



The Book of Philippians
Discussion/Reflection Questions

Philippians 1:1-2

As this letter begins, we see Paul and Timothy humbly refer to themselves as servants of Christ Jesus. The Greek word for servant is “doulos”, which means bondservant. A bondservant was bound for life to the one they serve and so Paul and Timothy were declaring themselves bound to Christ for life. Then they offer a greeting to all the believers in Philippi including the overseers and deacons. This shows us that this was a mature church with strong leadership. Their desire was that all the saints would experience God’s grace and peace in their lives.

In 1 Corinthians 6:20, Paul tells us that we were bought with a price, and we are not our own. While God gives us free will, it comes with an expectation that we will lay it down and humbly surrender to him as his servant, submitting ourselves to a lifetime of obedience to God. How well are you doing as a servant of Christ? Have you fully surrendered your will to him, or are you still holding back parts of your life? If there is an area of your life that you still have not surrendered, pray and commit that area of your life to the Lord now.

Philippians 1:3-11

Verse 6 is a key verse. The rest of the book is about verse 6 as Paul shows what a mature Christian looks like, sounds like, acts like and does. Paul says that God has begun a good work in them and he will bring that good work to completion “at the day of Jesus Christ”, or the day that Christ returns. While we live on this earth, God will always be working in us. Psalm 138:8 promises that God will perfect (or complete) that which concerns us. We can hold to these promises in those times when we feel like God’s hand has stalled in our life, or that despite our daily Bible study and prayer, we aren’t growing or maturing. Just because we can’t see his work, doesn’t mean that he has left or abandoned us. He is at work in our lives and will not stop until Christ comes again.

If you have received Christ as your Savior, he has begun a work in your life. Sometimes it seems that the work he is doing in us is slow. Many times, it’s like losing weight. We look at ourselves in the mirror and don’t realize the subtle changes that are happening

until one day we try on that old pair of pants to find that they no longer fit like they used to. God has begun a good work in you, and he promises to complete that work in your life. Have you been discouraged lately? Has it seemed to you that despite your faithfulness to God, he isn't hearing your prayers or has stopped working in your life? Take some time today to write these two promises down and carry them with you to help remind you throughout the day that God will never stop working in you to make you more like him.

Philippians 1:12-18

Paul is writing this letter to the Philippians from a Roman prison while chained to a Roman guard 24 hours a day. Rather than complaining that his circumstances are horrible and unjust, he recognized that he had an opportunity to share the gospel with a new Roman guard every 24 hours. He quite literally had a captive audience, and he took advantage of this divine opportunity God had given him. As a result, many Roman guards, and even many of those in Caesar's household, came to Christ during this time.

Paul recognized that there are times when God will ordain situations in our life that seem unjust or unfair; perhaps it may even seem that God has lost control over our lives when in reality he is laying the stage for something greater that we can't yet see. We simply need to trust that he knows things that we don't yet understand. In Romans 8:28, Paul reminds us that all things work together for good to those who love God and who are called according to his purpose. Are you walking through something that seems unjust or unfair to you? We often default to asking why God would allow something like this to happen, when perhaps our question should be, "God, what is your purpose in this?" Paul saw the purpose in his imprisonment was to share the gospel, and he saw many of the palace guards and Caesar's household come to Christ. If you are struggling to see God's purpose in your trial, take some time today to pray and ask him to reveal it to you. James 1:5 promises that God gives wisdom when we seek him for it.

Philippians 1:19-26

Whether ministering in churches, preaching to the guards, or writing letters, Paul was continually sharing the gospel and admonishing the ever-growing early church. He was not at all distracted or deterred by those who preached Christ with ulterior motives. He could authentically rejoice that Christ was being preached without getting caught up in trying to figure out other's motivations because his life was not wrapped up in his own reputation. His life was wrapped up in Christ being preached and glorified.

Now he sits in prison awaiting his turn to stand before Caesar Nero, the crazed ruler of Rome who was notorious for using Christians as human torches to light his gardens. While hopeful that his life would be spared, he did not know how things would turn out. While we may be tempted to look at the death of a young person as a pity or shame, as a life snuffed out too soon, Paul had a completely different outlook on the death of a Christian. If he lived, he had more time to preach Christ, but if he died, he would gain Christ. Either way, he won!

What are you living for right now? What are your priorities and life goals? Jesus reminded us that the only indestructible treasures are the ones we lay up in heaven. When we lay up heavenly treasures, we are free to authentically rejoice when others win, even when their motivations may not be entirely pure. We are also free to view death from a heavenly perspective, free from fear. If your priorities and goals have been misplaced lately, take some time to sit with Jesus and allow him to show you where you can begin adjusting your priorities so that you are laying up indestructible, heavenly treasures that glorify Christ.

Philippians 1:27-30

Paul is urging the Philippian church to see themselves beyond being Roman citizens and begin seeing themselves as citizens of heaven. They are born again, they have a new identity and a new citizenship that does not belong to this world, and their conduct reflects that. Paul admonishes them to behave in way that a good citizen of heaven would behave.

While in some of his other letters Paul listed behaviors that were unacceptable for the believer, as well as the visible, spiritual fruit a believer should exhibit; in this letter to the Philippians Paul mainly encourages them to remain unified and courageous in the face of the persecution they would inevitably face. Interestingly, Paul didn't see adversity and suffering as a lack of faith in a believer, but as a natural byproduct of living our lives in a way that glorifies Christ and is worthy of our spiritual heritage. Do you truly see yourself as a citizen of heaven? How does your behavior reflect your spiritual heritage? Do you identify more with your earthly heritage or your heavenly heritage? How well we identify with our heavenly citizenship will be reflected in how well we handle adversity. In what ways are you suffering today? How does remembering your citizenship in heaven comfort you?

Philippians 2:1-4

After having encouraged the Philippian church to stand strong and bold in the face of persecution, Paul gives them the ingredients for a unified church that is able to withstand the persecution that was about to come. In order to be a strong church, they needed to be a unified church. They needed to be unified in their purpose and the way

they cared for one another. They needed to forsake the temptation to be driven by personal interests and self-glory. A unified church is made up of humble believers who make an effort to elevate one another, instead of elevating themselves.

The phrase “lowliness of mind” flew in the face of the Greeks in Paul’s day because it was considered a weakness, not an advantage, to be humble and allow another to have the advantage. It is not much different today. Many times, our fear of being manipulated or taken advantage of tempts us to look out only for ourselves and our own ego; but Paul is urging the church to elevate one another in unity so that each person’s interests are considered.

How well are you contributing to the unity of your local church? Is it a struggle for you to let others have the advantage in an area where you feel you are the best qualified? It can be painful to set aside our own ambitions and interests to let someone get ahead. It contradicts everything we’ve been taught, but Paul is letting us know that when the church functions in this way, it is a strong and beautiful picture of Christ’s bride. Take some time today to write down in your journal 4-5 ways you can help promote unity in your local church.

Philippians 2:5-11

Paul continues to address the subject of humility and unity in the church, urging the Philippian church to have the mind of Christ. Christ never had to achieve his deity. He didn’t hold on to it with an iron grasp. He knew who he was and still chose to humble himself and take on the form of a man. He didn’t cling to his deity to prove he was God any more than he considered it beneath him to take on human form. Paul follows this up by saying that because Christ humbly took on the form of man, God exalted him and gave him a name above all names – a name to which every knee will bow, and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

When we know who we are in Christ, we don’t have to strive to cling to a position or title; nor do we feel any kind of servitude is beneath us. We can both serve in an elevated or humble position with equal joy and contentment because we know who we are and whose we are. When people see Christ in us, he is glorified.

What are some ways that you serve others in the church? Are you secure enough in your identity in him that you can serve with joy wherever there is a need, whether small or great? If this is a struggle for you, pray and ask God to reveal to you the security and contentment of being his child and the joy of serving without having to cling to an identity or title.

Philippians 2:12-13

When Paul urges the Philippian church to “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling”, he didn’t mean that they had to work for their salvation. The meaning of the phrase “work out” in the Greek means to perform or to apply. We could think of it in terms of exercising. When we work out our muscles, they grow stronger, and they give us the ability to do things we could not do before and keep us healthy. When we daily exercise our salvation, by being obedient to Christ and his word, we grow as strong, healthy Christians, living in a way that pleases Christ.

Whenever we see a command like this in Scripture, we can always be rest assured that God has already given us the tools necessary to carry out that command. We’re commanded to exercise our salvation, but God didn’t just expect us to pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps. Paul goes on to say that while we are working **out** our salvation, God is working **in** us, planting the desire and the power to live in obedience to his commands. God gives us the command, and then by his grace he gives us the desire to carry out that command and his strength to carry it through to the end. Isn’t that amazing? Is there an area in your life where you are finding it hard to walk in obedience? Why do you think it is so hard? Purpose today to take that first step. As you do, you will discover how God is already working in you, giving you the desire and the strength to continue walking in obedience to him each day.

Philippians 2:14-18

Paul began Philippians 2 by urging the church to function in unity, to serve with the same humility that Christ served, and to exercise their salvation through obedience to God’s word. Now, he puts final parameters around these commands by urging the church to do all these things in a right attitude, without grumbling or disputing. He goes on to reason that if we do this, we will be blameless and innocent children of God who shine brightly in a world that is corrupt and dark.

Without a doubt, we are living in a world that is both corrupt and very dark. It is in desperate need of pure, innocent lights that shine to the glory of God. When the church serves with authentic unity and humility, walking in obedience to Christ, she will stand out just like light stands out in darkness. Do you find yourself grumbling and complaining at times? Living our Christian lives with a wrong attitude dilutes our light in this dark world. This doesn’t mean that we won’t walk through seasons of trial and tribulation, but we can walk through them with assurance that God is with us and that we will come out stronger on the other side. Remember, God gives us the desire and strength to walk obediently and with a right attitude, because he’s working in us while we work out our salvation. If this has been a struggle for you, take some time today to write in your journal the areas where you’ve been grumbling and disputing; then write

down how you can start living out those areas with a right attitude, by God's strength and power so you can shine a pure, bright light to the world around you.

Philippians 2:19-30

As we wrap up Philippians 2, Paul lets the church know that he is wanting to send Timothy to them and to join them himself as soon as he's out of prison. In the meantime, he's sending Epaphroditus back to them. Epaphroditus had brought Paul an offering from the Philippian church. While there, he ministered to Paul but became ill and nearly died. God healed him, and now he is returning to them.

Paul urges the church to receive Epaphroditus with all joy and to value men such as him because he gave to Paul sacrificially in a time when Paul was in great need. Through these verses, we see a real-life application of the commands in the earlier verses of this chapter. Epaphroditus served Paul selflessly and sacrificially, esteeming Paul greater than even his own life. He served Paul and met his needs joyfully and without grumbling. After God healed him, Paul sent him back to the Philippian church, honoring him for his sacrificial service and urging the church to value him as a precious brother.

Is there someone you know who serves the way Epaphroditus did, selflessly and sacrificially honoring others without complaining? Take some time to write below some practical ways you can show them honor and value them as precious brothers and sisters of God. Also, how is their service to God an example to you of how you can serve selflessly and joyfully.

Philippians 3:1-3

Paul begins this chapter by warning the church of those who try to pervert the gospel with additional works for salvation. He called them "dogs". This was a derogatory term the Jews would use for the Gentiles and Paul is now turning it against them. This was a group of Messianic Jews, called Legalists, who taught that in order for a Gentile to be saved, he must first become a Jew and be circumcised. Paul warns that this is a perversion of the gospel, because there is nothing we can do on our part to earn salvation. He goes on to say, "We are the circumcision." God has circumcised our hearts by removing our sin, the heart of flesh, so that we have a heart that is passionate for him.

Paul then lists three attributes of a circumcised heart: One who worships God in the Spirit, one who rejoices with Christ, and one who has no confidence in the flesh. The last one reiterates the fact that circumcision in the flesh has no value to their salvation. There is nothing we can do in the flesh to earn salvation. It is a free gift from God, based on his own mercy and grace.

Do you find yourself trying to be good enough for God? Do you sometimes look at other Christians and feel like you do not measure up? We will never be good enough on our own. There is nothing we can do that will help us to measure up. This is why we need the blood of Christ to wash away our sins so that we can meet God's standard of perfection. Any effort on our own will fall miserably short. Now look at the list of attributes in verse 3. How are you displaying those in your life? If you've been trying to be good enough for God, and have felt like you've been failing, ask God to reveal to you what his free gift of grace really means and let him remove the burden of condemnation from your heart.

Philippians 3:4-7

Paul continues his argument against the requirement of circumcision as a precursor to salvation by bringing up his own heritage. Paul says, "If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more." Truly he did. Paul came from blue blood. He had fulfilled each point of the law, and more so, Jesus said in Matthew 5, "Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." Paul *was* a Pharisee, and had done more than most Pharisees had done by persecuting Jesus' followers. Yet, it was not enough.

He goes on to make a shocking statement. "But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ." The word loss in the Greek means damage or detriment. Paul tells us the things others consider an asset in their life he considers a detriment to him because they would tempt him to have more confidence in himself than in Christ and his saving grace.

This is why God credits nothing we do toward our salvation and entrance to heaven. If he did, all unity and love in the body of Christ would dissipate into competition and judgmentalism. It would be a race for who is best. Is there an area of worldly success or gains that you tend to take pride in? How can you be more humble in this area of your life? Is there something in your life you need to let go of for Christ's sake? Take some time today to meditate on the fact that God wants you to stop trying to earn the love and acceptance you already have and let your good works be your expression of love and honor back to him.

Philippians 3:8-11

In the previous verse, Paul says, "But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss". It is easy to make radical decisions when we're saved. The euphoria of having our sins forgiven and our life changed makes it easy for us to make big life-altering decisions. What is hard is sticking to those decisions the longer we walk with Christ. But Paul didn't waver. It has been 40 years since Paul's dramatic conversion on the road to Damascus. And yet, in verse 8 he still counts everything as loss. As a result, he has lost everything

for the cause of Christ, and yet he knows that Christ is worth every earthly loss because it means heavenly gain.

With each loss, Paul fellowshiped all the more closely with Christ's suffering. He knew that walking with Christ did not exempt him from suffering. Instead, it opened the way for him to know the power of Christ's resurrection more intimately. Are you still as passionate about your walk with Christ today as you were when you were saved? Or have you allowed the cares of this life to crowd out that passion? Have you picked up along the way things you had once counted as loss? When our hands are full of earthly things, we become weighed down and burdened by their weight; and the passion we once felt dissipates as we shoulder the burden we were not meant to carry. If you are feeling distant and detached from Christ, pray and ask God to reveal to you if you have picked up something you had once counted as loss. Ask him to reignite your heart again for him and his kingdom.

Philippians 3:12-16

Because Paul has already chosen to consider his achievements and pedigree a detriment, and not an asset, to his walk with Christ, he is able to leave those things behind him and focus on the goal. He understood that if a runner is to run swiftly and unhindered, he must keep his eyes forward at all times and his attention focused solely on the goal of the race. He cannot afford to look behind him or he will lose concentration, speed, and perhaps even his balance.

There are two very important words in this passage: behind and forward. As Paul is leaving behind and letting go of those things in the past that would slow him down in this race of life, he is simultaneously straining forward. In order to successfully grab hold of those things that lie ahead, he has to let go of those things that are behind because they will hold him back from the prize he hopes to receive.

What is holding you back today? Is it past trauma, hurt, rejection, or disappointment? Perhaps like Paul, it's past achievements or pedigree that you take particular pride in. If we want to reach forward and grab hold of those magnificent things God has for us, we have to be willing to leave behind both our past sorrows and glories; realizing that living in the past will only hold us back from the new things God has for us on our spiritual journey. Write down one thing you need to let go of today.

Philippians 3:17-21

Paul ends this chapter by urging the church to follow the example of those who live as Paul lives, because there are many who are not focused on the goal and the prize but are distracted by earthly things. Their worldly example is deceptive and leads believers

to assume they can follow Christ and still live in the flesh, hanging on to their worldly pleasures. But Paul calls these “enemies of the cross of Christ” and says that their end is destruction because their example leaves others with the belief that God tolerates sin. The cross clearly illustrates that God cannot tolerate sin. If he could tolerate sin, there would be no need for the cross. He then gives us the key that unlocks the door from living with a secular worldview to living with a biblical worldview: “Our citizenship is in heaven.”

When we comprehend that we are not citizens of this world, but citizens of heaven with a new name and a new identity, our attachments to this world and its materialistic trappings and vices along with its definition of success and achievement, fall away. Our eyes become fixated on Christ and heaven as the finish line for this race.

Where have your eyes been fixated? Do you identify more with your earthly or heavenly citizenship? As we fellowship with Jesus more and more, our focus on Christ becomes greater and we are less distracted by the things of this world. Fragments of the secular worldview we once identified with become dislodged and replaced with the truth of God’s Word. If this is what you have been longing for, take some extra time this weekend to read, study, and meditate on Philippians 3 and allow God to replace those earthly distractions with a greater focus on Christ.

Philippians 4:1-3

As Paul wraps up the book of Philippians, he begins this final chapter with deep, heartfelt words for the Philippian church. He doesn’t correct or rebuke them as he had to with other churches. The letter to the Philippians is a letter of encouragement. So, starting from where chapter 3 left off in talking about fixing our eyes on Christ and remembering that our citizenship is in heaven, Paul urges the Philippian church to “stand firm in the Lord.”

The only way we can stand firm is in the Lord. There is no other firm foundation on which we can stand but the Lord. But also, we are able to stand firm when we know who we are in Christ and remember that this world is not our home. The closer we are to Jesus’ second coming the more necessary it is to have a firm foundation and the strength to stand in the Lord. Pressure from this world to conform to their worldview is growing ever stronger. Are you feeling a little wobbly at times? Are there times when you feel tempted to give in to the pressure you feel from the world to conform to a worldview that you know displeases God? List the areas where you need to stand more firm and then pray and ask the Lord to give you strength to continue standing.

Philippians 4:4-7

Paul is in prison, chained to a guard 24/7, and still he is talking about rejoicing. In fact, joy is seen all through out the book of Philippians. Paul is able to rejoice in the most undesirable of circumstances because he has found a source of peace and contentment that isn't controlled by outward situations. He goes on to list two more commands that open the door for God's peace in our lives. He first says that we should be known for our gentleness, mildness, and refusal to contend with those around us. The second command is that we refuse to become anxious, but instead bring everything to God by prayer and with thanksgiving. Paul was living these three commands out in his own life as he waited for his trial. He rejoiced despite being on house arrest. He was gentle with the guards and as a result many came to Christ. He wasn't worried about the outcome, because he knew that whether he lived or died, he was still the winner. The result of living out these three commands, the peace of God ruled his heart.

The Greek word for "guard" in verse 7 means a garrison. When we rejoice, be gentle, and refuse to entertain anxiety, God will set up a military guard to rule over and to protect our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Have you been anxious lately? Are you plagued with thoughts of "what if"? Has the unknown element of a situation been keeping you up at night? Paul didn't say to rejoice because of our situations, he said to rejoice in the Lord; and because of the Lord's goodness, we always have reason to find joy in the midst of our struggles. He gives us his gentleness and his peace so that we can walk out these commands. He never gives us a command without giving us his ability to walk it out. So write below the thing that is bothering you today and surrender it to God. Ask the Lord to exchange your anxious thoughts for his peace.

Philippians 4:8-9

How was Paul able to continually walk in the joy and peace of the Lord despite the many times he was beaten, persecuted, left for dead, and imprisoned; knowing that each time he was in prison it could be a death sentence for him? He set up a filter for his thoughts. When a thought entered his mind, it went through a filtering process so that he only meditated on those things that made it through the filter.

When we fail to have a filter over our mind, we invite destruction in our lives. The enemy of our souls knows he can destroy us by targeting our mind and thoughts. Paul knows that the supernatural peace of God can only guard our mind in Christ Jesus when the proper protection is in place.

What are you allowing to traffic in your heart and mind right now? Are your gates wide open, or have you placed the filter of Philippians 4:8 over your mind as a protection to keep the enemy's thoughts from defiling your mind? At first, this takes great intention,

discipline, and follow-through to successfully create a habit of filtering your thoughts; but after a while you will find yourself automatically allowing the godly thoughts through that agree with Scripture while rejecting the thoughts the enemy sent your way to confuse and distract you. This is exactly what Paul meant when he commanded us to renew our minds and to take every thought captive to the obedience of Jesus Christ. We limit the traffic in our minds and hearts, we compare every thought with Scripture, and arrest any offending thoughts, making them conform to God's word.

Philippians 4:10-13

Though Paul rejoices that the Philippian church is once again able to care for him by supporting him financially, he reminds them that he has learned to be content in whatever condition he finds himself. Paul isn't saying this in theory, he has been both well off and in need; he's been both on the mountain tops and in the valleys. Currently, he is chained to a Roman guard 24/7, and yet can speak of joy and contentment.

There are two keys that Paul brings out in this passage on contentment. The first key is that he **learned** contentment. Contentment isn't something that comes to us naturally, it is a trait that must be learned as we enjoy the good times and walk through the difficult times. The other key is that he understood that it is Christ's strength that enables him to be content in all situations. Jesus said in John 15 that without him we can do nothing.

It is easy to be content when life is going well, but when we're faced with financial reversal, when our child receives a difficult diagnosis, when our marriage hits a rough patch, or when we find out that we will potentially lose our job, this is when contentment must be learned. How content are you today? Have you leaned on Christ's strength to learn contentment when life is hard? Sometimes we miss the lesson God wants us to learn because we're too busy looking for a way out of our problem rather than learning to be content in season to which God has led us. Trouble in the life of a Christian does not mean lack of faith or God's blessing in our life. Many times, testing and trials are evidence of God's hand at work shaping us and molding us to be more like him. How do you see God shaping you right now? In what ways can you rely more on Christ's strength in you to learn contentment in your difficult circumstances?

Philippians 4:14-23

It is easy for us to suppose that Paul was well supported by all the churches he had planted and ministered to during his mission trips. The truth is that for a season the church in Philippi was the only church supporting him financially. In other letters we learn that the financial gifts they sent were sacrificial, and it is thought they were likely not large gifts. Yet, Paul says that he was "well supplied". He knew that it is God who supplies every need. Because Paul had learned contentment in every situation, he was free to rejoice in the sacrificial gift the Philippian church sent, not because of the gift but

because God would credit their spiritual account with the fruit of that gift. He rejoiced in how God would abundantly bless them for their generosity toward him.

We see a perfect circle of God's blessing and supply in this passage. The Philippian church gave to Paul freely and generously in his time of need. Paul rejoiced in their gift, not for the gift, but for the way God would richly bless them for their generosity. Both had hearts that were not tangled up in material things but were content knowing that their supply came from God. Jesus said in Matthew 6 to seek first his kingdom and righteousness and all these things (food and shelter) will be added to us. He will supply our every need. Is there something you are in need of right now? Are you struggling to maintain faith in God's promises to provide? In what ways have you been generous and as a result, seen God provide for your needs?

Great job! You have reached the end of your study of Philippians. Rejoice! And keep walking with the King.