

NARRABEEN BAPTIST CHURCH 2023

ENGAGING TOGETHER

PHILIPPIANS BIBLE STUDY SERIES

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9 WEEK STUDY GUIDE



Introduction

Philippians is a short but incredibly powerful and encouraging letter that Paul writes while he is in prison in Rome in approximately 62AD.

In Acts 16:9, Paul has a vision about a man from Macedonia beckoning him to come and preach the good news there. Paul immediately responds and sets sail and arrives in Philippi. It was a small town located in the Greco-Macedonian coast (currently NE Greece) that was on a maritime trade route. A woman named Lydia became the first person in that town to believe in Jesus and after some time there, a church was planted, the first church born on European soil. Paul visited this church community a few more times in person and probably maintained regular communication with them. In his prison cell, it was this church that first came to his mind to write to and encourage. It is a book (as we'll uncover) about joy and unity, especially through difficult circumstances.

As we study this ancient letter of Paul's, we want to dig deep and learn what these themes of joy and unity mean for us, in our church community and world today. In a world that is heavily divisive, where many face depression as a daily reality, we want to be mindful of how we can experience Paul's countercultural themes. What would NBC look like if we, despite all our differences, were a unified community? How can we love one another and our neighbours so much that it becomes apparent to all? And how can we experience joy despite our pain and struggles and the brokenness that permeates our world? This is what we hope you will wrestle with as we explore Philippians together.

Just a note on this study. Each week is divided into three parts: *Read, Reflect* and *Respond*. We think this is a helpful way to approach Scripture. We want to read well the passage before us and immerse ourselves in it – the words, phrases, themes and culture so it becomes part of us. We then want to reflect, to work out why it's here and what it means; to ask hard questions of the text so we can hear what God's Spirit is saying to us. And we also want to respond. Reading and reflecting on God's Word is vitally important... but it's pointless if we don't do anything with it. We want to seek to apply, in real and measurable ways, how to live these words out in our daily lives and in the world we inhabit.

Our prayer for you and our church is that as we dive into Philippians, God's Word will soak into you, that you will wrestle with it to discover what it says and means, and that you will then do something with it, living it out the joy and unity Paul exclaims is ours in Jesus!


WEEK ONE

READ

PHILIPPIANS 1:1-11


REFLECT

Verses 1-11 of chapter 1 function as a common salutation that was used in Greco-Roman letters. These salutations served several purposes. First, it introduced the author of the letter and highlighted their qualifications or prime characteristics. Second, it addressed who the recipients of the letter were. Third, it contained a greeting to or blessing over the reader. And finally, it summarized in a few sentences what the main message of the letter was going to address.


 How do you see these four parts of ancient letter writing in these verses? Who is it from? To? What blessing is said over the recipients? What is the summary or purpose of the letter?

Grace & Peace


Typical Greco-Roman letters would contain the word *chairein*, a Greek word that simply means “greetings”. In many of the New Testament letters, this common word was hijacked with one of its cognate forms: *charis*, which means “grace”. Paul’s understanding of *charis* is more than a greeting or a hello, but a prayer and blessing that his recipients will experience God’s grace – the undeserved gift of God’s love. But Paul doesn’t end his greeting there. He also adds the word “peace”. He does this because the early church would have consisted of both Gentile (non-Jewish) and Jewish believers in Jesus. For the Jewish person, the word “peace” (Hebrew *shalom*) encapsulated the pinnacle of faith: wholeness with God, with others, with the world and with oneself. So, these two words, grace and peace, are not just nice words Paul happens to like, but deeply significant truths he wants the church to receive and experience.

 Why does Paul love this church so much? How does he describe them?

Philippians is often referred to as Paul's "joyful" letter. The words "joy," "joyful," or "rejoice" occur 16 times (out of a total of 104 verses). Joy is one of Paul's main themes in this letter. Strangely, this joy that Paul experiences and wants to share with this church community comes while he is in prison, in chains, awaiting what will likely be a death sentence.

 What would prompt Paul to experience such joy in the midst of his miserable situation? What part does this church play in Paul's experience of joy?

In verses 9-11, Paul informs the church of the purpose (or summary) of what this letter is about.

 In these verses, why is Paul writing this letter to this church? What's his purpose?

This purpose is further highlighted by the chiasmic structure of Philippians 1:1-11. A chiasm is a literary device where parts of a sentence match one another, usually in order to highlight the sentence contained in the middle. Here's what this chiasm looks like in these verses:

A (1:1-2) *grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*


B (1:3-4) *my every prayer for all of you...*


C (1:5-6) *He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion*


B' (1:7-8) *I should think this way about all of you...*


A' (1:9-11) *filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God. (1:11)*

By looking at the phrases and words Paul uses, A (verses 1-2) are matched with A' (verses 9-11), B (verses 3-4) are matched with B' (verses 7-8), which leaves C as the "highlight" of this section. Just as Paul prays that their love for God will grow, he indicates (in verses 5-6) that this is all part of God's good work continuing in the lives of this church community.


 According to Paul, how does his purpose for the letter (verses 9-11) fulfill the highlight of this section about God's carrying on a good work in the church?


 What does “abounding more and more in knowledge and depth of insight” have to do with Paul’s encouragement to “love”? Wouldn’t have it been easier to say, “Just grow in love”?


 Why is discernment so important for Paul?

 What do you think “filled with the fruit of righteousness” means?

RESPOND.

 What was something new you learned today or what was something that encouraged you?

 If this letter was addressed to YOU (insert your name into Paul’s salutation), how does that change how you view these verses? What might God be saying to YOU today through this letter?

 What is one action step you can apply in your life this week based on what you’ve read and reflected on? What needs to change? What needs to start? What needs to stop? What needs to continue? How will you measure your success in applying these verses to your life this week?


WEEK TWO


READ

ACTS 28:16-20 & PHILIPPIANS 1:12-26

REFLECT

As we reflected on last week, Paul is in prison in Rome for proclaiming the good news about Jesus. After a series of trials in the region of Caesarea (in northwest Israel), Paul gets deported to Rome to stand trial before Caesar. It is here he is visited by various Christian brothers and sisters and from here that many of his letters are written and sent out to various churches and individuals.


 Why does Paul view his imprisonment as a good thing according to verses 12-14?

 Why in the world would things like imprisonment and persecution (and even death) make Christians more confident and bolder instead of less? Shouldn't it be the opposite?

 Why is it that throughout history, in times of persecution, the church has grown instead of shrunk?

What you talking 'bout, Paul?


Verses 15-18 seem a bit strange to us, especially given the overall joyful nature of the rest of the letter. Paul moves from talking about how his imprisonment has been helpful for advancing the kingdom to discussing how others are taking advantage of Paul's circumstances. What does he mean? Unlike his other letters where Paul criticized certain people for preaching a false gospel, he says nothing of the kind here. Instead, these people are preaching the truth about Jesus, but also taking a dig at Paul. Again, from many of his letters and throughout the book of Acts, Paul was a prominent but controversial figure in the early church. After he planted the church in Corinth, other pastors led the church after Paul left and apparently certain groups within the church created sub-divisions of the "pro-Paul" group and the "pro-Apollos" group. It seems the same is happening here. Because of whom he was, other Christians leaders probably said Paul was getting what he deserved or sought to assert their authority in Paul's absence. Unfortunately, these relational rivalries which began as soon as the church was born still happen today!

 Despite rubbing salt in Paul's wounds because of his situation, what is Paul's perspective on what is happening around him (see verse 18)?

In verses 20-26, Paul outlines his greatest struggle while in prison.

 What is Paul's struggle?

For many followers of Christ, this same struggle is present in our hearts and minds. Those who struggle physically or mentally or even those who feel overwhelmed by the brokenness of the world often find themselves at this same crossroad. They ask the question – wouldn't it be better to be united with Jesus in heaven? Why am I still here?

 How does Paul answer this question (sees verse 21)? What do you think he means by this?


Paul knows the decision is not his to make – his future, whether it be life and freedom or death and heaven are in God's hands.


What does Paul then do, knowing that all control is in God's hands and not his own?

RESPOND.

Here we see Paul (and those around him) being spurred on to proclaim the gospel boldly in spite of the persecution they were or might face. This reality only encouraged them to live their faith out loud even more. Most of us have never and will never face any real persecution the way they did.

Why is it that persecuted believers share the Jesus more boldly and confidently AND experience more joy than those of us who suffer little to no persecution at all? What does this say about them? What does it say about us?

 Do you fall into the trap of formulating your own Christian sub-group? Do you judge people who value certain elements of the Christian life that you don't value (social justice, or welcoming immigrants, for example)? Do you look down on other Christians who have different opinions about theological or cultural matters than you (Calvinist vs Arminian or views on LGBTQ, for example)? Do you only show up when a certain topic is talked about or a certain preacher preaches? How can we, despite these differences, maintain unity and demonstrate love for one another?

 Do you ever struggle with wanting to be with Jesus now? How can we both hold onto the hope of heaven AND continue to live faithfully in the here and now?


WEEK THREE

READ


PHILIPPIANS 1:27-24


REFLECT


Paul does not know what is going to happen to the church or himself in the immediate future. He is in chains and (unbeknownst to him) awaiting death. The church is trying to thrive and grow in a world that is hostile to believers in Jesus. Everything is uncertain. Yet Paul does not toss his hands in the air and wish for the best. He issues some instructions that are relevant in both times of certainty and uncertainty.

 What do you think Paul means when he says to “conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ”?


The phrase “conduct yourselves” is the Greek word *politeusthe*, where we get the English word “politics” from. The Greek word *polis* simply means “city”. A more direct translation of this word might read “Citizen yourselves” or “live in your city as” worthy of the gospel of Jesus. For Paul, our faith is meant to be lived out publicly, in the public square, in our cities, as citizens of this world, not just behind closed doors or within church buildings.

 How might this understanding of this word change how we interpret this verse? What does it look like to live lives worthy of the gospel publicly?

 What three-fold hope does Paul have for this church community (in verses 27b-28a)?

 What does it mean to stand firm in one Spirit?

The phrase “striving together” is the Greek word *synathlountes*, where we get the word “athlete” or “athletics” from. The picture he paints is a team working together, struggling together in competition for the ultimate prize. You might think of a team at the Olympics or the World Cup, for example.

 What does Paul hope we strive/athlete ourselves for?

Paul then notes that when we do this, we will face hardship and resistance. In fact, he claims “it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him.” That’s a bold statement.



What does Paul mean by that verse? Do you suffer for Christ? If so, how? If not, why not?

Philippians 2 is actually one giant run-on sentence in the original Greek manuscript. In it there are a ton of unique words and words Paul often repeats in his writings. Whenever we see either unique words or repeated words, we are meant to pay attention. Here are some explanations of these words that bear some consideration:

“If you have any encouragement” – the word for “encouragement” is the Greek word *paraclesis*. This is the same word John uses to describe the Holy Spirit in John 14-16. It literally means *“one who stands alongside”* – which is what an encourager does.

“if any comfort from his love” – the word “comfort” means to *“speak alongside”*, as in a person who whispers in your ear when you’re scared or afraid

“if any common sharing” – this is the Greek word *koinonia*, which is usually translated as *“fellowship”*. It means to hold nothing back from one another

“if any tenderness and compassion” – Paul uses here the Greek word (my favourite word) *splanchnon* which translates as *“guts”* or *“innards”*. To the Greek mind, your guts was the location of your deepest feelings


“do nothing out of vain conceit” – here we find the word *kenodoxos*, which simply means *“empty glory”*. It means puffing yourself up for no reason at all with no basis at all.

“humility” does not mean think lowly of yourself. It means power that is contained. Like Jesus, it means being a somebody and being powerful, but willingly choosing to serve and be sacrificial instead.


RESPOND.





Does Paul’s words match your life? Why or why not?

 Does Paul’s picture of the church community match what Narrabeen Baptist Church looks like? Why or why not? Where do we get this right? Where do we need to continue to grow?

Jesus agrees with Paul when he tells his followers that if they believe in and live for him, they will face hardship and persecution. Why do you think both Jesus and Paul say this? Do you think it is possible to live as a Christian and NOT face some sort of persecution or resistance?

 What do you need to work on in your own life to be like-minded, having the same love, being one in Spirit and in mind with your fellow believers?

 What areas of your life do you need to display humility (remember this means power contained, not self-deprecation)?

 How can you this week value another person more than yourself? Who will it be and how will you do it?

WEEK FOUR

READ

PHILIPPIANS 2:5-11

REFLECT

These few verses may be one of the first Christian hymns. The phrasing and the way it is written indicate that these are not mere sentences about Jesus that Paul writes, but likely an early song that was passed down from generation to generation. For the Jewish people, as well as those in the early church community, hymns and songs were simple and memorable ways to pass down theological truths. This song springs from Paul’s earlier point (made in verses 1-4) about the church being like-minded, loving toward one another and humble, putting others ahead of themselves.

There is one Greek word that connects the earlier section to this one – it’s the word *phroneo*. This one word is translated in different ways: “be like-minded” (v. 2a), “being of one mind” (v. 2b) and “have the same mindset” (v. 5). Why is our mind so important in framing out we treat one another? Shouldn’t our actions come first?

There are some faith traditions (Islam, Jehovah's Witnesses, for example) that argue Jesus is NOT God, merely sent by God. How does Paul refute that argument here? What does being "in very nature God" actually mean?

What do you think Paul means when he says of Jesus, "he did not consider equality with God as something to be used to his own advantage"? How do we see this play out in Jesus' life?

Nothing but Greek!

The phrase "he made himself nothing" is actually a similar version of a word Paul has used before in this chapter. In verse 3, Paul instructs the church to do nothing out of "vain conceit". That phrase is actually two Greek words combined: *keno* (which means "empty" and *doxa* which means "glory." When describing Jesus, a similar construction happens. "Made himself nothing" is the same Greek word *keno* ("empty"). So Paul, by contrasting examples, shows the proper way to live: we aren't to glorify ourselves based on empty boasting, but are to empty ourselves of anything we might think we can boast about. This is how Jesus lived. God then *doxa* (glorifies) Jesus to the highest place because of this emptying.



How did Jesus "make himself nothing" or "empty himself" of his Godhood?




On a scale of 1-10, with 1 being "Not humble at all" and 10 being "The ultimate act of humility", how would you rank Jesus' choice to descend from heavenly splendour to human suffering? What picture does this give us of the humility of God?





What picture does it give us of the extreme that God chose to go to win us back?



Have you ever been so committed to something that you would accomplish it "even to the point of death"?


 Why does Paul have to add “even to death on a cross?” Isn’t being obedient to death enough?


 What happens to Jesus upon his sacrificial death?


 How is the statement about every knee bowing and tongue acknowledging Jesus Christ is Lord extremely counter-cultural and dangerous in that day and age?


RESPOND.

This hymn not only tells us about the very nature and character of Jesus, but Paul uses this movement (from glory to death and back to glory again) as the example we ought to follow in our relationships with one another.

 How have you seen and/or experienced someone in the church community do this? Be descriptive.

 An honest self-assessment – when you associate with your Christian sisters and brothers, is this the attitude you practice? Why or why not?

 What needs to stop or change or continue in order for you to love and serve like Jesus did?


 Is there any area of ministry (whether it’s a formal one or informal one) that you can get involved in so you can serve and love the family of Jesus?


WEEK FIVE


READ

PHILIPPIANS 2:12-18

REFLECT

 Serious question – what does Paul mean when he instructs these believers to “work out your salvation with fear and trembling?”


 Do you think Paul means that our salvation in Jesus is not secure? That we have to continue to “work” to guarantee it?

 Why the emphasis on “with fear and trembling”?

Sick AND Tired

Have you ever heard anyone say, “I am sick AND tired of...”? Or how about “Nice AND warm”? When someone says these things, they don’t usually mean they are both sick and tired, nor do they mean they are nice and warm at the same time (though they could be). These types of phrases are called “hendiadys” (I don’t EVEN know how to pronounce that word, so just take your best shot!). A hendiadys is an expression of a single idea by two words connected with “and”. Usually, a person is not sick, but they are tired. Usually, a person is not nice but they are warm. The “and” in the middle serves to intensify an idea. Here Paul uses this same type of expression. “Fear and trembling” is one of Paul’s favourite phrases. He uses it in several of his letters. The phrase itself can be found earlier in the book of Psalms as well, almost always with the same context. Paul neither wants believers to be afraid (fear) or standing cowardly (trembling) before God. When you look at all the many times this phrase is used throughout Scripture, probably the best way to understand it would be “with reverent obedience” or “serious eagerness”. It means to put oneself in our proper place and put God in His proper place. Paul indicates here we should be working so hard to grow in our faith because God Himself is working in us to fulfill His good purposes, so we should take this seriously.

 What “good purpose” is God fulfilling in us? Why is this important for us to focus on?

 What do you think it means to be “blameless and pure, children of God without fault?” How can we be this way even though we still sin and make mistakes?


The World is a Slinky


“Warped and crooked” is the opposite of “blameless and pure without blemish”. Paul indicates that this world, without God as its center, has become twisted and bent out of shape. As a kid I (Travis) used to love playing with a toy called a Slinky. A Slinky was basically a piece of metal all coiled up. If you had the right type of stairs, you could make the Slinky “walk” down the stairs. But my Slinkys never lasted very long. Squeeze it too hard or play with it too much, it gets bent and twisted and quickly no longer functions the way it’s supposed to. It’s of no real use and it is incredibly difficult to get it back to its original shape. In the same way, when we allow things other than God to use us, manipulate us, shape us, we also get bent and broken. We don’t look right or function properly anymore. We’re still a Slinky, but desperately need a master to pick us up and bend us back the right way again.


Paul indicates it’s important to stay godly and to follow Jesus so that in the very end, when all is said and done, we will be able to boast that we did not run or labor in vain. What do you think it looks like to run and labor in vain?


RESPOND

There is a lot of challenging theology in these few verses. Paul essentially states our purpose (to continue to grow in Christ) and our direction (to reach the Day of Christ). He tells the church to keep striving, keep going, don’t give up. Words not only important for Christians thousands of years ago, but for Christians today as well.

 Do you “continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling”? If so, what does that look like? If not, why not?

 How often do you do things with “grumbling or arguing”? Why are these things the opposite of what Jesus calls us to be? What is one area of your life that you can ask for God’s Spirit to help you in so your grumbling can be turned into something more beneficial?

 If someone who didn't know Jesus spent some amount of time with you, do you think they would say you "shine like the stars in the sky"? Why or why not?

 What are you doing right now that could be considered "running or laboring in vain"? How can you get back on the right track to make Jesus your center and your goal?


WEEK SIX


READ


PHILIPPIANS 2:19-3:11


REFLECT

Paul seems to insert a random digression in 2:19-30. Earlier in chapter 2, he reminds the church to follow Jesus' example, then reminds them (as we looked at last week), to continue to grow in their faith as they live for Jesus until the end. In chapter 3, Paul warns the believers to stay away from those who add certain works as a requirement for salvation, to consider everything rubbish in comparison with simply knowing and trusting in Christ. These two sections seem to build off one another.

 So why does Paul stop to mention two personal friends, Timothy and Epaphroditus?

 How is Timothy described in verses 19-23? What does Paul think of this young man?

 What does Paul tell us about Epaphroditus and his circumstances? What is his relationship with the Philippian church?


 How do Timothy and Epaphroditus illustrate (in the flesh) Paul's later instructions in chapter 2 as well as what he is about to say in chapter 3?

If Philippians 2 and 3 were a sandwich (a chiasm, as we discussed earlier), Tim and Epa here are the meat in the middle. They are those that are "shining like stars in the sky" in a depraved world. And they are servants who don't put stock in works or culture, but in


Jesus. So, this is not just some random insertion, but a living example of what it means to follow Jesus.


 Who is Paul calling “dogs”? Is this a good term?


Several times in this section Paul mentions the word “flesh”. That word (sarx in Greek) has several different meanings. The basic meaning is “flesh” – our skin and muscles and bones and tissues – the physical stuff that makes our bodies. But this term has another meaning: something that has not been transformed/redeemed/rescued by God through Jesus. Paul is using both meanings of this word in this passage. Paul in several of his letters addresses this issue and these people. Most likely, the “mutilators of the flesh” are Jewish Christians who are insisting that people must convert to Judaism first through following its rituals (especially circumcision) before they can be accepted into the family of God.

 Does Paul have anything good to say about people (like this) who tell others that they must jump through some hoops before Christ will accept them? How do Christians and churches do similar things today?


Not only was this a works/salvation issue (Jewish Christians saying you must do these certain works to be “saved”), but it was a cultural one as well. Judaism was not just a religion, but an ethnicity and culture. These Jewish believers were demanding that non-Jews become Jews (ritually and culturally) before they could become Christians. Similar examples in the more recent past would be English missionaries going to Africa and telling Africans they needed to learn English, dress in a suit, drink tea and sing English hymns (this actually happened in some places).

 How can forcing someone to adopt your cultural practices of Christianity prove dangerous and unhelpful?

 Paul then says if the standard is about boasting about your cultural and religious resumé, he’s got one up on everyone else.

 What’s so special about Paul’s qualifications? Why does this set Paul above anyone else?


 In verses 8-9, what does Paul think of all his achievements?

 What’s the difference between a righteousness that comes from the law and one that comes through faith?


 What is Paul’s greatest desire for his life (see verses 10-11)?


RESPOND


Paul talks a lot about the relationships he has with Timothy and Epaphroditus. Timothy, he says, is like a son to him. He's been called by Paul and has been mentored by Paul and is now being sent out to serve this church in Paul's name. Epaphroditus Paul describes as his brother and co-worker. A man who served alongside Paul and even through a sickness that brought him near death, continues to serve both Paul and this church community.

 Have you had a Paul or Timothy or Epaphroditus in your Christian journey? Who are the people that you shape or have shaped you along the way? How might you be a Paul or a Timothy or an Epaphroditus to someone in our church community?

We may not have the Judaizing Christians present in our church community today, but there most likely are people (even within NBC) who will say or imply that “unless you do/are _____, God won't want to have anything to do with you.” What are some of the qualifications that have been put on you or you have seen/heard about put on others? Are there any expectations/qualifications that YOU put on other people before you will accept them as a Christian sister or brother? Why is this not only unhelpful but unbiblical?

 Do you actually consider everything else in your life rubbish compared to knowing Christ? Or are there things about your life or about yourself that you think are more important?

 How have you experienced the power of Jesus' resurrection in your life? How have you participated in his sufferings?


 How can you become more and more like Jesus?


WEEK SEVEN

READ


PHILIPPIANS 3:12-4:1


REFLECT


 What did we talk about last week? (If you can't remember, go back and read Philippians 3:1-11). What is the “this” Paul is speaking about in verse 12?


 What is Paul “pressing on to take hold of”? And what is “for that which Christ Jesus told hold of me”? Why did Jesus take hold of Paul (or any of us)? If you need help, you can find the answer in chapters 2 and 3.

Paul indicates that he’s not at his goal yet. But he’s going to keep going. The language he uses is that of an elite runner at an Olympic track meet. Which warrants the following questions:


 What is “behind” for Paul? What is “behind” for any of us? Why do we need to forget it?


 What does it mean to “strain for what is ahead”? What IS ahead? How might one strain for it?


 What is the goal and the prize? Why is this goal and prize worth forgetting everything else for and straining oneself to reach?

 What and/or who is Paul talking about in verse 15? How will God make it clear?


Verse 16 is an interesting one. Paul is addressing a community. That community is filled with different types of people, all of whom would be at different points in their walk with Jesus. Paul doesn’t tell the newbies in the faith to hurry up and grow up. He simply says “live up to what you have already attained.” By that he means that wherever you are in your knowledge and love of Jesus – do that well. In other words, don’t feel bad for not being more holy than you are. And also, if you’re more mature in your faith, don’t get lazy or come up with excuses for why you’re not serving/going/giving/praying. Paul then makes this Christian life more relatable – watch and follow those who are a little further up the path than you. Again, the goal is not to go from new Christian to senior pastor, but to simply keep growing. To do this, watch and follow after those around you that inspire you and look like Jesus to you.


 Who is someone who inspires you in your faith? What is it about them that makes you want to live for Jesus more?


 Who do you think Paul is describing in verses 18-19?


 Why does Paul need to remind the church about where our citizenship lies?


RESPOND

 What do you need to forget in order to pursue Jesus? Is it your past? Your bank statement? The size of your neighbour's house? A lingering hurt? Your worries?

 What is one thing you can put into practice this week to “press on toward the goal”? How will you measure your success?

 If you thought long and hard, are you, by your actions or what your mind dwells on, living as an enemy of the cross of Christ? How can you know?

 What earthly things do you need to surrender over to Jesus so you can better focus on him?

 How can the hope of heaven spur us on this week?


WEEK EIGHT

READ

PHILIPPIANS 4:2-9


REFLECT

Again, we begin by what seems another random aside to some members of this church community. Paul just pleaded with the church to press on toward the goal for which God called us heavenward in Jesus and to do so without grumbling or complaining, but rather shining like stars in the sky. He finishes that segment by reminding the church that its citizenship is not on earth or with the things of earth but in heaven. But now, Paul stops to address what seems to be a quarrel amongst two women who have both served alongside Paul as gospel workers.


 Why (do you think) this is in here? What does it have to do with what has come before or is coming after?

We don't know much about what is going on in these verses. What we do know is that these women are partners with Paul in “contending” for the gospel. This is the same Greek


word we examined in Philippians 1 describing athletes who strain and strive for the prize. Because Paul is addressing them this way and stops to make specific mention of them, it is likely they were leaders in this church community. What they were not “of the same mind” about, we don’t know. But again, here is a fleshed out example to the wider church community of what Paul desires for everyone: being of the same mind so that others might see and experience the good news of Jesus (shining like stars).


 Why does Paul need to tell the church twice to rejoice?

“Joy” (or “rejoice”) in Greek is the word *chairete*, which is a cognate of another Greek word we explored in chapter one: “grace” (*charis* in Greek). “Joy” is the result of receiving “grace,” which means it is NOT dependent on circumstances (like happiness).

 Why do we need to remember to rejoice? How can we experience joy even when life is not always very fun?

Verses 4-9 function as Paul’s “fruit of the Spirit” here. He doesn’t use those words, but this is exactly what he means. When we strive to know and be more like Jesus, these are the by-products. This should lead us to ask two questions: what do these things mean and how do we experience them in our own lives?

 What does Paul mean when he says “let your gentleness be evident to all”? Why is gentleness a Christian virtue?

 What does our anxiety or lack of anxiety have to do with our walk with Jesus?

 What four-fold method does Paul explain as how we ought to approach God with our worries?

 What do the following terms mean:

Whatever is true

Whatever is noble

Whatever is right


Whatever is pure


Whatever is lovely


Whatever is admirable

Whatever is excellent or praiseworthy

RESPOND

 Which of these fruit of the Spirit are evident in your life? Which ones are missing?

 Do you present your requests to God in every situation? How can you move from prayer being an occasional part of your life to being a regular, every day, every circumstance essential in your life?

 What areas of your life do you need to find joy in? What would it look like for you to actually rejoice? When's the last time you've done that?

Paul finishes this section by reminding the church to “put [these things] into practice”. Paul is not interested in the church simply reading and studying these words but doing something practical with them. This is our desire for our Community Group time as well. If we are merely turning up to read and study and chat with friends, we're missing the point. The point for Paul (and for Jesus) is to live these things out.

 What is one thing you studied this week that you might apply to your life/work/home/recreation/relationships/faith this week?

Twice Paul reminds the church that our God is a God of peace. Peace, as we have looked at before means “wholeness” or “everything in its right place.” When we live out these things, we find God alongside of us, making us experience wholeness and rightness. The opposite is also true: when we don't purposely live out our faith, we experience anxiety and discomfort. So, the challenge for you and I this week is to take deliberate steps (with God's Spirit with us) to live for Him rather than treat Him as an afterthought.

WEEK NINE


READ

PHILIPPIANS 4:10-23


REFLECT


Verse 13 of Philippians 4 has always been a favourite of mine. It was the very first Bible verse I memorized. In America, the land of abundant bumper stickers, Philippians 4:13 would often be seen being driven down highways of Christians trying to get somewhere. It's a fantastic verse. However...it is perhaps one of the most misunderstood

and mistranslated verses in all of Scripture. Why? One word: context. Context means how something is to be properly understood. In the Bible, context includes examining the author and their world, the audience and their world, history, how words are used and where this word or verse fits into the book, chapter and paragraph it finds itself in. Understanding context is vitally important in order to know what the Bible is communicating.

 If we take this verse on its own, what are some (of the many) ways one might interpret it: “I can do all things through him [Jesus] who gives me strength”?


When I was younger (and for many Christians I knew), the interpretation of this verse went something like this: “If I have enough faith, I can do/achieve anything.” That interpretation sounds inspiring! It even sounds biblical (didn’t Jesus himself say if we had faith the size of a mustard seed, we could tell mountains to crash in to the sea?). But there’s one problem with this interpretation of this verse: that’s not what Paul is saying. How do we know this? Context. Have a read of verses 10-12 again.

 What is Paul describing in these verses? What key word does Paul mention that can unlock the meaning of this passage (hint: what is Paul’s secret)?


 How does knowing the larger context of this paragraph help us better understand and interpret verse 13?


Congratulations, you’ve just done some hermeneutics. That’s a very strange and funny word to simply mean “interpreting the Bible by understanding its context.” It is what all good Bible students should do (I like to call it “doing your homework”).

Paul concludes his letter to this church talking about how to find true contentment, no matter the circumstance: relying on Jesus to give you strength. Whether you’re hungry or well fed, rich or poor, in plenty or in want, or in Paul’s case: in prison or free, you can still experience contentment. No matter your situation, Jesus can lend you his strength and presence to pull through.

 How have you seen another Christian experience this kind of contentment?

 Have you ever experienced this sort of contentment through a difficult time? If so, how?

 What does Paul highlight about this church community’s behaviour in verses 14-19?


 Why is the generosity of a church so important to the work of the gospel? In what ways do you display generosity? In what ways does NBC display generosity?


Strangely enough, Paul ends with a very revolutionary and countercultural goodbye. In verse 22 he states, “All God’s people here send you greetings, especially those who belong to Caesar’s household.”


 Why is this goodbye so mind-boggling? Where is Paul? Who is Caesar and what is his relationship with Christians?


RESPOND.

This is the end of the letter. Paul closes by reminding people God can and “will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.” This is the reason for joy, which serves as the main theme of the entire letter. Joy again is our response to God’s grace. It transcends circumstance and brings us contentment no matter where we find ourselves. Philippians is Paul’s encouragement to keep going, to pursue Jesus, to not get discouraged because Christ is with us.

 How has this letter encouraged you?

 What lessons have you learned along the way these last few weeks?

 Have you seen your faith grow or find yourself applying these verses into your life?

 If this was the last letter you received from a loved one that you were likely never to see again, how might that change how you read/understand/apply this letter’s contents?

Spend some time praying for one another to close this study. Pray that you would be of one mind together. Pray that you would strive to pursue Jesus and live out your faith. Pray that you would be more encouraged to pursue joy and put into practice these lessons. Pray that God would show you areas you need to change, grow in or repent of. Pray that you wouldn’t just walk away from Philippians with a better understanding of the letter, but that it would sink down into your heart, mind and actions. And pray that you might hold one another accountable to these things, so that you can boast all the more as you see the Day approaching.