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INTRODUCTION

The apostle Paul was a prisoner when he wrote these letters to the early church. They reveal great freedom and joy in spite of adversity. The key for Paul was “life in Christ,” a life of true freedom. For Paul, nothing compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus his Lord. He yearned for everyone to share his joy.

These Prison Letters contain, much as Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s prison writing generations later do, great insights about the supremacy of Christ, the cost of discipleship and the importance of living together in community. They are filled with thanksgiving. They are laced with prayers that encourage people of all generations to live as visible expressions of God’s grace in the world. They invite today’s readers to “put into practice” much that will lead to true peace and freedom.

The church at Philippi was not troubled by serious doctrinal problem only by the problems of everyday life. Paul wrote this letter as a guide for ordinary living —how to live with joy in the midst of the normal difficulties of life.

LESSON ONE: PHILIPPIANS 1:1-11 and ACTS 16:1-40

OPENING QUESTION: *Have you ever longed to see a distant friend with whom you shared fond memories?*

Note: Philippi was a Roman city in Macedonia, today's Northern Greece, which became the site of the first Christian church on European soil.

Note: It was Paul's tradition to go first in every city to the synagogue but there were too few Jews in Philippi to form a synagogue.

1. **Challenge:** Read through the entire book of Philippians.
What reasons do you find for Paul's great love of these people?

2. Reread Philippians 1:1-11. Who is the letter written to?
Are there any clues in this passage of Paul's concerns for the church?

Read Acts 16:1-40

3. Describe the city of Philippi as fully as you can. Consider the spiritual climate, its culture and location.

4. Who became the first "members" of the church in Philippi?
What challenges might arise for such a community?

5. What reveals Paul's deep love for the church at Philippi? (Philippians 1:3-8)

6. What does it mean to be in “partnership” with others and what do you think is required for truly effective partnership?

7. What “good work” had begun in the lives of each of these people to form a basis for partnership in Philippi? (Acts 16:1-40)

Timothy

Lydia

Slave girl

Jailor and family

8. What confidence did Paul have about Christ followers? (v.6, see also Psalm 138:8)
9. What difference can this confidence make in your life and in your prayers for others?

Take time this week to speak and pray this assurance with another person.

10. What are Paul’s prayer requests for his friends? (vv.9-11)

Which of these requests might you pray for your family and friends?

Memory Verse: “... He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.” *Philippians 1:6*

Prayer Guide: Christ Jesus, bring Your good work to completion.

LESSON TWO: PHILIPPIANS 1:12-26

OPENING QUESTION: *Do you remember when something bad in your life brought forth good?*

Note: “Joy” is a deep settled confidence. (Wes Hardy)

Note: In Rome, chains bound a prisoner to his guard making escape impossible.

1. How had Paul’s chains helped to spread the good news of Christ?

vv.12-14

Acts 26:28-29

Acts 28:17-31

2. What are the “chains” in your life that God might use for His purposes?
3. Contrast the motives people have even as they preach Christ. (vv.15-18)

False motives

True motives

What was most important to Paul? (v.18)

4. Read 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12.
What were Paul’s motives in preaching?

What practices did he avoid in his preaching

5. How does Paul’s example keep you from either approving or despairing of those who preach Christ with false motives?

6. How did Paul, the prisoner, face the possibility of his own death? (vv.19-26)

What shapes your thinking about death?

7. How do these passages and Paul's example help reshape your thinking about suffering and death?

John 14:1-4

John 17:24

2 Corinthians 4:17-18

2 Timothy 2:8-13

1 Peter 4:12-14

8. How could Paul have *joy* in suffering? (vv.18, 25, see also Habakkuk 3:17-19)

How can you?

9. What enables unwavering belief even in the midst of fear and despair?
Psalm 42, Psalm 56:3, 2 Corinthians 1:8-11

Memory Verse: "For me to live is Christ and to die is gain." *Philippians 1:21*

Prayer Guide: Christ, give me courage to live for you.

LESSON THREE: PHILIPPIANS 1:27-2:11

OPENING QUESTION: *When has menial service taught you something important?*

1. How was the church to face opposition? (Philippians 1:27-30)
2. What benefits in Christ compel people to live beyond themselves? (Philippians 2:1)
3. How was true unity to be achieved? (vv.2-5)

What do you find personally convicting in these verses and what changes might God help you make?

4. How do these verses help you rethink the way you promote “your rights” in a self-seeking culture?
5. How can you look after someone else’s “best interests” this week?

Note: Humility is a uniquely Christian virtue. It stood in utter contradiction to the values of the Greco Roman world, which considered it a shortcoming, not a virtue. The truly humble have a proper estimation of themselves and a stance of utter dependence and trust before God.

6. Why do you think humility is so crucial? (see also Matthew 11:29, Mark 9:33-35)
7. How did Christ humble Himself? Trace the steps. (vv.6-8)

8. What did Christ accomplish through His humiliation?
(see also John 12:23-33, 1 Peter 2:24)

Note: *Crucifixion*, the most degrading execution possible in the Roman Empire, was reserved for base criminals. Jews regarded a crucified person as one accursed by God.

9. Read Hebrews 12:2-3. Reflect on this passage and the others in this lesson.
How has your understanding of the “cross” been deepened?

10. How is Jesus exalted? What future universal response is promised?

vv.9-11

Isaiah 45:22-25

Acts 2:32-36

Acts 4:12

11. What fresh perspective and hope have you gained from looking at Jesus?

Memory Verse: “Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.” *Philippians 2:5*

Prayer Guide: Christ Jesus, make my attitude like Yours.

LESSON FOUR: PHILIPPIANS 2:12-30

OPENING QUESTION: *Recall the visit of someone who came to lift your spirits.*

Note: “Working out” one’s salvation expresses the idea of bringing salvation to completion or carrying it to its ultimate conclusion.

1. What “work” is to be done by the Philippians in response to all Christ has done for them?

vv.12-13

Hebrews 3:13-15

Hebrews 6:9-12

2 Peter 1:3-11

2. How does God work in people to make such obedience possible?
(v.13, see also John 15:26, 1 Corinthians 15:10, Hebrews 13:20-21)

Note: “Complaining or arguing” describes the low, threatening and discontented muttering of a mob that distrust their leaders and are on the verge of an uprising. (William Barclay)

3. Why do you think *complaining and arguing* is so destructive?

4. What damage has *complaining and arguing* worked in the history of God’s people?

Exodus 16:1-8

Exodus 17:1-7

1 Corinthians 10:10-13

What damage has it worked in your history?

5. What antidote have you found to *complaining and arguing*?
(see also 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18)

6. What makes a generation “crooked and depraved?”
(see also Romans 1:21-22, Ephesians 4:17-19)

7. What enables people to “shine” as children of God in such generations?

vv.12-18

Daniel 12:3

8. Why was Paul sending Timothy and Epaphroditus back to his friends in Philippi?

What would this cost Paul?

9. How do these men model Christ?

Timothy: vv.20-22

Epaphroditus: vv.25-30

10. What does Paul teach about joy through his words and example?

11. Where would an increase of joy alter your life?

Memory Verse: “Do everything without complaining or arguing.” *Philippians 2:14*

Prayer Guide: Holy God, put to death my complaining.

LESSON FIVE: PHILIPPIANS 3:1-4:3 and ACTS 22:1-21

OPENING QUESTION: *Have you ever sacrificed to win a prize?*

1. Why is it valuable to have important spiritual warnings and commands repeated? (Philippians 3:1)

Note: The Philippian church was composed primarily of uncircumcised Gentiles whose unity would be disrupted if Jewish believers forced them into physical circumcision.

Note: Dogs were scavengers, detested by Greco-Roman society and considered unclean by Jews.

2. Why had physical circumcision been instituted? (Genesis 17:9-14)

Who are the *truly circumcised* people? (Philippians 3:3, Romans 2:28-29)

3. What warning is there against adding requirements beyond faith in Christ for salvation?

Read Acts 22:1-21

4. What privilege was Paul born into? (Philippians 3:4-5, Acts 22:3)
5. Describe Paul's zeal prior to encountering Christ. (Philippians 3:6, Acts 22:4-5, 19-20)
6. What new direction did Christ provide for Paul? (Acts 22:14-16, 21)

7. Describe the zeal with which Paul responded to Christ. (Philippians 3:7-14)

8. What did Paul consider “profit” and what did he consider “loss” in his new life?

Why did he view them this way?

9. How has society shaped your view of “profit” and “loss” in a way that hinders you from knowing Christ deeply as your Lord?

10. What did Paul understand about his citizenship in Christ? (Philippians 3:12-21)

What responsibilities come with citizenship in Christ? (see also 2 Corinthians 5:17-20)

11. What principles of conflict resolution can be gained from Paul’s words in Philippians 4:2-3?

Memory Verse: “...I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord...” *Philippians 3:8*

Prayer Guide: Lord Jesus, take hold of me.

LESSON SIX: PHILIPPIANS 4:4-23

OPENING QUESTION: *Recall a time when a gift from someone greatly encouraged you.*

Note: *Gentleness* was an attitude of kindness where the normal or expected response was retaliation (Frank Thielman)

1. What role is *peace* to have in the lives of God's people?

v.7

v/9

Isaiah 26:3

John 14:27

2. What path to peace does Paul outline?
List and explain how each one will help you experience the peace of Christ.

v.4

v.5

v.6

v.8

v.9

3. Why is anxiety such an enemy of peace?

What kind of prayer can counter anxiety? Practice such prayer this week.

4. What did Paul urge people to think about? (v.8)
List the things you are to think on and beside each write its opposite.

5. What is your response to the challenge of such *pure* thinking in light of the choices you are currently making?

6. How were the Philippians to follow Paul's example? (v.9)

7. Define contentment. What are the greatest enemies of contentment for you?

8. How did Paul learn to be content? (vv.10-13)

Where is *want* or *plenty* keeping you from being content?

9. How had the Philippians cared for Paul in the past? (vv.15-16, see also 2 Corinthians 8:1-5)

10. What did such gifts of care represent for Paul and God?

v.14

v.17

v.18

11. Read 2 Corinthians 9:6-15. In light of this passage and others in our lesson this week, why is it important to give generously?

12. What is God nudging you to practice in order to experience His peace more deeply?

Memory Verse: "To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen." *Philippians 4:20*

Prayer Guide: Lord God, You reign in glory.

PHILIPPIANS REVIEW LESSON

1. What reassured verses will you take from the study?
2. What questions continue to stir your thought and growth?
3. What have you learned about living with greater joy?
4. How have you been challenged in your thinking about the church?
5. What changes have you made in the way you pray?
6. What insights have gained about unity?
Are there any new ways you are working to bring about greater unity?
7. In what area has Paul's example most challenged you?
8. Is there any way that the study has changed what you hold important?
9. What are you thankful for as you leave this study?