

ABIDE: A BIBLE READING CHALLENGE

JOURNEY THROUGH THE NEW TESTAMENT

PURE JOY

PHILIPPIANS

There have been so many people who have been helped and blessed by this little letter to the Philippians. It provides so much practical insight in such a short amount of time. It answers so many questions about why we struggle, fight, and wish for different circumstances, people, and possessions in our lives, and causes us to use a new way of thinking as we approach life with every new morning given to us.

But first, how did this letter come into the hands of the Philippians in the first place?

It started as Paul and his ministry team were entering their second missionary journey. In Acts 16, we see that there was a little bit of a false start in attempting to engage in this journey. The Holy Spirit continued to block every path and stop every way that Paul originally attempted to take. It may be profitable right here to mention that not every hindrance we face is because of the work of Satan. Sometimes it is because of the Lord's direct involvement in disrupting our plans that we come to find what God really wants us to do instead of what we think we should do. That's what happened here. Paul has a vision eventually that instructed him to head west into the land of Macedonia and do ministry at this location, and this is exactly what Paul does.

With plans in place, they eventually made it into the city of Philippi, which has some fascinating history attached that Paul later uses to his advantage in this letter.

Philippi was a colony city of Rome. Every so often, Rome would establish a new colony in their empire and use it as a cultural outpost of sorts. Those Roman soldiers and officials who were retired and were looking to take it easy, would go to these cities and live the good life in their new home away from home. Everything in these colonies were set up to mimic the life and culture of Rome. The architecture was the same. The dress was the same. The language was the same. The government was the same. In every way, these areas were just like Rome. It was like a Rome in miniature. Most importantly, even though they were in a foreign place, those who were citizens of Rome retained their citizenship and enjoyed every right and privilege of Rome. This was how the city of Philippi was structured. It was named after King Philip and was used as a little Rome.

That's why Paul, writing to this church told them, 3:20, "For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ:" He was saying that just like you're in the foreign land of Philippi but live as if you are in Rome, Paul says you're really citizens of heaven, and so while you're here on this earth, you should live as if you are right there before the throne of God right now. He was using their history as an illustration. Let's dive a little deeper.

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How to Think About Philippians

What makes this letter so encouraging is the fact that there is not that much correction that has to take place. You're looking at a group of believers who loved Paul and a pastor who loved this church in return. Though there is one little problem Paul addresses, for the most part, Paul just makes some clarifying remarks about his situation, the Christian life in general, how to think about certain situations, and how he feels about them as a church. If you're looking for a quick, uplifting read that can help put a little pep in your Christian step; this is the book for you.

The book can be divided into four sections which present themselves at the start of each chapter division.

How to Think about Your Circumstances (Chapter 1)— Paul is doing a little explanation here about what is threatening to shake these believers a little bit. In this letter we have entered into another one of Paul's "prison epistles" and it was somewhat unsettling to think about as they thought about the potential circumstance, "What if that happened to me?" But notice what Paul does throughout this first chapter. He continually directs their attention to Christ and the Gospel. Sixteen times the name of Christ is mentioned in just a handful of verses. And then, six times Paul mentions the Gospel.

Fellowship in the Gospel (Chapter 1:1-11): Paul mentions to them how he thinks and prays for them, and also how together they share in the work of giving the Gospel to people.

Furtherance of the Gospel (Chapter 1:12-26): Paul tells these people not to be afraid for themselves nor to be afraid for him because what God has allowed in his life has actually worked itself out in such a way that Paul was able to preach to people that he would have never had the opportunity to if God had not caused this to happen.

Faith in the Gospel (Chapter 1:27-30): This is a call to strive and fight together for the faith no matter what stands in your way. It's okay to be stressed to a degree. It's okay to be discouraged to a degree. It's okay to be confused. It's never okay to quit.

How to Think about Your Service (Chapter 2)— Paul then moves to the area of having to deal with people. Here is a little reminder that we are here to serve people and not for people to serve us. We like to be served. We like to be treated well. It's not bad to like those things. But if you like it so much that you have come to expect it, or always expect or want the same in return, then prepare to be disappointed. Here Paul calls on us to continually maintain the mind of a servant. To illustrate this point, Paul points to four different examples.

Use Jesus as Your Example (Chapter 2:1-11): A great verse exists in this passage. Verse 5, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:" and then details what kind of thinking Christ displayed. What a great verse to use for private meditation.

Use Paul as Your Example (Chapter 2:12-18): Here the encouragement is given to be lights in a dark and crooked world and hold forth the word of life. And Paul says, "If you can do that, then he can rejoice over that when Christ comes."

Use Timothy as Your Example (Chapter 2:19-24): Paul said that since he could not come right away, he would send Timothy to them to help them along and be an example to them.

Use Epaphroditus as Your Example (Chapter 25-30): Obviously, we can see that Paul cared a great deal for this young man. It was this fellow that Paul sent and used to encourage others. He fell ill in his service but recovered and continued on for the work's sake.

How to Think About Your Possessions (Chapter 3)— Paul tells us now how he used to think of his life versus how he now thinks of his life. He said that he used to think he was doing pretty well. There was a lot he had to be proud of and a lot of that he tried to continually accomplish to make himself look better, but that was simply not how he lived any longer.

Paul the Accountant (Chapter 3:1-11): Philippians 3:8, "Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ." In taking in account all of the things that he used to value, Paul doesn't care for 'things' anymore. Paul cares to win Christ.

Paul the Athlete (Chapter 3:12-16): Philippians 3:14, "I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

Paul the Alien (Chapter 3:17-21): We mentioned before the image of heavenly citizenship. Paul is pointing for us to live as pilgrims instead of permanent residents in this life.

How to Think About Your Problems (Chapter 4)— When you care too much about your circumstance; when you care too much about how people treat you; when you care too much about the stuff in your life, worry is the natural result and it can cause some unnecessary problems in your life. As Paul closes out this letter, his parting words are about how to experience the peace of God by way of the God of peace and how to be content with whatever God allows in your life.

The Presence of God's Peace (Chapter 4:1-9): In exchange for your praise and giving your problems and worries over to God, God will exchange all of that weight for His peace which passes all understanding.

The Confidence of God's Power (Chapter 4:10-13): Verse 13, "I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me." The meaning here is that you can do all things that God has called you to do because of the power that Christ puts down on the inside of you. Showing kindness to someone who doesn't respect you. Enduring heartbreak. All things that God brings into our lives for us to do, we can do it.

The Abundance of God's Provision (Chapter 4:14-23): In verse 19, when Paul says that God would supply all your need, it literally means to cram full. Your needs are met to the full according to the riches we have in Christ. God has given you a blank check when it comes to your needs being met.

What to Look for in Philippians

Words—

Joy: This word, or a variation of it, occurs 16 to 18 times. It has to do with an inward satisfaction in all things because of the ultimate victory of Christ. It mingles the past, present, and future all together: What God has done, what God is doing, and what God will do through Christ. If you mix all of this truth together you get joy.

Think: This word, or a variation of it occurs 16 times. This is significant because your experience with joy has everything to do with what you do with your mind. It's been said that Philippians is like a little Christian psychology book. You do have eternal joy, but depending on how you think will determine whether you experience it or not. Therefore, joy is a state of the mind because of the keeper of the heart.

Prayer—

Philippians 1:9-11 is a special prayer Paul prayed for God's people, and just as with the letter to the Ephesians, there is valuable information here about how we can pray for each other.

What to Gain from Philippians

You Are What How You Think— This is the underlying theme throughout this letter. Paul is telling you how he thinks about things. He tells us how he thought about his circumstances. Paul talks about how he thought about himself as a servant. Paul talks about how he thought about possessions. Paul talks about how he thought about stress.

THE CHRISTIAN'S FAVORITE ROAD - ROMANS

And the point is this: How you think makes all the difference in how you react.

Paul viewed every single instance of his life through the lens of God's providence. It was no accident that Paul experienced the kinds of things he did. It was solely and fully because God brought those things into his life, and it was up to Paul to allow God to work in his life so that he could bring as much glory to God as possible.

Where we miss the point so often is how we have our joy stolen because we are self-serving that we think the things that happen to us just happen and are all about us. Friend, there is nothing in the Christian life that just happens, and it's most certainly not about us.

You have a Father in heaven who is bringing about His purposes in our lives through every situation and every relationship, and the moment you stop thinking like this is the moment your joy is gone and the purpose of your life is disrupted.

Make no mistake... we are our greatest enemy.



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