



A Study of Philippians

GET JOYFUL

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Lesson 1 – Joy in Living

An Introduction to Philippians

Welcome to *Get Joyful*, a study of the book of Philippians. This Life Transformation course is designed to motivate you as a believer to activate spiritual qualities already in you by the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. *Get Joyful* examines Philippians to discover how to live each day with a sense of wholeness anticipating best outcomes according to God's purposes. This New Testament book contains numerous references about experiencing joy in relationship with Jesus and other believers while participating in the advancement of God's kingdom.

Philippians is often called the Epistle (Letter) of Joy. It was written by the apostle Paul to people he had influenced to become followers of Christ. The noun 'joy' is used five times in the letter, the verb 'rejoice' nine times, and the phrase 'rejoice with' twice. Joy is a spiritual quality that the Holy Spirit produces in a believer who surrenders to and cooperates with him to mature in Christlikeness. For a deeper look at how the Spirit grows his spiritual fruit like joy in believers, check out the Life Transformation course *Produce*.

Joy is experiencing well-being regardless of the circumstances you go through. You have confidence that God is in control of everything happening and will bring about what is for your good. Joy is more than an emotion or feeling like happiness that comes and goes. It is a spiritual quality developed by the Holy Spirit to sustain you in all situations that is demonstrated by your positive attitudes and perspectives. You experience pure joy through intentional engagement with the Spirit as a daily discipline.

Q1 Why is joy an important trait for a believer to have?

Read Philippians as a Letter

The apostle Paul wrote this letter to people he had impacted with the gospel at Philippi on his second missionary journey. Read Acts 16:6-40 for details about the beginning of the Philippian church when Lydia responded to Paul's gospel presentation. Paul and his team stayed with Lydia for some time establishing a church in her home while facing opposition and experiencing miracles.

Paul authored Philippians near the end of his life while he was in prison in Rome because of his faith in Christ and proclamation of the gospel. His ongoing difficulties and decades of ministry experience give him credibility to write about being joyful no matter what the circumstances you find yourself in.

You can tell by his tone in the letter that Paul was very fond of those he was communicating to. The Philippian believers had been faithful supporters of him and his ministry for a long time and he considered them to be his brothers and sisters in the Lord. You will find Paul's teaching and instructions to the Philippians practical and encouraging and adaptable to your own life.

Q2 Read through Philippians and make notes of your first impressions.

The Theme of Joy Through Philippians

Life can be difficult for anyone dealing with everyday issues. Add to that the extra challenges for those who commit to follow Jesus and live according to his teachings. As a believer, you are continually pressured to conform to the ways of the world that are in direct opposition to what pleases God. When you separate yourself to Christ and influence others to do the same, you will face opposition, persecution, and hardship because of your faith in Jesus. Going through suffering in a way that builds your godly character and strengthens your faith is one of the themes of Philippians.

In this study you will be introduced to the benefits of unity in the church family, the connection between receiving God's grace and doing good works, and the potential for believers to impact the world around them for Christ. Philippians will encourage you to thrive as a disciple of Christ, not simply survive. You are given practical principles to utilize to make the most of every day regardless of the circumstances you go through. You will be learning from and applying the lessons taught by Paul who took on every challenge and grew spiritually overcoming it with joy. He understands the necessity of relying on the Holy Spirit to stay focused on Christ and the gospel mission. You too will be successful at handling the pressures of life by being filled with God's presence to empower you and give assurance that you are not on your own.

Q3 How do you as a believer learn to embrace added life challenges because of your faith?

Learning how to be joyful is the focus of this Philippians study. Each lesson highlights your potential for experiencing the joy of the Lord in everything you do:

Lesson 2 - Joy in Perspective

You have a way of looking at every situation that profoundly affects how you deal with it. Perspective is your subjective evaluation of anything's relative significance and comparative importance for you. Philippians addresses the value of allowing God's joy to influence your assessment of and reaction to each experience.

Lesson 3 - Joy in Personhood

Your personal being is the summary total of spiritual, physical, emotional, and social characteristics unique to you. This is sometimes referred to as your identity, the qualities that

set you apart from others. Each element of your personhood contributes to the way you see yourself and assume others look at you. Philippians gives insights into how joy positively affects your sense of wholeness, completeness, and self-worth.

Lesson 4 - Joy in Purpose

Every person wants to know why they exist and what they can accomplish in their lifetime. Disciples of Christ have the advantage over unbelievers who try to find meaning in their own abilities. They adopt the values and practices of the world that constantly change and cannot fully satisfy deep longings of the heart. At the same time, the believer recognizes their overall purpose for living is to know, love, and serve Christ well. Doing that with joy gives one's life focus and anticipation of producing things that are eternal and meaningful.

Lesson 5 - Joy in Pursuit

It is easy to get caught up in going after things that appeal to your senses and promise you status and security. Jesus says that unbelievers run after material things and that produces anxiety, stress, and worry (Matthew 6:25-34). What you choose to pursue will determine how you spend your time and energy. Making God and his kingdom your priority in everything and doing it joyfully is the best way to invest your time, energy, and resources.

Lesson 6 - Joy in Potential

God created every person with the capacity to accomplish things that benefit themselves and others. Everyone is unique and different from anyone else in terms of personality, talents, intelligence, and access to resources. No life should be wasted by feeling incompetent, insignificant, or useless when comparing oneself to others. A believer sees their potential for contributing to the world around them because of who they are and what they have in Christ. You can use what God has given you to benefit others while growing as a healthy and high-functioning person. You do that with joy as a favoured child of God.

Q4 Describe what it is like having the Holy Spirit produce joy in you in every situation.

Let Paul Inspire Your Faith

As a believer, God supernaturally works in you to accomplish his eternal purposes through you. You are not limited to wishful thinking that hopes things will turn out okay if you maintain a positive attitude. The Holy Spirit gives you clarity about the way things are so you can work through them competently and confidently. The apostle Paul looked to the Lord and asked for his help in every circumstance to treat problems as growth opportunities.

You learn a lot analyzing Paul's ability to manage the ups and downs of life joyfully. He willingly chose the hard path of following Jesus, obeying his commands regardless of the cost. Paul believed that with Christ, he had everything he needed to live well and be godly. Without

Christ, he knew he was on his own. Paul was aware that life is not fair or easy, but it can be productive and enjoyable by aligning yourself with God's purposes.

Paul wrote Philippians while he sat in prison. He was waiting for a court hearing on bogus charges made by people who felt threatened by his Christian lifestyle and message. He had committed no crime worthy of imprisonment but was confined, nevertheless. Paul was not being treated fairly and his situation offered no reasons for optimism. How would you have reacted in his place? What would you be tempted to think, say, and do? What would you say to others who were not in your predicament? You could be tempted to become discouraged and depressed and give a negative report to those you talked to. However, Paul does the opposite. He uses his experiences to encourage believers to take heart and be strong in faith.

The letter of Philippians is a joyful expression of living to the full as a believer in Christ. It is written to every member of the local church family to read and learn from. Paul affirms the benefits of participating in body life and ministry to maximize one's daily transformation. That is still the case for believers. You are not on your own to mature in faith and produce spiritual fruit. You have others willing to teach, encourage, and disciple you to reach your full potential.

You will notice that Paul understood the importance of maintaining relationships with those he connected with in Christ. His opening words include Timothy, his partner in ministry, extending their greetings to the Philippian church (1:1,2). Paul mentions other coworkers throughout the letter who shared life and ministry with him, contributing to the expansion of the gospel. He thanked the Philippians as well for their ongoing support for the mission he oversaw. Paul was assisted by their prayers, financial support, hospitality, and encouragement over the long term.

Paul felt a close bond with the Philippian church he helped establish approximately ten years earlier as the first congregation in Europe. He stayed connected with them through communications and revisited them at least once during other missionary trips. Paul considered the Philippians as a loving family who looked out for each other. When they learned that Paul had been arrested for preaching the gospel, they sent one of their members to connect with him. Epaphroditus took a financial gift to bless Paul and show the Philippians' support for him.

Paul responds to the Philippians' kindness with thanks, affirming them as partners with him in the expansion of God's kingdom wherever he went. Still today, God uniquely gifts every believer to play a role in unifying and building up the church family so that every member can participate in Christ mission of reaching out and discipling. Churches following Paul's example and instructions will experience collective joy as each member lives life to the full in Christ.

Q5 How does Paul inspire your faith by his teaching and example?

Life Application

1. What is your initial overall impression of Paul's Philippian letter?
2. Do you experience joy every day while dealing with life issues? Why or why not?
3. How do you engage with the Holy Spirit to produce his joy in you?
4. Why is it wise to take on the added responsibilities of being a disciple of Jesus?
5. How does interacting with others joyfully promote positive outcomes?
6. What do you know about the apostle Paul? How are you like him?
7. How does the Philippians learning from Paul motivate you as a church member?
8. What do you hope to learn and apply in this *Get Joyful* study of Philippians?

Lesson 2 – Joy in Perspective

Philippians 1:1-11

Recall from Lesson 1 that Paul wrote to the Philippian believers to say thank you for their concern, encouragement, and financial support. During his time of incarceration, the church at Philippi made sure that Paul knew they stood with him. Paul used his response to them to offer his example for learning how to face challenges and obstacles with joy the Holy Spirit produces in believers. In this lesson, we examine the benefits of a godly perspective for embracing every situation with joy.

We defined ‘perspective’ as your subjective evaluation of things regarding their relative significance to you. Perspective forms your point of view about issues and affects your opinion about their importance to other matters. In his opening words to the Philippians, Paul paints the big picture of who they are in God’s scheme of things and how that should influence their approach to whatever they encounter.

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

Paul describes himself and Timothy as servants of Christ Jesus. They had been conscripted by the Lord to do whatever he asked of them to advance the work of the kingdom. A true and faithful servant dutifully does what their master tells them to and considers their reward as the satisfaction of a job well done.

Paul addresses the Philippian believers as ‘God’s holy people’ in Christ Jesus. Older Bible translations use the word ‘saints’ which means to be called out by God from the masses and set apart to be used by him for his special purposes. Every believer in Christ is a saint or holy person as the result of God’s grace towards them. God initiates the action of calling unbelievers to be saved from sin and transformed to living for Christ full time (1 Corinthians 1:2 / 6:11). Included in this holy group are overseers that give spiritual leadership and deacons that carry out the administrative details of church life and ministry. Paul prays God’s blessing of grace and peace on the entire congregation as he begins his formal address to them.

Q1 How does it affect you to be called a holy person of God in your world?

You are in a Spiritual Partnership

“I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now...” 1:3-5.

The Holy Spirit produces his joy in you from the moment of your conversion to the end of your time on earth. Your relationship with Christ by faith positions you to experience a deep sense of wholeness and confidence in whatever you face. Your joy is maximized as you offer yourself to be a spiritual partner with God and other believers to advance the work of the kingdom together. You can have joy on your own, but you expand your capacity to experience maximized joy through your relationship with others of like faith.

The Greek word translated to the English term 'partnership' is *koinonia*. It carries the concepts of being in fellowship with others and sharing life together. More than a mere connection because of being part of God's family by faith, it assumes an intentional concern for and investment in the lives of other believers for the cause of Christ. Paul acknowledged the Philippians as true partners with him as he undertook his mission. They shared in reaching lost people with the gospel, planting churches of new believers, establishing converts on solid ground, and discipling everyone to follow Jesus and produce eternal spiritual fruit.

When you have the perspective of kingdom partnership with God and others, you add joy to your prayer life. The Holy Spirit helped Paul intercede for people effectively and increased Paul's joy every time he thought about his partnership in the gospel with those he had impacted for Christ.

Q2 Describe how your kingdom partnerships with other believers bring you joy?

You are God's Work in Progress

"...being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." 1:6.

Paul tells the Philippian believers that their spiritual development in Christ at any moment is not the final product they will become. They are works in progress being transformed daily by the Holy Spirit to be more like Jesus in the way they think and act. As amazing as it is to be born again and set apart for God's holy purposes, there is always work to be done in a believer's spiritual growth and maturity.

It is encouraging to know that God finishes what he starts. Paul is confident God is committed to completing his transformation of your life in Christ regardless of any forces opposing it. The progress you have experienced to date is assuring evidence of the continuous perfecting process you are in by God's design. Take joy in knowing that your spiritual development is ongoing. Feel blessed by God today and anticipate even greater things in the days ahead. Paul makes this point in his letter to the Ephesians. God knows you and has a kingdom plan in place for you to participate in: "For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." Ephesians 2:10.

Your life has meaning and purpose as a follower of Christ. God saved you from the penalty of your sin and gave you the desire to join him in his mission of reaching others for Christ. Paul is convinced that the Philippians want what he experiences in Christ and will participate in the maturing and equipping process like he does. Paul makes this assumption because he knows their active faith and works firsthand. They are true partners with him in the ministry as proven by their commitment to Christ and the gospel mission.

The Philippians' devotion to kingdom advancement should not be taken for granted. Church people can sometimes want to experience the blessings of God but not be willing to do the necessary work to receive them. They are content to make minimal investment in their spiritual growth and produce little evidence of being born again. The Philippians were not like that. They made sure they did not miss out on anything the Lord had for them by involving themselves in helping God's kingdom grow. Paul had no hesitation in declaring that God had started a good work in them and would keep them spiritually vibrant and productive.

Q3 How does being a work of God in progress encourage you to be fully engaged with him?

You Have Work to Do

"...that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." 1:6b.

You are saved to serve. God started to train you to be his servant the moment of your spiritual rebirth. He began to transform your heart and mind to understand and value what is important to him including his mission to save the world. You have been enlisted for gospel ministry and must commit to learning what your assignment is and how to do it well. Whatever you need to be successful for Christ, God will provide the required resources through the Holy Spirit working in you. You cannot be not a passive participant in your transformational process but must intentionally invest your time and effort in spiritual growth.

Remind yourself often that you are a partner with Christ and other believers in the gospel enterprise. Consider yourself to be a stakeholder in God's kingdom and concern yourself with helping it expand and flourish. The Philippians were honoured to be included in advancing the gospel mission and sacrificially gave their time, money, and effort. Their investments made a meaningful difference for the work of the kingdom championed by Paul (4:14-16).

Never take your membership in a local church family for granted. It is with that group of believers that you are disciplined to obey Christ's commands and equipped to engage in kingdom ministry. Take advantage of every opportunity provided to add to your spiritual growth and maturity. Be an active participant in church life and service until Jesus returns.

Q4 How do you develop the desire to serve well in God's kingdom?

You Bring Joy to Your Spiritual Mentors

It is no wonder that Paul had such affection, high regard, and thankfulness for the Philippian believers who stepped up with their support time after time: “It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart and, whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God’s grace with me. God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.” 1:7.8.

Paul felt it appropriate to have confidence in the Philippian believers because they held each other deeply in their hearts. They considered one another as partners with Christ in his agenda. Similarly, anyone you connect to in Christ anywhere is spiritually bonded with you for life. Some people you interact with more often than others but there is always a sense of closeness with those you partner with in ministry.

The Philippians had a special place in Paul’s heart as he did in theirs. Partners in the gospel are continually in each other’s thoughts and prayers. Sometimes you are aware of what a brother or sister in Christ is doing and you pray specifically for the success of the undertaking. Many times you are not sure what they are up to, so you pray in the Holy Spirit to intercede on their behalf. You care deeply about them and let them know you do as you are able.

No matter what ministry task Paul was attending to, he confirmed that the Philippians were playing a significant part in it even at a distance. Each day apart increased Paul’s desire to meet with them in person to share stories of God’s workings and thank them for serving with him. Paul longed for this reunion “with the affection of Christ Jesus” which means yearning with Christ’s compassion full of mercy and grace. Relationships of mutual devotion and sharing bring joy to disciples and to those who mentor them.

Q5 How has discipling others increased your joy because of their progress?

You Must Abound in Love

“And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ – to the glory and praise of God.” 1:9-11.

Paul provided the Philippian believers good return on their kingdom investments. He taught them God’s word, disciplined them to be godly, prayed for them, showed them how to engage the Holy Spirit productively, and focused them on kingdom priorities including impacting the world with the gospel. At the same time, Paul benefited significantly by the Philippian’s partnership with him through financial support, encouraging words, and spiritual fruit produced by their maturing, ministering, and missions.

The next section of Paul's letter presents a prayer for the Philippians to keep growing in their relationship with the Lord and experience the love of God more deeply and the supernatural benefits of doing so.

1. Increase in knowledge – “that your love may abound more and more in knowledge”

Knowledge is both experiential and intellectual. It is knowing God in relationship and knowing about God through the Word. God grows his love in you as spiritual fruit produced by the Holy Spirit as you surrender to and cooperate with him. The Spirit enables you to express your love to God and others supernaturally. Paul's prayer is for believers to abound in love to know God and his truth deeply.

a) Abound in knowing God

Growing in a knowing relationship with God is an expectation for believers:

“I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.” Ephesians 1:17

“We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God” Colossians 1:9b,10

“His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.” 2 Peter 1:3

Q6 What do these Scriptures teach you about knowing God experientially?

b) Abound in knowing the truth

Jesus is the embodiment and revealer of absolute and moral objective truth:

“This is good, and pleases God our Saviour, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.” 1 Timothy 2:3,4

“Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ to further the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness” Titus 1:1

“Jesus answered, ‘I am the way and the truth and the life.’” John 14:6a

Q7 What do these Scriptures teach about knowing God's truth intellectually?

2. Increase in insight – “that your love may abound more and more in...depth of insight”

Insight is apprehending the true nature of a thing through intuitive understanding. It is the ability to see underlying factors of a situation and grasp how they connect. Having insight is comprehending the inner forces at work affecting attitudes and behaviours of people so that you can formulate appropriate responses and actions.

Love influences your moral perception for evaluating the motives of others. Godly love is the filter for receiving information and judging it correctly without bias and selfish intentions. Godly insight enables you to know the right action to take in any given situation for the best outcomes. Embracing God’s love helps you to accept his insights and make choices that facilitate your spiritual growth and benefit others.

Q8 How has God’s love helped you accept and utilize insights about yourself and others?

3. Increase in spiritual discernment – “that you may be able to discern what is best”

To discern means to distinguish between things as to their true nature. It is the ability to discriminate properly with expertise developed through experience and common sense. God gives spiritual discernment for evaluating what is going on in the unseen spiritual realm that is influencing what is happening physically.

Paul’s prayer is for believers to be able to perceive every situation and identify the differences between what is happening and what should be according to God’s standards. The ability to be competent at distinguishing right and wrong is developed by training oneself in the Word with the enabling of the Holy Spirit: “But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.” Hebrews 5:14.

Spiritual discernment enables you to assess a situation and know if it lines up with the teaching of God’s word. It helps you address and correct ungodly beliefs and behaviours confidently. You to give wise counsel to yourself and others to make the best decisions that align with God’s will. Spiritual discernment is something you should desire and ask for from God in every situation.

Q9 How has spiritual discernment helped you in both ordinary and complicated situations?

4. Increase in personal purity – “that you may be...pure and blameless for the day of Christ”

This is about living as a holy man or woman in an ungodly world. Paul’s prayer is for believers to preserve what they are and have in Christ to the end of their lives. Purity means being without any trace of contaminants and flaws. It is the ideal moral condition which is unachievable in the real world by human effort. For the believer, staying pure from all sin is the expectation and is possible to maintain only by God’s enabling.

Personal purity is possible because of one's position in Christ that provides access to everything necessary to be godly (2 Peter 1:3). By active and cooperating faith, the presence and power of the Holy Spirit sanctifies (1 Peter 1:2), and the Word purifies from sin (John 17:17).

To be blameless means to not cause offense to God or others. It is living in such a way that no one can legitimately lay a charge against you for improper character or conduct. This is possible for a believer because of the discernment, guidance, conviction, and purifying of the Holy Spirit for those fully engaged with and surrendered to him.

Purity and blamelessness are required for believers to maintain throughout their lifetimes. Paul sees living now as preparation for standing before the Lord on the Day of Judgment and pass the test. "The day of Christ" refers to Jesus' second coming at the end of the age when he sets the final aspects of his eternal kingdom in order. Recall that Paul is confident that God will continue his transforming work in believers for completion on that day (1:6/ 1 Corinthians 1:8).

The reality of your ultimate reunion with Jesus should motivate you to make every effort to present yourself pure and blameless: "But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure." 1 John 3:2b,3.

Q10 What do you do to maintain your personal purity for the long term?

5. Increase in righteousness – "filled with the fruit of righteousness...through Jesus Christ"

Righteousness is conforming to God's will to be in proper relationship with him. There are many references to righteousness throughout the Bible. In the Old Testament, you were required to obey the Law to be righteous and make prescribed sacrifices to God when you failed to do so.

In the New Testament, Jesus changed the dynamics of being righteous. Under the new covenant established by Christ's death and resurrection, a believer's righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and teachers of the law (Matthew 5:17-20). Jesus instructs his disciples to seek God's kingdom and righteousness as the priority of everything they do (Matthew 6:33).

Paul's prayer for the Philippian church is to be "filled with the fruit of righteousness." That is experiencing maximum benefits by living according to God's will. Having your sins forgiven by faith in the work of Christ is spectacular so you choose to live in a way that reflects your deep gratitude to God. You enjoy the abundant spiritual blessings God bestows on those who know and obey him. Righteous living produces a harvest of benefits for you like spiritual fruit and personal purity to guard your heart from sin.

Everything you need to live well and be godly is available to you in Christ (2 Peter 1:3). Every good thing you experience is a testimony to the generosity and grace of God: "filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ – to the glory and praise of God." 1:11.

Q11 What is an example of your spiritual fruit of righteousness that glorifies God?

Paul wrote Philippians, not as a wishful theorist, but as a practical theologian whose life advertised what he knew believers could be. Like Paul, you are a work in progress who has not yet arrived at having it all together and getting it all right. Let God do his work in you by keeping your heart open and soft towards him and asking the Holy Spirit to fill you with his presence.

By continual growth and maturity, you gain God's perspective in all matters. You develop confidence to think and act like Jesus in every situation. The Holy Spirit produces his joy in you as you live up to what you have by faith in Christ. Through consistency and persistence, you will inspire believers to follow your example and influence others to do likewise.

Life Application

1. How does being a holy person affect the way you plan your life?
2. What things do you do to affirm your partners in life and ministry?
3. What are things you have seen God transform in your life to this point?
4. What do you recognize God is still doing in you to bring you to maturity?
5. What investments are you making to advance God's kingdom?
6. Who has been a spiritual mentor to you and how do you affirm them for it?
7. What is your strategy for continually increasing in God's love?
8. How do you monitor your spiritual growth and make necessary adjustments?
9. How does knowing God provides everything you need motivate you to act in faith?
10. How does your growing spiritual joy influence your perspective about everything?

Lesson 3 – Joy in Personhood

Philippians 1:12-30

You are the sum of your physical, emotional, and social characteristics that create your identity. Joy in your personhood is realized and displayed when you are thriving at life even when facing stresses and urgencies of circumstances that demand your attention. You go through the ups and downs of living as everyone does but with a difference. You sense God present and involved with you every step as you follow his lead. You look at things with a godly perspective and see possibilities where others see only difficulties and problems.

Paul's approach to life is the best way to get the most out of it. Philippians is the letter he wrote while sitting in prison because of people who felt threatened by him and his message. You could easily assume that his letter would be full of complaining about the unfairness of his situation and asking his readers for sympathy and action on his behalf. Instead, we read the words of a man encouraging others to persevere in their faith in Christ as he saw God accomplishing significant things right where he was. Despite how things appeared, he was thriving under pressure experiencing God at work.

Remember that God finishes what he starts. He has begun a good work in you that he is committed to finishing regardless of any forces working against it. In your growth as a follower of Christ, you can be sure that God will do his part as you do yours. You cannot be a passive participant in your daily transformation but an active partner with the Holy Spirit at work in you. Learn to think and act more like Jesus and you will mature as a person.

Q1 Why does it matter that the person you are today is not the finished product?

Challenges Can Benefit You

“Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel. As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. And because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear.” 1:12-14.

When you are a person of joy, you face every situation confidently, believing you will accomplish something worthwhile by going through it with Christ. The apostle Paul considered any occurrence an opportunity to advance the gospel with the Lord's help. He was not looking for trouble to prove a point but believed that many of his challenges came because he followed Christ. Jesus predicted that his disciples would be opposed and persecuted like he was and would be blessed by trusting him to overcome (John 15:18-25 / Matthew 5:10-12).

God uses the circumstances of your life to shape and mature you. With the inner working of the Holy Spirit, you become more like Jesus in your attitudes and actions. You develop godly thoughts and values that honour Christ in stark contrast to the sinful ways of the world. You consider others ahead of yourself, you forgive people who hurt you instead of carrying a grudge, you turn the other cheek to someone's disrespect instead of slapping them back, you give what you have to people in need instead of taking from them, and you love and pray for your enemies instead of hating them.

Paul wrote to the Philippian believers from firsthand experiences in real life. He proved repeatedly that every challenge, no matter how difficult, when surrendered to God, can be used to advance the message of the gospel. Adverse conditions highlight the power of God to transform people and things for his eternal purposes (2 Corinthians 4:7-10). Paul saw his imprisonment as being "in chains for Christ". He used his predicament to testify to unbelievers about the gospel and to encourage believers to be bold and fearless living out their faith.

Q2 How do you learn to embrace challenges by faith and not run from them?

Opposition Cannot Cancel You

"It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. The latter do so out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice." 1:15-18a.

Opposition from others will come when you put yourself on the line for Christ. Paul identifies those who selfishly use the gospel for personal gain instead of doing everything for Christ and his mission. This remains a common occurrence in our day when people with false motives claim to represent Jesus while but are looking out for themselves. When you see their success at gathering others around them to use for their own purposes, you assume that they are severely hindering God's work. However, Paul makes a startling statement that those who try to cancel you and your gospel message will not be able to do so.

Notice the contrasts between authentic disciples of Jesus like Paul and self-serving imposters. Both groups preached Christ, some out of goodwill and others out of envy and rivalry. The true disciple presents the gospel with love for God and others. Misguided competitors preach with sinful attitudes and motives. They are insincere opportunists with selfish ambition who try to stir up trouble for legitimate Christ followers whenever they can. So, what should a sincere Christ follower think and do in response to the efforts of disingenuous pretenders? Paul's instruction on the matter is not what you might expect as concerned Christian. He gives good counsel that needs to be heeded and applied in our day.

Paul makes clear that it does not ultimately matter what false teachers and leaders do and say if Christ is being preached. He refused to get worked up about the personal attacks against him and the self-promoting of the scammers and deceivers. He determined not to waste time and energy worrying about theoretical outcomes caused by the purveyors of a different gospel. Paul concentrated his efforts on presenting and living out the true gospel. He reasoned that whenever Christ is preached, people will be drawn to the Lord as the only way, truth, and life. Like Paul, you can continue your ministry with joy knowing you are secure in Christ and are confident you cannot be prevented from serving him.

Q3 How is Paul's approach to false teachers preaching Christ beneficial to you?

Hope of God's Deliverance Sustains You

"Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and God's provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance. I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death." 1:18b-20.

Paul was determined to be joyful every day knowing that he was making his life count for something eternal. Paul's identity was in Christ and that changes everything about how you approach each situation. You know in your spirit that God is with you and other believers are your spiritual partners. You develop a winning attitude because you trust Christ who has already provided your victory no matter what you face (1 John 5:1-5).

The Holy Spirit in Paul continued to produce spiritual joy to sustain him. He was not overly concerned with the obstacles he faced as he lived out his kingdom calling because he believed that God's will would be done despite how things looked. Paul sensed the support of the prayers of the Philippian believers and was confident in God's provision of the Holy Spirit for everything he needed. The same Spirit caused Paul's hope for God's vindication of him to well up and overflow (Romans 15:13).

What mattered to Paul was not whether he would live or die through his experiences, but that Jesus would be always exalted in him. He expected that the Holy Spirit would empower him to be bold and courageous every step so that he would finish his kingdom assignment full of hope and joy in the Lord.

Q4 Describe how the Holy Spirit's power has increased your hope in God to sustain you.

Living in Christ Shapes You

“For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labour for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, so that through my being with you again your boasting in Christ Jesus will abound on account of me.” 1:21-26.

Humans work hard to extend their lives and postpone dying. Fear of death and what happens after hinders many people from discussing and accepting that everyone will die. When someone passes away, they do not know what to make of it and ask a lot of questions about why it happened. Not confronting your mortality or preparing for death’s eventuality robs you of living in hope without fear.

Paul thought seriously about living and dying every day and he did so with joy. Facing the prospect of being executed, Paul decided what mattered to him most in life was Christ regardless of how things turned out. It was the Lord that made his living and dying worthwhile: “For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.” 1:21. Physical life or death were equally desirable for Paul with Jesus. Continuing to live meant fulfilling his calling to preach Christ while dying meant spending eternity with the Lord.

Paul’s personhood, identity, and purpose were fused with Christ: “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” Galatians 2:20. Paul saw himself in Christ by faith and participated with the Lord in all he did. He considered himself dead to sin and transformed by Christ to live with kingdom purpose. Paul’s relationship with Jesus gave his life meaning and shaped him to be Christ-like.

Q5 What evidence do you see that you are defined and shaped by who you are in Christ?

Live Worthy of the Gospel with Joy

“Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in the one Spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved – and that by God. For it has been granted to you on

behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him, since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.” 1:27-30.

Paul instructs the Philippian believers to prepare themselves for whatever happens. Things do not always turn out the way you want them to, and you must learn to take what comes in stride. When you submit every prayer, dream, and plan to God, you can have confidence that what transpires is according to his will and for your good. Paul and the Philippians desired to see each other again but Paul did not want the potential disappointment of not reconnecting in person to derail the Philippians from carrying on their kingdom mission.

The directive to “conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ” is an overriding principle for every believer. Nothing you say or do should reflect poorly on Jesus and his message of salvation. The caution about maintaining a godly reputation applies wherever you are and whoever you are with. There is no moment you are not a disciple of Jesus. This applies when you are at home, church, work, school, your community, with others or on your own when no one seems to be watching. Always think and act like Jesus would in your place.

Paul says that church family members acting Christlike gives evidence “that you stand firm in the one Spirit”, “are striving together as one for the faith of the gospel”, “without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you”. Conducting yourselves this way is “a sign to them that they will be destroyed” and “that you will be saved”. Destroying and saving people for eternity is God’s business alone as the only perfect judge.

The Philippians are instructed about two realities in every believer’s relationship with Jesus: You experience the benefits of salvation, and you suffer for Christ because of your faith. Paul notes that the Philippians are aware of the struggles he endures at the hands of enemies of the gospel and should take heart when facing similar challenges. Be one who encourages others that are facing opposition by staying committed to Christ regardless of what unfolds.

Q6 What motivates you to joyfully live worthy of the gospel every moment no matter what?

Summary

You can exhibit joy in all circumstances like Paul did in jail, uncertain of his fate. He knew in his heart he was winning at life even if it looked like he was losing. He believed his present circumstances were useful to share the gospel in ways he would not otherwise have been able to: “Now I want you to know...that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel.” 1:12. Every situation is in God’s hands regardless of how they transpire. Paul was convinced that his challenges were being used to accomplish kingdom purposes. He does not suggest that suffering is easy to fully understand and endure but it does present opportunities to showcase and advance the gospel. People notice when you suffer for your faith and will be interested in how you can handle it so well.

With God's help and encouragement from others, you exhibit joy even when overwhelmed by the pressures wondering if you have what it takes to persevere. You remember Paul who was stretched beyond anything you will have to deal with and never gave up. The joy of the Lord was his strength, and his partnership with other believers increased his joy and encouragement: "Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and God's provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance." 1:18b,19. Paul keeps rejoicing and advancing the gospel knowing the Philippians' prayers and God's provision of the Holy Spirit's presence and power give him everything he needs to persevere.

It is always beneficial to see yourself as God does. You are not simply the person you or anyone else thinks you are. In Christ, with the Holy Spirit's fullness, you are who God has created you to be for his purposes. Believing that will bring you joy to endure every situation.

Life Application

1. Describe how you see yourself as a person. Why do you think that?
2. How do you think other people see you as a person? How does that affect you?
3. What changes about your perception of yourself by believing you are in Christ?
4. How is it beneficial to remember that you are being transformed and matured daily?
5. How do you increase your joy when facing challenges because of your faith?
6. Why is it essential to believe that your opponents cannot cancel the real you?
7. What do you do to grow your hope for God's best outcomes during difficulties?
8. How and when did you conclude that Christ is enough for living and dying?
9. Give an example of you making a choice based on living worthy of the gospel?
10. How does being a person of joy enhance your potential to impact others for Christ?

Lesson 4 – Joy in Purpose

Philippians 2:1-30

When you understand your God-given purpose for your life, you find joy in making the most of every opportunity with kingdom perspective. You learn to evaluate things with the insight the Holy Spirit gives you. You face every challenge assured that God's presence and supernatural power will sustain you. Paul's letter to the Philippians details what God does on your behalf when you cooperate with him. As a follower of Christ, God has started a good work in you that he will continue until the end of your life on earth.

The last lesson was about being a person full of joy by choosing to accept your identity in Christ. You have access by faith to everything you need to live well and be godly and you have hope that you will see Jesus in person and receive your eternal reward when you die. Paul spent his time left on earth helping believers like the Philippians maintain "progress and joy in the faith" 1:25. He expected them to "conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel" 1:27.

This lesson stresses the importance of increasing your joy as you live out your created purpose in Christ by taking advantage of the resources he has provided and the people he has given you to learn from.

Q1 What are you discovering about acquiring and sustaining your joy so far in this study?

Learn From Your Church Family – 2:1-4

You live in a world that promotes entitlement and selfishness as inherent rights. You are constantly told by cultural influencers that you deserve to be perpetually happy even at the expense of others. The disciple of Christ takes the opposite view. You believe you are what you are and have what you have only because of God's grace, not because you deserve any of it. You humbly consider others before yourself in all matters giving special attention to your attitudes and conduct towards other believers.

Paul tells the Philippians to make sure every member acts like a true partner in the gospel because the spiritual health of the church depends on it. Later in this letter, Paul identifies two prominent church members, Euodia and Syntyche, who were quarrelling with one another, potentially disrupting the unity of the whole group (4:2). He wants the church to help them be reconciled and restored to the valuable roles they have played with Paul in the gospel ministry. This example serves to remind his readers to put the interests of other believers inside the church ahead of their own and actively stand in unity against all opposing forces coming from those on the outside.

Paul begins this section about living out your created purpose with joy reminding and encouraging the Philippians about their position and privileges as believers in a healthy church family. Paul reminds them what they already have in Christ as preparation for what he will exhort them to do. The opening phrase “If you have” is a qualifier that can be stated “since you have” regarding the spiritual benefits true believers possess as true disciples of Christ.

a) “...encouragement from being united with Christ” 2:1a

You have every reason to be positive about who you are and what you have because of your relationship with Christ through faith.

b) “...comfort from (Christ’s) love” 2:1b

Christ perfectly loves you. He sacrificed himself to save you and transform you into a new creation. He continues to fill you with his love daily.

c) “...common sharing in the Spirit” 2:1c

The Holy Spirit lives in you as a believer and provides what you need to live up to your created purpose. You are given supernatural power, gifts, insight, and abilities.

d) “...tenderness and compassion” 2:1d

You have a changed heart that is tender towards God and cares deeply about others in practical ways.

Q2 Why is it important to remind yourself of what you have in Christ?

After pointing out some spiritual blessings believers have, Paul gives the Philippians instructions for facilitating their personal spiritual growth and promoting health and unity in their church family.

a) “...make my joy complete...” 2:2a

A spiritual mentor experiences increased joy when their disciples grow and mature spiritually. As fulfilled as Paul already felt, he knew that his joy would grow even more seeing the spiritual return on his investment in the Philippian believers.

b) “...by being like-minded” 2:2b

This is a call to value and share one another’s opinions for the sake of unity. Everything must be considered from Christ’s perspective and decided in a way that pleases and

represents him well. Agreeing together in Christ creates an environment that promotes togetherness and fosters kingdom growth.

c) "...having the same love" 2:2c

Love is a fruit of the Holy Spirit who dwells in every believer. God's love in every disciple is to be shown to one another with sacrificial generosity. Jesus says that this his disciples will be recognized by their godly love for fellow believers (John 13:34,35).

d) "...being one in spirit and of one mind" 2:2d

Internal unity of the church family is essential for standing firm against opposing forces. Disunity develops relational weak spots susceptible to enemy infiltration to cause confusion and defeat. The Holy Spirit is the agent of unity who reveals the priorities of God's kingdom and empowers believers to do them in harmony and neutralize the enemy.

e) "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit" 2:3a

Paul points out what believers must not do in this injunction. Everything a disciple does is to bring glory to God and not to oneself. Self-centredness and pride are sins that are unacceptable for a Christ follower. They inhibit one's spiritual growth and negatively affect the unity of the church family.

f) "Rather, in humility value others above yourselves" 2:3b

Paul offers the antidote to selfish ambition and vain conceit. Humility and esteem for other believers are godly attitudes that reflect well on one's relationship with Christ and build up others in ways that promote wholeness and well being. Taking the focus of everything off yourself and placing it on Christ and his work helps you to develop a healthy self-concept and self-awareness as well as increasing your joy in relationship with others.

g) "...not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of others." 2:4

This completes the thrust of the previous injunction of subordinating your interests for the sake of the others. You see yourself maturing when you care about what other believers care about. Your church family provides an excellent environment to develop and practice your spiritual qualities including those that contribute to building church body health and unity.

Q3 How do you develop the desire to humbly want the best for others?

Learn From Jesus' Example - 2:5-11

In this section, Paul gives three examples of individuals who demonstrate Christlike attitudes and actions that increase joy while living out your eternal purpose. The first and ultimate model to learn from is Jesus who heads Paul's list of those to be influenced and motivated by.

A good way to develop your Christlikeness is "In your relationships with one another" 2:5a. Growing spiritually is facilitated by your interactions with the whole church family. Paul's goal is for everyone is to "have the same mindset as Christ Jesus" 2:5b. Jesus sets the standard to emulate so you learn to think the way he does. The church family becomes healthy when every member develops Christ's attitudes about all matters.

Godly humility displayed by Jesus is described in the following verses that are written in the form of a hymn for use by the churches at the time of the Philippian letter. It proclaims how Jesus perfectly laid aside his divine privileges to provide the gift of salvation for others.

- a) "Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;" 2:6

Jesus has always been, still is, and always will be fully God. Jesus has existed since before the beginning of time along with the Father and the Holy Spirit. All three members of the Godhead were involved in creating the universe and are still active in sustaining and overseeing it. Each member of the Trinity is equal to the others and collectively they form one God. They play unique and various roles to accomplish their eternal purposes. In the plan of salvation specifically, Jesus submitted himself to the necessary requirements for undertaking and completing the redemptive mission.

- b) "rather, he made himself nothing by taking on the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness." 2:7

Jesus refused to use his privileges of deity to undertake the salvation plan. He willingly made himself a slave to the mission for the sake of others by becoming a human being in every sense. By being physically born like every person and experiencing the full range of human existence, Jesus met the requirements to be the perfect substitute and sacrifice for the penalties and consequences of human sin. Jesus can rightly be the ideal model for any person to follow because he did his work without using his divine advantages.

- c) "And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death – even death on a cross!" 2:8

Jesus' humility is displayed by his taking on human form despite his divine superiority. He limited himself to the human experience and utilized God's help as any believer can. Jesus knew every detail of the salvation plan in advance, including the cost for him to complete it.

Death on a cross at that time was the most terrible, shameful, and agonizing way to die. Jesus willingly and obediently chose to suffer it for the sake of others.

- d) "Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." 2:9-11.

Father God's response to Jesus' sacrifice is noteworthy. Jesus did not become God because of the outcome of the Incarnation including death and resurrection. Jesus has always been and will be God. This exaltation of Christ by position and name is a preordained action of the redemptive plan to announce his superiority and unlimited abilities to rule and save.

Believers must develop Christ's mindset collectively as they interact with one another. Godly humility like Jesus demonstrated is necessary for living up to the high calling of holy living and church unity. If Jesus willingly sacrificed his own privileges and interests for the sake of others, so all believers must humbly accept their responsibility to do likewise.

Q4 How does Jesus' self-sacrificing spirit influence your attitudes and actions?

Learn From Timothy's Example - 2:19-24

The next example to learn from and follow is Timothy, Paul's protégé and the pastor at Ephesus, one of the churches at the time. Timothy practically demonstrated unselfishness caring about the welfare of others which gave Paul much satisfaction seeing his mentoring investment producing spiritual fruit. The Holy Spirit increases joy in you when living in the intentionally selfless way Timothy did. Full of Christ's love, you delay your own wants and desires to minister to the needs of others.

- a) Be an encouragement to your mentors

"I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you." 2:19

People who invest in you experience joy when you extend their ministry reach and provide them with good reports of God at work.

- b) Set the pace of ministry among your peers

"I have no one else like him, who will show genuine concern for your welfare." 2:20

While you are not to be in competition with other believers regarding life and ministry, you can distinguish yourself in the group as an exceptional model of competency with compassion. Others should be motivated to follow your lead.

- c) Know what Jesus desires from you and do it above all else

“For everyone looks out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.” 2:21

It is easy to be absorbed in your own thoughts and wants when you neglect to stay focused on Christ and learn what he desires of you. Stay filled with the Holy Spirit and he will keep your heart soft towards Christ and your mind renewed daily.

- d) Build a reputation of commitment and serving

“But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel.” 2:22

Having a good reputation is a big deal for influencing others for Christ. People can tell if your actions match your words. Gain the respect and approval of your mentors so that they give a positive reference about you to others.

Paul was strengthened and encouraged because of Timothy’s partnership with him in the ministry and his availability to serve where needed. Paul’s relationship with the Philippian believers brought him joy and he wanted to reconnect with them in person. Timothy played a role for Paul’s aspirations: “I hope, therefore, to send him as soon as I see how things go with me. And I am confident in the Lord that I myself will come soon.” 2:23,24

Q5 What does Timothy’s example teach you about kingdom service?

Learn From Epaphroditus’ Example - 2:25-30

The third example Paul presents to the Philippians to learn from is Epaphroditus. Any believer can be encouraged by this ordinary believer who played a significant role in building up the body of Christ and advancing the reach and impact of the gospel. Epaphroditus was sent by the Philippian church to help Paul while he was in prison. He delivered a monetary gift for Paul’s expenses and reported about the healthy status of his home church family. He also brought encouragement and joy with his presence to Paul and Timothy as they patiently endured Paul’s incarceration. Epaphroditus displays attitudes and actions for you to emulate.

- a) Make yourself available to serve as needed

“But I think it necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, co-worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger, whom you sent to take care of my needs.” 2:25

Epaphroditus is only mentioned in the book of Philippians so not much is known about his background and personal life. He receives high praise from Paul who considers him to be his brother in Christ, his co-worker in the gospel, and comrade in fighting the spiritual battle.

Paul was grateful to have Epaphroditus with him when needed most and he willingly sent him back to his church family where he would continue to serve.

b) Trust the Lord to enable you to complete your mission

“For he longs for all of you and is distressed because you heard he was ill. Indeed he was ill, and almost died. But God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, to spare me sorrow upon sorrow.” 2:26,27

Notice that Epaphroditus was fully human and subject to setbacks like illness. He kept his trust in the Lord for completing his ministry assignment even when near death. No one lives forever on earth and believers know that they are in God’s hands whatever they go through. Epaphroditus received healing to continue his service with Paul during a pivotal time until he finished his part.

c) Stay connected to your church family

“Therefore I am all the more eager to send him, so that when you see him again you may be glad and I may have less anxiety.” 2:28

When someone is sent out from your church family to serve somewhere at a distance, it is important to keep the connection between you strong. Epaphroditus was a contributing member of his local assembly who had the necessary qualities to assist Paul for a season. His church sent him out as an extension of themselves and stayed connected with him in thoughts and prayers. His return to Philippi would be an occasion of great joy as a reunion of kindred spirits thankful to God for the kingdom gains made.

d) Be a risk taker for the gospel

“So then, welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honour people like him, because he almost died for the work of Christ. He risked his life to make up for the help you yourselves could not give me.” 2:29,30

Paul wants the Philippians to welcome Epaphroditus back with joy. He should be honoured by them for his selfless sacrifice for the sake of the gospel. He willingly put himself on the line to support Paul at a critical time as a representative of his church family. You may not be assigned to travel to another region for a period to do ministry, but you should always be available to step out in faith when the Holy Spirit directs, the church leadership confirms, and the church family supports the plan. Jesus says that his disciples willingly take up their cross daily and follow him whatever the cost.

Q6 What qualities make Epaphroditus relatable for ordinary believers?

Learn to Have Joy in Your Purpose - 2:12-18

In this section of the letter, Paul addresses the proper perspective, motives, and conduct for believers to facilitate their spiritual growth, promote church unity, and maximize impact for Christ and the gospel in an unbelieving world.

“Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed – not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence - continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.” 2:12,13

You cannot save yourself in any way, but you are responsible to engage in the process of sanctification which is living a holy life as an instrument of God. Paul instructs the Philippians in this matter in a positive and proactive way. He refers to them as “my dear friends” and notes that they have proved themselves faithful to Christ and his commands consistently when Paul was with them and when he was not. It is no small thing to have a reputation for joyful obedience to the Lord over the long term without the need of direct supervision.

Paul reminds the Philippians that they are to continue their spiritual growth “with fear and trembling”, keeping in mind who God is and how inadequate they are to live up to God’s holy standards on their own. You must choose to be serious about giving your best effort to please God and mature spiritually while relying on his enabling to do so. Remember that you are a recreated work still in progress: “for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.” 2:13

You can experience extraordinary joy living out your created purpose in Christ as you learn to do life and ministry with the same attitudes as Jesus did: “Do everything without grumbling or arguing” 2:14. You will kill your joy by complaining, murmuring, nit picking, and finding fault with your situation and with others. You set yourself up for joylessness by constantly being contrary, disagreeable, contentious, and opposed to the views and preferences of others that are godly. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you replace destructive actions with constructive ones.

Q7 What does working out your salvation with fear and trembling look like in your life?

You add to your joy by choosing to use words that build others up, are constructive, edifying, and productive. You facilitate your own spiritual growth and influence other believers to do likewise: “so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault” 2:15a. You and your church family have God-given potential to develop. You do not want anything to hinder anyone from maturing by your thoughtless and selfish actions. The upside to practicing Christlikeness is worth the effort. You become free from blame for the actions of others and devoid of impurities of the heart that contaminate your character. You will be recognized as a spiritual child of God along within the family of Christ followers.

Living with no moral defects or flaws that cause sinful behaviour is essential for standing out as a model “in a warped and crooked generation.” 2:15b. The world you live in is under the control of the evil one and is morally perverse and mean-spirited. Unbelievers are conditioned by their sinful nature to not be truthful and straightforward but dishonest, unscrupulous, fraudulent, and corrupt. The “generation” refers to the entire body of individuals living in the world at the same time. “Warped and crooked” foster the overindulgences practiced by younger and older people in the absence of godly foundations. Few people recognize the toll that reckless living is having on relationships, families, and societies and have no idea or desire to turn things around.

As a believer, God has given you a significant role to play in this world of darkness: “Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky as you hold firmly to the word of life.” 2:15c,16a. You will stand out as being different from the majority by utilizing the Bible as your foundational guidebook for life. You will be on display as one who has been transformed by God, free from slavery to sin, and full of joy and purpose.

Christ followers are the moral change-agents of society that shed light on the dark ways of the world like stars shining in the sky. Showcasing the character and conduct of Jesus offers the model for living life the way God intends. By willingly embracing your opportunities to impact others for Christ, you help bring about social, cultural, and behavioural change to those you interact with. God has changed you from the inside out and given you godly desires and spiritual resources to be a positive influence on the world in which you live.

Q8 How is it possible to stay joyful in a dark and messed up world?

Everyone Working Together Produces Great Joy

“And then I will be able to boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labour in vain. But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you. So you too should be glad and rejoice with me.” 2:16b-18.

Paul is speaking to all the Philippians believers, not just individuals. His message to the church is that there are no superstars in the kingdom but a vast array of single stars shining brightly in the world together. The church family is made up of people with different gifts, talents, and ministries who all serve the same Lord to bring glory to God: “You are the light of the world...let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.” Matt.5:14a,16. One light does make a difference and, when every believer shines brightly, God’s glory is displayed to the world.

Ministry for Christ is most effective through unity of believers. You contribute to the impact of your community and world by advancing Christ’s mission and message with your church family. The loving partnership of believers gives credibility to gospel witness and inspires everyone’s

commitment to godly living. You and your coworkers stand firm against opposition to God's word, demonstrate the reality of life transformation by your conduct, and make the message of Christ known to those outside of the faith. People are more likely to listen to what you say when you think and act like Jesus.

Paul looked forward to the day he would meet Jesus face to face and receive his eternal reward. The Philippian believers gave him confidence that his sacrificial efforts on their behalf produced mature and productive Christ followers that the Lord would acknowledge. The Philippians had made a significant contribution to Paul's life and ministry and would share in all that was accomplished through them for the kingdom. Paul invites the believers to participate in his gladness and joy resulting from their partnership in the gospel in their everyday world.

You can learn from and be inspired by the examples of Jesus, Timothy, Epaphroditus, and Paul. They show what it means to give everything you have to live out your created purpose in Christ. You can be a model for others to follow as you point people to Jesus by your godly words and good works. Living that way will increase joy in you and others.

Q9 How do you help other believers engage in church family ministry joyfully?

Life Application

1. Describe your life purpose in one sentence.
2. How does finding joy in your life purpose motivate you to live it out?
3. Why is your church family ideal for you to accelerate your spiritual growth?
4. How does being a partner with Christ in his work add to your joy?
5. What things do you do to promote kingdom partnership with fellow believers?
6. What do you learn from Jesus' example about humility in life and ministry?
7. How was Timothy's apprenticeship with Paul excellent pastoral leadership training?
8. In what ways are you like Epaphroditus and how does that encourage you?
9. How do you learn to serve Christ's mission faithfully without complaining or arguing?
10. How does anticipating your meeting with Jesus one day bring you joy?

Lesson 5 – Joy in Pursuit

Philippians 3:1-21

With the joy of the Lord you can make the most of every day in all the circumstances you face. You can develop an elevated and expanded perspective of life to see things more as God does. You can successfully manage the pressures that come against you with God's presence filling your life to assure and equip you.

Paul wrote this letter to the Philippians to thank them for supporting him during his time in prison with words of encouragement and financial gifts. He wanted to assure them that he was doing well in his predicament, not just getting by. He desired that the Philippians experience the joy he did in every situation. You can learn valuable lessons from Paul about thriving under pressure by maintaining an eternal focus.

You are winning in life even when it looks like you are losing because you are in Christ. You keep moving ahead with confidence knowing you making a difference in the world by pointing the way to spiritual and moral freedom following Jesus. You are an example of God's light shining brightly wherever you go.

Q1 Why can you have joy in your life when you experience hardships and reversals?

Clarify Your Main Pursuit in Life

A pursuit is a concerted effort to secure or obtain something you value. It is being on a quest to take hold of the prize through intense effort and personal cost. The apostle Paul defines his life's pursuit: "...I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things." 3:8a. For Paul, knowing Jesus personally is priceless and worth more than anything else.

You establish and grow a relationship with Jesus by submitting to his lordship and spending time with him. You deliberately choose to neutralize anything that interferes with your spiritual progress. That obviously involves sinful attitudes and actions and includes relational and emotional baggage, negative memories, sinful habits, and other things that seem harmless but dominate your thinking and time. Paul identifies the practice and process of losing unnecessary things to gain the best in life now and for eternity. From practical experience he gives insights about the transformation necessary to discern what is God's best in any situation.

What does a successful life look like from God's perspective? Paul assessed his life candidly, knowing his days were numbered. He wanted a realistic evaluation of his progress in gaining the greatest prize of knowing Christ. How willingly had he paid the cost to gain what he considered the only thing worth living and dying for?

Paul writes in Philippians 3 that he had no second thoughts about prioritizing Christ above position, prestige, power, and possessions. He writes about his experiences enthusiastically so that his audience would be inspired to live likewise. Paul begins this section with the exhortation to “rejoice in the Lord!” with him as they pursue Christ daily.

Q2 Describe your life’s pursuit and why it brings you joy to go after it.

Beware of the Drive for Self Importance

“Further, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you. Watch out for those dogs, those evildoers, those mutilators of the flesh. For it is we who are the circumcision, we who serve God by his Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh – though I myself have reason for such confidence.” 3:1-4a.

Paul is writing to those he considers his spiritual family. “My brothers and sisters” is an endearing term that reminds everyone they are spiritually related in Christ. Paul wants the Philippian believers to joyfully thank the Lord for their privileged position and benefits. He tells them he does not consider it a burden to review the things he has taught them and sees it as a necessary reinforcement for their faith and protection from false teaching.

Paul warns the Philippians about the damage caused by putting too much confidence in oneself instead of in Christ. He identifies dangerous people that pride themselves in how well they keep man-made rules and regulations to earn God’s favour. Paul uses strong language that his hearers would understand to describe those to beware of. “Dogs” was a derogatory term Jews used to call Gentiles (non Jews) to denounce their spiritual uncleanness. Paul denounces them as “evildoers” because, by their false teaching, they hinder people from truly knowing Christ. “Mutilators of the flesh” refers to their insistence on circumcision as a badge of righteousness instead of being righteous by faith in Christ alone.

Paul contends that the teachers of salvation by works have it all wrong because performing rites and rituals is not the means of receiving God’s grace. He warns the Philippians to be on their guard for anyone saying that human effort gains salvation from God. Paul had in mind the Judaizers that opposed his ministry and message of grace relentlessly and tried to convince believers they were still under the Law and obligated to obey it. Paul called out this false teaching as a threat to the Philippians experiencing real freedom in Christ by adhering to the truth Jesus taught (John 8:31,32).

Q3 How is self righteousness feeding the illusion of self importance so detrimental?

“If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless.” 3:4b-6.

Paul had credibility to denounce religious self importance by means of works. If finding favour with God was determined by the number of personal religious accomplishments and pedigree, Paul would be at the top of the class. Even the Judaizers would envy Paul’s credentials and could not legitimately claim otherwise. Paul gives a brief listing of things that the self-righteous take pride in that he had on his resume. He says that if anyone has reasons to brag about themselves for self effort, he leads the pack.

Being “circumcised on the eighth day” marked Paul as a Jewish male. He was born into the tribe of Benjamin that occupied the part of Israel that included Jerusalem and the temple where God’s presence dwelled. Saul, Israel’s first king, came from the tribe of Benjamin which was a source of pride among the twelve Jewish tribes.

Being “a Hebrew of Hebrews” is supported by the fact that Paul was educated in Hebrew by the prominent rabbi Gamaliel. He became “a Pharisee” who were extremely serious about their religion and made it their goal to please God. They separated themselves from the world and were devoted to obeying the Law of Moses, trying to be good enough to be raised from the dead to live with God on the last day. Paul was a hard core Pharisee with his membership dues paid in full.

Paul was also famous for persecuting the church with zeal. Before he met Christ, Paul viewed Jesus’ followers as a cult that had contaminated pure Jewish teaching and needed to be eliminated. He was energized by making life difficult for anyone who belonged to the Christian church. Paul considered his efforts legitimate because he was faultless at maintaining legalistic righteousness. If anyone was qualified to be approved by God based on strict adherence to religious rules and regulations, it was Paul.

All these things were considered prestigious and valuable among the Jewish people of the day. Paul was not only born into the right circles, but he relentlessly pursued religious excellence and success with outstanding results. He had every reason in the natural to brag about his status and accomplishments and would be tempted to have confidence in his abilities to gain God’s approval. Paul’s point in his letter is that the Judaizers had nothing over him regarding religious self importance.

Q4 How difficult is it to not be prideful about your religious accomplishments?

Consider Your Relationship with Christ to be Priceless

“But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ – the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.” 3:7-9.

Paul makes the contrast between what one thinks of their own importance and what they should consider because of their relationship with Christ. When compared to the best thing in life, personal accomplishments are of little value. Think about what Paul is saying and how it applies to your life’s pursuits.

While many would call Paul as successful because of the things he had, he considered everything worthless compared to what really matters. Paul willingly cashed it all in “for the sake of Christ”. Treating personal gains as loss does not mean they were intrinsically worthless or unimportant. They are the best that someone can possess as signs of outward righteousness and devotion to God from human effort. That these things are costly to acquire provides a stark contrast to experiencing the blessings of a relationship with Christ by faith alone.

Paul treats every personal accomplishment as incidental “because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord”. Anything he had achieved was miniscule in value when compared to the greatest gain, knowing Jesus now and forever. Paul uses strong language to refer to the achievements of his self efforts. “I consider them garbage” is an extreme diminishment of their value and importance. You could use terms like rubbish, filth, or excrement to convey the estimation of anything you consider less than worthless. Paul’s point is that compared to true righteousness that comes by faith, human accomplishments are filthy and rancid because they cannot measure up to what is required to be acceptable to God.

Q5 How is it possible to view your relationship with Christ as more valuable than anything?

Never Stop Pursuing Christ

“I want to know Christ – yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.” 3:10,11

Paul is never satisfied to sit still in his spiritual development. He presents a powerful purpose statement for anyone who wants everything there is for a believer to experience: “I want to know Christ”. But did Paul not already know Christ? Has he not been referring to that reality so far in his letter? Quite clearly, he is a believer in Christ who values his favoured position and wants everyone to have it as well. So what does Paul mean that he wants to know Christ?

The Amplified Bible expands the statement this way: “For my determined purpose is that I may know Him – that I may progressively become more deeply and intimately acquainted with Him, perceiving and recognizing and understanding the wonders of His Person more strongly and clearly.” Phil.3:10a (AMP 1965). Notice the descriptive words that accentuate the focus and depth of relationship pursued. Paul’s determined purpose embodies a progressive process. He wants a deeper and more intimate acquaintance with the Lord to better grasp how amazing Jesus is. Simply put, Paul wants to know Christ more than he already does.

Until you put your faith in Jesus as Lord of your life, you only know about him to some extent. You have an intellectual knowledge of the existence of Christ, but you do not know him relationally. Once you come to faith in Jesus you are spiritually connected to him and have the potential to develop your relationship with him. You know Christ more as you spend time with him like you do with a friend. Paul committed himself to pursuing an intimate relationship with Jesus as a priority.

Paul identifies four things that he wanted to know deeply in his relationship with Christ:

a) “I want...to know the power of his resurrection”

This is the power of God that raised Jesus from the dead. It is available to believers through fullness of the Holy Spirit. When you are in Christ by faith, you have access to supernatural power that enables you to live well each day and be godly. Incredibly, you have the same Holy Spirit and power in you that brought Jesus back to life. Paul relied on the Spirit’s empowering to obey Christ and serve him in ministry.

b) “I want...to know participation in his sufferings”

Knowing Christ brings suffering with it because of the enemies of Christ. You pay the price of being identified as Jesus’ disciple through mistreatment from those opposed to the gospel. Jesus suffered at the hands of evil people throughout his time on earth, culminating in his crucifixion. He warns his followers that they will also suffer for their faith but to take heart because he has already won the victory for them (John 16:33). While suffering is not pleasant, it is used to conform us to the likeness of Christ so that we think and act more like him. Paul realized that suffering like Jesus helps you to know and understand him more.

c) “I want to know...becoming like him in his death”

Paul is not asking to be crucified in the same manner as Jesus specifically. He desires to develop the same attitude as Jesus had about his death and to experience the benefits of dying in the faith. The act of water baptism symbolizes the spiritual union of a believer with Christ graphically. Going down under the water illustrates dying to oneself and to sin made possible through the sacrificial death of Jesus.

d) "I want to know...attaining to the resurrection from the dead"

Just as Jesus died and was raised from the dead once and for all time, so Paul believes that when he dies by faith in Christ, he will be raised to life again at the final resurrection. No one knows if they will be alive or dead when the Lord returns to initiate the resurrection of the dead (1 Thessalonians 4:16-18). That is why Paul uses the word 'somehow' to indicate that whether he is dead or alive when that happens, he will participate in the raising of believers to be with Christ for eternity.

Q6 Pick one of these aspects of knowing Christ more and explain how you relate to it.

Give Your Best Effort Always

"Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ. Jesus." 3:12-14.

At no point did Paul think he had it all figured out or finished regarding knowing Christ more deeply and intimately. He accepted that it requires a life-long commitment to reach one's eternal destination. Paul uses athletic imagery to make the point as he pictures himself running in a race to cross the finish line and claim his prize. He knows he has not yet attained what he is going after, so he continues to give his best effort with Christ's help: "but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me." Athletes understand the need to keep pressing past the temptations to quit and drop out of the race.

Paul is a man on a mission "to take hold" of what he has been created in Christ to do. When you run with eternal purpose, your life has meaning. You believe that you exist for reasons that have kingdom value. You see yourself as Jesus does as you spend with him and carry out his plan for your life. Like Paul, you willingly lay aside whatever you must to accomplish your divine assignment. You learn to be laser focused in pursuing Christ and completing your mission. Paul incorporates all his life's activities under the same objective to keep things simple and on track: "But one thing I do...".

The one thing Paul does has two parts: forgetting and pressing on. You facilitate your spiritual development and emotional well being by integrating these two dynamics into your daily living.

Q7 Why kind of effort is required to live full out pursuing Christ? How is that possible to do?

1) "Forgetting what is behind"

This is more than not remembering the bad things that have happened to you although they are included. It is also putting behind personal achievements and status that can tempt you to be prideful and ignore God. Forgetting these things does not mean you no longer have any memory of them or that your accomplishments are meaningless and were a waste of time. This is about not using those things to impress God and others or letting them weigh you down pursuing and obeying Christ. You intentionally choose to leave the past behind and use the lessons learned to help you live wisely each day.

2) "Straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize"

Straining and pressing on require extreme effort. Paul has his eyes set on crossing the finish line of his spiritual race as a winner to claim the ultimate prize of eternal salvation in Christ. He looks forward to taking hold of his eternal reward waiting for all believers at the end of life. Picture Jesus standing now ready to welcome you into your forever state. Anyone who has crossed the finish line of a competitive race gets the point Paul is making. There is joy experienced from completing what you trained for and did. Similarly, everyone who runs the spiritual race well by pressing on to the finish will have inexpressible joy convinced it was worth the effort. At the moment you cross the finish line, you will have no regrets about what you gave up pursuing Christ and living out your kingdom calling.

Q8 Give an example of you forgetting the past and pressing on to the future.

Live Up to What You Have Attained in Christ Every Day

"All of us, then, who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. Only let us live up to what we have already attained." 3:15,16

Paul makes it clear that those who are spiritually mature will agree with his teaching. The Word of God is understood with the help of the Holy Spirit who illuminates and makes it practical for applying to one's life. Those who are still spiritual infants will have trouble grasping and accepting Biblical instruction at first but, by persevering and praying, they will receive God's enlightenment. Paul is not chastising immature believers for their slowness to process spiritual truths but is challenging them to keep growing. He makes no apology for speaking truth and directs those who disagree with him to seek God about the matter for clarity.

Mature believers must "live up to what we have already attained" in Christ. It is beneficial to remind yourself often about your position and privileges as a born again child of God. Learn to live up to what you have gained by your spiritual transformation and refuse to pause or digress in your spiritual growth.

The following are some practical ways to maximize your spiritual maturity:

- 1) Live by faith and access everything available for you to live well and be godly (2 Peter 1:3).
- 2) Ask the Holy Spirit to fill you with his power and produce his fruit in you (Galatians 5:22,23).
- 3) Manage yourself and your relationships with others maturely.
- 4) Talk with the Holy Spirit constantly and ask him to guide you.
- 5) Keep in step with him to resist the desires of the flesh (Galatians 5:16,25).
- 6) Make yourself available to the Holy Spirit to operate his gifts through you.
- 7) Deal with every situation with supernatural enabling (1 Corinthians 12:7-11).

Be teachable with God and mature believers who disciple others by godly words and example. God helps spiritual infants grow up to understand and accept Biblical teaching and put it into practice effectively. Mature believers invest daily in their spiritual growth. They continue to study and learn Christ's commands to obey them and teach them to others.

Q9 Why is spiritual maturity vital for a believer and how do you know that you are?

Choose Your Spiritual Mentors Wisely

“Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do. For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.” 3:17-21

You must be discerning about who you listen to for instruction in spiritual matters. You will be influenced and shaped by those you trust to speak the truth and give you practical advice about obeying God. Paul told the Philippian believers who knew and trust him to follow his example for life and ministry. Paul gave the Corinthian believers a similar directive and added the safeguard for doing so: “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.” 1 Corinthians 11:1. Whatever a spiritual mentor tells you to believe and do must be in alignment with Christ's example. When the teaching given to you matches with what Jesus has taught, you are on solid ground. If there is disparity between the two, you must question the instructor's validity.

Sadly, there are people in the church world who are not legitimate disciples of Christ. Paul calls them “enemies of the cross of Christ” because they distort the gospel centred on Jesus by faith through his grace alone. “Their destiny is destruction” means they will experience eternal death for their misdeeds. “Their god is their stomach” refers to their focus on the flesh and its sinful appetites. “Their glory is in their shame” conveys the reality that they take pride in their own self-destructive ways that take others down with them. Paul gives the reason for their self-deception and spiritual disfunction: “Their mind is set on earthly things”. They are fascinated by the world and its sinfulness that will eventually pass away. Eternal separation from God awaits them as the result.

The people you want to choose as your spiritual mentors must clearly have their “citizenship in heaven.” They seek God’s kingdom and righteousness first in all things to ascertain what God’s will is and then they do it. Their minds are set on things above where Christ is exalted, not on earthly things under the control of the evil one (Colossians 3:1-4). They live each day with the expectation that Jesus will return to earth one more time and give his followers their new bodies “like his glorious body” 3:21b. Those are the people you want as your spiritual mentors. Do your due diligence and make sure those you follow legitimately follow Christ. Aspire to be like them over time and become a qualified discipler of others yourself.

Q10 How do you find spiritual mentors? What must you do to learn from them?

Life Application

1. What have you learned about the reality of following Christ to this point?
2. Why do you believe it is possible to experience real joy even in hardships?
3. How do you make knowing Jesus your lifelong pursuit?
4. What is the difference between self-righteousness and true righteousness?
5. How do you guard against developing selfish pride in your spiritual progress?
6. What does it mean for you to want to know Christ more than you already do?
7. How difficult is it to forget the past and how do you do it successfully?
8. How do you maintain your best effort to run well to the finish line spiritually?
9. What does it mean for you to live up to what you have attained in Christ by faith?
10. How is it helpful to set a goal to become a spiritual mentor to others?

Lesson 6 – Joy in Potential

Philippians 4:1-20

Potential is your inherent ability and capacity for growth, development, and maximizing of your personal being. This lesson explores living out your potential with joy as a believer. God has started a good work in you that he is committed to finishing by the time you leave this life. While you are here, make a positive difference for the people you interact with and influence. Your godly character and conduct point the way for experiencing spiritual, emotional, and moral freedom in a crooked and depraved world under the control of the evil one.

Knowing Jesus more each day is priceless to you: “I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things.” 3:8. You keep pressing on in your spiritual race to meet Jesus at the finish line and will have no regrets about what you have given up pursuing your relationship with him.

In the last chapter of Paul’s letter to the Philippians, believers are shown how to reach one’s full potential in Christ in all circumstances. Maturing and producing spiritual fruit ensure that your life counts in the eternal things that matter. You bring credibility to the gospel so that more people meet Jesus and accept his invitation to follow him.

Q1 Why is it valuable to consider your potential as a follower of Christ?

Get along with others for the greater good

“Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends!” 4:1

These words of Paul are a family talk with the Philippian believers. He is the spiritual father who teaches godly principles to his children in the faith and helps them stay accountable to living Christlike. Paul has special affection for these people who chose to believe in Christ as Lord and join Paul in advancing the gospel message. Paul calls them “my brothers and sisters” which acknowledges they are all children of God by faith in Christ. There is no group on earth to belong to that compares with the family of God. Even when separated by physical distance, a supernatural love and bond remains between the members of the church body. Never take for granted how privileged you are to be chosen by the Father to be adopted into his spiritual family and favoured with everything need to live well and be godly.

Paul feels more than blessed by the impact he made on the Philippians and calls them “my joy and crown”. The Holy Spirit produced joy in Paul as he thought about everyone he has disciplined for Christ. They are a significant part of his eternal reward for faithful service in the kingdom.

The people you influence for Jesus that grow in faith and produce spiritual fruit will be a source of joy to you and a foretaste of the treasure in heaven you are storing up through kingdom service. Like Paul, you will stay interested in the progress of those you influence for Christ and remind them to stay the course: “Stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends!”. This is a challenge to keep steady in the way of maturity which includes building unity among church family members giving attention those who are at relational odds.

“I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. Yes, and I ask you, my true companion, help these women since they have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my coworkers, whose names are in the book of life.” 4:2,3

You cannot thrive spiritually when you are being disagreeable. Your growth will be stunted, and your negativity will affect the harmony of the whole church body. Too often personal preferences colour the way we look at other people and issues. That can quickly cause squabbles about who is right and wrong. There is no upside for anyone when tension and conflict are left unresolved. Followers of Christ must commit to doing what it takes to get along with each other with love and respect. The furthering of the gospel is at stake and every member must make every effort to ensure every member is in harmony.

Paul implores two of the Philippian believers to understand the damage they are doing by their selfish behaviour: “I plead with Euodia and Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord.” Paul identifies Euodia and Syntyche as the ones that needed to put aside their differences and get along for their own sake and for the unity of the church. ‘Plead’ is a strong word that means to earnestly appeal to someone’s sense of wanting to do the right thing. It is urging them to come to their senses for their personal benefit and for the greater good. In this case, Paul exhorts the two “to be of the same mind in the Lord” which means to humbly put the interests of others ahead of one’s own like Jesus did with his personal sacrifice for humankind.

Paul knows that people in conflict with others need the help of church family members to be reconciled. Paul calls on “my true companion”, the whole church, to get involved and “help these women” at odds to be reconciled. Paul was invested in Euodia and Syntyche who “have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel along with Clement and the rest of my coworkers whose names are in the book of life.” The church family must be always ready to help members face up to their errors and fix them with the grace God gives.

Q2 How do you know if you are getting along with the church family or hindering its unity?

Rejoice in the Lord in every situation

“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!” 4:4

Paul exhorts the Philippian believers to express their sense of gratitude to God for his goodness to them. 'Rejoice' means to be glad and take delight in something or someone. Acting joyful is easy during times of extraordinary blessing when amazed by your good fortune. It is not as natural to do when dealing with stressful circumstances that demand your attention.

How are you able to rejoice during the challenging moments like you do when things are going smoothly? You must train yourself to "rejoice in the Lord". You learn to not depend on your circumstances to set your mood but focus your attention on Jesus whatever you are going through. At no point does the Lord stop being extremely good to you. He is the same regardless of the situation you are in. Condition yourself to think about Jesus, praise him for who he is, and thank him for what he has done time and again. With that approach, your outlook and demeanour become more positive.

Paul reminds the Philippians that they must practice rejoicing in the Lord "always". There are no exceptions for expressing gratitude to the Lord. You focus your attention on Christ and rejoice when things are going well and when they are not. Unless you condition yourself to act joyfully with the help of the Holy Spirit, you quickly forget how blessed you are regardless of your circumstances. Paul reinforces his instruction about exhibiting a joyful posture by repeating it: "I will say it again: Rejoice!". Your potential to experience life to the full is expanded by engaging each moment with joy in the Lord.

Q3 Give an example of how acting joyful improved your dealing with a difficulty.

Be gentle in your approach with people

"Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near." 4:5

Gentleness means displaying a sensitive spirit when interacting with others. It is being considerate to people even when they are unappreciative of your graciousness. It is showing forbearance and patience with those who frustrate you and make life more difficult by their poor choices and lack of consistency. When you are tempted to be harsh with your words and actions, choose to act like Jesus would in your place.

Gentleness is a fruit of the Spirit that develops in you as you surrender to his sanctifying work (Galatians 5:22,23). Being gentle with those who are kind to you as well as the challenging people in your life is evidence of your spiritual maturity. At the same time, a lack of gentleness reveals a deficiency in spiritual fruit that needs attention. Your gracious manor should "be evident to all". This character quality should be a notable trademark when dealing with people. Build a reputation of having grace and respect for others.

Always practice gentleness even when you do not feel like doing so. You can act immaturely even to those being kind to you when you are cultivating your Christlike character. As you

mature in Christ, you learn to be gentle and firm with people at the same time. You speak the truth in love to bring clarity and calm to a situation instead of fueling the fire and escalating the conflict: “A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.” Proverbs 15:1. You are wise to defuse contention with gentleness.

Paul includes a statement with his injunction about practicing gentleness that can be easily overlooked. It gives a compelling reason for always conducting yourself with a gentle spirit: God is watching everything you say and do. “The Lord is near” first means that God is with you wherever you are. Ask yourself if your words and actions would be any different if you saw Jesus physically standing beside you whatever the situation. He is with you spiritually wherever you are, and you should act accordingly.

The second inference in Paul’s words is that the Lord’s coming again is nearer now than when you first believed (Romans 13:11). That means you live each day as if it is your last by being faithful to obey the Lord in anticipation of his return. You make everyday count for God and do what is expected of you joyfully. That includes being gentle in all your dealings with others because you never know if it will be your last interaction with them.

Q4 What are some results of the lack of godly gentleness in our world today?

Trade your worry for peace through thankful prayer

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” 4:6,7

Worry is a thief that will steal your peace and joy. It wastes your time, uses up energy, and gives you headaches and heartburn in return. Worry is having more than simple concern about potential dangers to safeguard against. It is being anxious and obsessing about situations you have little or no control over. Jesus makes it clear in his teaching that as a believer you have nothing to worry about. God will supply your daily needs and has you covered in all circumstances when you seek him first (Matthew 6:25-34).

Paul advances Jesus’ teaching by instructing the Philippian believers to not stress out over situations: “Do not be anxious about anything.” The word “anything” includes the big issues and the smaller ones. How is it possible to not allow concern about something to take over your thoughts? Paul faced lots of things he could worry and fret about, but he stayed focused on his kingdom mission with his heart at mind at peace.

In these two verses, Paul identifies the necessary actions for maintaining anxiety free living. Think about the benefits you experience by putting them into practice.

1) Seize every moment - “but in every situation”

You choose how to respond in all circumstance both large and small. Do not take your eyes off the Lord for one second but ask the Holy Spirit to enable you to make the most of every moment.

2) Stay connected to God in prayer – “by prayer and petition”

Ask the Holy Spirit to help you stay in touch with God. Praying is talking with the Lord and listening to him speak to your spirit. You can bring any matter to him and ask for his involvement. You will gain assurance that he is always acting on your behalf.

3) Be grateful for God’s favour – “with thanksgiving”

You have been blessed in Christ beyond all measure. Maintain a spirit of gratitude and remember to thank the Lord for how he takes care of you no matter what things may look like. Thank God every time you speak to him.

4) Trust God with everything – “present your requests to God”

Turn your anxieties, worries, and cares over to God with confidence that he will do what is best. Trust God that he will always provide what you need when you need it.

Q5 How do you learn to turn your worries over to God in thankful prayer as a normal reflex?

Your potential to experience joy continually is maximized by turning your anxiety over to the Lord and anticipating he will act according to his perfect will to accomplish his purposes. By trading in your worry, you receive supernatural blessing in return that defies human logic: “And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.” 4:7 You have the overwhelming sense that God has everything in control. That enables you to function effectively in any situation with clarity and confidence.

God’s peace that fills your life is hard to describe because it goes beyond all human understanding. You can exude calmness and serenity at times others are falling apart. You feel like you are tucked away in a secure shelter when the storm is raging around you. You see what is going on and maintain your trusting connection to God with readiness to receive his direction for what to do next.

Paul tells the Philippians that Jesus guards believing hearts and minds with supernatural peace. You are protected from the negative thoughts and emotions trying to cause worry and doubt. Your heart and mind are at peace when you would normally stress out. You have inner strength to face any issue without becoming spiritually and emotionally paralyzed. You live out your potential in Christ with joy worry free.

Q6 How does picturing Jesus guarding your heart and mind with peace inspire you?

Renew your mind with excellent thinking

“Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things.” 4:8

Paul continues his family talk with his spiritual brothers and sisters. He offers the Philippian believers practical instructions for maintaining healthy minds saturated with the peace of God. You can think, evaluate, choose, plan, and strategize the best way to live well and impact others for Christ when you are focused on pleasing God.

Your mind is a battleground of opposing thoughts that try to negatively influence your values, decisions, actions, and demeanour. It receives and computes thousands of messages every day that must be instantly analyzed and evaluated to be discarded or acted on. The evil one is constantly attacking your mind with ungodly ideas and deceptions. Jesus enables you to guard against all unwanted intrusions with his peace. You experience soundness of mind by not worrying about anything and prayerfully trusting God (4:6,7).

Be diligent about screening what you allow into your mind so that you stay mentally healthy and renewed. The enemy attacks at any time he chooses so stay alert. Do not make yourself vulnerable to evil infiltration by looking at and focusing on unholy and negative things. Instead, concentrate on that which is worthy of your attention: “whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things.” (4:8).

There are many things around you that reflect the perfection of our Creator. Take time to look at them and marvel at their uniqueness and beauty. As you do that, think about how these qualities are perfectly exhibited in Jesus. Remind yourself and others often that Jesus is perfectly true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, and praiseworthy. That will help you keep your mind renewed and transformed and full of peace and joy.

Q7 How does focusing on Jesus and excellent things facilitate your life transformation?

Watch mature believers closely

“Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me – put it into practice. And the God of peace be with you.” 4:9

It is important to be influenced by people mature in the faith. You learn how to maximize your potential for joyous living by following the examples of those who are Christ-centred. Discipling involves teaching people by words and example how to obey the commands of Christ daily. Without spiritual veterans in their life, a believer will struggle to mature in faith, relationships, decisions, and values. They need to see what to do and then put it into practice.

Growing as a disciple requires learning and doing daily. Paul was not shy about telling the Philippians what to do to be spiritually mature. He does not hesitate to offer himself as an example to follow: "Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me – put it into practice." Paul makes himself accountable as a godly example and challenges the Philippians to think and act like would in all matters.

Paul finishes off this section with a reminder that the Philippians can have calm resolve in their commitment to discipleship: "And the peace of God be with you." As you practice what you learn from godly examples, you will experience God's presence by his supernatural peace.

Q8 How do you find mature believers to watch and learn from?

Practice contentment in all circumstances

"I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength." 4:10-13

Paul is convinced that you can experience joy living out your life's potential. He talks about his relationship with the Philippian church who took the opportunity they were given to bless Paul tangibly. For whatever reasons, it had been some time since the Philippians had made personal contact with Paul. When they were able to send one of their members to see Paul, he "rejoiced greatly in the Lord". Their ongoing concern for Paul brought joy to him through the Holy Spirit. You relate to Paul's reaction by remembering how other believers have blessed you.

The monetary gift to Paul was appreciated but secondary to his spiritual possessions. He lets the Philippians know that because he is in Christ, he already has everything he needs: "I am not saying this because I am in need." The costs of gospel ministry are examined in the next section. Here Paul refers to God providing the daily needs of those who trust him. Contentment is a learned behaviour developed by the practice of thankful reliance on God. Paul says, "I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances". He has taught himself to stay detached from anxious concern about material things and to be satisfied with whatever has been made available to him in the moment.

The Greek word translated as “contentment” means treating what one has as enough and sufficient to keep going. Contentment is different than complacency when someone says, “Who cares?”, or lack of ambition and effort thinking, “Why bother?”, or fatalism that takes the approach, “Whatever will be will be.” Godly contentment is produced by doing what is required and trusting God to meet every need: “I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation.” Paul practiced this behaviour whether he had a little, a lot, and everything in between.

There are lots of things to tempt you to be discontented. You are bombarded daily with consumer driven messages saying you deserve more than you already have. You are pressured to change your circumstances or accumulate more things to satisfy your appetites. If you give in to the temptations, you feed the spirit of discontentment that is a hungry beast that can never be satisfied. Whatever you have, you will always want more.

G.K. Chesterson once said, “There are two ways to get enough: one is to continue to accumulate more and more. The other is to desire less.” How is that possible? How can you learn to practice contentment in every situation by being satisfied with what you have? Paul gives the source of his enabling to do so: “I can do all this through him who gives me strength.” He is declaring that Jesus alone is enough – anything more is extra. When you have Christ, you have everything you need including the strength to get better at practicing contentment.

Jesus helps you see things from his perspective by staying focused on him. You will discover that you can be productive with what you already have. God gives you supernatural abilities to deal with anything you face and supplies the resources to meet every need. Trusting the Lord that way brings you joy that helps you persevere. Contentment is a spiritual quality that enables you to enjoy what you already have with gratitude.

Q9 How does practicing godly contentment affect your lifestyle choices?

Be a generous giver to God’s work

“Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles. Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid more than once when I was in need. Not that I desire your gifts; what I desire is that more be credited to your account.” 4:14-17

Paul addresses all the Philippian believers in his letter, commending their collective participation in furthering the gospel. Paul notes that they had distinguished themselves from all the other churches at the time by their support of his ministry. The Philippians stood out as a church of generous members investing in kingdom expansion.

Giving to God's work involves money and the sense of ministry partnership. Paul was always thankful for the interest his followers showed in his mission: "Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles." 4:14. You share in the ministry of the gospel with others through your prayers of intercession and blessing as well as finances. You strengthen and inspire coworkers with words of encouragement whether spoken in person or written and sent. Giving money to the cause shows that you are invested in the work. Generous giving pleases God who treats your gift as a sweet smelling sacrificial offering brought before him: "I have received full payment and have more than enough. I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God." 4:18.

Because of their sacrificial giving, the Philippians' needs were guaranteed to be met by Christ out of his unlimited abundance: "And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus." 4:19. Think about the implications of this principle of spiritual sowing and reaping. God has unlimited resources and takes care of every need a believer has. Your potential to receive from God is enlarged by the measure you use to give so that you have even more to give (2 Corinthians 9:6-11). You will be constantly amazed at how blessed you are by practicing the law of sowing and reaping in God's work.

Q10 What are some benefits a believer gains by being a generous giver to God's work?

A fitting conclusion

Paul brings his letter to the Philippian believers to a close with praise: "To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen." 4:20. It is beneficial to pause and reflect on the many things Paul has taught us about God and his church in loving partnership. It is inspiring to think about the potential for producing spiritual fruit through personal and collective maturing. Good works impact the world for Christ and the gospel transforms one person at a time. You will be in awe of God supplying every need and will respond to him with liberal praise.

It is comforting to realize you are related to brothers and sisters in Christ around the world. They are your spiritual family who share the same faith and hope in the Lord as you. You will never meet most believers, but you can affirm your love and support for them at a distance by various means of communication. Paul encourages connecting with other Christ followers to strengthen relational bonds: "Greet all God's people in Christ Jesus. The brothers and sisters who are with me send greetings. All God's people here send you greetings, especially those who belong to Caesar's household." 4:21,22.

Paul concludes his communication by praying God's blessing on his kingdom partners: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen." 4:23. This gracious act expresses the joy a believer has to bless others.

The theme of this study of Philippians is to 'Get Joyful' as a follower of Christ. Through the work of the Holy Spirit and your willingness to follow godly instruction, you experience supernatural joy in all facets of daily life. You find joyful fulfillment in your relationship with Christ. You gain Christ's perspective about everything and feel secure in your personhood. You live out your created purpose as you pursue your relationship with Christ. You maximize your God-given potential to be an example to others of Christ-centred living.

God provides you with everything you need to thrive in daily life regardless of any pressures you face. You experience God's presence at work in you giving you joy and hope for each day and for the future. With Christ as the focus of every thought and action, you are ready to engage every situation with a joyful demeanour and praise. You take Paul's instruction to heart: "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!"

Life Application

1. Describe your life's potential in Christ in a sentence or two.
2. What are you contributing to your church family to facilitate unity and spiritual vibrance?
3. How do you remember to rejoice in the Lord continually?
4. How does having joy in the Lord help you inspire others towards maturity?
5. How does the fruit of the Spirit affect your character and demeanour (Galatians 5:22,23)?
6. How do you recognize worry and neutralize it?
7. When should you experience supernatural peace and how is that possible?
8. What do you invest in your mind to keep it renewed?
9. How do you keep being mentored and be a mentor simultaneously?
10. How does being a generous giver help you practice contentment and praise God?



This course is part of the Life Transformation series available online from:

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Get Joyful

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Del Wells is an ordained minister with the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada having served the local church for 37 years as a pastor. His vision is to see people transformed daily by having their minds renewed with the Word of God and the power of the Holy Spirit. Utilizing his teaching gift and drawing on his many experiences and spiritual insights, Del has written numerous courses, studies, and articles to help followers of Christ learn to live well, be godly and impact the world around them for Jesus.

These resources form the Life Transformation series and are available online at freedomkw.com.