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Philippians:

**I consider everything a loss compared
to the surpassing greatness of
knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.**

*Eight Studies in Paul's letter
to the Philippians*

Paul's Letter to the Philippians.

“Rejoice in the Lord always,” said the apostle Paul, *“and again I say, Rejoice!”* Familiar words from a popular chorus which we sing in the comfort of church on Sunday? But when Paul wrote these words (4:1) he was in prison, in chains, uncertain as to whether he would be executed or released.

Philippians reverberates with Joy in the Lord (1:4, 18; 2:2, 17; 3:1; 4:1,4,10) in the midst of situations which the world would not find joyful. What was the secret of contentment (4:12) which Paul had learned?

The Themes of Philippians:

- (i) **A life modelled on Jesus.** Jesus humbled himself and died for us (2:6-8). But God raised him from the dead and greatly exalted him (2:9). Paul longs to share in both Jesus' sufferings and the power of his resurrection (3:10), and Paul urges us to follow his example in this (3:17; 2:1-4). In our studies we will reflect on how this works out in our everyday Christian living.
- (ii) **Relationships amongst Christians.** This is a very personal letter in which Paul describes his own feelings and the actions of deeply Christian people. Paul often refers to the relationships amongst the Christians at Philippi, and his relations with them. It is a rare privilege for us to enter so closely into the lives of such godly people. It can inspire us.
- (iii) **Dealing with difficulty.** After reading through Philippians, it will probably not come as a surprise to find that Paul says in the last chapter that he has “learned the secret of contentment” (4:12), and can rejoice even in the most difficult situations. But what is that secret? Can we share in it?

Memorable Phrases in Philippians.

Philippians is packed with phrases and verses which are both profound and memorable. The letter gives evidence that Paul had time to reflect and refine his choice of words (he was in prison!). Some of these memorable verses are:

- (i) *“For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain.”* (1:21)
- (ii) The sublime poem about Jesus in 2:6-11.

- (iii) *“Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to work according to his good purpose.” (2:12-13)*
- (iv) *“I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.” (3:8)*
- (v) *“One thing I do: Forgetting what lies behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.” (3:13-14)*
- (vi) *“The peace of God which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (4:7)*

There are many others as well. As you read Philippians, why don't you make a collection of some of these which are particularly meaningful to you?

Background.

Paul founded the church at Philippi on his second missionary journey (Acts 16:11-40), and passed through there again on his third journey (Acts 20:3-6). It was the first church in Europe. Close relationships developed between Paul and the Philippians, and during his time in Europe, time and again they sent Paul aid when he was in need (Phil 4:16)

Paul wrote Philippians from jail (1:13, 17). He hoped to be released, but he faced the possibility of execution (2:17). (For more details, see Study 2.)

Prayer

I would like to borrow Paul's words, in my prayer for everyone who studies Philippians this term, *“That your love may abound more and more in knowledge ... so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ.” (1:10)*

Max Gilbert 2000

Week 1

THEME: Paul's prayer: "That your love may abound."

Day 1 Acts 16:11-15. The first(?) Christian at Philippi.

What did Lydia do after she became a Christian?

Day 2 Acts 16:16-24. Paul and Silas in Jail.

Why were Paul and Silas imprisoned at Philippi?

Day 3 Acts 16:25-34. The Jailer becomes a Christian.

What did the Jailer do after he became a Christian?

Day 4 Acts 16:35-40. Paul leaves Philippi.

Other than Lydia, the Jailer and their families, do you think there were any other Christians in Philippi by the time Paul left? (v40).

Day 5 John 17:30-35. "Love one another".

How did Paul's prayer in Phil 1:9 correspond to Jesus' command in John 17:34?

STUDY PASSAGE **Philippians 1:1-11**

To Discuss:

1. Share with the group how you feel when you know that someone is praying for you. In what ways do you especially like/dislike other people praying for you?

2. In this passage, Paul describes his prayers for the Philippians in *general* terms. Based on this, what do you think are some of the *particular* things he might have prayed for Lydia (Acts 16:11-15)?

3. Find the places in these verses where Paul describes how he and the Philippians were *partners in the gospel* (or similar). How does this affect Paul's prayers? In what ways are you a partner in the gospel with any other Christians? How does this affect your prayers for them?

4. What is the main thing for which Paul prays? What difference will it make when God answers such prayers? What things could we do as individuals, home groups, or as a church to ensure that we each benefit from such prayers?

PRAY for someone following some of the patterns used by Paul.

Week 2

THEME: Paul in Prison: “For me to live is Christ”.

Day 1 John 13:36-14:7. “Let not your hearts be troubled”.

Why did Jesus say we ought not to be troubled (14:1), even at the prospect of death (13:37-38)?

Day 2 John 13:36-14:7. Jesus - the only way to the Father.

Why does it make sense to walk your life on the way of Christ? Is this why Paul can say, “For me to live is Christ”? (Phil 1:21)

Day 3 Paul’s imprisonments.

Read about Paul’s imprisonments, in Philippi (Acts 16:24); in Caesarea (Acts 23:35); in Rome (Acts 28:16,30-31); and (probably) in Rome again (2 Tim 1:16; 2:9), where he expected to be executed (2 Tim 4:6-8). Post Biblical evidence (eg 1 Clement 5) suggests that Paul was indeed executed under Nero during this second imprisonment in Rome.

Day 4 Paul writes Philippians from prison.

Note that Paul was in prison when he wrote Philippians (1:13-14). It appears that this was his first imprisonment in Rome, and that he was later released (2 Tim 4:17), as he expected (Phil 1:25). He then went on a fourth missionary journey, and was later imprisoned again in Rome, where he wrote 2 Timothy, and was subsequently executed.

Day 5 Philippians 1:12-30.

What is Paul’s eager hope while he is in prison? (v20)

STUDY PASSAGE **Philippians 1:12-30**

To Discuss:

1. Discuss whether you would rather “depart and be with Christ” or continue to “remain in the flesh” (v 22-23). Why?

2. (a) Paul seems to count it a privilege and a normal part of the Christian life to suffer for Christ (v29). What positive things happened as a result of Paul being in prison? (v 12-18 describe things relating to the spread of the gospel; v15-26 describe things relating to Paul more personally).

(b) What similar or different experiences have you had?

3. Paul said, “For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (v21). What did he mean? In what ways and to what extent is this true for you, personally?

4. Paul expected the Philippians as a group (27) to have the same attitude (v27-30, especially v30). How can we as a Christian community in Riverwood-Punchbowl live out the challenge given by Paul in v27-30?

PRAY That Christ may be honoured in every part of our life (v20), in both the good times, and the difficult times; and that we might rejoice as Paul did, when Christ is proclaimed though the circumstances of our lives.

Week 3

THEME: Be Like Christ: “He humbled Himself”.

Day 1 John 13:1-9. Jesus washes the disciples feet.

How did Jesus humble himself like a servant in this incident on the night before he was crucified?

Day 2 John 13:10-17. Jesus’ act was an example for us to follow.

What are the two reasons Jesus gives for why we should follow his example of humility? (v14-15, 16). What is the result if we do follow his example? (v17)

Day 3 Phil 2:1-11. The name above every name.

What name did God give to Jesus? (v9,11)

Day 4 Isaiah 45:18-21. I am the Lord, and there is no other.

God claimed the title Lord, and refused it to any other (v18). What then does it mean when God grants this title ‘Lord’ to Jesus in Phil 2:9,11?

Day 5 Isaiah 45:22-25. Every knee will bow and every tongue confess.

Isaiah 45 concerns the time when God rescued Israel from its Babylonian captors, and also looks forward to end-time salvation. How do these verses describe the different fates of (i) those who have ‘raged against’ the Lord, and (ii) those who are God’s people, Israel? Will the two groups ‘bow the knee’ before God in different ways?

STUDY PASSAGE **Philippians 2:1-18**

To Discuss:

1. In what ways do you think Jesus is a model on which Christians should pattern their lives? Are there things which Jesus did which we cannot take as models for our own lives?

2. What does this passage show about the uniqueness of Christ? What was Jesus' nature before he was 'made in human likeness'? (v6). What did Jesus do during his life on earth? (v7-8) What happened to him after his crucifixion, and why? (v9) How will the entire Universe ultimately relate to Jesus? (v10-11) *{Sadly, Isa 45:23-25 shows that not everyone will bow their knee willingly before Jesus, but rather some will only submit to Jesus in judgement.}*

How does this passage show that salvation is impossible apart from Jesus?

3. Compare Paul's reaction to his imprisonment (1:12-26; 2:16-18; 3:10-11) with Jesus' reaction to being found in human form.

4. We too should imitate Christ (v5). In the light of v1-4 and 14-16, what should we be like, as we imitate Jesus? Why should we be confident that our striving to be like Jesus will bear fruit in our lives? (v12-13).

5. Privately or in pairs, reflect on a situation in which you currently find it difficult to be humble like Jesus. **PRAY** that God will enable you to show real humility and sacrificial service in this situation.

Week 4

THEME: What makes a true Christian Friend?

Day 1 John 14:15-21. Jesus - our true friend.

How does Jesus continue to care for us?

Day 2 John 14:15-21. Our friendship with Jesus.

How do we show our love for Jesus (v15, 21)? If Jesus (v20) and the Spirit (v17) are in us, what do you think this means about our character?

Day 3 Acts (various). Timothy, Paul's helper.

Read how Timothy was Paul's travelling companion and helper in his missionary journeys (Acts 16:1-5; 17:14-16; 18:5; 19:22; 20:4).

Day 4 2 Tim 1:1-7. Timothy, Paul's dear son.

Paul and Timothy were so close, that the Bible contains two letters written by Paul to Timothy, while Paul named Timothy as the co-author of four of his letters (Phil 1:1; Col 1:1; 1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:1)

Day 5 Phil 2:25; 4:14-19. Epaphroditus.

Why did the Philippians send Epaphroditus to Paul?

Week 5

THEME: 'I consider all things rubbish that I may gain Christ'.

Day 1 John 15:18-25. We do not belong to the world.

Why is it not sensible to put great value on the things of this world? (v19)

Day 2 John 15:18-25. "He who hates me hates the Father as well".

Why is it so dangerous to ignore or 'hate' Jesus (v23).

Day 3 John 6:66-69. "You have the words of eternal life."

Why did the disciples decide to stay with Jesus, when others left him.

Day 4 Mark 8:34-38. What can a person give in exchange for his soul?

What good is it to gain the whole world, but forfeit your soul?

Day 5 Matt 6:31-34 The worries of the world.

Instead of *worrying* about the things of the world, what does Jesus say we should make as our first priority?

STUDY PASSAGE **Philippians 3:1-11**

To Discuss:

1. How has being a Christian changed the things that are really important in your life? *or* From your observation of Christians, what things do you think they count as most valuable and important in life?
2. How did Saul the Pharisee (v4-6) change when he became Paul the Christian (v7-11)? Are you surprised that Paul wanted to know *both* the power of Christ's resurrection, *and* the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings (v10)?
3. Concerning the righteousness which Christians desire, (i) where does it come from (v9); (ii) how do we gain it (v9,10); (iii) who 'owns' it (v9)? Is legalistic righteousness an equally valid way of approaching God (v7, 9)?
4. What does it mean "to gain Christ, and be found in him" (v8-11)? How can your life give evidence that you count everything as loss compared to the "surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus"(v8)?

PRAY, praising God that he has shown us the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus our Lord, and that our lives might show that in comparison, we count everything else as rubbish.

Week 6

THEME: ‘Press on to take hold of that for which Christ took hold of you’.

Day 1 John 15:9-17. Chosen by Jesus.

Did we choose Jesus, or did Jesus choose us? (v 16)

Day 2 John 15:9-17. Chosen to bear fruit.

For what purpose did Jesus choose us? (v16)

Day 3 John 15:9-17. Love each other as I have loved you.

How do we bear this fruit? (v12-14, 17)

Day 4 1 Cor 9:24-27. The Christian life as a race.

Is the Christian life characterised by aimless drifting, or by discipline and purpose?
What are some ways of showing this discipline and purpose?

Day 5 2 Tim 4:7-8. At the finish of the race.

When Paul was again in prison a few years later, and he faced imminent execution, his thoughts again turned to his Christian life as a marathon race. What did he look forward to at that time?

STUDY PASSAGE **Philippians 3:12-21.**

To Discuss:

1. Do you ever feel that your Christian life is like a marathon race? What are the points of similarity? What are the differences?

2. For what purpose did Christ Jesus take hold of you (v12)? Consider v10-11, 14, 20, 21. What does it mean to be a citizen of heaven (v20)? What will our resurrection body be like (v21)?

3. Paul urged the Philippians to follow his example (v17). Was this boastful? Did Paul think he was already perfect (v12)? Did he think he was the only one whose example they should heed (v17)? Based on Philippians 1-3, how was Paul an example to us? In what areas are you (or someone else in your group) an example to other Christians?

4. Even though our salvation is all from God, and *he* took hold of us (not vice versa), nonetheless God expects us to *work* and *strive* and *strain* towards taking hold of the “prize” for which he has called us (2:12-13; 3:12-14). In what areas of your Christian life are you striving, and in which areas could you strive more. Discuss how we can help each other in this.

PRAY that God will carry through to completion the good work which he began in us (Phil 1:6), and that he will enable us to strain forward towards this goal.

Week 7

THEME: The Peace of God that Passes all Understanding.

Day 1 John 14:22-27. “My Peace I leave with you.”

What did Jesus leave with his disciples as he was about to be crucified? (v27)

Day 2 John 14:22-27. The divine basis of this peace.

Both the Father and Jesus himself make their home with us (v23). Also, the Father sends the Holy Spirit to us (v26). Does this explain why the peace he leaves with us transcends all understanding (Phil 4:7)?

Day 3 John 14:22-27. The human side of this gift of peace.

What is the difference between those who receive this peace from God, and those who don't? (v23, 24)

Day 4 Ephesians 3:14-21. The Love that surpasses knowledge.

This exulted prayer expresses something of the wonder of Christ's love for us. This is the reality which brings us peace with God. Why not read this passage thoughtfully to God, as a prayer for yourself and your home group members.

Day 5 Romans 8:31-38. It is God that justifies. Who can condemn us?

This passage also describes our peace with God. It is worth reading often.

STUDY PASSAGE: Philippians 4:1-9

To Discuss:

1. In your experience, are there any barriers which can hinder our peace with God? What are they?

2. Concerning Euodia and Syntyche (v2-4):

- (i) What was the problem?
- (ii) Were they living according to the example of Christ (Phil 2:1-4, 6-8)?
- (iii) In what ways can such disagreements cause us to ‘not stand firm in the Lord’ (v1) or, to lose ‘the peace of God’ (v7)?
- (iv) How could the ‘true yolkfellow’ or anyone else help these women (v3)?
- (v) How can we respond when there are disagreements in our church?

3. Why does the peace of God “transcend all understanding” (v7)? Does the passage suggest that Paul thought God would quickly remove all our troubles when we ask? What do verses 4-7 say about (i) the peace of God; (ii) why it is a good thing to gain; and (iii) how we go about gaining it?

4. What ought we to think about and put into practice if we want the peace of God to be with us? (v8-9) What are some examples of things which are “noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent or praiseworthy”? How can we go about setting our thoughts more and more on such things?

PRAY. Are you anxious about anything? Then pray with thanksgiving, committing your anxiety to God, as you present your requests to Him.

Week 8

THEME: The Secret of Contentment

Day 1 John 15:1-8. The Vine and the Branches.

In this illustration, who is the gardener, who is the vine, and who are the branches?

Day 2 John 15:1-8. The Life of the branches.

From where do the branches gain their life support? From where do Christians gain their life support?

Day 3 John 15:1-8. “Apart from me, you can do nothing”.

What did Jesus mean in terms of everyday life, when he said, “Apart from me, you can do nothing?” (v5)

Day 4 Matt 6:25-27. Do not worry about food and clothing.

Why does Jesus say that it is pointless to worry about food and clothing?

Day 5 Matt 6:28-34. Seek first his kingdom.

What is the right way to act in worrying situations?

STUDY PASSAGE: Philippians 4:10-20.

To Discuss:

1. In what situations do you find it difficult to cope? What do you usually do in these situations? Is there a 'secret of contentment'?
2. What sorts of difficult situations had Paul faced? (v12) What was his current difficult situation? (Phil 1:13,17)
3. What is the secret of contentment? (Refer v13, which is probably best translated, "I have strength for all situations, through him who gives me strength.") To what extent is the secret a matter of relying on Jesus, rather than on our own 'inner strength' or 'abilities'?
4. In what sense is this secret something which can be learned, as Paul twice says he did (v11,12)? How are you learning it?
5. Why did Paul not really need the support of the Philippians (v11, 17)? Why then did he rejoice greatly over their gifts and concern for him (v10,14)? (v17-19). Why are acts of care and generosity a vital part of our own Christian fellowship? How should this passage affect our giving and receiving?

PRAY that Jesus might give us strength for all situations, and that we might learn to rely on that strength more and more.

HOW TO USE THESE NOTES

- 1.** Read the daily Bible readings on the left hand side of the double page, and think about the question for the day. Make a note of your answer and any difficulties you have.
- 2.** The questions on the right hand side of the double page are designed for group discussion. Think about these questions before you go to your discussion group.
- 3.** The study passages follow the morning and evening sermon series. You may find it helpful to take notes of the sermons.
- 4.** Please don't be frustrated if you can't understand or answer the questions: the important thing is that you read God's word.
- 5.** Use this guide for family or personal Bible reading, and if you would like to join a home group, please see one of the ministers.

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