

Women's Bible Study
Introduction to Philippians

The city of Philippi was the first place in Europe that Paul visited after being warned in a vision to not continue to Asia. Acts 16:12 states that they (Paul, Silas and Timothy) went to Philippi which is "a leading city of the district of Macedonia, a Roman colony". He preached the gospel to Lydia, who is described as a seller of purple, on the Sabbath when Paul and his companions went to a riverside where they supposed there would be a place of prayer since there was no synagogue in Philippi. She was already a worshiper of God and Acts 16:14 states that "the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul." She and her household were baptized, and she invited (prevailed upon) Paul and his companions to stay at her house. Later Paul cast out a spirit from a slave girl which caused her master to realize that their hope of profit was gone because she had used that spirit for fortunetelling. They dragged Paul and Silas into the marketplace and accused them of causing confusion. They were beaten and thrown into jail and placed into stocks.

Acts 16:25-31

But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them; and suddenly there came a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison house were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's chains were unfastened. And when the jailer had been roused out of sleep and had seen the prison doors opened, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. But Paul cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Do yourself no harm, for we are all here!" And he called for lights and rushed in and, trembling with fear, he fell down before Paul and Silas, and after he brought them out, he said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved, you and your household."

The letter to the Philippians was written by Paul as a thank you because of a gift that the Philippians had sent to him. This was at least the second gift they had sent to him. The letter was written toward the end of his first two-year imprisonment in Rome around A.D. 62.

Philippians 4:15-16 And you yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the gospel, after I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone; for even in Thessalonica you sent a gift more than once for my needs.

One of the reasons Philippians is interesting is because Paul does not reprimand them during the letter except to ask two women, Euodia and Syntyche to get along at the end of the letter. In his commentary, Albert Barnes states:

“He expresses his grateful remembrance of all their kindness; he evinces a tender regard for their welfare; and he pours forth the full-flowing language of gratitude and utters a father's feelings toward them by tender and kind admonitions. It is important to remember these circumstances in the interpretation of this epistle. It breathes the language of a father, rather than the authority of an apostle; the entreaties of a tender friend, rather than the commands of one in authority. It expresses the affections of a man who felt that he might be near death, and who tenderly loved them; and it will be, to all ages, a model of affectionate counsel and advice. “

The theme of the book of Philippians is the **Joy of the Lord**. The word joy (or rejoicing or gladness) is found 19 times in the book. Strong's Greek dictionary defines this word as cheerfulness, calm delight, gladness.

How is it possible for Paul to continue to be joyful when he had been through so much and is writing this book from prison?

2 Corinthians 11:23b-27

...in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers among false brethren; I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.

He also had great concern for the believers in the churches that he had ministered in.

2 Corinthians 11:28-29 Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure upon me of concern for all the churches. Who is weak without my being weak? Who is led into sin without my intense concern?

So what was Paul's secret to joy even in the midst of a very difficult life? There is another word that is used many times in the book of Philippians. It is the word mind (or attitude, think, or remember). It is used 16 times.

Philippians 2:2,5 make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus.

What attitude was it that we should have that was also in Christ Jesus? In verse 7 of chapter 2 it says that Jesus emptied Himself. Is that what we should also do? I believe that is exactly what we should do. When our focus switches from ourselves and all the things that go with self to the glory of the Lord we are free to let go of the things that rob us of joy. These things are worries for our health, our future, our children, our possessions, our relationships and the list goes on.

What do we spend time thinking about?

If we are struggling with joy I would bet that our focus is on ourself and not on the job we have on this earth to glorify God. I also have to say that it is not easy to change our focus. We are born into this world dead in our trespasses and sins. If we have been given faith in the Lord Jesus Christ he has made us alive spiritually speaking. But we have this flesh we were born with until we are called home to be with the Lord. We war against this flesh from the point of salvation until our home going. Our bent is to take care of ourselves. This is a battle ladies!! Thankfully, God has given us the tools to fight this battle and have victory.

Warren Wiersbe explains in his book Be Joyful that “we must cultivate the right kind of mind” One of the terms he uses is to be “single minded”. We cannot allow circumstances to knock us off the path to our goals.

Philippians 3:14

I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

The prize spoken of is not achievable in our own power. Thankfully God is the one with the power that we need, and he gives it to us.

2 Peter 1:3

...seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence.

Let's start looking at the letter to the Philippians.

Philippians 1:1-5

Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all, in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now.

Right from the beginning of the book we can see Paul's great affection for the Philippians. He offers a blessing to them, then he states that he thanks God for them every time he thinks of them. The word *grace* (Greek: *charis*) and *peace* (Greek: *Eirene*) here is in the manner of a salutation where the sender is hoping for the well-being of the reader. He prays for them with *joy* (Greek: *chara*) because they have participated with him in the gospel. The gospel is available equally to all people whether highly educated or 6 years old. Those Philippians could participate with Paul not just be preached at by Paul.

These Philippian believers Paul considers partners in the gospel. What did Paul mean when he talked about their participation in the gospel? The Greek word for

participation is the word *koinonia* which means partnership, participation, or fellowship.

Look back at Philippians 4:14-16, Paul is referring to financial participation specifically and that is important but that is not the only way to participate in the gospel. There are many places in the Bible that make it clear that being part of a church is not a spectator sport. We don't just come to church to hear a wonderful sermon and then go home and go about the rest of our week with nothing changed and the focus is still on ourselves. Within our own local body there are ways to serve and participate in the gospel. Serving within our own church is a way to get our focus off ourselves and on to the goal of sharing and promoting the gospel of Jesus Christ or in other words; making disciples.

1 Corinthians 12:14-16

For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body.

1 Corinthians 12:17-18

If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired.

1 Corinthians 12:19-21

And if they were all one member, where would the body be? But now there are many members, but one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; or again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you."

Romans 12:4-6a

For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. And since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let each exercise them accordingly

We are all necessary. Our local body is a living breathing part of the whole body of Christ. Individually and as a whole church we need to abide in Christ and be of the same mind so we can be unified and bring honor to our head who is Christ Jesus.

Ephesians 1:22-23

And He put all things in subjection under His feet and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fulness of Him who fills all in all.

John 15:4-5

Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing.

The relationship between Paul and the Philippians feels like a close one when reading the book. He addresses the saints in Christ Jesus even before he mentions the overseers and deacons.

Let's look at a few more verses in Philippians about Paul's love for these dear Christians.

Philippians 1:7

For it is only right for me to feel this way about you all because I have you in my heart, since both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers of grace with me.

Philippians 1:23-25

But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better; yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake. And convinced of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith.

Philippians 4:1

Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and crown, so stand firm in the Lord, my beloved.

How amazing to be taught by Paul. He was an apostle. The Strong's Greek dictionary defines the word apostles in 2 Corinthians 12:29 as **a delegate; specially, an ambassador of the Gospel; officially a commissioner of Christ, with miraculous powers, messenger, he that is sent**. Paul was divinely inspired by the Holy Spirit in his writings and as an ambassador sent by Christ, in his teaching. He was highly educated and a Roman citizen. He gave up his career as a Pharisee which was most likely very lucrative to become an ambassador for Christ.

This is what Paul said regarding gain because of his high worldly qualifications:

Philippians 3:8

More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ.

Are these Philippian believers more highly favored than us because they heard Paul in person? I don't think so. At the time of Paul's letter, the only other scripture were other epistles and the Old Testament. None of the gospels had been written. We are so blessed to have the entirety of the Bible and the freedom to read it and share it almost without opposition. The Word of God is so amazing, and we have it all! **Think about how blessed we are!**

God has also blessed us with godly leaders in our church. Our elders labor tirelessly on our behalf, teaching us God's word patiently and consistently. They long for our church's holiness. These men have been given a high responsibility and we should honor them for their faithfulness in God's work.

Ephesians 4:11

And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ.

1 Timothy 5:17

Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching

1 Thessalonians 5:12-13a

But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work.

Hebrews 13:7

Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith.

We should also be very careful in our criticism of them. God has given us ways to confront brothers and sisters that are having sin issues. The protocol for confronting an elder with a sin issue is even more stringent.

1 Timothy 5:19

Do not receive an accusation against an elder except on the basis of two or three witnesses.

We need to be extremely careful in our speech concerning all our brothers and sisters but even more when it comes to an elder. We can be so quick to be critical towards other people including our elders. When something happens in the church that we don't like we may want to find someone to tell our displeasure (gossip?) and hopefully have them agree with us. Don't we always want someone to commiserate with us? We like to think we know the motives of the person that made the decision. Talking among ourselves like this does not build up the body. It is sin and could be the motivation for the other person to sin also. We need to be very slow to express any anger toward a brother or sister and particularly an elder.

James 1:19b-20

But let everyone be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God.

Colossians 4:6

Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned, as it were, with salt, so that you may know how you should respond to each person.

1 Corinthians 13:7

(Love) Bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Philippians 1:4 focuses on Paul's commitment to prayer on behalf of the Philippians. I feel like our elders also spend time praying for us their flock. Prayer by us is a wonderful way to minister to our elders and our brothers and sisters in our church. Our local church is an amazing gift from God. It should be a top priority for us to uphold our church in prayer. The blessings we receive in our church are many, but I will mention a few here.

- Opportunities to worship our God corporately
- Opportunities to serve God and each other
- Teaching in many forms
- Accountability
- Care during hard times

Just these blessings should encourage us to come before our Father's throne to ask for his blessing and to help us to increase our holiness. Our church has recently gone through a difficult split. It is so important for all of us to be a part of the rebuilding process. It is imperative that we spend time daily confessing our sin, praying for our brothers and sisters especially those in leadership and being an encouragement and not someone who is tearing the body apart by apathy or negativity.

The book of Philippians is a study of the joy of the Lord. This is possible through disciplining our minds to think the way we are instructed in scripture. We have learned today about our participation in the gospel in our own church and how

important it is that we do not allow ourselves the indulgence of talking in a way that tears down our body. We belong to the kingdom of God. Let's not behave the way the world does. We need to be an example of love and unity. Backbiting and gossip are ugly and only tear us apart. We need to view our elders as gifts from the Lord and pray for them continually. We should also be praying for the other leaders in our church and supporting them by praying and working where needed.