

WELCOME.

What you are holding in your hands is the result of a lot of hard work and prayer. Paul's letter to the Philippians is a rich spiritual resource that has been encouraging Christians for centuries. Gathering together with a small group of friends to explore it together will be a worthy investment of your time.

Our hope is that through this series your connection to Christ will deepen, and his love will begin overflow out of your life and impact everyone around you.

With much love,

Rev. David Emery, Lead Pastor

THE BACK STORY.

Philippians is a personal letter written by the Apostle Paul to his friends in the city of Philippi. What makes the letter special is that its contents were inspired by God and included in the New Testament.

Paul was a devout Jew who at one time saw Christianity as a threat to true faith, so he dedicated himself to destroying those who claimed to be followers of Christ. However, around 35 AD Paul experienced a personal, life-changing encounter with the resurrected Jesus, which is described in Acts 9, 22, and 26.

In that encounter Paul made a dramatic turn in his life that transformed him into an apostle for Christ. Paul then became a missionary to the gentiles, and traveled all over the known world, planting churches and proclaiming Christ. He wrote the letter to the Philippians to express his gratitude and affection for the Philippian church, his strongest supporters in ministry.

Paul drafted the letter during his two years of house arrest in Rome. At the time of its writing he was facing execution. Paul had established the church in Philippi approximately 10 years prior, during his second missionary journey recorded in Acts 16. His tender love for the church in Philippi is apparent in this most personal of Paul's writings.

The church had sent gifts to Paul while he was in chains. These gifts were delivered by Epaphroditus, a leader in the Philippian church who ended up assisting Paul with his ministry in Rome. At some point while serving with Paul, Epaphroditus became dangerously sick and nearly died. After his recovery, Paul sent Epaphroditus back to Philippi carrying with him the letter to the Philippian church.

The joy of the Christian experience is the dominant theme running through the book of Philippians. The words *joy* and *rejoice* are used 16 times in the epistle. True joy is not based on circumstances according to Paul; the key to lasting contentment is found through a relationship with Jesus Christ. Paul says, "to live is Christ." (1:21)

OVERVIEW.

We will walk through this most intimate of all Paul's letters and paints a beautiful picture of what it is to be a mature Christian. The story begins in Philippi where Paul introduces three individuals that were all enslaved by the kind of things that we often choose over the gospel: Lydia, the business executive, the slave girl, and the hard-working jailer.

Their lives portray dysfunction and emptiness, but are totally transformed by the Gospel. True joy and Christ's love begin to live within them, giving them a life of purpose. In fact, Paul himself was enslaved and then by God's grace and mercy he could pen these popular and profound words: *to live is Christ and to die is gain.*

This is the most beautiful and personal letter that Paul writes to his churches. He talks in this letter about joy in way that does not make sense to most people. Most people attach joy to positive circumstances in life. But the joy Paul talks about is a joy that he has in this little church has regardless of their circumstances. It begins in Paul who had Jesus do something in him. It began in Lydia, in a slave girl, and then in a jailer. There is this **joy** there. This is where we are starting.

Session 1	Philippians 1: 3 - 11	<i>love</i>
Session 2	Philippians 1: 12 - 26	<i>joy</i>
Session 3	Philippians 2: 1 - 11	<i>humility</i>
Session 4	Philippians 2: 12 - 18	<i>influence</i>
Session 5	Philippians 3: 1 - 16	<i>passion</i>
Session 6	Philippians 4: 4 - 14	<i>peace</i>

GETTING STARTED.

Whether you're gathering and walking through this study with one person or ten people, here are some helpful suggestions for your time together:

Catch up on each other's lives. Pray together. Be specific. Read the scripture together.
Watch the video, pausing to discuss and engage the questions.

This page <https://hacctulsa.org/joy-no-matter-what/> features :
the link to each video (six total)
the four discussion questions for each session
the complete study guide (intro, overview, six discussion guides)

- Use the links, and watch together on a smartTV or large screen.
- You may want to share the link with your group and invite everyone to watch the video (each is about 15 minutes) before you gather. When you're together, you can use a smaller screen to play the video, and use it as a 'listen' lesson (since you've all seen it once already) before you discuss.
- You could have more than one device in your group and watch/listen together.
- You could download the videos and save them to a DVD, using a DVD player for viewing when you're ready.
- You might print discussion guides for your group, or encourage everyone to bring their own, or have it accessible on a mobile device (again, it's all on the website!). Remind them to bring their Bible as well!
- *If you need help to get a DVD copy or print the discussion guide, please call the church office.*

As you read Philippians don't limit yourself to the videos and the study questions. Of course, we want you to explore the rich themes. But this is a very rich spiritual resource so dig in and explore ideas and questions that you have. Ask the Holy Spirit to use what you are reading to speak to your life.

1:

Philippians 1: 3 - 11

LOVE

NO MATTER WHAT

KEY VERSE

And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight.

- Phil 1:9 NRSV

MAIN IDEA

People who live a 'you first' life are more joyful than people who live a 'me first' life. A 'you first' life overflows with love that touches other people's lives.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- ✦ What is the most encouraging thing you read in Philippians 1:3-11?
- ✦ What's the difference between a "me first" and a "you first" approach to life?
- ✦ When have you witnessed overflowing love impact another person's life?
- ✦ What might happen if we began to pray for our church to overflow with love?

2:

Philippians 1: 12 - 26

JOY

NO MATTER WHAT

KEY VERSE

What does it matter? Just this, that Christ is proclaimed in every way, whether out of false motives or true; and in that I rejoice. Yes, and I will continue to rejoice...
- Phil 1:18 NRSV

MAIN IDEA

Paul is convinced that any challenge, even affliction, can turn to God's good. He finds JOY in the fact God provides in all things.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- ✦ When/Where is it hardest for you to find joy?
- ✦ What does it mean to be happy? How is that different from finding joy/being joyful?
- ✦ What/Who steals your joy?
- ✦ Read v20. How does 'boldness' (NRSV) relate to joy?

3:

Philippians 2: 1 - 11

HUMILITY

NO MATTER WHAT

KEY VERSE

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.

- Phil 2:5 NRSV

MAIN IDEA

Humility is not thinking less of yourself but thinking of yourself less. Humility is a counter-intuitive path to joy.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- ✦ What are the most challenging aspects for you in Philippians 2:1-4?
- ✦ How does humility impact our relationships in a positive way?
- ✦ How would you describe the difference between humility and low self-esteem?
- ✦ Why does humility lead to joy? Why does pride lead to misery?

4:

Philippians 2: 12 - 18

INFLUENCE

NO MATTER WHAT

KEY VERSE

For it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure. - Phil 2:13 NRSV

MAIN IDEA

Influence is the effect you have on others through your words, actions, and attitudes. Jesus calls us to be the influence of light amidst darkness.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- ✦ Think about someone who has had a positive influence on your life. What was it about this person that left this positive impact on you?
- ✦ Paul says to "shine like stars in the world." Name some of the ways he suggests we go about doing this in the passage.
- ✦ Of the ways that Paul asks us to shine like stars, which is the most challenging for you? Why do you think that is?
- ✦ Who are the people in your life that you influence? What kind of influence do you want to have in others' lives and why?

5:

Philippians 3: 1 - 16

PRESS ON

NO MATTER WHAT

KEY VERSE

I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.

- Phil 3:8 NRSV

MAIN IDEA

Paul drops what may seem like an egotistical list of ways he is worthy of God's favor. But he comes around to say his greatest desire is to on pursue the goal of union with the mind of Christ.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- ✦ What is a goal (of any kind, small or large) you have in your faith life?
- ✦ V10 sounds extreme, saying he wants to be like Christ, knowing his suffering, death, and resurrection?! How do you put that intention in your own words?
- ✦ He starts the chapter with warnings. Who or what do you need warning against?
- ✦ Where do you find inspiration to 'press on'?

6:

Philippians 4: 4 – 14

PEACE

NO MATTER WHAT

KEY VERSE

And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

- Phil 4:7 NRSV

MAIN IDEA

There is a peace that anchors us in God. Seeking vulnerable relationship with God helps guard our spirits from the storms of life.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- ‡ The word 'peace' is often tossed about, but rarely defined. What do you understand by the word 'peace'?
- ‡ How do you personally respond to Paul's challenge to "*Be anxious for nothing.*"?
- ‡ Share of a time that you have experienced a peace that passes all understanding.
- ‡ Perhaps you are familiar with the lyric "*Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me.*" What does it look like for peace to 'begin with me'?