

Welcome and Reminders

Welcome to any visitors and welcome back to the group members. It is important to remember that everything said and done in this group is confidential. The expectation is that there will not be discussion about our conversations to anyone outside of the group that is represented here and now. We understand that sometimes personal insights or information may be shared by someone who feels comfortable doing so in this group and not around others. Let's be respectful of that and carry our commitment to confidentiality as we leave this group. *(Pass out the confidentiality reminder to anyone who has not yet received one).*

Prayer and Praises

Introduction

In Acts 16:9 we read about a vision Paul had where a Macedonian man was asking Paul to come over and help them. Paul woke up the following morning and immediately left, recognizing that God was leading him there. The Roman colony, Philippi, was the leading city in the district of Macedonia. Outside the city gates of Macedonia Paul met a woman named Lydia who opened her heart and home to Paul. Thus began Paul's work at Philippi. This church was the first Christian church in what we now consider modern day Europe. Paul did visit the city several time, and considering the churches continued investment in his life and ministry, it is likely that he spent some time visiting the church of Philippians, but there are not very many details given in the Book of Acts.

Although we do not know much about the Philippian church at that time, we do know a bit about Paul's circumstances when he was writing the letter. It was about 10 to 12 years after he founded the church and he was, once again, in prison. In the last decade he was jailed at least four times - his first recorded arrest was in Philippi (Acts 16), he was imprisoned in a jail at Caesarea (Acts 23), again in a rented house in Rome (Acts 28), and finally in the Prison in Rome (II Timothy 1). That is quite astounding considering that the overwhelming theme of his letter is joy.

Other than to proclaim joy and thank the church, there really does not seem to be a specific purpose for which Paul wrote the letters. In many of his letters he was writing to warn, clarify, correct, or instruct. But Philippians is completely void of scolding. It has been considered by

some to be a sweet love letter to a church he greatly cared for. Others have called Philippians Paul's hymn of joy. The word joy is found five times in these four short chapters and the verb rejoice can be found 11 times.

Read Philippians 1

¹Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all God's holy people in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons: ²Grace and peace to you from God our Creator and the Lord Jesus Christ.

³I thank my God every time I remember you. ⁴In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy ⁵because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, ⁶being confident of this, that the one who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

⁷It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart and, whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me. ⁸God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.

⁹And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, ¹⁰so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, ¹¹filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.

¹²Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel. ¹³As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. ¹⁴And because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear.

¹⁵It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. ¹⁶The latter do so out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. ¹⁷The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. ¹⁸But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice.

Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, ¹⁹for I know that through your prayers and God's provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance. ²⁰I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. ²¹For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. ²²If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! ²³I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; ²⁴but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body.

²⁵Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, ²⁶so that through my being with you again your boasting in Christ Jesus will abound on account of me.

²⁷Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in the one Spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel ²⁸without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved—and that by God. ²⁹For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him, ³⁰since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.

- *Discuss anything that stood out to you in this chapter. Share your first impressions. Was there anything that struck you as profoundly inspiring or difficult?*

Paul shows amazing confidence that his suffering is completely worth every bit of hardship because it is furthering the gospel of Christ. Although he was in prison, literally chained to a soldier, people came to hear him preach. The guards themselves were so interested in his message that they spread it around. Their reactions encouraged others to be bold in preaching. Not only did Paul's direct words spread the good news of Christ, but they aided in the development of new messengers, exponentially increasing the news of salvation. It is easy to see this in hindsight, but Paul had the faith to see this in spite of his circumstances.

- *Think about one or more circumstances that have been in your life recently. Can you see God working not necessarily in spite of but as a direct result of these circumstances? Please share if you feel comfortable doing so.*

For me to live is... If we were to honestly complete that sentence could we really say for me to live is Christ? This is a powerful convergence of faith and works. We know what Paul believes, but his beliefs do not just stop with empty words. Literally for him to live is Christ. The message of Christ is not dependent on Paul's successful life. Paul's life is not just Christ when things are going well or according to plan. He does not have to amend the statement to, "for me to live is Christ, most of the time." I am inspired by the consistency of Paul in some of the most difficult of circumstances. There is no doubt that his motives, his passion, his consuming drive is Christ. There are so many people who find themselves in tough circumstances and their focus immediately becomes consumed with getting out of the tough circumstances. How much different would our life and message be if our focus remained on Christ while trusting God to deliver us from trials when and if our release from that particular circumstance is the will of God?

- *Can you think of a situation or circumstance you have been in or are currently in that has taken your focus off of Christ? How might you redirect your focus without surrendering the hope or faith that God has it under control?*

Perhaps this is the strategy for conducting ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. There is so much conversation and debate about what is "right" living and what is not. But if we were to see Christ as the center and source of our life, worthy living would then be a natural response. Consider some further Scriptures that point to Christ our life:

- Christ is the giver of life
 - "I have come that they might have life." John 10:10
- Christ is life itself
 - "I am the way, the truth, and the life." John 14:6
- Christ is life in us
 - "I live: yet not I, but Christ lives in me." Galatians 2:20
- Christ is the source of eternal life

- “that whosoever believes in (Christ) shall have eternal life. John 3:16

Paul understood the power of Christ in the life of a servant wholly devoted to Him. This enabled Paul to say: “When I travel, it is on Christ’s errands. When I suffer, it is in Christ’s service. When I speak, the theme is Christ. When I write, Christ fills my words.” I pray that this week we would be committed to making that our mission statement. To live - to act, speak, hope, love, listen - to live would be Christ.

- *Share any other thoughts regarding the first chapter of Philippians.*

Prior to next CARE night, read Philippians chapter 2.