Philippians, he watches out for their souls.

Though Paul writes this letter to urge the Philippians to rejoice in all they'd come to experience from their relationship with Christ, he also warns them of a serious threat from people he calls "dogs" and "evil workers" (3:2). These were the false Judaizers trying to lure the Philippians back to an old system of following Old Testament Law by insisting they be circumcised.

Paul passionately defends against that sort of false, misguided focus on keeping religious rules. In his past, Paul had taken first place in religious zeal. And he isn't shy in repeating all his "religious qualifications." No one had earned more merit badges than Paul. He was the Hebrew of Hebrews, a zealous Pharisee. He had defended the Law to the point of death.

Now, Paul refuses to boast about anything other than His relationship with Jesus Christ, which he had received, not by worth of his own, but as a free gift of grace from the Lord. Remember? That's the mind of Christ!

Instead, the wise pastor warns the Philippians about the dangers posed by people who constantly comfort them but don't give them the Word of God. Christians in our day must also guard against such shallow preaching and teaching. Every culture wants to be trendy and fashionable rather than present only what God's Word says is truth. We're tempted to water down the truth and deliver a safe message that makes people simply feel better about themselves.

If you're a child of God, a follower of Jesus Christ, don't put any confidence in the way you lived before you came to Jesus Christ. Trust His work alone to save you and keep you. Don't look to yourself to accomplish anything that would qualify you spiritually or religiously for salvation. You can't live

the Christian life by relying on your own wisdom or smarts. None of those things amount to any spiritual value when it comes to pleasing God. It must be Christ *in* us.

These legalizers follow Paul throughout his missionary journeys and hassle new believers about the importance of keeping all the requirements of the Old Testament. They even remain among the new Christians long after Paul leaves in order to gain a foothold in their gatherings and try to lead them away from the truth. But Paul passionately defends the gospel and warns them—and us—against trusting anything other than Jesus Christ alone and His work on our behalf to secure our life in God.

Paul's conversion to Christianity was not just an experience of a moment. He has been completely changed from being a religious fanatic, bent on doing the will of God, to becoming perhaps the most humble, effective spokesperson for Christ the world has ever known.

Many people think you can go to some altar and have an experience, see a vision, and be carried to the heights of religious ecstasy. But that's not true. When you come to faith in Jesus Christ, that experience and all it includes remains with you and takes deep root in your mind and your soul. It's not all emotion. Although it happens in a moment of time, that new relationship continues for a lifetime. The process of growing deeper in your love for Jesus and becoming more like Him may include an emotional experience, but—more importantly—it's a daily walk in dependence on Him and His Spirit.

Do you know God that way? Have you turned away from trusting in your own ability or a personal understanding of what it means to live a good life? Have you fully put your faith in what Jesus Christ did for you? That's when you will be truly saved.

Paul feels so strongly about the importance of that truth he sums up his own personal experience of what it means to be saved. He said nothing could compare to what it's like to know Jesus Christ as Lord. Nothing is worth as much, nothing he could bring to the relationship could ever be enough, no amount of religious practices could measure up to what Jesus' righteousness gives him before God.

Paul has long given up on trying to make himself right with God. He instead has learned to throw himself completely on Jesus' mercy and to receive the true righteousness only Jesus could offer—a righteousness we can receive by faith, not in ourselves, but because of our relationship with Jesus Christ alone.

God's Word asks of you: *In what or in whom are you trusting for your salvation?* If you are trusting in yourself or in your own brand of religion, or if you are trying to please God by living a good life or keeping a set of religious rules, you won't measure up to God's standard. No one can. That's why you need Jesus.

We can trust fully in Christ alone for not only our salvation, but for the daily motivation and ability to "work out" our salvation in humble obedience to God's Word. Salvation remains God's gift of grace to anyone who recognizes their need for a Savior and who calls on God in faith. Have you done that? Will you? He will be faithful not only to begin "a good work in you" but also to "complete it until the day of Jesus Christ" (1:6).

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**NEXT: Discover how the real goal in life is to know  
Jesus intimately and experience His power.**

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7. Imagine you were a companion of Paul and Timothy. How do you think you would describe their relationship?

## LESSON 5

# HELP FOR WORRIERS



Begin with prayer



Read **Philippians 3:10–4:3**



Listen at [TTB.org/Philippians](https://www.TTB.org/Philippians) to **Philippians 3:7-14**, **Philippians 3:15-20**, and **Philippians 3:20–4:3**

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Paul's personal encounter with Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus brought him to his knees, literally, and in his heart (see Acts 9:1-6). Under the Law, the once Jewish fanatic was willing to go to Damascus to stamp out the followers of Christ and try singlehandedly to squash Christianity's rapid growth across the known world.

But everything changed for Paul after Jesus laid him out. Paul surrendered his life to boldly proclaim salvation through grace and by faith alone in Jesus. His life was transformed. Grace changed everything. Once he tasted the freedom of grace's refreshing stream, he wanted more power and a deeper intimacy with the risen Jesus. He didn't just want to meet Jesus, he wanted to know Him—even if that meant suffering just as Christ had suffered for him.

That passion for intimacy with Jesus fueled his message to the Philippians and to us today to also experience the power of the Holy Spirit, a far greater source of strength than any human effort. Salvation isn't just an experience of a moment. Nor is it about that mountaintop experience where you're up in the clouds. Conversion is something that stays with you. It may happen in a moment, but it continues on. Sanctification is a walk right down here, day by day and moment by moment.

Paul said that when he came to Jesus Christ, he wanted more and more of Him. Jesus became first in his thinking. Paul said in effect, *All the things I counted on to make me a religious man, I no longer count on them. What I thought before was a prized possession, I now think is dung. When I was converted, I lost my religion and found Jesus Christ. A revolution has taken place in my soul* (3:7-9).

## TAKING AIM AT HEAVEN

We can know Jesus more and more and reach a level of spiritual maturity he called “perfection.” He didn’t mean perfection as we would understand it today—but rather it means a completely, distraction-free nearness to Jesus that lasts all the way to heaven. We can *really* know Jesus in the fullest possible way, but that level of spiritual experience means leaving everything from our past behind us—worth it all, if that means we can know Jesus more! Is that your aim, too? Not only to believe in Jesus but to pursue Him with everything in you—like an Olympic athlete going for the gold?

This aim to know Jesus deeply, to running a race where we can win the ultimate prize—intimacy with Jesus and an eternity with Him—is the “upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (3:14). What could be a higher calling in our lives than to know Jesus like that?

## PURSUE JESUS

Paul holds himself up, humbly, as an example for us to follow. He wants us to pursue Jesus like he did—with a longing to go deep in our awareness of Him, desire for an experience of His power that helps us to live, and a commitment to suffer for His name. The promise of eternal life, a wonderful eternal intimacy with Jesus in heaven, is the goal for all who follow Him to the end.

Some people, then and now, really hate the gospel and go to great lengths to stop the spread of Christianity. Paul calls them “enemies of the cross of Christ” (3:18) because of their heartless intimidation of his friends. These enemies make us weep, as you think about the damage their evil causes.

These enemies of the cross have no appetite for grace—they only gorge themselves on the foolish indulgence of sinful and evil ends. Grace always has enemies. You may have people like that in your life. Jesus calls you to resist them in His name and continue to run the race with the assurance of

the prize of eternal life waiting for anyone who keeps their focus on Him. Someday, you will not only be with Him, you will be *like* Him! That's the prize for running the race of faith.

## SOMEDAY—A NEW BODY

As we battle on in the Christian life, we feel the pain of our own daily struggles against sinful attitudes, thoughts, and actions. Someday, when we see Jesus face to face, He will transform our earthly bodies into glorious, redeemed, heavenly bodies. No more pain, no more aches and strains, no more temptations to sin physically with our bodies. Our hope is set squarely on Jesus and a future day when God transforms us to be like Him. There's far more to life for us ahead. Paul fixes his hope on heaven as he endures the stormy times here—especially true as he writes this letter from prison.

What is your heart set on for the future? Are you looking to Jesus and the promise of spending an eternity with Him? We have so much more to look forward to than anything we experience on earth. In fact, Paul struggles to keep his feet planted on earth while his heart soars toward heavenly things. Do you see your earthly life through the lens of heaven? You can have that mindset even as we live temporarily in this world.

How can we deal with daily worries and anxious thoughts? Prayer.

Thankfully, these heavenly lessons come with practical help in coping with life's natural anxieties. For the Philippians, this urge to pray came at a time of increasing persecution. No doubt they felt a heightened anxiety about living for Jesus in desperate times. So, Paul urges them to pray.

*Stand firm in the Lord. Don't lose heart in the face of circumstances. When you face difficult times, be encouraged in your faith. Do all you can to reach unity in Jesus among you. Get along with each other. Resolve whatever differences between you so you can experience God's grace offered to you in Jesus Christ.* In all of it, as a congregation and individually in your relationships with one another, live in harmony based on your common faith in Jesus Christ (see 4:1-7).

If we do this, we will know pure joy. Joy is the goal, not gloom and despair the way many experience church life. The goal is to know the pure joy of a deep relationship with Jesus so we don't give in to the temptation to despair. In fact, God commands us to "rejoice in the Lord always" (4:4). Over and over, joy should prevail no matter the circumstances. Whether it's

dark or bright, difficult or sublime, chock full of trouble or lined with blues skies and smooth sailing, the believer's heart can rejoice. What a vision for our lives.

Do you follow your negative emotions or painful thoughts when life crowds in, or do you determine to find your joy in Jesus? That's an important question for anyone who trusts God. We have a unique opportunity—instead of slipping into depression and despair—to show the world Jesus' gentleness (4:5). In other words, our joyful, Spirit-filled response to trouble can shine the light of Jesus to unbelievers around us. That's why our response as followers of Jesus to our own predicaments can carry such enormous impact—especially when people see the joy of the Lord in us.

The Christian life is powerless without joy. One who does not experience the joy of the Lord has no power at all. This joy only comes from our walk with Jesus and from the love we share with each other (4:1-4).

We can also trade our anxieties for the peace that comes from knowing Jesus.

The key to turning anxiety into peace is prayer. Tell the Lord about everything, instead of endlessly worrying over things you can't control or change. For all followers of Jesus, resisting anxious thoughts is not an option; it's a command. The Lord not only commands His children to rejoice in our circumstances, He also commands us to resist the natural tendency to fret and worry about them and instead let thanksgiving come out of our mouths.

Is that your experience? Is that how you respond to trouble in your life or to those situations that fall well beyond your control? So many hours and valuable energy are wasted every day by Christians who, for whatever reason, fail to see this connection between prayer and worry. Instead of worrying about everything (and who doesn't do that from time to time?), pray about everything. That's where the peace comes from.

This powerful peace not only guards your emotions (your heart) but also places a protective shield around your thoughts. Wouldn't you rather think peaceful thoughts instead of anxious ones? Prayer is the answer—and the joy of the Lord won't follow far behind the prayers.

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**NEXT: One more challenge for the people God loves.**

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## LESSON 5



## FOR DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

1. It may not be as dramatic as what happened to Paul, but how has grace transformed your life?
2. Why do you think it is so much easier to focus on spiritual experiences than maturity?
3. God doesn't just want to know us; He wants us to strive to know Him intimately. How can this idea change our thoughts and actions?

4. The battle against sin can be exhausting. How can the realization of a future heavenly body bring us hope today?

5. What difference could it make in your attitude if you saw your earthly life more through the lens of heaven?

6. How is standing firm related to experiencing joy in the Christian life?



7. Imagine you could hear God verbally responding to your prayers. What do you think He would say? And how would that change your prayer life?



## *Thankfulness*

IS NOT A RESULT OF OUR  
PRAYERS BEING ANSWERED,  
BUT THANKFULNESS  
IS WHAT *guides us*  
TO PRAYER IN THE  
FIRST PLACE.



THRU the BIBLE

## LESSON 6

# A GRACEFUL DISMOUNT



Begin with prayer



Read **Philippians 4:4-23**



Listen at [TTB.org/Philippians](https://www.TTB.org/Philippians) to **Philippians 4:4-6**, **Philippians 4:6-7**, **Philippians 4:8-13**, and **Philippians 4:13-23**

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The Lord Jesus could come back at any moment. Every day could be the day of His return. Isn't that a great reminder to start every morning?

This letter to the Philippians urges us to live with that expectation. If we think Jesus could return at any moment, it would sharpen our focus, realign our priorities, and purify our thoughts and actions.

And worry? It would be a thing of the past. Since the battle against worry is primarily a mental battle, so much is won or lost in the mind. We can control what we think about and then what emotions follow by bringing everything to Jesus in prayer. Prayer is the secret of power.

We can bring everything in our lives to the Lord in prayer. He wants us to trust Him so that we worry about *nothing* and pray about *everything*. And when we pray, we should do so with an attitude of “thankfulness,” which will in turn usher in a replacement for worry—the overwhelming peace of God (4:6-7).

Thankfulness is not a result of our prayers being answered, but thankfulness is what guides us to prayer in the first place. As a result, the peace of God flows into our anxious minds and brings relief and calm.

The Bible describes other kinds of peace, too. When Jesus returns, a peace will blanket the world. God assures us in His Word that someday peace will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea. It will come through the person of Christ, the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6). The Bible also describes a spiritual peace, when the human heart is reconciled to God through faith in Jesus Christ (Romans 5:1). Then there is the peace of *tranquility*—like the calm that covers a lake following a storm. Jesus promised His disciples His peace that would come over their hearts as they trusted Him (John 14:27). The peace of Jesus overcomes anxious thoughts and fear and comes when we turn to Him in prayer.

If joy is the *source* of power, prayer is the *secret* of peace.

This battle for peace is fought in the mind. Focus your thoughts on things honoring to Jesus. Meditate on things true, moral, reputable, authentic, compelling, gracious—the best, not the worst; the beautiful, not the ugly; things to praise, not things to malign. How easily we can pollute our thoughts with things that bring us down, lead us away from purity and truth, and cause more and more anxiety. A constant stream of cultural input, though at times appealing, only further draws our attention away from those things God has given to us to raise our thoughts to Him and to His Son, Jesus. In Jesus, everything worthy and pure, wholesome and praiseworthy, honorable and true, resides. So why not think about Jesus and those things that He teaches us to admire and consume? And just like prayer brings a peace over our worry-ridden lives, so does focusing on things that are worthy of Jesus. Anxiety comes when we focus on the unwholesome things around us, filling our minds with sinful images, unholy lyrics, or soiled messaging from a society that despises anything related to Jesus. How much better to experience the peace of Christ when we fix our minds on and meditate on His words, His truth, and His holiness and majesty (Isaiah 6:1-3).

We need a place to go mentally when our worries threaten our confidence in the Lord. Simply put, we need a safe, peaceful sanctuary for our minds. Doesn't that sound like a good place to be? That sanctuary is Jesus. We need something to think about that will clean up our minds. That place where we can meditate on Jesus is the Word. The Word is like a mirror shining back to us the person and glory of Jesus—and as we meditate on Him, we are changed, our thoughts purified, and our minds renewed (2 Corinthians 3:18). The only way you can see the living Christ is in the Word of God. As you look at Him there, He provides a freedom and a growth you can't come by any other way.

When Paul was writing this, he reminded the Philippians they could follow his example in their quest to focus on things honorable to the Lord. At first glance, it sounds like Paul was full of himself. Instead, though, he humbly suggests that the things he is teaching and preaching are a reliable foundation on which to build their own lives. Together they can bring praise and glory to Jesus. Do you have someone the Lord has placed in your life that consistently lives a life worth following? No doubt you have several and they, too—like the Word—are gifts from the Lord to you just as Paul was to the Philippian believers. When your relationship honors Jesus, it's a special one to be sure.

When the Philippians heard about Paul's imprisonment, they sent him a generous gift, grateful for the opportunity to show him how much they loved him. Paul was so encouraged and grateful that he wrote them this loving thank you note.

For two years the church in Philippi had lost touch with Paul. They didn't know where he was after he had been arrested in Jerusalem and then put in prison. The next time they heard about him, he had been transferred to a prison in Rome. Through Epaphroditus, they had apologized to Paul for losing touch and not providing him financial support. Paul never doubted their faithfulness to the work or to him personally.

Even this thought became a teaching moment for this gracious, seasoned pastor. He explained to the Philippians how he has learned—through both times of financial need and in those times when he had plenty—to be content in knowing Jesus. Jesus was enough for Paul, regardless of his financial situation. How encouraging is that! Do you have that same attitude toward your situation? Whether you're in a pinch or living well, your happiness comes from knowing Jesus intimately. That's what Paul meant by being content.

Paul had not asked his friends for financial help nor sent any request for support. He only trusted the Lord, all the while knowing Jesus would sustain in good times or in times of financial hardship. Paul had gone through everything in his ministry. He had gone hungry, he had been left for dead, he had even spent a few days in the ocean after his ship ran aground. That's why Paul's encouragement carried weight with his friends. They knew he had learned how to be full and how to be hungry, both to be flush as well as to suffer need (4:12). And it was no secret how he did it. Remember: It was never about Paul, and it was *always* about Jesus. He told the Philippians he

could endure any situation because of the strength he possessed from Jesus (4:13). That kind of Jesus-centered thinking is really freeing, isn't it? You don't have to let your circumstances or your needs—good or bad—dictate your thoughts and emotions. Over and over, Jesus proves He's enough! That's the message of Philippians. And being able to share that joy in Jesus with other believers—that was just icing on the cake for Paul.

That's what Paul had in mind when wrote of the “fruit” he wants the Philippians to experience (4:17). The Philippians joined their hearts to Paul through their prayers for him and through their faithful giving to his ministry. Their thoughtfulness reminded Paul of incense on the altar and how its sweet smell drifted up to God. Same as now, a Christian's generosity to God when given in the right spirit, is more than just making a donation or taking up a collection. It is an offering, an aroma of a sweet smell to God. It pleases God when it comes from a heart of faith (4:18).

Thinking of their sacrifice to supply his need, Paul assures his friends how God would supply all their needs, too. He didn't promise them God would meet all their *wants*, but all their *needs*. More than the money, the Philippians' financial faithfulness was to Paul an outward expression of an inner work of Jesus in their lives. They stood out as shining examples of sacrificial faith and joyful generosity among all the churches Paul served in Macedonia—they were to him his most prized congregation, and he blessed them for it (4:19).

Is Jesus' work in your life coming out in real ways? Do you happily share your resources—financial and otherwise—with others, particularly those serving the gospel? A byproduct of the generosity of Jesus in your life would be your sharing His goodness to others in need. That's the way of Jesus. What better way to demonstrate your love and admiration, for instance, for Christians serving Jesus in difficult places around the world, than to support them financially and with your prayers?

Paul finished his letter of love to his dear friends at Philippi with a heart filled with praise to God and an affectionate greeting to them from all the brothers and sisters who knew Jesus in Rome. This must have been a most exciting greeting from Paul as he closed his letter—for the Philippian believers to know they had brand-new brothers and sisters in Christ in Rome and even among royalty. How's that for the fruit of their faithfulness?! Paul was thrilled to see so many people come to know Jesus in Rome and equally thrilled to tell the praying Philippians about it.

Paul closes the letter with, “Now to our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen” (4:20).

Does God get the glory in this letter of joy? Yes, He does—every time you receive and experience God’s grace yourself.

*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you, amen.*








7. If you could go back in time to try and encourage the Philippian church in their suffering, what would you say to them?

A photograph of two men, one Black and one white, smiling and talking to each other outdoors. They are gesturing with their hands as if in conversation. The background is slightly blurred, showing other people in a park-like setting.

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