

Walking Through Philippians

A Lambchow Bible Study



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Contents

Lesson 1 – Foundational Attitudes.....	3
Lesson 2 – Paul’s Prayer.....	6
Lesson 3 – Unexpected Gains	9
Lesson 4 – Worthy Conduct	12
Lesson 5 – Worthy Attitude	15
Lesson 6 – Worthy Walk	18
Lesson 7 – Worthy Examples	21
Lesson 8 - Righteousness	23
Lesson 9 – Further Up! Further In!	26
Lesson 10 - Citizenship.....	29
Lesson 11 - Undercurrents.....	32
Lesson 12 – Joy!	34
Lesson 13 - Peace	37
Lesson 14 – Final Words	40

Lesson 1 – Foundational Attitudes

Letter writing seems to be a lost art. After all, when was the last time someone sent you a handwritten letter in the mail? Or when was the last time you sent one? If you saw my handwriting, you would be glad that I haven't sent a letter your way. It's not pretty. The principles of letter writing still apply to our emails, texts, and tweets. They are addressed, they do convey some sense of our emotion and reason for writing even if it's an emoji, and they contain some kind of information. Many of the books of the New Testament are actually letters. What we call Philippians is a letter written by Paul while imprisoned in Rome to the believers at Philippi in Macedonia. Yet, God speaks to us today in this simple letter about attitudes, joy, and fruitfully following Jesus. In this lesson, we will take a look at Philippians 1:1-8.

“This letter is from Paul and Timothy, slaves of Christ Jesus. I am writing to all of God’s holy people in Philippi who belong to Christ Jesus, including the elders and deacons. May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace. Every time I think of you, I give thanks to my God. Whenever I pray, I make my requests for all of you with joy, for you have been my partners in spreading the Good News about Christ from the time you first heard it until now. And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns. So it is right that I should feel as I do about all of you, for you have a special place in my heart. You share with me the special favor of God, both in my imprisonment and in defending and confirming the truth of the Good News. God knows how much I love you and long for you with the tender compassion of Christ Jesus.”
(Philippians 1:1–8, NLT)

As you read these opening lines of Philippians what emotions did you pick up on? I saw grace, peace, thankfulness, joy, confidence, love, and compassion. Paul liked the Philippians, and we know from the start that this letter will be encouraging. For comparison take a look at Galatians 1:1-6. The first couple of verses shows us that Paul had a standard opening which included the author(s), who the letter was intended for, and a prayer for God's grace and peace. It's what comes next that sets the stage. In Philippians Paul writes, “Every time I think of you, I give thanks to my God.” In Galatians, we see, “*I am shocked that you are turning away so soon from God, who called you to himself through the loving mercy of Christ. You are following a different way that pretends to be the Good News*” (Galatians 1:6, NLT) Philippians is a letter of encouragement, Galatians is one of correction. We are going to see that attitude of encouragement over and over as we walk through Paul's letter.

In this snippet from Paul's letter, we see some things about the way he prayed. What would you say was Paul's attitude in prayer? I see three distinct attitudes in these verses. Specifically thankfulness, joy, and certainty.

Praying with Thankfulness

Paul often prayed with thankfulness. Consider these examples: “*Let me say first that I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith in him is being talked about all over*

the world." (Romans 1:8, NLT) And, *"I always thank my God for you and for the gracious gifts he has given you, now that you belong to Christ Jesus."* (1 Corinthians 1:4, NLT) And, *"I have not stopped thanking God for you. I pray for you constantly,"* (Ephesians 1:16, NLT) Just about every one of Paul's letters opens with some mention of prayer and thankfulness. Along my own journey of faith, I've learned to start almost all of my prayer with thanksgiving. Sometimes it is thanking God for who, or what I'm praying for, sometimes it's thanking Him for a yet unknown answer, and sometimes it is thanking God for who He is. No matter how dark the day or the situation beginning prayers with thanksgiving seems to instantly lighten the load.

Praying with Joy

The words joy and rejoice will reverberate many times during our walk through Philippians. It was Paul's joy to write this letter and to pray for the believers gathered in Philippi. We often come to God's throne with heavy hearts; motivated to pray for our problems. I think that that is only half of the prayer life we are supposed to have. We should bring our troubles and challenges to Jesus, but we should also bring our joys to Him as well. Since I have the skill set of being good with computers, I tend to get phone calls when folks are having computer trouble. I don't mind too much. What gets my goat is when that's the only time I hear from them. Some folks only call when something bad is going on, it would be nice if they would share their joys too. It kind of makes me wonder if God feels that way at times. So, I have this habit as well for prayer. Share everything with God, the good, the glorious, and the victories as well as the challenges, struggles, and failures.

Praying with Certainty

The third prayer attitude we see in Paul is a certainty. Paul wrote, *"I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns."* Paul was certain, he had faith that God would continue to work in the lives of the believers on the other end of his letter. It wasn't Paul's confidence alone that did the trick; it was WHO we had confidence in. We often come to God with the faulty understanding that if we pray the right way, say the right things, or pray long enough, or pray loud enough, or pray persistently enough then God will have to answer. That thought puts the burden on us, as if our prayers somehow move God. But Paul's attitude and example are different. Instead of trying to move God, He recognized what God was already doing and moved to join it. Other New Testament letter writers saw this as well. James said, *"And even when you ask, you don't get it because your motives are all wrong—you want only what will give you pleasure."* (James 4:3, NLT) John wrote, *"This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him."* (1 John 5:14–15, NASB95) Whenever I'm up against a situation or when someone brings a prayer request my way the second prayer after being thankful is asking God to show me His will for the need. It makes it much easier to pray with certainty and faith when we know in advance what God wants or what He is already doing.

My encouragement is for you to incorporate Paul's prayer attitudes into your own time with God. Start your prayers with thanksgiving. You may not be able to thank God for the situation, but you can thank Him for who He is and what He is doing in us. Thank Him for the answer, but most of all thank Him for His love. Next, bring to God your joys as well as your troubles and challenges. God is not asking us to put on a happy face when praying. In other words, we don't need to fake joy or pretend to be happy when bad things are happening. But there is something about prayer that brings joy even when we are surrounded by darkness. Lastly, we need to pray with certainty and faith. I'm not meaning that we should pray in a way that sounds like we're bossing God around. Perhaps a better word picture would be settledness. Knowing that whatever we bring to God is in His hands. The issue is settled even if we don't see it yet and even if it takes a lifetime to unfold. Growing a prayer vocabulary that includes thanksgiving, joy, and certainty will change how you look at prayer. I find that it makes those moments with God much more meaningful, powerful, and fun.

Lesson 2 – Paul’s Prayer

There’s a basic truth of life we often forget -- what ultimately matters is not how much we know but what we do with it. Isn’t that what separates trivia from useful knowledge? Can we make a difference in our life or in someone else’s life by knowing that there were four Maltese Falcons created for the iconic movie, one of which Humphrey Bogart damaged when he accidentally dropped it? I can’t think of how knowing that fact could possibly help anyone unless they were playing a trivia game or were on a quiz show. Now, not all knowledge is trivial. In fact, part of Paul’s prayer for the folks at Philippi was that they would grow in knowledge. But that’s only a part of a greater whole as we’ll soon see.

Welcome to the second lesson on our Walk Through Philippians. In our first lesson, we looked at Philippians 1:1-8 and discussed the attitudes of thankfulness, joy, and certainty that Paul expressed in his prayers. This lesson will focus on Philippians 1:9-11 and takes a closer look at what Paul prayed. Paul writes, *“I pray that your love will overflow more and more, and that you will keep on growing in knowledge and understanding. For I want you to understand what really matters, so that you may live pure and blameless lives until the day of Christ’s return. May you always be filled with the fruit of your salvation—the righteous character produced in your life by Jesus Christ—for this will bring much glory and praise to God.”* (Philippians 1:9–11, NLT)

Paul’s Prayer List

What is on Paul’s prayer list for to the believers at Philippi? I see overflowing love, growing in knowledge and understanding, and that they should always be filled with the fruit of their salvation. What I’m struck by is the outward facing and practical character of Paul’s prayer list. Now, that may not be immediately obvious, but it is something we are going to unfold as we look at each of his desires and the ultimate outcome Paul is hoping for.

Overflowing with Love

Paul’s first prayer for the Philippians is to overflow or abound with love. Paul didn’t pray that they would just receive some love or be filled with love but that their love would overflow. Let’s say that there is a cup sitting on a table, could be a small coffee cup, a tumbler, or a 64 oz. Super-Mega-Big-Gulp cup. What happens if you take a pitcher of lemonade and keep pouring until the cup overflows? It makes a mess. It runs all over the place. Someone screams and runs to get some paper towels. Notice that Paul didn’t pray for bigger cups, he prayed that their cups, their lives, would overflow with love. That their love would spill out and touch the lives of those around them. Not just once, but in a continual fountain-like flow.

Growing in Knowledge

Paul’s second prayer for the Philippians was to grow in knowledge and understanding. Now, this isn’t just growing in fact based internal knowledge like remembering what Pi is or that water is two hydrogen atoms and one oxygen. The word Paul used indicates knowledge that

has been experienced. It's the difference between flight school and actually flying. Flight school is filled with facts. What the parts of a plane are called and how they work. How to read the instruments and operate the controls. How to do a pre-flight check. How to navigate and use the communication systems. How a pilot must balance thrust, drag, lift, and gravity. But knowing all of those things is not the same as actually stepping into a Cessna, strapping in, taxiing, taking off, flying around, and landing again. Paul wasn't talking about facts, or teachings, or doctrines of love, faith, and Jesus but having a continually growing real knowledge based on experience that leads to action.

Paul's second prayer combines two words; knowledge and understanding. Understanding could also be translated as discernment. We discern things every day, often without even thinking about it. We make choices based on our knowledge, past experiences, and prejudices. Think of this as a giant buffet. What do you put on your plate? What looks good? What would be tasty? What would satisfy your appetite? What would be healthy? That's discernment. We often exercise what I'll call negative discernment; making choices based on our dislikes and negative experiences. I don't like rhubarb because of a negative experience I can't let go of. The discernment Paul is talking about distinguishes or grabs onto what is excellent. You could call this positive discernment. Another translation puts it this way, *"And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ;"* (Philippians 1:9–10, NASB95) Discerning what is excellent in this context means determining what has the greater value.

The goal of these two words, knowledge and understanding or discernment, is to live a sincere and blameless life. Paul desired that the folks at Philippi would walk out what they were learning in Christ. Faith in Jesus should not be compartmentalized to a few hours on Sunday, but it should affect every moment and every choice of our lives. We must also recognize and give space for growth, not only for ourselves but also for other Christ-follower.

Fruit of Righteousness

Paul's third prayer was for the Philippians to be filled with the fruit of their salvation or fruit of righteousness. The New Living Translation underscores that this fruit is the "righteous character produced in your life by Jesus Christ." Paul's prayer reminds us that what we are learning and doing is actually a work of Christ in our lives. We overflow in love because of Christ. We gain concrete knowledge and practice positive, practical discernment through the Holy Spirit. We will grow fruit; the quality and quantity will be determined by how deeply we abide in Christ (John 15:1-11).

Paul's prayer for the Philippians centered on their lives; that they would walk in what they had and grow even more. This was not just a prayer for peace among believers but that they would live out their faith in concrete and tangible ways out of love, understanding, discernment, with sincere integrity through the righteousness of Jesus.

Practical Effects

What do you think would happen if we prayed for each other as Paul prayed for the Philippians? How often do we gossip and complain to God about someone's bad choices, or faulty character, or inconsistent faith? You see Paul had a goal. That the lives of the folks at Philippi would bring glory and praise to God. That was his aim. It should be ours as well. I have some homework for you that is a practical, concrete, and living it out encouragement. Who in the church has hurt you? For the sake of this exercise pick one. If you can't think of anyone, then consider your family, friends, past friends, and co-workers. If you still say no one, then you need to get off the computer and experience some real flesh and blood relationships. So, do you have someone in mind? Good. First off forgive them, don't let bitterness corrupt your prayers. Be specific in your forgiveness, name the incidents and attitudes. What about your sin in the situation? Anger? Guilt? Gossiped, complained, or murmured? Something else? Confess it to God, determine to turn from it, and ask for His forgiveness. Got that? Good. Now that we've gotten stuff out of the way pray a blessing on their lives along the lines of what Paul prayed for the Philippians. Remember to pray with the attitudes of thankfulness, joy, and certainty. Ask God to fill them to overflowing with love, that they would grow and experience Christ, and that God would form their character according to the righteousness of Christ that has been planted in their hearts. Hard to do? Could be. But we are changed as we pray for others like this and begin to walk out Paul's prayer in our own lives.

Lesson 3 – Unexpected Gains

I think that we all have a few strange habits. Things we do that few others do. For instance, my wife Betty loves to eat lemon slices. She's even taught our grandson Eli to "like" them, you should see his face pucker from the sourness as he sucks one down. There's a kind of proverb often quoted when life turns sour - when life gives you lemons make lemonade. Easier said than done. Paul wrote a similar sentiment in his letter to Rome, "*And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.*" (Romans 8:28, NASB95) Perhaps those words echoed in Paul's heart as he wrote to the Philippians from his Roman prison.

In this article we continue our walk through Philippians and look at 1:12-26. Paul shifts from his opening remarks to calming the reader's fears about his present circumstance. He begins by saying, "*And I want you to know, my dear brothers and sisters, that everything that has happened to me here has helped to spread the Good News.*" In the verses that follow Paul expresses three examples, the direct impact on those around him, the new boldness by Roman believers to talk about Jesus, and the results of his own struggles. These were unexpected gains, unforeseen and unplanned for as Paul journeyed to Rome.

Unexpected Impact

From Luke's history in Acts we learn that Paul is not in some bleak dungeon but under house arrest with a constant guard and limited mobility. That little piece of information helps us understand Paul's first unexpected gain. Paul writes, "*For everyone here, including the whole palace guard, knows that I am in chains because of Christ.*" Can you imagine being assigned to guard Paul? I wonder if the palace guard considered it an easy assignment or a waste of their time? We learn in Acts that folks were coming to see Paul since he couldn't go out to preach.

Imagine what those guards witnessed. Paul's guards didn't just hear what Paul said, they watched his life. They saw how he treated others, how he dealt with his own pain, how he dealt with complex problems like the runaway slave Onesimus, and what caused him joy and sorrow. I wonder if they saw in Paul something unique, a person that wasn't just out for themselves. It is a safe assumption that some chose to follow Christ. Paul hints as he closes his letter, "*All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household.*" (Philippians 4:22, NASB95) We don't know much else. Who these folks were or their names. But Paul's unfortunate circumstance gave opportunities to spread the good news into several unforeseen places.

Unexpected Boldness

Paul also observed another unexpected side-effect from his situation. He writes, "*And because of my imprisonment, most of the believers here have gained confidence and boldly speak God's message without fear.*" Paul doesn't explain why or how this boldness came about. Was it a trickle down of Paul's own faith as he taught those that came to see him. Or it could have been

that seeing or hearing about Paul's situation an attitude of "if he can do it so can I" took hold. Either way, more and more folks were talking about what they have experienced in Christ. But there were some problems. Paul tells us, *"It's true that some are preaching out of jealousy and rivalry. But others preach about Christ with pure motives. They preach because they love me, for they know I have been appointed to defend the Good News. Those others do not have pure motives as they preach about Christ. They preach with selfish ambition, not sincerely, intending to make my chains more painful to me."* Kind of like today. Some folks proclaim Jesus sincerely and lovingly while others do so to best others or for their own agenda.

There are stories from the days of tent revivals that echo what may have been happening in Rome. During the 1930's, 40's and 50's, before the advent of Television and the Internet, men and women would travel the country to preach and evangelize. They would bring their own large tents to provide a facility large enough to handle the crowds. Along the way, a kind of rivalry broke out over who had the largest tent (and by extension the largest crowds). And like in the Rome of Paul's days some of the tent revival preachers did preach out of jealousy and rivalry while others preached with pure motives. We still see this today. It's easy to point the finger at today's televangelist and their failings. But rivalry can also consume local pastors and leaders as they race to outgrow one another in numbers or significance. Paul didn't wag his finger at these wrong-headed folks but found an unexpected gain. Paul writes, *"But that doesn't matter. Whether their motives are false or genuine, the message about Christ is being preached either way, so I rejoice. And I will continue to rejoice."* We can adopt that same attitude. We may not agree with how or why someone preaches but we can rejoice that Christ's good news is being spread.

Unexpected Struggles

Paul's third unexpected gain came through his own struggles. Paul writes, *"For I know that as you pray for me and the Spirit of Jesus Christ helps me, this will lead to my deliverance. For I fully expect and hope that I will never be ashamed, but that I will continue to be bold for Christ, as I have been in the past. And I trust that my life will bring honor to Christ, whether I live or die."* There was a very real concern that Paul's imprisonment would end in death. Buried in Paul's statement is a sense of his struggle and perhaps his own doubts. This isn't the first time things looked bleak for Paul or the first time that he faced death. He lists some of those times in 2 Corinthians 11:23-28. Paul continues, *"For to me, living means living for Christ, and dying is even better. But if I live, I can do more fruitful work for Christ. So I really don't know which is better. I'm torn between two desires: I long to go and be with Christ, which would be far better for me. But for your sakes, it is better that I continue to live."* I think that we see some of Paul's own thoughts as he struggled through what was going to happen. Which should he hope for, to encounter death and be with Christ or continue on in fruitful labor? We don't know how long Paul struggled with thoughts of life and death. We do know that he concluded, *"Knowing this, I am convinced that I will remain alive so I can continue to help all of you grow and experience the joy of your faith."* Paul's unexpected gain came in the form of understanding where he should focus next. He could have just sat around waiting for the end. He chose instead to keep his hand on the plow for the sake of others.

Lessons Learned

We've seen three things that could be counted as negatives fighting against the Kingdom. Paul's imprisonment could have silenced his voice, but it gave him a whole new audience. The preachers speaking with wrong motives could have tarnished Paul's message, but they advanced the good news of Jesus anyway. Paul's personal struggle over death and life could have ended his ministry. Perhaps it was this struggle that birthed his letter to the Philippians and given joy, hope, faith, and encouragement to an audience far beyond Paul's imagination. Life with Jesus is full of unexpected gains. Times when darkness seems to be winning but the good news advances in unexpected ways. Consider those circumstances and situations in your own life that seem negative and bent on killing your faith, hope, and joy. Ask Jesus to show you the unexpected gains that have already come out of those dark times and what may be just around the corner. Praise God and rejoice with Paul! You see, the old saw about making lemonade from lemons isn't exactly right. Life may have given us a load of lemons, but it is God that turns them into lemonade for his own purposes. Paul didn't just learn this lesson; he lived it out for all to see.

Lesson 4 – Worthy Conduct

Our conduct is often guided by who we are with and where we are at. We act one way at work and another way while standing in a checkout line. The different groups we belong to each have their own set of expectations or rules of conduct. Motorcycle riders have an expectation of “the wave” as they pass each other on the road. Campers have an expectation of helpfulness and of respecting the temporary boundaries of each other’s campsites. Parents have guidelines that specify what is helpful and what is off-limits when someone’s child is acting up in the canned goods section of the major mart. There are formally expressed workplace expectations from employers and informally understood ones between workers. Is it any wonder then that Paul said, *“Above all, you must live as citizens of heaven, conducting yourselves in a manner worthy of the Good News about Christ.”* (Philippians 1:27a, NLT)

Welcome to the fourth lesson in our series Walking Through Philippians. In this lesson, Paul begins the meat of his letter. The preliminaries of welcome, prayer, and personal update are finished. In the next four lessons we’ll see Paul opening up what living or walking in a way worthy of Christ looks like. In Philippians 1:27-2:4 Paul talks about worthy conduct.

“Above all, you must live as citizens of heaven, conducting yourselves in a manner worthy of the Good News about Christ. Then, whether I come and see you again or only hear about you, I will know that you are standing together with one spirit and one purpose, fighting together for the faith, which is the Good News. Don’t be intimidated in any way by your enemies. This will be a sign to them that they are going to be destroyed, but that you are going to be saved, even by God himself. For you have been given not only the privilege of trusting in Christ but also the privilege of suffering for him. We are in this struggle together. You have seen my struggle in the past, and you know that I am still in the midst of it. Is there any encouragement from belonging to Christ? Any comfort from his love? Any fellowship together in the Spirit? Are your hearts tender and compassionate? Then make me truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, loving one another, and working together with one mind and purpose. Don’t be selfish; don’t try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. Don’t look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too.” (Philippians 1:27–2:4, NLT)

Worthy Manner

Good and God-fearing folks have hung all kinds of expectations on Paul’s encouragement to conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of the Gospel. Expectations about clothes, jewelry, food and drink, hairstyles, demeanor, timeliness, and certain activities have been underscored with Paul’s words. To be perfectly frank, most of those are more cultural than Biblical. So, instead of hanging something on a verse that doesn’t belong let’s ask Paul. Take a look at verses 1:27-2:4 again. What kind of conduct do you think Paul is proposing for his readers?

In my mind, Paul’s overriding thought in this section is the unity of believers. He expresses this in phrases such as - “standing together with one spirit and one purpose”, “fighting together for the faith”, “We are in this struggle together”, “make me truly happy by agreeing

wholeheartedly with each other”, “loving one another”, and “working together with one mind and purpose.” That’s what conducting ourselves in a manner worthy of Christ’s good news looks like. Elsewhere in the scriptures, we are reminded that the body is made up of many parts, each having its own function. That there are a diversity of gifts, talents, and abilities in God’s kingdom. Unity is not the same as uniformity. Outward attempts to enforce unity eventually steals the focus from what it should be. So, looking again at Philippians what do you think Paul wanted their focus to be?

Here’s what I see. Paul anchors worthy conduct in the Good News or the Gospel of Christ. He reminds his readers that because of the good news they “have been given not only the privilege of trusting in Christ but also the privilege of suffering for him.” Their unity is to be anchored in the Good News of Jesus. Not only that they have received the truth of life-changing love and forgiveness because of Jesus’ sacrifice but also finding unity in letting others know as well. When the rules of our church, denomination, or group become the central focus, we are not walking in the unity of Christ’s Good News. We may be unified, but it will eventually fracture under its own weight. Anchoring our unity on the Gospel allows for great diversity without judgment. For instance, one may spread God’s Good News with “turn or burn” tracts, while another seeks to build bridges of friendship, while another fixes someone’s roof, while another offers comfort, while another prays, while another writes blog articles, while another plants seeds of truth, while another harvests, while another sings songs of praise, while another.... What did Paul say in our last lesson? *“But that doesn’t matter. Whether their motives are false or genuine, the message about Christ is being preached either way, so I rejoice. And I will continue to rejoice.”* (Philippians 1:18, NLT) That’s the difference. I may not be able to share the good news like you do and watching you may even make me a bit uncomfortable. But if I look down on you with judgment then I have thrown unity out the window.

Unity

Now, Paul doesn’t leave us wondering how unity is to be nurtured and maintained. He gives us several attitudes and activities that encourage unity. Consider verses 2:2-4, what attitudes and actions does Paul encourage? The wording may vary depending on the translation but here’s what I see from the NLT. 1) Agreeing wholeheartedly. Agreeing without reservation with honesty and transparency. (I don’t think the hedge to “agree to disagree” is included in Paul’s thoughts. More on that in a moment.) 2) Loving one another. 3) Working together with one mind and purpose. I always visualize this as pulling in the same direction. 4) Don’t be selfish. 5) Don’t try to impress others. We should do our best out of an attitude of service and not one of empty pride. 6) Be humble, valuing others as better than ourselves. One way to value others is to be willing to be wrong. 7) Look after your own interests but also take note, encourage, and participate in the interests of others as well. Wow! What would happen if we brought these attitudes and actions to our church, fellowship, or small group? We could always try it and find out.

Agreeing to Agree

Let's talk for a moment about this "agreeing to disagree" thing I threw on the table. Think about it in terms of the seven attitudes and actions we just read through. I don't think it fits at all! It usually means that one or both parties are so blinded by pride that they can't see value in the other person or what they are saying. Keep in mind that we are talking about brothers and sisters in Christ.

There are times we may need to "agree to disagree" with the world to maintain a bridge for the Gospel. When it comes to brothers and sisters in Christ, though, this phrase is usually a cop-out. A way to say, I'm right, and you're wrong, and I'm just not going to talk about it anymore. It's a mind twisting picture of proclaiming unity in disunity.

There are ways to disagree with grace; to recognize what the other person is saying and value their point of view without violating our own. We do have to be willing to be wrong, however, which is a gigantic risk. It also means being willing to invest time instead of just shoving something aside. "I recognize that we don't see eye to eye on this right now. Will you give me some time to pray about it and consider what you are saying? Will you do the same? Can we talk about it again next week?" Of course, the promise to pray, consider, and talk must be followed up on.

It's possible that the disagreement will stand. What happens next depends on more factors than we have the space to cover. In the end, you may need to agree for the sake of the Gospel to lay the disagreement aside. The difference is subtle, but the effect is huge. You see, the first agrees on the disagreement. We agree that we will never agree. The later is an agreement that the Good News of Christ is more important than our disagreement. There is wholehearted agreement, there is love for one another, we can still work together with one purpose, we've laid aside the selfish desire to win, we aren't holding on to pride, we are humbly valuing each other, we are looking out for their interests as well as ours. Give it a try the next time you're in one of those "we seem to be stuck" moments.

Review

We've covered a lot of ground so let's summarize. Find unity in the Gospel of Jesus. There may be huge differences in the way the Gospel is presented but rejoice. Avoid building unity on anything other than the Good News of Christ. Grow unity by maintaining the seven attitudes and actions listed above. By doing this, we will be conducting ourselves in a manner worthy of God's kingdom in all that we do even when we disagree. This kind of unity is itself a witness to the world about the Good News of Christ. We have been given the privilege of trusting Jesus and also the privilege of suffering for him. Sometimes, perhaps more often than we'd like to admit, that means the sacrifice of our pride. Are you willing to bear that cost to see God's Kingdom come?

Lesson 5 – Worthy Attitude

We've all had this happen. We're standing at the pantry door looking for something like a can of creamed corn or a special spice or a jar of spaghetti sauce. In exasperation we announce that we can't find it, maybe we're out. Then our spouse comes over, slightly moves a can of green beans and there it is. At this point, my mom would say, "If it was a snake it would have bit you." Maybe this just happens to me. Somethings seem to hide in plain sight, we see but we don't see. Our next passage in Philippians is like that. Paul's point can be "hidden" if we are not careful hearers.

In our fifth installment of Walking Through Philippians, Paul underlines an attitude he presented in the previous verses. To recap, Paul presented seven attitudes and actions that support and grow unity with each other. Those are whole-hearted agreement, loving one another, working together with one mind and purpose, putting aside selfishness, giving up trying to impress others, being humble by considering others as better than ourselves, and to look after our interests along with the interests of others. In today's verses, Paul underscores humility and presents Jesus as its ultimate example.

"You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross. Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor and gave him the name above all other names, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (Philippians 2:5–11, NLT)

Paul's Point

Did you lose Paul's point by the time you got to the end of the passage? It's easy to do. There are essentially three jewels in these verses. The brightest is the Hymn of Jesus that Paul used or penned to make his point. The victory scene where every knee bows to Jesus takes our breath away. And there is Paul's point that Jesus is the highest example of humility. Let's take each of these in turn.

Paul writes of Jesus, "Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross. Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor and gave him the name above all other names." These verses form a kind of creed. Many scholars think this may have been an early hymn that Paul borrowed to make his point. In them we see the grand scope of eternity past, of Christ's undeniable divinity, the incarnation we celebrate at Christmas, the passion we celebrate at Easter, and we are swept up

into heaven as Jesus is exalted above all. In them we find the answer to the most important question ever asked - Who do you say Jesus is? In a few brief lines Paul declares Jesus' as God, co-equal with the Father. Jesus is not a man that becomes God, he is God that became a man, a slave. He was executed as a criminal. Although Paul doesn't explicitly mention the resurrection it is part of "Therefore, God elevated him." But "elevated" loses something in translation because Paul uses a word that proclaims God's hyper-exaltation of Jesus.

Name Above All Names

Jesus is the name above all names. Every person, be they angels, humans, or demons will bow their knee in submission to Christ and proclaim His Lordship. There is no name or title or statement higher than Jesus Christ is Lord. Jesus, the name given by an angel to Mary before His birth, literally means Jehovah saves. Granted, Jesus is an English way of saying Yeshua. But whether you say Yeshua, Jesu, or Jesus it means the same. Christ, a title that has become more than a title. It's a declaration of role and purpose but also of accomplishment. It is the English version of a Greek word which bears the same meaning as Messiah, the anointed one. Yet even today it is more than just a title. President, king, and caesar are all similar titles of office. Yet there has been many presidents, many kings, many caesars, but there is only one Christ. Lord, there is no one higher or greater. Jesus is the high king over all other kings. He is the Lord of all other lords. It is not a statement of desire, it is a declaration of fact. Jesus Christ is Lord over all of God's creation both the obedient and the rebellious. So tell me, what does that mean to you right now?

Do you remember Paul's point at the start of these verses? (No fair looking) Paul began by presenting Jesus as the ultimate example of humility. "You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had." Four times he either explicitly or implicitly points out how Jesus humbled himself has an example for us. Even though Jesus was God he did not cling to or grasp or hold on to it. We all know folks that flaunt their position and make sure everyone else knows how special they are. Jesus did not act that way even though he had every right to do so. Jesus' example is more than not flaunting who He is but also that he willingly became "less than." Most of us struggle to live up to something, to be seen as significant and needed, perhaps even important. Because of His love for us, He became "less than" in a very big way. Over the years folks have tried to come up with metaphors and allegories to explain what Jesus gave up. All fall short because they can't express the fullness of being God. One I heard a long time ago compares Jesus becoming a man to that of a man becoming an ant. Paul goes on to say that Jesus humbled himself and took the form of a bond-servant. He became part of creation instead of existing outside and over creation. Lastly, Paul says that Jesus humbled himself in obedience, even to the point of submitting to an undeserved death as a convicted criminal.

Review

So, let's review Jesus example of humility. 1) Even though He had a position of power He didn't flaunt it or draw His significance from it. Sometimes we are in a position of authority,

sometimes we just think we are. A humble person does not use position as a weapon to demand their own way. 2) He was willing to give up His position for the sake of others. He didn't stop being who he was but came down to our level. Humility means meeting people where they are at. If we are looking down on someone then there is something wrong with us. 3) Jesus humbled himself as a servant. Not only did Jesus come down to our level but he served. It would be like the President of the United States cleaning the toilets on Air Force One. Humility means serving in whatever capacity is needed, nothing is beneath doing. 4) Jesus humbled himself in obedience to the point of suffering an unjust death. Humility often means paying someone else's penalty at our own expense. Humility's down payment is our pride, but its full cost is our life. Jesus said, *"This is my commandment: Love each other in the same way I have loved you. There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends."* (John 15:12–13, NLT)

That's what humility looks like. Are you willing to pay the price? Maybe today's price for the sake of humility is calling someone you're mad at to ask forgiveness instead of waiting for them to call you. Maybe today's price means getting dirty as you clean an elderly person's gutters or bathroom. Maybe today's price is your leisure time as you take a neighbor to shopping. Maybe today's price means parking far from the door instead of taking the closest spot. Maybe today's price is serving a meal to the homeless. Maybe today's price is listening to the fifteenth retelling of the same story as if it was the first time. Maybe today's price is not getting angry when someone else gets the credit. Maybe today's price for humility is saying thank you when someone moves the green beans so you can see the spaghetti sauce.

Lesson 6 – Worthy Walk

Folks either love exercise or hate it. We know we need it or at least have this vague notion that it would somehow make life better. Although some may doubt that. Exercise can be fun, work, painful, joyful, drudgery, and exhilarating all at the same time. Figure that one out. Why does something so beneficial require so much attention? I think there's a lesson in that.

Welcome to our next step in our Walk Through Philipians. Our verses for this lesson are Philipians 2:12-18. Paul wrote, *“So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure. Do all things without grumbling or disputing; so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I will have reason to glory because I did not run in vain nor toil in vain. But even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with you all. You too, I urge you, rejoice in the same way and share your joy with me.”* (Philipians 2:12–18, NASB95)

Work Out

This phrase, “work out your salvation” has caused confusion at times. On the surface, it may seem that Paul is saying to work to gain salvation, but that is not what he means. Salvation remains a free gift from God that our only input is to receive. Paul, on the other hand, is advising his readers to put their salvation into action through (if you will allow) several exercises.

Obedience

Obedience is one of those words that many shudder at. It strikes at the heart of our independent individualism. But through obedience, we exercise our faith. Obedience keeps us honest instead of religious. Samuel prophesied in part, *“Has the Lord as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices As in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, And to heed than the fat of rams.”* (1 Samuel 15:22, NASB95)

One day Jesus was being quizzed by the various religious factions of his day. The Pharisees challenged him on taxes. The Sadducees quizzed him on relationships in heaven. Lastly, a lawyer asked a most honest question, “Which is the greatest commandment?” Jesus answered, *“The foremost is, ‘Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ ‘The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”* (Mark 12:29–31, NASB95) This may have stunned some of his listeners no doubt expecting Jesus to point to one of the ten commandments or something from Leviticus. The lawyer found Jesus’ answer to be perfect and replied that to love God and

love others is greater than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.

That is what obedience looks like – loving God in the reality of who He is with every part of our lives and loving others in the same way Jesus loves us.

Word Matters

Paul next goes on to encourage his readers to avoid grumbling and arguing. It's easy to go negative and point out all the flaws, all the sins, all the failures, all the wrongheadedness of others. Bad things happen. Sometimes it's just an accident or oversight. Sometimes it because of the world's twisted nature. People say and do all kinds of crazy things. Welcome to the world.

Grumbling and complaining seem to be part of our nature. It's even on exhibit in the Genesis story of the Garden. After God had revealed Adam and Eve's sin, they took turns blaming somewhere else for their own failure. Grumbling requires a certain amount of pride and blindness and is often designed to push someone else down so that we don't look so bad. Paul points us in a different direction, to add light instead of joining the darkness.

Paul links grumbling with disputing as in debating or arguing. There is such a thing as a reasoned appeal and discussion. Each side laying out their own thoughts, opinions, and truth as they understand them. Discussion turns to disputing when the "I'm right and you're wrong" attitude kicks in with open mouths and shut ears. As with grumbling, we need to check our attitude and motive. While many have responded to Christ through a reasonable appeal, I don't know of anyone that has been argued into faith. Again, let's add light instead of joining the darkness.

Hold Fast

Paul clarifies that we shine by holding fast (or holding forth) the word of life. There is a dual edge meaning to the word Paul used. One the one hand it means to maintain a grasp on someone or something. On the other hand, it also means to be mindful with the idea of fixing our attention. I think that both apply to Paul's instruction.

The word of life basically means the Good News of Jesus Christ and the free gift of salvation offered to all. In another letter, Paul warned, "I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ." (Galatians 1:6–7, NASB95) The issue? The Galatians were replacing love with law and relationship with religion.

Holding fast and forth the word of life requires intentionality and focus lest we too turn grace

into something else. I suppose I would put it this way. We hold fast and forth the word of life by adopting and maintaining an attitude of utter dependence on Jesus.

Joy

The last exercise of working out our salvation is joy by rejoicing and sharing our joy with others. What happens soon after a child is born? The parents share their joy with others. That's the hallmark of joy, an effervescent bubbling out, over, and all around that cannot be denied. This will not be the last word on joy, there's much more as these lessons unfold.

The purpose of all this exercise is to keep us vital and healthy in Christ. Oh, and here's the good news. There's no gym fee involved because working out our salvation in this way is not a three hour a week thing but a 168 hour a week activity (meaning every hour of every day). Now get out there and pump some iron.

Lesson 7 – Worthy Examples

Grandpa Joe loved puzzles. Jigsaw puzzles, 3-d block puzzles, wire puzzles, and just about anything else you can think of. One of the things he brought back from his time in Germany during WWII was a figure puzzle. Essentially, figure puzzles are clay or wooden tiles of different geometric shapes that can be assembled to form larger shapes. With it came a little book, not of answers - that cost extra, but of shape puzzles. The challenge is to assemble each shape without any leftovers tiles. In a way, Paul is now taking all the pieces of the last several lessons on unity and humility to show us two examples of what those look like when all the pieces are in place.

Welcome to the seventh installment of Walking Through Philippians. Over the past few lessons, Paul has been encouraging the Jesus followers at Philippi to grow in unity and humility. In today's section it seems that Paul is shifting gears to something different, but what he is really doing is providing his readers two real life examples that they can relate to.

Paul writes about Timothy, *“If the Lord Jesus is willing, I hope to send Timothy to you soon for a visit. Then he can cheer me up by telling me how you are getting along. I have no one else like Timothy, who genuinely cares about your welfare. All the others care only for themselves and not for what matters to Jesus Christ. But you know how Timothy has proved himself. Like a son with his father, he has served with me in preaching the Good News. I hope to send him to you just as soon as I find out what is going to happen to me here. And I have confidence from the Lord that I myself will come to see you soon.”* (Philippians 2:19-24, NLT)

Timothy

Timothy is a picture of unity, of working together with one mind. Paul's plan is to send Timothy to Philippi to look in on them and see how they are doing. It may seem that Paul is a bit gruff with his statements of “I have no one else like Timothy” and “all others care only for themselves.” There were other men that Paul trusted, Luke and Aristarchus come to mind, but they may not have been available to make the trip to Philippi. As to the others that only seemed to care about themselves, Paul mentioned them earlier when he rejoiced that Christ was being preached even if their attitudes were off. That's the surface stuff. But I think that Paul is bringing up Timothy as an example of unity. Timothy and Paul have the same mind, share the same goals, and are moving in the same direction. This also gives us another clue on how to grow unity.

You see, Paul and Timothy grew together over many hours, days, weeks, months, and even years. They spent a huge amount of time together. Unity requires time, mutual respect, and a large dose of honesty. There are some folks we only see on a Sunday morning and maybe only share a handful of words. Tough soil for unity to grow in. Now, before we put all the burden on the Pastor to grow and maintain unity we need to remember that they only have 24 hours in a day and they have to sleep sometime. It would be impossible for them to grow that kind of

deep relationship with every single person under their care. Enter small group ministry. As the Pastor works to grow unity with small group leaders, the small groups grow unity among themselves. That's better soil to grow in. But of course, it means time. Not only time to meet once a week, but also to care for each other as life happens. Just something for you to consider.

Epaphroditus

In the next few verses Paul updates the followers at Philippi on Epaphroditus. Epap, as we're going to call him, carried letters and coin to Paul from Philippi. The distance he traveled was over 815 miles one way, no small journey on foot. Paul writes, *"Meanwhile, I thought I should send Epaphroditus back to you. He is a true brother, co-worker, and fellow soldier. And he was your messenger to help me in my need. I am sending him because he has been longing to see you, and he was very distressed that you heard he was ill. And he certainly was ill; in fact, he almost died. But God had mercy on him—and also on me, so that I would not have one sorrow after another. So I am all the more anxious to send him back to you, for I know you will be glad to see him, and then I will not be so worried about you. Welcome him in the Lord's love and with great joy, and give him the honor that people like him deserve. For he risked his life for the work of Christ, and he was at the point of death while doing for me what you couldn't do from far away."* (Philippians 2:19–30, NLT) Whether on the journey or after he had arrived in Rome, Epap got deathly sick but recovered. Paul's plan may have been to send Epap back to Philippi with Timothy, probably carrying the very letter we are now reading. Paul encourages the folks at Philippi to welcome Epap with love, joy, and honor.

Paul is also offering Epaphroditus as an example. Epap didn't have a preaching ministry that we know of. Basically, Epap was a truck driver. He served the kingdom by delivering the messages and coin safely to Paul. That's it. Epap served. But consider this. It may have taken Epap close to 40 days to make the journey one-way. So he invested at least 80 days away from his home, business, and family in order to serve, and that's not counting the number of days he expected to remain in Rome. It cost Epap something to serve. He was a living, breathing example of Christ's servanthood. Paul goes on to say that the Philippians should welcome him with love, joy, and honor. Bringing this home a bit. Remember to say thank you to those that serve, especially those that do so behind the scenes. Consider writing a thank you note to the cleaning folks, or the prep folks, or that person stuck in the sound booth, or any of the others that serve in some way. Too often they become fixtures to us instead of people that have chosen to give for the sake of Christ.

Timothy and Epaphroditus, two men serving in the way they were shaped and equipped by God. Excellent examples of unity and service for us to consider. Think about all of the pieces that went into their shape. Consider how each had a unique combination of the fruit of the Spirit and other giftings to fulfill what God had given them to do. Each man exhibited something Paul was emphasizing to his readers. Even today we would all do well to imitate the unity shown in Timothy and the humble service seen in Epaphroditus no matter how our shape differs from either of them.

Lesson 8 - Righteousness

Most of us can come up with an overflowing bucket of examples for the old adage - One man's junk is another man's treasure. One example is the spring and summer tradition of garage sales. Someone, or perhaps a whole neighborhood, puts their no longer needed or wanted clothes, toys, furniture, and what-not up for sale. For a couple of bucks, one family's junk becomes a useful treasure for someone else. While Paul doesn't repeat the old saying or reference garage sales, he does revalue his faith, determining some things to be useless junk and other things as priceless treasures.

Welcome to the eighth installment of our walk through Philippians. Having provided his readers with the meat of his message, Paul began a series of reminders; things that he has taught them before but wanted to underscore again. Paul writes, *"Whatever happens, my dear brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord. I never get tired of telling you these things, and I do it to safeguard your faith."* (Philippians 3:1, NLT) So, maybe you've gotten this far and figured that what comes next will be the same old stuff. I'm hoping that you'll stick with Paul and me, perhaps you'll see walking with Jesus in a new light or become even more confident in your faith.

There are three movements in the verses we are going to cover. In Philippians 3:1-7 Paul encourages his readers to avoid man-made righteousness. In 3:8-9 Paul talks about authentic righteousness. And lastly, Paul looks both at today and eternity as he considers the reward of righteousness in 3:10-11. So let's dig in.

Avoid Man-made Righteousness

Paul writes, *"Watch out for those dogs, those people who do evil, those mutilators who say you must be circumcised to be saved. For we who worship by the Spirit of God are the ones who are truly circumcised. We rely on what Christ Jesus has done for us."* (Philippians 3:2-3) Throughout Paul's ministry to non-Jewish believers he was dogged by other teachers that demanded the necessity of circumcision for salvation. For instance, the reason Paul wrote to the Galatians was that they had fallen into this wrong-headed teaching. Those teachers of circumcision were essentially saying that to be a follower of Jesus you must first become Jewish. Paul insisted in Romans that, *"No, a true Jew is one whose heart is right with God. And true circumcision is not merely obeying the letter of the law; rather, it is a change of heart produced by the Spirit. And a person with a changed heart seeks praise from God, not from people."* (Romans 2:29, NLT) It was difficult for the Jewish believers, steeped in the demands of the first covenant to understand that Jesus had fulfilled those demands for them.

Paul then lays out his own credentials of faith. *"We put no confidence in human effort, though I could have confidence in my own effort if anyone could. Indeed, if others have reason for confidence in their own efforts, I have even more! I was circumcised when I was eight days old. I am a pure-blooded citizen of Israel and a member of the tribe of Benjamin—a real Hebrew if there ever was one! I was a member of the Pharisees, who demand the strictest obedience to*

the Jewish law. I was so zealous that I harshly persecuted the church. And as for righteousness, I obeyed the law without fault. I once thought these things were valuable, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done." (Philippians 3:4–7, NLT) Perhaps you have the same kind of spiritual resume or maybe you don't. You see, that is Paul's point. Righteous faith does not rely on our heritage, our actions, our obedient list-keeping, or even our zealous passions. Paul looked back on all his efforts, all the man-made things he did in the name of God and revalued them as junk. Not because they were necessarily bad or corrupt but because what Jesus Christ had given him was exceedingly better. It would be like driving around in a rusty twelve-year-old high mileage Ford. It still works, it still gets you from point a to point b. You may even be happy with it and work hard to keep it running and looking, well, kind of good. But then someone comes along and gives you an expensive brand new car. Suddenly that old car becomes just so much junk. In comparison, the righteousness given to us by Christ should make anything else we try to do to earn God's favor just another pile of junk.

Authentic Righteousness

Now, Paul just doesn't denounce something and leave it at that. Paul goes on to say, Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ and become one with him. I no longer count on my own righteousness through obeying the law; rather, I become righteous through faith in Christ. For God's way of making us right with himself depends on faith. Maybe you've heard this before - Paul values all his own self-righteous attempts to reach God right up there with cow poo and animal dung (just to keep this "G" rated). Paul gives up all of that for the righteousness that comes through faith in Christ and nothing else. This doesn't mean that Paul felt free to do whatever he wanted, there were still boundaries, but they were there for new reasons. This kind of righteousness is authentic because it comes from God and not through anything man-made. This is righteousness God's way.

Some, having a different value system, have discounted righteousness by faith. It's too cheap. It's too easy. Where's the sacrifice? Where's the discipline of body, mind, and soul? Where's the pain or the cost? Our walk with Jesus is founded on grace. He paid the price so that we could receive His righteousness as a free gift through believing in Him. Sacrifice, discipline, and obedience are joyously grown in us as we take each step with Christ. The gulf can be seen in these two compound words. We are either self-sufficient or God-dependent. We are either trying to scratch, claw, and earn our way into God's favor on our own merits, or we are open-handedly relying on God to reach towards us and draw us to Himself.

Righteous Reward

Paul writes of that because of this righteousness founded on faith in Christ, "I want to know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead. I want to suffer with him, sharing in his death, so that one way or another I will experience the resurrection from the

dead!” Paul highlights five things, knowing Christ, experiencing God’s power, suffering with Christ, sharing His death, and participating in the final resurrection of the dead. Knowing Christ. Think about it this way. Most religions of man are aimed at appeasing their god. Often unknowable, somewhere up there or out there or sometimes even just an idea. Followers of Jesus are not just walking towards something but walking with someone. Jesus invites us and wants us to abide in Him, to get to know Him personally. Not only does Jesus want to know us, but He also wants to work through us with the same power that raised Him from the dead. But with power also comes suffering with Christ, demonstrating His compassion and sacrifice for the sake of others. This extends to the point of being willing to lay down our lives for others. Sometimes this means physical death, more often than not it means putting to death our own wants, passions, and goals for the sake of another.

Paul’s last statement, “so that one way or another I will experience the resurrection from the dead” can cause some confusion. In some English translations, it almost sounds as if Paul is unsure about salvation or ultimately being in heaven. I like the way the New Living Translation put it above. Throughout the letter, Paul’s ultimate sentence from Caesar is on his mind. Will he live and be released or will Caesar decide to put him to death? I think a better understanding is that Paul is saying something along the lines of “see you there or in the air.” Or to put Paul’s thought into something more formal, because of righteousness by faith in Christ he will either be resurrected from the dead or translated as he wrote about in 1st Thessalonians 4:13-18. The only doubt in Paul’s statement is which way it will be for him.

Your Righteousness

It’s easy to get off-track and account for our righteousness on things other than Christ. Take a moment and ask Jesus to show you anything that you have or do to gain His favor. Consider things like your heritage, church attendance, religious traditions, avoiding certain sins, doing or giving certain things. There’s nothing wrong with those, and they can be God honoring. But none of them will be enough to open the gates of heaven or earn points with God so that our prayers are answered. Our prayers, our worship, our fellowship, our sacrifice, our giving, our loving, and our living is all because of Jesus Christ. When our prayers are answered, it’s not because God thinks we’re special or that we’ve learned some secret formula but because of God’s power working through Christ’s righteousness which we have learned to value above everything else. Lord, please keep us laser-beam focused on You and keep us from putting our trust in anyone or anything else.

Lesson 9 – Further Up! Further In!

The final book of C. S. Lewis's Chronicle of Narnia series is titled *The Last Battle*. In a way, it mirrors the apocalyptic vision of Revelations, or more properly, The Revelation of Jesus Christ. There is a scene in *The Last Battle* when the children enter what could be understood as heaven. It was Narnia, but it was more than Narnia. The old Narnia seemed old and faded by comparison. One character called it a "Shadowland." Another character describes the new Narnia as a kind of reverse onion, every layer you remove the amount to explore increases.

While the new Narnia is heaven-like, I also wonder if it doesn't remind us something about living in God's kingdom while here on this earth. That, as much as we learn and grow in Christ there is always more. I borrowed another memorable line from Lewis's tale for the title of this article. Upon entering the new Narnia Jewel, the Unicorn says, "I have come home at last! This is my real country! I belong here. This is the land I have been looking for all my life, though I never knew it till now...Come further up, come further in!" Further up! Further in! I think that Lewis echoed a bit of Paul, specifically the passage we are going to look at in this lesson.

Paul wrote, *"I don't mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection. But I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me. No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it, but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us. Let all who are spiritually mature agree on these things. If you disagree on some point, I believe God will make it plain to you. But we must hold on to the progress we have already made. Dear brothers and sisters, pattern your lives after mine, and learn from those who follow our example."* (Philippians 3:12–17, NLT) In the previous verses, Paul laid out his view of righteousness, how it is received and what that means for us as believers. That thought continues in today's passage. Paul recognizes that even though he may appear to be this spiritual mountain of faith he too is in the process of being shaped and molded. If the writer of much of the New Testament can say, *"I don't mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection."* What does that mean for you and me?

Press On!

One of our family adventures, that's what we called our vacations with the kids, was to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Part of our adventure there was hiking up the half-mile to the top of Clingman's Dome. Clingman's Dome is the highest point in the Park and the highest point in the state of Tennessee. When I say that we hiked up, well that is a bit of a misnomer. Perhaps it would be best to say that we slowly took one step at a time up the steep grade at about the speed of an overburdened turtle. Sometimes, perhaps more often than not, walking with Jesus is like walking up Clingman's Dome. It's hard, but we press on. We may have to stop and catch our breath now and again. Maybe our foot slips and we lose a bit of progress. But no matter what we press on, always going further up and further in, into our new life in

Jesus. And just when we think we've reached a pinnacle the onion peels back to reveal another layer and even more to explore.

The Next Chapter

Paul gives us some important instructions for navigating this idea of pressing into Jesus. Paul wrote, "but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, I press on to reach the end of the race..." There are times when we just need to let the past go, to consider that a chapter of our life has closed and realize that a new chapter with new adventures has begun. It's not easy, sometimes it requires more than a thought to put the past behind us. Sometimes we need to draw a bloodline. What I mean by drawing a bloodline is that all the pains have been forgiven, all the sins have been confessed, the hurt may not be fully healed, but the past now belongs to Jesus. It is under His blood. When we are tempted to look back, the bloodline reminds us that that chapter is now closed. To go back and reopen those old failures and those scarred over wounds would prevent us from pressing further up and further in. You can't move forward when you're looking back.

We Must Hold On

Paul's encouragement to hold on to our progress tells us something important. We are not just randomly going through experiences on this journey with Jesus. He is instead leading us further up and further in. Each step builds upon another. Each new discovery is reliant on holding on to what we learned three steps back, seventy-five steps back, or several hundred steps back. The expectation, however, is more than just remembering. Holding on to our progress also has the idea of doing what we have learned. Our journey with Jesus is not built upon knowledge but upon the application of that knowledge. What did Jesus say? *"Anyone who listens to my teaching and follows it is wise, like a person who builds a house on solid rock. Though the rain comes in torrents and the floodwaters rise and the winds beat against that house, it won't collapse because it is built on bedrock. But anyone who hears my teaching and doesn't obey it is foolish, like a person who builds a house on sand. When the rains and floods come and the winds beat against that house, it will collapse with a mighty crash."* (Matthew 7:24–27, NLT) While we must forget some things that are in the past, there are other things that we carry with us. Concepts and practices that we can build on. Here's the part that blows my mind, every time I think I have a concept like grace or forgiveness all figured out Jesus peels back the onion and reveals even more ways to live out those truths.

Follow Me!

Paul ends this particular passage with an invitation, "pattern your lives after mine, and learn from those who follow our example." For us, Paul's pattern is incomplete. We only have glimpses into his life and how he applied the lessons he learned on his walk with Jesus. That's not to say that his pattern is invisible, there is much that we can learn from Paul. Not only can we gather important truths but we can watch both his failings and successes in relationships.

But, keeping this in context, the pattern that is most visible for us today is Paul's pressing on despite circumstances to the contrary. Perhaps you're not familiar with Paul's story. Paul himself gave us a compressed version of the trials he had "pressed on" through. This passage deserves a bit of context. The Corinthians had been wooed by a group of men that called themselves "super-apostles," (No, I don't think they wore capes). Paul is saying, hold up a minute have these men endured anything close to what I endured spreading the Good News of Jesus.

Paul wrote, "Are they servants of Christ? I know I sound like a madman, but I have served him far more! I have worked harder, been put in prison more often, been whipped times without number, and faced death again and again. Five different times the Jewish leaders gave me thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. Once I spent a whole night and a day adrift at sea. I have traveled on many long journeys. I have faced danger from rivers and from robbers. I have faced danger from my own people, the Jews, as well as from the Gentiles. I have faced danger in the cities, in the deserts, and on the seas. And I have faced danger from men who claim to be believers but are not. I have worked hard and long, enduring many sleepless nights. I have been hungry and thirsty and have often gone without food. I have shivered in the cold, without enough clothing to keep me warm." (2 Corinthians 11:23–27, NLT)

The important point for us is that Paul pressed on through all of these things. That is a pattern we can follow! No matter what life throws our way we can continue to press on, to go further up and further in, to hold on to the progress we have and continue to take one step after another on this road of serving Jesus.

Doing It

Ok, catch your breath. I know the climb was difficult and quick. There are two major encouragements for us to consider from this vantage point. The first is to let go of the past. Sometimes we can just forget. But sometimes we need something more – we need to give it to someone. That's what forgiveness and confession of sin are all about, we are giving our sins, our failures, and our hurts to Jesus. Often we can do this on our own, but sometimes it's good to have a friend, a pastor, or a small team of prayer ministers help us with that. Sometimes it's called hug therapy, sometimes counseling, and sometimes inner healing. Of the later, there are several examples, one of those is Victorious Ministry Through Christ. You can find them at vmtc.org. The second thing in Paul's to-do list is pressing on in Christ despite the challenges of the moment. Oh, and if you think you have "arrived" or have it all figure out or are "perfect" even just a little bit then I delight in bursting your bubble because you haven't, you don't, and you aren't. There's always more to learn and do. The onion doesn't get smaller with each layer but larger so press on in Christ. Let's all go further up and further in!

Lesson 10 - Citizenship

To be a citizen means something. Imagine a line-up of various folks from around the world. We could tell something about their citizenship by how they talked, how they dressed, and by their general conduct. We could be wrong, of course, they may be recently immigrated and have retained the manners of their former country. The same can be said for us as well. Our mannerisms, our language, our clothing, and our conduct says something about our homeland. Now, consider this. Shouldn't our citizenship in heaven through Jesus also be observable in our language, countenance, and conduct?

In this lesson of Walking Through Philippians Paul continues his thoughts on living by the standard of Jesus. Our last lesson ended with Paul's encouragement, *"Dear brothers and sisters, pattern your lives after mine, and learn from those who follow our example."* (Philippians 3:17, NLT) That verse not only concludes one thought but sets the stage for Paul's next warning and encouragement.

Enemies of the Cross

Paul's thoughts again return to those who say they are preaching Christ but are really going in a completely different direction. Paul said, *"For I have told you often before, and I say it again with tears in my eyes, that there are many whose conduct shows they are really enemies of the cross of Christ. They are headed for destruction. Their god is their appetite, they brag about shameful things, and they think only about this life here on earth."* (Philippians 3:18–19, NLT) It's important to notice that Paul identifies their conduct and not just their preaching and teaching as being wrong-headed. It's not only what is said but what is done that matters. Previously in Paul's letter he mentioned teachers that were trying to pull non-Jewish believers into Jewish practices. This particular condemnation seems to go the opposite direction, focusing on those who push aside all law to become a law to themselves.

Paul mentions three specifics which demonstrate that these folks are enemies of the Cross of Jesus. Paul observed, *"Their god is their appetite."* This could literally mean cravings about food but can also be seen as anything they desired. The problem was that their desires and appetites were what they wanted instead of what God wanted. The next thing Paul says is that *"they brag about shameful things."* It could be that they were bragging about their successes, their past sins, or their current sinful activities. Recall that Paul had just spent time demonstrating the humility of Jesus. The word *"brag"* in the NLT is translated elsewhere as *glory*. They gloried in their shame and disgrace instead of giving glory to Jesus. The third conduct Paul points out is that they *"think only about life here on earth."* Their thoughts are consumed with their own kingdoms. Their treasure was in the *"here and now."* Jesus said, *"Don't store up treasures here on earth, where moths eat them and rust destroys them, and where thieves break in and steal. Store your treasures in heaven, where moths and rust cannot destroy, and thieves do not break in and steal. Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be."* (Matthew 6:19–21, NLT)

In essence, these folks may name the name of Jesus but their conduct paints a completely different picture. Paul warns the Philippians that these folks are really enemies of the Cross and that they are headed for destruction. It doesn't mean that they are irretrievably lost but that their course doesn't end well. Lastly, Paul is not angry with them but is grieved to the point of tears. Even though Paul calls them enemies there is no call to go to war but one of following Jesus and grieving over these lost souls.

Our Citizenship

The idea of being a citizen meant something special to the Philippians. Keep in mind that although Rome controlled much of the known world it was not a nation as much as a city-state. Philippi was an important city in the Roman empire and they took pride being citizens of Rome. With citizenship comes benefits and responsibilities that differ from nation to nation and kingdom to kingdom. Think about where you live, what are the benefits and responsibilities of citizenship?

Paul wrote, *"But we are citizens of heaven, where the Lord Jesus Christ lives. And we are eagerly waiting for him to return as our Savior. He will take our weak mortal bodies and change them into glorious bodies like his own, using the same power with which he will bring everything under his control."* (Philippians 3:20–21, NLT) What would you say are the benefits of being a citizen of God's kingdom? What are the responsibilities? Paul recognizes the tension we currently live in. We are citizens of heaven but we have not yet received everything that is included in that citizenship. We live in the "here-and-now" while our direction, desires, and conduct are of Christ's kingdom.

Side by Side

To hear all that Paul is saying we must put the two thoughts side by side. On the one hand is someone whose is focused on what they want or need; on the other is someone who simply wants more of Jesus. On the one hand is someone caught up in their own glory, pride, and importance; on the other is the example of Christ's humility. On the one hand is someone that glories in shame; on the other someone that follows Jesus example of enduring and despising shame for the sake of others. On the one hand is someone whose thoughts are consumed with what they can see, feel, hear, touch, and experience; on the other is someone who acknowledges the "here-and-now" but lives to see the day of fulfillment in Christ. Do you see why Paul identified these folks as "enemies of the cross" and called on the Philippians to follow his own example?

The most basic understanding of what it means to follow Jesus is on display in these verses. Who is Lord? Is it our desires and appetites or abiding in Christ? Which kingdom do we really live for? Following Jesus means accepting His redemption and His lordship. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, *"for God bought you with a high price. So you must honor God with your body."* (1

Corinthians 6:20, NLT) Or you could think about it this way – We experience a slice of God’s kingdom here on earth right now as we follow Jesus and seek His lordship in our lives. In a way, the kingdom of heaven is already here right now because it is manifested in all who follow Jesus as their Lord.

Lesson 11 - Undercurrents

Sometimes things aren't as they seem. Starved Rock State Park is less than an hour from where we live. Its sandstone bluffs and grand view of the Illinois River has drawn folks for years. While many take the path to the top of the rocky bluff, some choose to walk beside the river. The Illinois River is like a series of lakes. Many folks spend time swimming, fishing, and playing up and down its course. But not at Starved Rock. Next to the statepark there is a flood-control dam. All along the shoreline are signs warning folks of the dangerous undertow caused by the dam. The surface of the water may look calm, peaceful, and inviting but there is danger underneath.

The next few verses in our Walk Through Philippians almost seem like a side comment. Paul has concluded his main teaching and is beginning to add a few personal remarks and quick reminders. I've read these personal notes of Paul many times without much thought. But now I wonder if it wasn't the undercurrent that steered Paul's letter. Paul wrote, *"Now I appeal to Euodia and Syntyche. Please, because you belong to the Lord, settle your disagreement. And I ask you, my true partner, to help these two women, for they worked hard with me in telling others the Good News. They worked along with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are written in the Book of Life.."* (Philippians 4:2–3, NLT) Keep in mind that this letter was read publically to the whole church, I wonder what Euodia and Syntyche felt when they heard their names.

Paul's Appeal

We don't know how Paul learned of the disagreement between these two women. It is possible that "my true partner", called "yokefellow" in other translations, could have included that bit of news in the letters Epaphroditus carried. Maybe one or both of the women wrote to Paul. Or perhaps Epaphroditus brought the disagreement up during his conversations with Paul. Neither do we know much about the women themselves. They both shared Paul's labor of telling others about the Good News of Christ. Both of them are counted as being in the "Book of Life." And Paul addresses each one in the same way. The NASB put it this way, *"I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche..."* (Philippians 4:2a, NASB95) Paul didn't take sides but addressed each them equally.

Paul's appeal takes us back to earlier in the letter. Paul wrote, *"make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose."* (Philippians 2:2, NASB95) Paul's appeal to "settle your disagreement" (NLT) or the "live in harmony" (NASB) or to "agree in the Lord" (ESV), are same words found in Philippians 2:2 – be of the same mind. Paul is urging them to find unity and peace because of their mutual love for Jesus. While joy punctuates Paul's letter his primary appeal is to grow in humility and unity. Paul taught about those points, showed several examples, and encouraged his readers to follow Jesus' example. It almost feels like Paul was addressing the disagreement between Euodia and Syntyche the whole time.

Help Wanted

It's interesting that Paul doesn't leave Euodia and Syntyche to navigate these waters on their own. He instead enlists the aid of "my true partner." While not stated, it is possible that Paul is addressing the local pastor or elder. The last thing many pastors want to do is wade between two disgruntled factions. By highlighting their "partnership," Paul is giving an important reminder that he is standing with the local pastor in this.

Sometimes fractures in personal relationships heal on their own. "Love covers a multitude of sins." The hurts are real, but love maintains a way to express forgiveness. But there are times when the fractures are so deep that they need help to heal. Just like when bone is broken there is pain involved as it is reset. There is a time of discomfort as the bone is immobilized in a cast that may require some downtime. But if the bone is not reset, if there is no cast the bone will still heal but be permanently misshapen and impaired. Evidently, the fracture between Euodia and Syntyche required help and perhaps a time of immobility to allow things to heal properly. In a practical sense, we can think of relationship fractures as campfires. A log will not stay burning by itself, it takes the combined heat of two or more logs to keep the fire going. With that thought in mind, there are several ways to remove the heat and put out the fire.

Sometimes it's good to let things burn out, the heat brings things to the surface things need to be dealt with. Sometimes it's good to simply separate the logs, they'll smolder for a bit, but the fire will eventually go out. Sometimes it's good to pour water on the fire which is what Paul is doing for Euodia and Syntyche. The one thing we should avoid is adding fuel to the fire by taking sides as tempting as that might be.

Rewind

It's almost as if we should rewind Paul's letter at this point. Replay his words and apply them directly to the conflict between Euodia and Syntyche. Consider that your homework, reread Philippians putting yourself in the place of one of these women. How did they hear what Paul was saying? How often did their minds go to their fractured unity? Did they nod in agreement when Paul discusses humility while thinking that it was what the other one needed? What did they feel like when their disunity was gracefully spotlighted by Paul? Looking back this way makes it easy to see the undercurrent Paul was addressing. These few verses are not a local side issue that is of little importance to us. Their disagreement created an undertow so strong that Paul felt he needed to address it. But notice how he addressed it, with humility, a call to unity, a reminder of what was really important, with grace, and with gentleness. He didn't denigrate Euodia and Syntyche but elevated their labors with him.

Lesson 12 – Joy!

If I asked you to show me a picture expressing joy what would it be? The joy of a bride on her wedding day? The celebration of a game-winning moment? The grin of a wildcat driller when their oil rig turns to a gusher? The laughter of children at play? The amazement of someone eating chocolate for the first time? The victory salute of a climber having arrived at the summit? Or maybe something different like a still-life of flowers in full bloom? While all of these are valuable pictures of joy the gallery is incomplete and missing something. Paul's letter to the Philippians is often called the Epistle of Joy. Let's turn there to fill out our gallery.

Welcome to the 12th lesson on our walk through Philippians. Paul is at that point where he expresses several quick reminders to his readers. For this lesson we're going to focus on, *"Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!"* (Philippians 4:4, NASB95) As mentioned above, Paul's letter is punctuated with joy and rejoicing more than any other book in the Bible. Let's take a closer look at the joy in Philippians.

Paul rejoiced that Christ was being preached even it was with wrong motives. *"But that doesn't matter. Whether their motives are false or genuine, the message about Christ is being preached either way, so I rejoice. And I will continue to rejoice."* (Philippians 1:18, NLT) Several times Paul expressed joy and rejoicing in regards to his unknown future and possible execution. *"But I will rejoice even if I lose my life, pouring it out like a liquid offering to God, just like your faithful service is an offering to God. And I want all of you to share that joy."* (Philippians 2:17, NLT) And, *"Whatever happens, my dear brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord. I never get tired of telling you these things, and I do it to safeguard your faith."* (Philippians 3:1, NLT) He rejoiced that the Philippians sent tokens of their care and concern to him. *"But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned before, but you lacked opportunity."* (Philippians 4:10, NASB95) Paul prayed with joy. *"Whenever I pray, I make my requests for all of you with joy,"* (Philippians 1:4, NLT) Paul found joy in experiencing faith, *"Knowing this, I am convinced that I will remain alive so I can continue to help all of you grow and experience the joy of your faith."* (Philippians 1:25, NLT) Paul found joy in unity, *"Then make me truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, loving one another, and working together with one mind and purpose."* (Philippians 2:2, NLT) Paul encouraged the Philippians to share in his joy and to share their joy with others as seen in Philippians 2:17-18. What we see is that Paul expressed joy and rejoiced in the Lord in both beautiful moments and in dark times.

Often we link joy with happiness, pleasure, and enjoyable experiences. C. S Lewis in his autobiographical book *Surprised by Joy* wondered "whether all pleasures are not substitutes for Joy." We often settle for pleasures that are less than, perhaps even a mockery of true joy. In a sense we try to manufacture joy, repeating activities that brought it to us in the past. In the same book Lewis also observes that joy "is never a possession," it is "always a desire for something longer ago or further away or still 'about to be'."

The Joy of Yesterday

A curious thing about the human condition is that we often paint our yesterdays with a bright brush. I think that it is part of God's design. The pain of childbirth is quickly forgotten in the joy of new life. Time and distance often erode away our pain leaving monuments of joy. (Although sometimes it is the other way around.) There is something special about the "good ole days." Sometimes we do need to look back to see the times of joy that were buried and hidden under a mountain of pain. In a way, the joy we experience when looking back is not the old joy from back then but a new joy that is fresh and for today. Sharing our memories is perhaps the easiest way to also share our joy.

The Joy of Today

Paul found a way to rejoice in the good things he saw and the bad. It's natural for us to rejoice in the good times of life. But Paul's emphatic encouragements and examples were to "rejoice always." It's a common misconception that we are to rejoice and be thankful for everything ala, *"in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."* (1 Thessalonians 5:18, NASB95) The problem is that we inadvertently change God's word to read "give thanks for everything" instead of "give thanks in everything." For instance, God never asks us to be joyful or thankful that someone has been tragically taken from us, or that we lost our job, or that we've been in an accident. But we can rejoice and be thankful IN those situations. We can rejoice at the good we do see or the hope that brightens even in the blackest of days. We can rejoice in the Lord even when everything else has fallen apart. This is not doing the human thing of finding the silver lining in every storm cloud. This is anchoring our joy in the immeasurable and unchanging love of God. The events, circumstances, situations, pains, grief and despair are real, but God's love, grace, compassion, mercy, and peace are always greater. That is why we can "rejoice always" and "in everything give thanks."

The Joy of Our Tomorrows

Finding joy in an unknown future is poignantly displayed by Paul in his letter to the Philippians. Paul's future is not in his hands. Over his head is the spectre of Caesar. He doesn't know the outcome of the trial or when it will be. Paul writes, *"But I will rejoice even if I lose my life."* It's not that Paul wanted to die, he'd much prefer continuing his ministry. But he also recognized that for a follower of Jesus death is simply a gateway to being with Christ. He could rejoice in living, and he could rejoice in his death. Most of us aren't facing that probability right now. We've got more mundane things that try to steal our joy. We can rejoice in the Lord no matter how bad things are. We can rejoice that He loves us. We can rejoice that we will one day meet him in glory. You see even if life is so dark that we can only hope that there is a light at the end of the tunnel we can still rejoice in Jesus. As Corrie Ten Boom wrote, "There is no pit so deep, that God's love is not deeper still." We don't know what tomorrow will bring our way, but we can trust Jesus and rejoice in His love.

Our Gallery

What pictures have been added to your gallery of joy? Perhaps one of a prisoner penning a letter in quiet confidence. Or one that is all black with just a hope of something brighter in one corner. Or perhaps one of a mother dealing with a crying toddler while seeing a vision of the child in years to come. Maybe there are a few pictures looking back at long buried and forgotten monuments of joy from our past. You see joy is much more than being happy or glad. It is more than just finding a silver lining to every cloud. Joy explodes like a geyser that cannot be contained as we turn our fears, our hopes, our pains, our disappointments, and our unknowns over to Jesus. Rejoice in the Lord always! And again I say, rejoice!

Lesson 13 - Peace

There seems to be a shift of focus as Paul closes his letter to the Philippians. It feels as if Paul has pushed his readers to the top of a hill so they can coast down the other side. It doesn't mean the ride is over, in a way it's just begun. The long walk of stepping through unity and humility is complete. The summit has been joyfully reached, and a completely different vista is now in view as they race down the other side. As we consider Paul's closing words in Philippians 4:5-23 a new thought takes the forefront. There seems to be five topics, gentleness, peace in our hearts, peace in our minds, contentment, and fellowship. Because of the breadth of Paul's closing topics, we're going to divide them into two lessons. This article will cover Philippians 4:5-9 while our next lesson will close the series with a look at 4:10-23.

As I consider these five topics there is one thought that stands out; peace. Paul explicitly mentions peace in two of the topics. Yet gentleness, contentment, and fellowship also contain a large dose of God's peace as well. For that reason we're going to look at each one through the lens of peace and what that means as we fly down the hill and put these things into practice.

Peace in Our Interactions

Paul wrote, *"Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near."* This combination seems a bit awkward to our modern ears. There is no explanation of how Jesus' soon return has anything to do with being gentle. Yet we also read in James, *"You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near."* (James 5:8, NASB95) Anxiety seems to be our natural reaction when we know something is around the corner. Storytellers often use the "ticking clock" to create tension and a sense of drama. Will the hero be able to solve the puzzle before time runs out? But Paul and James connect the expectation of Christ's return with gentleness and patience. I think the key to this mystery is found in Matthew 24:42-51. Jesus, talking about his return, gives us a dual metaphor of a good servant and an evil servant. The implication is that the good servant serves well even while the master is away. And the evil slave is anything but gentle and patient to their fellow slaves because they assume that the master's return is far off.

Gentleness requires peace. I remember as a child making the springtime trip into town to pick up a few boxes of newly hatched baby chickens. Soft yellow chirping fuzzballs that needed to be handled with care. That's how I picture gentleness. Even as a youngster I had the strength to easily wound or kill one of those chicks if I held too tightly. Gentleness is not weakness but strength under control. We recognize the weakness in someone else and meet them with grace and tenderness so they can grow in Jesus. Can you see how peace plays a role in gentleness? Now extend that out. Paul doesn't limit gentleness to just our brothers and sisters in the church but to all men and women. Yes, we are going to see their sin, their folly, their brokenness, their woundedness, and their anger. We will experience their weaknesses which we must, in Jesus name, approach with gentleness strengthened by love and grace.

Peace in Our Hearts

Paul next writes, *“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”* Praying with thanksgiving brings peace to our hearts. Each day has plenty of anxious moments.

Circumstances and situations that cause fear and doubt. Problems that we can't seem to handle, shake, or put aside. We aren't strong enough to handle it or smart enough to figure it all out. Our sea is tossed, and the waves are threatening to swamp our boat. Peace comes when we turn to God, He's strong enough, smart enough, and assuredly more powerful than any wave that may come our way.

It seems too easy and yet at the same time hard to do. Say a prayer, turn things over to Jesus, and everything will be ok? Saying a prayer is the easy part, leaving it in Jesus' hands is the hard part. You see when we turn things over to Jesus the source of our peace changes. Before, peace could only come if the situation was fixed, if the storm blew over and the waves became calm. Prayer may or may not change the situation. But prayer does change our source of peace. Instead of looking at the situation we are looking to Jesus. He is our peace no matter what happens. Knowing that Jesus will guard our hearts and our minds with His peace.

Peace in Our Minds

Paul next writes, *Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things. The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.* Let's connect these verses with what we just considered about prayer. Like I said, it's easy to pray about our problems but at the same time hard to keep our minds off of them. I think Paul understood that as well. We've seen throughout his letter to the Philippians that his trial and possible execution was on his mind. But we've also seen how Paul steered those thoughts towards rejoicing. While Paul felt the uncertainty of the moment, it didn't steal his peace or his joy.

We all struggle at times with thoughts and worries that we can't get rid of. They rudely invade our thoughts and our dreams. They steal our joy and our peace. I think that Paul is sharing with us his own habit to combat those joy stealing thoughts. Instead of dwelling on the problem dwell on, consider, think about, dream about, and look intently at those things which are true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, of good reputation, excellent, and/or worthy of praise. It's often far easier to see and dwell on what is wrong, dishonorable, sinful, dirty, ugly, rotten, poor, and/or worthy of condemnation. I want to be careful here. Some have taken these verses and created a kind of positive thinking theology. Paul is not saying that we spin reality or only spout positive confessions. Paul did not ignore the wrong or pretend that it wasn't there. We always must start with truth – whatsoever things are true. Then we either look upwards towards God and find the honorable, right, pure... or we start at the truth (or what we think is true) as look

downwards on the ugliness. I think you can see how one is the road to peace, and the other is the road to debilitating worry and anxiety.

Finally...

The possibility for peace is always there. We are over and over again promised peace in the words of the Bible. Jesus is the Prince of Peace. We can have peace with God, be reconciled to Him through the blood of Christ. We can approach and interact with others with a gentleness which provides a bridge for peace. The world may see this is weak, but it is actually stronger than you can imagine. We can have peace of heart as we turn from looking for peace in the situation and turn to Jesus for our peace in prayer and thanksgiving. We can have peace of mind as we choose to consider those things that are true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, of good reputation, excellent, and worthy of praise. The Bible never invites us to wear a façade of peace but to discover and hold tightly to the real thing in Jesus.

Lesson 14 – Final Words

Four or five times in the past week we've received an unwanted phone call. You know how this works. Usually, around dinner time the phone rings. The person on the other end mispronounces your name and begins a scripted dialog designed to part you from your money. Sometimes their pitch is about the good that a group of folks has done like the police or veterans. Sometimes it's a guilt-trip to help an organization fight cancer or some other disease. To be honest, I hang up on them as soon as I figure out what they are up to. It's not that I'm stingy or unwilling to give, but I don't trust or know the folks on the other end of the line. In a way, Paul's letter to the Philippians is a response to their generous gift. A thank you for their donation that is unlike anything we see today.

Welcome to the fourteenth and final lesson on our walk through Philippians. It has been a joy to journey with you through Paul's letter. I hope that you've gained new insights that can be applied to your walk with Jesus. As we stated in the last lesson, Paul has shifted gears towards peace as he closes the letter. The interesting thing is that Paul even finds peace when it comes to giving and receiving, a topic that often promotes anything but peace.

Peace in Giving

Let's be honest, for some folks talking about money, donations, and offerings is troubling. I know a few that refuse to go to church because in their eyes "All they talk about is money." For others, the offering time is not a joyful act of worship but an uncomfortable guilt-ridden moment. But when we read about the donation carried by Epaphroditus to Paul all we see is joy in the giving and the receiving.

Let's break these final verses up a little. Paul's comments on their gift are found in Philippians 4:10-20. Early on he talked about contentment which we're going to handle in a moment. Paul starts by thanking God for their gift and their concern for him. In verses 15-17 it seems that giving to Paul's ministry was a habit for them. But we also learn that while Paul willingly received it, he didn't expect support from the churches he ministered in. Paul was also quick to add that he's not asking for more from the Philippians but that they would receive the fruit of their gift. In verses 18-20, Paul recognizes the gift as a sacrifice of worship to God.

There's something peaceful in this. There's no drama. No plea designed to make someone feel guilty. Not even the cute but guilt-tinted "reach your hand forward, take the wallet of the person in front of you and give like you've always wanted to." Neither is there a promise of a 100-fold return on their "heavenly investment." Their giving is done freely with joy, the gift is received with joy, everyone involved focuses on the goodness of God. No judgment. No anxiety about meeting the tithe. We see in action what Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "*You must each decide in your heart how much to give. And don't give reluctantly or in response to pressure. For God loves a person who gives cheerfully.*" (2 Corinthians 9:7, NLT)

Peace of Contentment

Early in this passage, Paul tells us something about himself. He wrote, *“Not that I was ever in need, for I have learned how to be content with whatever I have. I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little.”* (Philippians 4:11–12, NLT) It’s challenging to read these verses. Paul states that he was never in need but describes times of great need. Not that I was ever in need, for I have learned how to be content with whatever I have. I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little. Early in this passage, Paul tells us something about himself. He wrote, *“I don’t know about you, but I need to eat when the stomach feels empty. We all have times of lack and times of plenty. It’s easy to look around us and see the wealth and abundance someone else has. Perhaps we even grow a bit jealous. We may feel that life is unfair. Remember, Paul was in prison as he wrote this. He wasn’t writing from the mountaintop looking down at folks. He was showing us that being content with whatever he had is a source of peace.”*

Paul realizes though that even he wasn’t strong enough to find contentment in every moment. He adds a verse that many know, *“For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength.”* (Philippians 4:13, NLT) When the cupboard is nearly empty, it’s difficult to be content. Paul’s secret of contentment was trusting Jesus for everything, even the strength to be content with the situation of the moment. Can I tell you a secret? Even those who have plenty struggle with contentment because someone always has more. It’s not easy to maintain an attitude of contentment, but we can do everything through Christ, who gives us strength.

A Promise

The last words of encouragement Paul gave the Philippians are often twisted. Before his final prayer, Paul wrote, *“And this same God who takes care of me will supply all your needs from his glorious riches, which have been given to us in Christ Jesus.”* (Philippians 4:19, NLT) Remember the context, Paul is basically saying *“in the same way that God used your willingness to meet my needs God will meet yours as well.”* This is not an invitation to expect from God everything our heart desires. It is a reminder that God will supply whatever we lack; this goes way beyond our bank accounts. What do you need? Food, clothes, shelter? What about peace, joy, and love? Or how about forgiveness and hope. Almost everyone needs a sense of safety and feeling significant. What about purpose and direction? Those are needs as well. You see, we twist this verse when we limit what God gives to the amount of money we have. God promises to meet those needs but often not in ways we want or even expect. Some pray for a check in the mail but fail to see God’s provision in a thousand other ways like something lasting longer than it should or unexpected savings in the marketplace. God’s promise is true, but we are often blind to how He fulfills it.

A Prayer

“Now all glory to God our Father forever and ever! Amen. Give my greetings to each of God’s holy people—all who belong to Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me send you their greetings. And all the rest of God’s people send you greetings, too, especially those in Caesar’s household. May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.” (Philippians 4:20–23, NLT) That is my prayer for you as well as we close this series. May God our Father be glorified forever and may the grace of Jesus be with you all.