

Paul's Letter to the Philippians

The Lord is at Hand

Miles O'Neill / 2015

Content

Leader's Summary– Pages 2-6

Asking Questions that Target the Heart– Pages 7-8

How to Study the Bible– Pages 9-14

Part I– “*The Great Race*” (Philippians 1:1–2:30)

Lesson 1–Gospel Over Self (Philippians 1:1–11) Pages 15–23

Lesson 2– Paul's Deeds and Resolve (Philippians 1:12–30) Pages 25–29

Lesson 3– Jesus, Wow! (Philippians 2:1–11) Pages 31–38

Lesson 4– Shine as Lights (Philippians 2:12–18) Pages 39–43

Lesson 5– Examples of Lights (Philippians 2:19–30) Pages 45–47

Part II– “*Keep on Keepin On*” (Philippians 3:1–4:23)

Lesson 6– Mini Romans (Philippians 3:1–11) Pages 49–56

Lesson 7– Maturity (Philippians 3:12–21) Pages 57–61

Lesson 8– The Lord is at Hand (Philippians 4:1–9) Pages 63–68

Lesson 9– Thanks and See You Soon (Philippians 4:10–23) Pages 69–72

Leader's Summary:

Miles O'Neill

Welcome to Paul's letter to the Philippians. This Epistle is a powerful book to study as a group because it is written to a group yet with a very personal tone. I am excited that you are taking the time to lead others through it.

I call this the "fight club" book. If you have seen the movie or read the book, fight club is a place you go to get beat up essentially! That's what Philippians does to me! In Paul's personal honesty to the Philippian church he both directly challenges the reader with exhortation. Yet he also indirectly challenges as he tells of his own personal attitudes to his situation. But just like fight club, you want to go back. It's a "good" beating up. It challenges me. It's in my face. And most importantly the challenges Paul throws forward are rooted in the reality that "God is at hand" (4:5). He is real. He is worth our lives. He has gone through everything that you and I are asked to go through... and more, way more! In the midst of a culture that subtly or loudly says we are crazy for following Jesus, Paul says no way! Jesus is greater and worthy of our lives. Don't listen to the taunts and jeers around you. Listen to the Word of God and He will change your life and perspective from being about you, to being about the Gospel of Jesus.

For small group leaders, here are a couple of pointers: First, know that I am praying for you right now as I type! Your task is to take the lessons that follow and use the framework to lead according to the level and pace that they can handle. You can add or delete questions in order to tailor the study to your particular group. Sit down ahead of time and go through the lessons yourselves. Use a red pen and write in the margins. What are the questions that you have as you read the letter alongside the lessons? Where would you want to go deeper, where would you want to simply read the comments included? (Read the included article "Asking Christ Centered Questions" to gain valuable insight into asking good questions). There is a lot of room to use the study as a framework and make it your own. Furthermore, I highly recommend purchasing the Philippians commentary in the [NIV Application Commentary](#) series. You can find it on Amazon for about \$15. It will help you gain rich insight into the letter and give you confidence as you lead through it.

In this study, you will find that I am attempting to focus on some key elements of which you must help your group see. First of all, you want to help them see a process of studying the Bible. You want to help them see that context is hugely important to understanding the author's intentions. You want to focus on certain details of the text but zoom out often to help them see where it fits into Paul's reasoning and the flow of the letter. Even more than that, where does the letter fit into the story of the whole Bible? This is the perhaps the number one weakness I find as students approach the Bible. They ignore the bigger picture and focus in on particular phrases often misinterpreting them in the course.

Secondly, you will see an intention to build a solid foundation of the Christian life on the Gospel, the good news of what Jesus has done for us. It is both the starting place and the continuing place from which all growth must take place. (As Tim Keller says, it is both the ABC's and the A to Z's of the Christian life). You will constantly see questions directed at both Paul's and the group member's motivation. I am attempting to help you lead people to expose their hearts and not just their actions. You must also help build a foundation in the beautiful Gospel of Christ's love and acceptance so that Christ becomes compelling in the process of change. Guilt, a standard of performance, pressure, a desire for a moral or satisfying life will never change a person's heart. Only as Christ becomes more beautiful and compelling will real, time enduring life-change occur! Sound difficult? It is! In fact you can't cause it. You can be a part and God wants to use you to do it, but relax, your part is just showing

up being prepared. God promises to use His word to richly impact lives. The pressure is off so experience the freedom of the Gospel as you teach about the Gospel!

Finally, you will see that I attempt to ask some questions that will help your group grow in depth together as they grow deeper in their understanding of Christ. Pray often through the questions that help people reveal their hearts with one-another. As God exposes peoples' hearts, their sins, their hopes, dreams, fears and pains, an environment that can really promote deep change begins to form. As light opens up into people's lives, God surgically removes pain, pressure, and heartache and replaces them with joy and freedom. Take steps of faith and don't shy away from initiating intimate conversation where vulnerability can take place. And remember, you can only take your group where you are willing to go yourself.

At the end of the last lesson, I ask the following questions in review. You may want to keep them in the back of your mind during the whole study and even ask them of your group from time to time over the weeks you meet. They summarize the lessons that can be learned from the inspired words of this letter well.

- ✓ What have you learned about who God is?
- ✓ What have you learned about who you are?
- ✓ What have you learned about who others are?
- ✓ What have you learned about what you are called to?
- ✓ What heart motivations are there to follow Christ?
- ✓ Summarize how Paul proposes to help the Philippians grow in unity and in Christ?

As you plot your course as a leader ahead, would you keep this prayer related to the study of Philippians of David Powlison in his book [Seeing With New Eyes](#) before you.

Our heavenly Father, you have spoken such wonderful things. They are true, but we stumble in the dark. Overcome our hearing-impaired, sight-impaired, mind-impaired, heart-impaired natures. Our God, you let us glimpse what is true and right holy and perfect, what is worthy of adoration. You give us a glimpse of Christ himself. Paul blazed with light in Christ, and we want to blaze with light also. Make us know you better. Help us, our father, we pray in the name of your Son, Jesus, who brought us into life. Amen

Practicals in using this study

A danger in reading a familiar book of the Bible for many of you is that perhaps you have read it or one similar many times and wonder what you can still learn. I encourage you to approach Philippians with an open heart and mind. *"The Word of God is living and active, sharper than any double edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart."* Hebrews 4:12 Wow, if that is true, this book is not simply words, but it is power! Look deeper. Ask your heart deeper questions. As you go through this study, try to both get a bigger picture as well as see in-between the lines. Paul introduces us to the person of Jesus and His message. What greater knowledge could there be and it is worth putting your whole life into studying.

Here are a couple of practical study suggestions. If you are leading a group, ask the members to do the following:

- First, get a notebook or journal and prepare a section for your personal notes on the study.

- Second, read the letter through in one sitting. Take 2 hours on a Sunday afternoon and get your favorite coffee drink. Write down your own observations. What stands out to you? What do you learn about Paul's view of Jesus? What surprises you? What makes you ask questions? What makes you uncomfortable?
- Then, go through each section of this study. Read the material. Ask yourself the questions and write your answers down. Try and get the smaller details of each section but also keep in mind the comments and highlights on the big picture. Try and think big picture- smaller details- and bigger picture as you go through the book.
- Write down a broad outline as you go through. Try and see Paul's overall big picture themes. Pick out a couple verses to memorize that summarize what Paul is trying to tell us.

Each section of this study includes three major parts. They start with a **"HOOK"**. The hook is meant to grab the participants' attention. It may be several questions, a statement of context, a scenario or perhaps a story. **Important Note:** Under each Hook, I suggest reading the passage out loud and then simply asking the questions, **"According to this section, What is Paul saying and what are his motivations"**? These are simple questions but they are profound in observing what the text reveals about the purpose of the letter. Don't overlook the simple face value message Paul has for us by quickly moving on to the smaller nuances of the passages.

Second, the **"LOOK"** section is the most significant portion of material and designed to engage with the passage of that study. I have spent hours and hours studying the letter to the Philippians using several commentaries and other studies. (Those resources are highlighted below). Use the work I have done in putting this together to help create more awareness of some of the themes and intentions to which Paul points. There are many questions written for each section. The Leader's Guide in particular (LG) offers more commentary, illustrations and creative ideas to help you as an individual or group process on a deeper level.

A cursory reading of Philippians will leave many stones unturned and even potential errors in how we see Jesus. So look deeper, read thoughtfully and examine the hard teaching. The goal of the Look section is not just to process information, but move that information to heart action. In leading a group, try and make this study your own. But at the same time, it has been laid out intentionally to communicate the heart of what Paul tries to get across so bear in mind that the information is chosen with a goal in mind.

Often I will include a line or two at the end of the study for personal reflection. I will call this section **"Notebooks"**. In the notebook that they have purchased, give several minutes to respond to the questions. Then, as your group grows in vulnerability, ask them to share some of what they wrote.

Finally, each study finishes with a **"TOOK"** section. If we don't apply what we see in the Bible, studying the Bible is useless. Each section ends with the questions:

What was most helpful, challenging or thought provoking?
What did you learn about the Character of God?
How should you respond?

I encourage you to leave time at the end for these questions. Have group members write their answers down. Help them remember their answers by saying them out loud. Ask each other to pray for the others that week along the lines of the answers to these questions.

*Unless noted, all commentary/context has been written by Miles O'Neill

*Sources:

The NIV Application Commentary, Frank Thielman 1995 Zondervan

An Introduction to the New Testament, D.A. Carson and Douglas Moo, 2005 Zondervan

Encountering the New Testament, Walter Elwell, Robert Yarbrough, 2005 Baker Academic

Asking Christ-Centered Questions That Target the Heart

Rick Hove

In the process of leading a small group, you will employ a wide variety of questions. You will ask questions that help participants see important details in the text. You will ask questions that encourage participants to wrestle with the meaning of the text. You will ask questions that encourage participants to consider the significance of what they have read. You will ask questions that help participants discover the big idea. Ideally all of these questions should prepare people for the application that is the goal of your study. As you lead people respond to God through his Word, ask Christ-centered questions that target their hearts.

Why ask questions that target the heart?

First, life-change rarely occurs from simple knowledge. Think of all the things you know you should do. You know you should exercise. Does knowing this insure you will do it? You know you should control your eating. Does knowing this insure you will do it? You know you should guard your thoughts. Does knowing this insure you will do it? You know you should share your faith. Does knowing this insure you will do it? Life-change rarely occurs simply from “knowing” we should do something. Instead, life-change is more often like this: knowledge ⇒ “want to” ⇒ action. Someone can know, for example, that he should end a particular dating relationship but he will not do it until, at some level, he *wants to*. In other words, the *heart* is central to life-change. Thus, we need to ask questions that target the heart both to expose the ugly parts of our hearts and also to point our hearts to Christ so that we will *want to* change in response to who He is. If all the questions we ask in our study are merely “knowledge” or “how to” questions, we will not help people become who God wants them to be.

Second, one of the central motifs of the Scriptures is that God wants our hearts. Much of Christianity today fails to touch the heart. Furthermore, the root of sin lies at the heart level – cursing God, resisting God, ignoring God, making ourselves God, etc. When questions target the heart they expose sin and point the way to the glorious Savior and the awesome gospel.

Why ask questions that are “Christ-centered”?

From this point in salvation-history believers view the entire Bible through the lens of Christ. This isn’t to say that Christ is hiding in some obscure verse in Lamentations. Rather, it is saying that we read Lamentations, Psalms, Matthew and all Scripture from a post-Christ perspective, aware of who Christ is and what he has done. Christ, then, should be at the center of the Christian life. It only makes sense that our “sub-text” should be “Isn’t Christ great?” One of the major themes of the New Testament is our resistance to Christ. We may, for example, judge others but at the root of this sin is some sort of resistance to Christ. Making questions “Christ-centered” gets to both the root of the problem and the solution to the problem.

What do “Christ-Centered questions that target the heart” look like?

Here are some examples of Christ-centered questions that target the heart:

- Think of some of the darkest thoughts that have ever crossed your mind – thoughts which deeply haunt you. Christ knows these thoughts. How does this make you feel?
- What are you turning to for love in your life right now? If you turned to Christ for love,

how would it affect your relationships with others?

- Think of your relationship with Christ. Is Christ most often an “end” – the object of your enthrallment and interest? Or is Christ a “means” – someone who is pursued to get you something else? Why is this the case?
- Why is a slain Lamb who conquered so beautiful and worthy of adoration?
- What are things apart from God on which you build your identity? If your identity was in Christ how would you be different?
- What’s the most soul-gripping thing you’ve ever anticipated . . . something, some person, or some event that you LONGED for? Tell us about it. Do you LONG for the appearing of Christ with the same soul-gripping intensity that you long for other things? If not, why not?
- The greatest insult to Christ was the cross. It was the place of greatest shame. He was naked. He was hung as a criminal though he was innocent. He was suspended on a tree he made. He was taunted by jeers to save himself (like he couldn’t). Isaiah puts it so powerfully: *“He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to slaughter, and like a sheep that is silent before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.”* Is53:7 What is uniquely beautiful about Christ at this moment? Or, put another way, how is his beauty different at this moment than, say, when he raised Lazarus from the dead? What is beautiful about a God like this?

Although you might use “Christ-centered” questions at various points in your study, they will be most helpful as you move to “application.” As you help your group members respond to God through his Word, ask questions that target the heart (especially heart-resistance toward God) and point them to beauty of Christ and sufficiency of the gospel.

How to Study the Bible

**Inductive Bible Study Method is a method of studying the Bible through a system of steps that help us grasp what a book's author intends for us to learn and apply. The focus of the method is in Observation technique as detailed below. I have personally found it very helpful to have some guidelines and ideas that help and motivate me to know where I am going and how to get the most out of what I am reading. The following will help explain the process, but ask a staff member for more details as needed.*

- Here are some quotes establishing an overall thought in studying the Bible:
 - "God is building a kingdom of redeemed people for Himself." *Unknown author*
 - "Establish thy word as that which produces reverence in thee." *Unknown author*
 - "For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any double-edged sword. It penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." Hebrews 4:12

- ✓ What is the theme of these quotes? What is similar?

These quotes serve to communicate that the Bible is doing something! It is moving, living, powerful and purposeful. We should never approach the Bible as a benign object, rather as a living object used by God to move us and change us and build His kingdom on Earth.

Inductive Bible study method

- ✓ Which is the most difficult of the following: Observation, Interpretation, Application below?

Perhaps observation is really the most important, if we would do it well, it would leave far less to interpretation and even figuring out how to apply, the application will jump out at us as we observe well.

- ✓ Which is the one we do the most poorly?

Especially of late, there has been widespread interpretation which has been done very poorly and has become very dangerous... 'Jesus Seminar', Open Theism etc. Once again, if we would observe well, context, genre, intent, we would need to interpret far less and application would become compellingly apparent.

**We need to focus on Observation as the key to studying the scriptures. There are commentaries written by far smarter and more educated people to help us interpret well. Focus here on Observation.*

1. Observation

- **Context-** *One of the central tasks of observing well is to be aware of the context in which a portion of the Bible was written; (or any piece of literature for that matter.) The context in which a letter or book was written helps us decipher the author's potential intentions. If we can determine the writer's intentions, it helps us see what he is actually saying and leads to interpreting well and also applying well. Thus there are many contextual issues to become familiar with as you observe a book of the Bible well: time, place, culture, and setting of the particular writing to name a few. On an even broader scale,*

we must also look at where the writing takes place in light of the whole history of scripture. As you look at the particulars of a certain book, find out where that book fits in compared to what all of scripture has to say about God outworking of His divine plan. In light of that greater picture, this quote is worth reading:

**"Scripture- the Old and New Testaments- is the story of creation and new creation. Within that, there is the story of covenant and new covenant. When we read scripture as Christians, we read it precisely as people of the new covenant and of the new creation. We do not read it, in other words, as a flat, uniform list of regulations or doctrines. We read it as the narrative in which we ourselves are now called to take part. We read it to discover "the story so far" and also "how it's supposed to end." To put it another way, we live somewhere between the end of Acts and the closing scene of Revelation. If we want to understand scripture and to find it doing its proper work in and through us, we must learn to read and understand it in the light of that overall story....*

...It is the story of how God's kingdom was established on earth as in heaven in and through the work of Jesus, fulfilling Israel's great story, defeating the power of evil, and launching God's new world.

As we read the letters, we must remind ourselves that these are the documents designed to shape and direct the community of the new covenant, the people who were called to take forward the work of new creation.

As we read Revelation, we must not allow the wonderful heavenly vision in chapters 4 and 5 to lull us into imagining that this is the final scene in the story, as though the narrative were simply to concluded with the redeemed casting their crowns before the throne. This is a vision of present reality, seen in its heavenly dimension. We must read on to the end, to the final vision of Revelation 21 and 22, the chapters that give final meaning to all that has gone before and indeed to the entire canon.

Likewise, when we read the Old Testament, we must read it- as it manifestly asks to be read- as the long and winding story of how God chose a people to take forward his plan to rescue creation, not the story of how God had a shot at calling a people whom he would save from the world and how this was aborted, forcing him to try some things else (a caricature, I know, but one many will recognize). And this means that through the Old Testament must be read as part of "our story" as Christians, we must not imagine that we are still living within that moment in the story. The story itself points beyond itself, like a set of parallel lines meeting in the infinitely rich narrative of the gospels and the sudden outburst of new life in Acts and the letters.

-Surprised by Hope, NT Wright pp. 281-282

➤ We must study whole books to understand the message in its context

Illustration: *reading a letter from a girl/boyfriend. What if you read the middle paragraph sentence that says 'I can't stand you, I don't want to be around you!' You call the friend and cuss them out and break up! They e-mail you, (you won't answer the phone of course...) and in words of tears ask, 'didn't you read the sentence before that?' It read, 'I love you! I can never imagine saying '.....'!*
Context!

Read it all in one sitting, don't just read the middle and use 'tweezer theology' (plucking some bit out ignoring the surrounding context) or you may end up getting the wrong message!

"Whenever we pick up the Bible and read it, even in a contemporary version like the Good News Bible, we are conscious of stepping back two millennia or (in the case of the OT) even more. We travel backwards in time, behind the microchip revolution and the industrial revolution, until we find

ourselves in an alien world which long ago ceased to exist. In consequence, the Bible feels odd, sounds archaic, looks obsolete and smells musty." John Stott

**Therefore, a system of studying the Bible that looks for contextual clues to the author's intentions is very important. The inductive Bible Study Method is just that.*

Study Process:

1. First time read through 1x in one sitting to gain a broad feel of the letter. (I will use Paul's letter to the Ephesians throughout this example)

2. Read through 2nd time and begin recording the following in a journal: Who, What, Where, When, Why

- Who: Paul (vs.1)
- Where: From prison in Rome
- When: About A.D. 60
- What: How to live in Christ as the unified Church
- Why: There seemed to be a significant problem arising between the Jews and the Gentiles. Probably the Jews, those that had the 'first right' to Christ, treated the Gentiles as second class believers. (Where do you see evidence for this in the text?)

3. Read through 3rd time focusing on a search for THEMES.

Ask: what do you know about themes in Ephesians? Any verses or sections you know of?

Themes of Ephesians: Unity of Jews/Gentiles, Spirit Filled life, Grace, Responding to God's grace through obedience through the Spirit.)

**A key to studying a Pauline letter is discovering its theme. Ephesians has a very specific theme and reason for which it was written. You must search for the theme and begin to grasp what Paul says in light of that backdrop. Read Eph 2:11-22 and you will see it. The theme has everything to do with Jew and Gentile unity in the church. The Jews thought they were special and had more of a right to God due to their special historical relationship as God's people. The Gentiles were treated as second class Christians in the church. Paul is writing this letter to restore unity and right foundation to both sides...therefore everything can be seen more clearly in the letter through this lens and you can understand and apply the text more accurately to Paul's and God's intentions.*

Why is Eph 1:1-14 there? -To establish the common foundation amongst Jew and Gentile.

Why is 2:1-10 there? -To establish that they both come from slavery to death and are both now freed by grace! So on and so on. You might ask throughout the study...'why is this here in light of the theme?' If you are confused about a section....remember the theme to help interpret it.

- ✓ In light of the main themes, why might Paul have written chapter 1?
(Common foundation for Jews/Gentiles creates unity)
- ✓ How about Chapter 2:1-10?
(Common foundation of death to life by grace creates unity)

✓ How about Chapter 6?

(The armor of God context is really to do battle against disunity!)

4. Observe Repeated words, Transition words.

Ask: What are some transition words and why might they be important? ie. therefore, so, for etc.

-Paul is usually making a strong point with transition words...ie. Chp 4:1...'Therefore'....in light of Chp 1-3..... He goes on to give his ethics of living the Christian life, but all in the context of his first three chapters and the 'therefore' alerts us to the connection.

Ask: What are some repeated words that you have seen in Ephesians? In Christ, grace, life. Death; these all point to significant themes Paul is addressing and thinks are very important.

5. Observe Questions, Confusing statements and ideas.

Write down the questions and ideas that you want to pursue more at a later time.

6. Look for a Controlling verse

Select a verse that you could memorize that summarizes the book well. Perhaps Eph 2:8-10? This will help you remember the theme of the book and help you hold onto the main message and even help you live and apply. 5 years later you will be able to grasp some of what you have studied as you memorize the controlling verse.

7. Outline main sections

This and the following step are the meat of what you will spend time on in the Inductive Method. Outlining is key to gaining a grasp on the intention of the author of NT writings.

If you were to use roman numerals in an outline, how would you arrange Ephesians? Perhaps there are 4 main sections...5, 6...How would you outline it and what would you call each section? (this helps gain an overall view of the letter and helps put the details in each section in the larger context of what Paul is intending to write.)

9. Outline further detail

If you chose 4 main sections...now outline each section in further detail.

10. Diagram

Create a grammatical diagram for sections that you really want to dig deeper into. Write down each sentence in a hierarchical structure which shows which are the main phrases of emphases and which are the subordinate phrases. For example, Paul may pray a prayer lasting 5 verses. However, he may only pray for three main things. It is helpful to highlight those three main things and see how the other words serve to give more weight and foundation to those three. In this way it helps you see Paul's message clearly, hold onto the information more succinctly and apply more readily. I do this for each main section that in particular challenges or intrigues me. (For information on diagramming ask a staff member).

11. Do word studies

Choose a key word and dig deeper to gain a fuller understanding. 'In Christ' is mentioned 31 times in Ephesians...Paul may be telling us something! Try and dig deeper to understand that phrase better. Use cross references to other letters, look it up in a commentary you own or on-line, look the words up in a dictionary...may not apply to this phrase... This will help you grasp the word and meditate on its significance.

12. Create a Chart

5 Years later, what will you remember from the letter? Creating a chart can give you a quick glance overview and refresh your memory years later. Begin with your outline of the main sections. Ephesians probably has two main sections...#1- from chapters 1-3 might be called 'Being'. #2- from chapters 4-6 might be called 'Doing'. Put those headings at the top of a chart. Section 1 may have 3 subheadings...#1- Chp 1:1-2:10, Identity in Christ, #2- Chp 2:10-22 Unity in Christ, Chp 3:1-21 Purpose in Christ. Place the titles you choose under the main heading. Then briefly outline each of the 3 headings you just chose under them. Do that for all the sections you come up with. Finally, under the whole chart, write out your controlling verse. You have now created a chart that you can quickly glance at and remember all the work you have done in the book. At this point you will really 'own' the book for yourself for years to come.

2. Interpretation

What is the Author's Big Idea (ABI) given the context in which the passage is found? All interpretation must be done in light of the ABI. Use commentaries to get a wide range of opinions about confusing questions. (Try BibleGateway.com for a sampling of commentaries for free.)

3. Application

- **View of God:** What have I learned about one of the persons or all of the Trinity? What do I need to believe about God? What am I not believing about God? What are the ramifications in my life of not thinking rightly about God?
- **Action:** What should I do according to the Bible? Is there a command to obey?
- **Character:** What should I be? What must I change if I am to be holy? How can I become more like Christ? Is there a lesson to learn? Is there a sin to confess?
- **Goals:** To what causes should I devote my life energy? What can I do to change the world so it conforms to God's plans?
- **Discernment:** How can we distinguish truth from error? How can I gain discernment? How can I gain wisdom from God and the church?
- **Meditation:** Ask God to reveal where He wants you to apply the passage you are studying. Memorize a section to remember and allow it to permeate your heart and mind.

*Assignment:

- Read article: 'The Music of the Gospel' by Keith Johnson
- Read Ephesians in one sitting all the way through

Suggested Reading: How to Read the Bible for all its Worth, Fee/Stuart; God's Big Picture, Vaughan Roberts

Part I – The Great Race

Lesson 1: Gospel Over Self

Philippians 1:1-11

HOOK:

Ask:

- What do you know about the letter to the Philippians?
- What do you know about the author Paul?

(There is little debate amongst scholars that Paul was the author of this letter. Of course there are opponents to this theory, but for the most part, there is agreement that Paul wrote from Roman imprisonment sometime during the mid 50's to early 60's A.D.)

 - Go to Acts 7:54-8:3 and 9:1-18 and read about Paul's background.
- What do you know about the environment of ancient Greek culture during this time?
 - What would some of the cultural religious norms have been?
 - How would the message of the Gospel have been received?
 - What would it have been like to be a Christian in this culture?
- If Paul were writing a letter to you, given the Philippian back-drop, what would you want/need to hear?

Context: Philippians Intro

The context of this letter is rich with importance. Philippi was the city Paul chose for his first venture into "Western" lands- Macedonia (modern Greece). That Philippi was westward in Paul's journeys is significant because this is His first headway with the Gospel into Europe from Asia Minor. Here we mark the entrance of the Gospel going to "the west"! God had divinely planned Paul's initial visit to Philippi. (Macedonian call Acts 16:7-8)

Philippi was already an important Roman colony in a province many miles East of Rome. Large numbers of its citizens were descended from Roman soldiers originally having fought a decisive battle against Mark Antony. For this reason, though the province's common tongue was Greek, in Philippi most spoke Latin while the city proudly sought to maintain a Roman heritage.

Upon Paul's first visit, they found no Jewish synagogue and only a few women who worshipped the Hebrew God. In other words, there was very little Christian presence. Amongst the first new believers arose Lydia, a jailer and perhaps a slave girl (Acts 16:15-28). For those of you that think women are marginalized in the Bible... here, perhaps Paul's favorite church begins with a woman, a jailer and a young girl! Thus Paul leaves soon after and entrusts the future of the Church at Philippi to a young, diverse group of believers. Later, he is given reports of the Church's progress and so writes this letter as encouragement and instruction to a young church struggling to live out their faith in the midst of a hostile environment. I can think of no more ripe context into which to peer in order to gain challenge, wisdom and power for current life on a college campus.

Philippians is divided into two major sections. In this first section, as usual in Paul's letters he sets the stage. He encourages the young church and gives them motivation to continue on. He also lets them in on his own situation in order to comfort. He is in jail you see and so they are rightly concerned for him. However, Paul, to their surprise shows that even in jail God is being glorified. They need not worry he tells them, but rather "rejoice" with him! Indeed "rejoicing" is one of the themes in this letter, used at least 14 times by Paul. Paul, in prison is full of joy! This first section I will call "The Great Race" as that is what Paul seems to admonish them to consider. No matter what the circumstance, realize that there is a journey at hand. We are not alone on that journey, but God is always near. We race with Him in a journey of joy knowing that He is in control and worth our lives.

Read: Philippians 1:1-11

LOOK:

Intro- Philippians 1:1-2

1. As usual, Paul gives us an introduction. It is easy to read on and give only cursory attention if you are familiar with his intros. However, Philippians' intro warrants a slower look. Compare Galatians 1:1-3, Colossians 1:1-2, Ephesians 1:1-2 with this intro here. What is the same? What is different? What points of note can you find?

(Galatians 1:1-5 ESV)

[1:1] Paul, an apostle—not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead—[2] and all the brothers who are with me,

To the churches of Galatia:

[3] Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, [4] who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, [5] to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

(Colossians 1:1-2 ESV)

[1:1] Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,

[2] To the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father.

(Ephesians 1:1-2 ESV)

[1:1] Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God,

To the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus:

[2] Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Most notable are two things:

1) The honored title of "apostle" is missing. The use of "servants" here sets the tone of the letter emphasizing Paul's own humble calling to which he extends to the church at Philippi. In fact, the word "servants" is not the most accurate translation; rather it could be more closely translated "slaves". Paul is calling himself a slave of Jesus! While slavery in Paul's day did not have the same connotation as it does today, still, slavery was not an esteemed position. Slavery was a position of servant hood. It was a position underneath another. It was a humble position for the sake and benefit of another. In contrast, he specifically addresses the overseers and deacons giving dignity to them vs. his lowly position.

2) This is the only time Paul specifies "all the saints AND overseers and deacons"- he is specifically addressing the leaders in the Church yet noting that this letter is addressed to "ALL" as well.

Here already, we see the theme of Paul's letter emerge. Paul advocates a role of submission to one another as he models unto Jesus- "Gospel over Self". Now, I realize submission is a loaded word and not well thought of in our current world. Our culture's loudest cry is "freedom" rather than giving up for the sake of another. Oh, yes, we exclaim that "love" is the highest value. However, true love requires submission for the sake of another and without it, "love" is just a pleasant sounding sound byte for personal fulfillment at the expense of another. In this letter Paul entreats us to consider what it means to truly love another. It means to submit your self to others and their well-being like a slave just as Paul does to Jesus. This is radical, hard-hitting stuff. Let me quote from the NIV Application Commentary by Frank Thielman,

"Among (modern Western culture's values) is a deeply seated commitment to self fulfillment and to the notion that each person should be free to choose what he or she wants to believe. The result of this perspective for this generation's religious commitments has been an attempt for each person to borrow elements from a variety of religious traditions in order to meet his or her special spiritual longings.... According to recent studies, 80 percent of this country's population believes that "an individual should arrive at his or her own religious beliefs, independent of any churches or synagogues"... In such a climate, the mandate of Philippians to subordinate self-interest to the interests of Jesus Christ and to draw bold, unyielding boundaries around the essence of the gospel needs to be heard. If it is not, the church stands in danger of following the culture away from the truth of the gospel into a syncretistic morass of "answers" to the search for self-fulfillment."

2. On whose authority does he write? Why is this significant?

In our culture today there are a host of truth claims. Anyone can claim anything they want to and be heard. Christianity never asks us to believe anything that is not true! All claims made by the Bible claim to be truth from God, not from philosophy or another person's ideas but direct revelation from Jesus. This stands out compared to any other philosophy of life.

3. Who is his audience? Christians or non-Christians? Why might that matter to us?

"To the saints in Christ Jesus". Of course it is not that it is "off limits" to non-Christians, actually it is a great letter to read if you are just investigating Christian faith. But we must realize that it is largely written to Christians in Philippi during the 1st century and so must be read with this in mind. The important thing to know is that it is written specifically to believers and should be read as a letter talking to believers about how to grow in Christ.

“Right on yo” 1:3-8

1. What’s “right on” about the Philippians according to Paul? (Make a list on your own and read out loud.)

***Notebooks:** Make a list of what God would call you to if your life were to look like the Philippians’.

2. What does their “partnership in the gospel” mean? Let’s lay some tracks for this whole study- what is the Gospel? Be careful, don’t oversimplify and give a two-word answer. Let’s dig a bit here. What is this Gospel and what are its implications?

***Notebooks:** Take 5 minutes and write down what you think the gospel is.

Literally gospel means “good news”. Gospel was not a word that Paul...or Jesus came up with. Gospel was a common word of antiquity that was used in reference to the news of a fortuitous event often in military campaign. Thus a rider would return to a city from battle announcing the “gospel” of victory. So, Paul uses the word in reference to the good news of all that Jesus was, did and is. It centers on the death and resurrection of Jesus on the cross. But it is broader than that in many ways. The gospel is that God is real! The gospel is that God created us to live in harmony with Him. The gospel begins in Genesis and ends in Revelation. It is for yesterday, today and forever.

The “gospel of the gospel” is that it is free! You can do nothing of self-effort to attain it. Jesus offers it to us free of charge as a gift. There is no way to make God love you more, nor any way to make him love you less. He offers a free gift out of love and we must simply reach out in response and accept it as true.

Finally, the gospel changes everything. It changes our motivation to live- in response to an encounter that he offers! It takes a weight off our backs. It gives us a new secure foundation from which to interact with others. It allows us to be free of self-interest and live for others as Paul admonishes us in this letter. The Gospel allows us to place the Gospel over self!

3. There is a common teaching prevalent in American society that God will bring you “health and wealth” if you follow Him closely. What about Paul’s circumstances and message flies in the face of that teaching? What is the danger in such a teaching?

This may be one of the most dangerous teachings today in the Christian church. It’s subtle yet runs deep. It equates joy in life with outward circumstances. Thus when outward circumstances do not seem to be going as desired, we doubt God, we doubt ourselves, we turn to other things. In a time-period where opposition to Christian teaching is only going to grow, if a Christian looks to their outward circumstances to evaluate God’s goodness or their own salvation, danger lurks.

The Christian life is one based on faith according to God’s promises. His promise is one of joy in this life DESPITE circumstances not BECAUSE of them. Furthermore, joy is different

than happiness. He never promises, nor herein does Paul express happy feelings all the time. Rather in this letter, Paul in prison can have joy because he knows that God is real, God is in control and one-day happy bliss will be full and rich in heaven. In our "immediate gratification" culture that is hard to appropriate, but that is the perspective that Paul calls us to investigate in this letter.

4. What are Paul's reasons for joy that follow in vs. 3-11

(Reason1)

Verse 5 "because of your partnership"

We are in this together. The Gospel makes all of our decisions part of a greater whole. We are to give up personal freedom for the sake of the church. What was their partnership? Search Philippians to see how they partnered. (2:25, 4:10, 4:14) What did their partnership mean for their personal choices in life?

(Reason 2)

Verse 6- "And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ."

It is because of God's faithfulness, not theirs! If one is truly "in Christ" there is no chance that God will not bring their salvation to completion. Satan has lost. Christ has won. Knowing this means that you can be 100% sure that if you have trusted Christ's work on the cross for the payment of your sins, you are going to heaven to be with Jesus for all eternity. There is no other possibility. That is such a great comfort and reason for rejoicing isn't it? Despite how you feel today, Jesus cares more about your perseverance than even you do! He is a pretty good guy to have in your corner. Think about what confidence it would give you to know that someone is looking out for your spiritual growth. Now realize that Jesus is just that person. He is looking out for your growth and development. That is powerful.

However, don't rest there without taking steps of action. The way we now know whether we are truly "in Christ" is that our attitudes are changing to be in conformity with Jesus. Then as our attitudes change, you will act on those attitudes till completion. Look at Phil 2:13- there will be a change in will AND action. It is God that does it all, but we agree and act with his leading. The presence of a changed will and action provide evidence of real belief.

Going back to reason 1- Paul is joyful not only for their partnership in assistance for his benefit, but also because it confirms that they are truly justified by Christ through the evidence of their works. According to this statement then, what is a mark of a true believer? Look at 1:28, 2:12-14, 3:12, 4:17

"Those who will be saved in the future live holy lives in the present, but the holiness that characterizes their lives is God's work from beginning to end." NIV pg 39

5. Seeing here that God began the work in our hearts and will carry the work on until its complete- how does this confirmation affect you?

*** Notebooks:** Look at each of the 14 instances of Paul's use of joy/rejoice in Philippians- Come up with a Biblical/Pauline definition of Joy.

6. How could Paul's imprisonment be an element of God's grace!?

Paul has received grace through the gifts from the Philippians while he was in prison. Paul has thus shared in the grace of God through the Philippians. They have also partaken of grace through the connection to Paul's ministry. Those that give and those that go are both an integral part of the mission of God.

Also, the Philippians have experienced God's grace through the ministry of Paul, but on another level, how has the Philippians' gifts to Paul been defense and confirmation of the Gospel in the Philippians' lives? .

Prayer: 1:9-11

1. Look over vs. 9-11. What and why does Paul pray these things in particular?

He prays for love stemming from "knowledge". That's important. We have the notion that we should just "love" others. Like it should pop out of a hat. It should be easy. But we all know it is not easy. Not easy to really love. I mean, maybe easy to say the word. But to love, like we have already mentioned, means to put another in front of self... even when it does not feel natural or benefit the giver. I believe Paul's connection of love to knowledge is the key to true love. The word for "knowledge" in vs. 9 is the Greek word, "epignosis".

Look up the following uses of epignosis. Compare and try to find a definition. (Romans 1:28, Eph 1:17, Col 1:10, Rom 10:2, Eph 4:13, Col 2:2, Col 1:9, Ro 3:20, 1 Tim 2:4, 2 Tim 2:25, Titus 1:1, Phil 6)

In all these uses, "knowledge" is connected to right head understanding of God, that leads to a heart understanding of God, then of self and others. The love that stems from this knowledge lasts as contrasted with paltry self-produced love. This type of knowledgeable love takes into account whom God is and what he has done to redeem us. It takes into account what we deserve personally from a holy perfect God. It takes into account what it cost him to cross the gap between he and us. This is all true knowledge. It is not just philosophical thought. It is not just the warm feelings produced by the idea that there is a loving god out there. This is powerful reality of a king that really lived in space and time history that loves us so we can love others knowing such a great love ourselves.

Now, specifically, the reason for this prayer must certainly be that there is a lack of love-choosing to forego one's freedom for the sake of others in the Philippian church. So Paul prays against that lack of love with a positive turn. A right knowledge of God's love is the only cure for their lack of personal love towards one another.

2. What is the difference in love abounding from knowledge vs. emotion vs. choice?

The first is the only lasting foundation. When you love according to emotion, what is the result? When you simply choose to love, what is the result? I would submit that both are short lived or at least based on circumstances. Emotions come and go. Choice based on resolve strengthens and weakens. We need a fundamental heart change to take place and that comes through knowledge of the truth of whom God is and what he has done for us. That reality leads to

emotion and gives us the ability to choose as he gives us a new, live heart in place of a dead selfish heart.

3. Turn in your Bible to Ephesians 3:14-21. Observe Paul's prayer in which he gives us knowledge of Christ. Observe some of the truths about God's love for us. Describe the love that God has for us. What does is the height? What is the depth? What is the breadth that Paul speaks of? How does his love surpass knowledge even? These are the truths of the "knowledge" that Paul speaks of in Philippians.

[14] For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, [15] from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, [16] that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, [17] so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, [18] may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, [19] and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

[20] Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, [21] to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen. (Ephesians 3:14-21 ESV)

***Notebooks-** Meditate on these truths and write down some thoughts as you discern what loving others might look like in light of how Christ loves you.

Parents, Girl/Boyfriend, school friends, those you don't know....

4. What does purity and blamelessness mean and why does he include it here in this prayer?

To paraphrase backwards- Be pure and blameless (filled with the fruit of righteousness) by agreeing with what is excellent (best)- which comes from having knowledge and discernment that comes from love (which comes from the knowledge of God's love). Here he is saying that purity and blamelessness flow from having right thinking so that we know what is the right action. We often think of purity and blamelessness in terms of sexual purity, or honesty, or "not cheating" or perhaps going to church regularly. But here Paul uses purity and blamelessness in the context of loving one another and glorifying God through such. It is not just our "don't do this" or "do this" that God wants from us. It is a total life of love towards God and others that he wants... he commands! But that's impossible really. He wants all of our hearts full of all of our love at all of our time. But notice, Paul recognizes it is a journey. He prays that our love would abound, "more and more" as we gain knowledge and so discern better and better. You and I are on a journey, a life-long journey to know God and respond to Him. And get this- he wants that more than even we do. (Vs. 6) He is working on our hearts and it is time to get in step with Him. As you spend time in college learning, growing, maturing, make knowledge of God one of your paramount goals. Spend time in his Word. Spend time listening. Spend time talking to Him. There are no written tests, no verbal quizzes but your work in this area will far outweigh the power of your work in any other study.

5. In light of our current culture's motifs, what kind of a struggle is it to live in purity and blamelessness?

6. What sort of motivation does Paul give to live pure and blameless? Does that motivate you?

Paul urges us to be ready. Who knows when Christ will return? Is what you are doing and how you are living towards others currently what you would want to expose to Christ if he knocked on your door today? This is not guilt, Dad looking over your back. This is the reality that Paul knows there is a day ahead when God's power and glory will return. He wants his life to reflect the beauty of who Christ is and prepare the way for His return. It is a joy to Him to regard the return of Christ as imminent just as you or I would await the return of a friend and so prepare accordingly.

7. Why is God's glory and praise worth living for?

God's glory and praise is the highest reality, the most beautiful scenario, the most true truth. What else possibly could be MORE worth living for? If we were to see just a snapshot of God's glory it would blind us. Moses asked and he had to be hidden behind a rock and even then he nearly died. The reality that you and I can add to God's glory, that we can please Him through our praise should overwhelm us and is certainly food for thought and discussion. What do you think about that... we can add to God's glory!? We can please the king of the universe!?

8. How do our attitudes change to actually WANT to bring God glory and praise over what the world says is cool? What does it feel like to live with the fruit of righteousness? If it feels so right, why do we stray?

Paul has set the scene with theological depth from which to exhort in the coming chapters. Based on their high calling as saints who know God they are to choose what is best for one-another giving up personal freedom based on fellowship with God himself. In Paul's day, Judaism had divorced ethical living from religious life. A devout Jew was to follow the law as it related to God, but personal conduct and ethical living towards fellow humans was disregarded. Thus sexual licentiousness, degradation of women as second class and all sorts of moral failures were normal and commonplace.

***Notebooks:** Summarize 1:1-11. In your own words, what has Paul said? What has he set up? What insights into the potential problems amongst the Philippians do you perceive? What areas do you see addressed that you could call Gospel over self?

TOOK:

What was most helpful, challenging or thought provoking?
What did you learn about the Character of God?
How should you respond?

***Assignment:**

- Read through Philippians for 1st time this week following Inductive Bible Study Methods steps.
- Write down everything that interests you, or raises questions in your mind. List themes, ideas or words that you see repeated?

Leaders: Begin next week asking for themes that they came up with. Ask, How did they arrive at them?)

Suggested Reading: Abba's Child, Brennan Manning

Lesson 2: Paul's Deets and Resolve

Philippians 1:12-30

HOOK:

Ask:

- Think of some "bad" things that have happened in life. Write down 3-5 bad things that have happened to you. What have been your responses? Share a couple with the group.
- Have any "bad" situations turned out for the "good" in your life or someone you know?
- Observe in this section the "bad" that Paul has experienced and how he responds.

***Context:** In this section, Paul recounts his situation to the Philippian church. He is in prison. There are some that are using his imprisonment to assert their power and preach Paul's message in order to gain advance over Paul's work. He is also awaiting trial to see whether or not He will be killed. Things can't get much worse can they?

In Paul's day, the primary reason for writing a letter was to inform the reader of details of the details or circumstances of life. It was customary to begin with, "I want you to know that....". He wants to set his audience at ease as to his conditions. In this week's whole, 1:12-18a, and 1:18b- 26 form two sections. In the first, Paul communicates that his circumstances are advancing the Gospel. Then in the second, he gives a theological treatise on the benefits of staying vs. leaving to death. Paul is not surprised at the "bad" he is experiencing. He knows that God uses "bad" circumstances to advance the gospel....

Read: Philippians 1:12-30

LOOK:

Handcuffed 1:12-26

1. What stands out to you as you read this section (1:12-26)? What is the mood of Paul's writing? What's the overarching theme?

In this section, Paul communicates a guiding theological principle that is in everything he does or says: God is behind the scenes in control! The oddity here for the reader is that Paul focuses on the advance of the gospel rather than his own comfort or discomfort. There is no mention of his own needs, satisfaction or fulfillment. His concern is with the Gospel's proclamation. He has placed his own circumstances under the authority of God rather than his own emotions. He realizes that God chooses to work not DESPITE of difficult circumstances, but THROUGH difficulty.

Verse 12- "Advance the Gospel" is used only one other place in scripture, 1 Tim 4:15- Paul has in view here not only to tell of his circumstances, but to communicate his primary concern, the power of God in all circumstances.

Verse 13- "become known" or more literally become "clear"- The connotation is that the guard began to see why Paul was really in prison. They were also able to see God's divine hand and so came to faith... ie. Paul's faith was such a model that it led others to faith.

2. Perhaps one of the primary goals of Western individuals is to avoid suffering. Paul's view of the goal if life is radically different and it leads to a radically purposeful life.

- Do you somehow want the Gospel to work through comfort and an easy lifestyle?
- Are you more committed to comfort than you are committed to the Gospel's advance?
- Do you get mad at God when things are not easy?
- What are your "chains" that though burdensome in our culture, might serve to advance the gospel?

God's design is NOT what we would expect. It is not despite Paul's suffering that the Gospel is going forward, but rather BECAUSE of His suffering in Christ. Make sure you get that last part; it is not just suffering FOR Christ, but suffering IN Christ. This is the power Paul has to endure suffering and indeed count it blessing. He knows Christ. Christ's spirit dwells within Paul as he does in every believer. He listens to the spirit's voice that encourages him and shapes his outlook on his circumstances. He doesn't listen to the voice of circumstances or his adversaries, but listens to the voice of God.

Will the day of Christian persecution return to Western culture? The time is probably not far off. But maybe persecution will be healthy for the church? In the midst of persecution, it was probably Paul's model of perspective and boldness that encouraged the Christian brothers and sisters to persevere, grow and mature. It is not as if people should hope to be imprisoned... but if Paul, in prison, is faithful to preach the Gospel, should not the Philippians be as well?

3. What does this section say about the "problem" of suffering?

This is one of the main oppositions to the God of the Bible in our culture. How could a good God allow bad things to happen to anyone, especially his followers? There is an easy answer, however it is not easy to swallow. The answer is that perhaps God allows, even causes "bad" things to accomplish "good". If the Bible is true, "bad" things will cease to exist one day when he conquers evil. Like I said, it is an easy answer but hard to embrace especially as we experience "bad" things. But think about it. What have bad things that you have experienced in life caused in terms of growth and maturity and wisdom in your life? Maybe God is more interested in your growth, maturity and reliance on Him than He is interested in your simple comfort. Perhaps God is more concerned about the saving power of the Gospel to rescue us from sin than he is from rescuing us from hard things in life. Here Paul's overarching theme is Joy in the face of trial. Joy is something that is way deeper than laughter and comfort.

***Context:** These "preachers" in vs. 15 are probably NOT heretical "Judaizers" as many have suggested. The Judaizers preached a false gospel that was no gospel at all. (Gal 1:6-7) Probably more likely, these preachers were some that were out for fame and popularity in opposition to Paul's emerging fame. They were probably jealous and wanted more of the attention and recognition. In modern terms, Pastor Tim Keller has suggested that most church culture subtly proclaims, "aren't we great!", "aren't our methods great?" Perhaps that is what is going on here. Can you think of

churches, pastors, preachers that come across in that way? Is there an undercurrent of that attitude in your life? Thank God for Paul's lesson here that God can use even the proud and arrogant to communicate the Gospel. Could it be that you and I might even fall more into that category than we realize at first take?

Paul is teaching a lesson here. Just like in the Philippian church, there is sin and wrongful motivation. However Paul does not lament those "against" him in this similar way, but trusts God for the good of the gospel out of it. God can and still does use the misguided, prideful efforts of humans to communicate his gospel. Churches, preachers, movements are not the source of power, but the gospel that comes forth from even broken vessels can produce life.

4. A helpful study for those that want to live life as Paul did in worship of Jesus is to look at all the motivation statements that Paul gives us in the Bible. Look at 1:12-26 and write down all that motivates Paul. Do those things motivate you? What is it about the way that He must have known Jesus for these things to motivate Him?

- The Gospel's advance
- Others are emboldened to speak of Christ
- The proclamation of Christ no matter who or why
- Christ will be honored no matter what his circumstances
- Christ is life
- He gets to labor for Christ while alive
- He will be with Christ when he dies
- Serving the church for their progress and joy

He considers Christ to be of surpassing worth and value. He knows of no other greater person to live for. He considers everything less as compared with Jesus. He is convinced that Jesus is real, alive and working. Wow, pray for that attitude.

5. Verses 22-26, His choices are constrained by what is best for others. The Gospel ties him to give up "freedom" of self for "freedom for others in the Gospel". What would this look like for you in your present day life?

This is the theme of Philippians. Paul does not isolate his own growth and development at the expense of others. He considers everything he does and is as subordinate to the growth and development of others. He chooses not to exercise his own personal freedom in order that others might experience freedom. In a culture of "my choice" that reigns supreme, Paul gives us a counter-intuitive model and challenge by living for others for God's glory.

Live a life worthy 1:27-30

***Context:** *This section serves as a transition from focus on Paul's circumstances to that of the Philippians. Paul has opposition in jail but they also have opposition in Philippi. The context is that of a church growing yet suffering at the hand of opposition. God must show up. Failure looms on the horizon. There is no help for the church beyond what God can provide. There are no artificial programs through which to get by. Church, arise and take the call of Christ's death and resurrection on your back.*

1. What is a manner worthy of the Gospel as a college student today? Christian faith is too often equated with "do this" and "don't do that". God is more concerned with your heart than he is with your actions as Jesus proclaims in the Sermon on the Mount. However, that is not to say that He is not concerned with your actions or "manner of life". What areas in your "manner of life" need attention?

***Notebooks:** Take five minutes and write down some honest thoughts to the question above. Would you be willing to share some in the group?

Verse- 27b- "with one mind (soul) striving side by side". They need each other for perseverance. They are not meant to stay in a holy huddle, but they can't do it w/o a huddle as well. Again, there are personal choices that must be made but total freedom of choice is not the goal. The goal is unity in the gospel so that the gospel wins and is convincing.

2. Handling opposition- Paul constantly encountered opposition to his central message of Jesus' death and resurrection for sin. When you encounter opposition to Christianity or to the Bible or to Christian ethics what is your response? Does it cause any of you to doubt?

One of the difficulties of living as a Christian in today's culture (or any cultural period) is the apathy and even opposition towards Christian teaching and the Bible. It causes us to struggle and doubt our faith. If so many oppose, then maybe they are right. Conversely, Paul here gives us a different way to look at opposition to Christianity. Isn't this the way they treated Jesus? Didn't most people NOT believe and were even violently opposed to Him? Why would we expect anything different today? Perhaps if everyone did believe it would be a greater sign as to the unreliability of Biblical truth. Given that Jesus suffered, why would we expect that as followers of Him we would experience something else? Perhaps suffering with Christ leads us to a deeper intimacy with Him as we identify with Him in His suffering?

***Notebooks:** Summarize 1:12-30. In your own words, what has Paul said? What has he set up? What insights into the potential problems amongst the Philippians do you perceive?

TOOK:

What was most helpful, challenging or thought provoking?
What did you learn about the Character of God?
How should you respond?

***Assignment:**

- Read through Philippians for 2nd time this week following Inductive Bible Study Methods steps.
- Write down a summary of each section.

Suggested Reading: The Reason for God by Tim Keller

Lesson 3- Jesus, Wow!

Philippians 2:1-11

HOOK:

Ask:

- This is the "smack me" passage. It is quite unfathomable if you read it closely. Jesus, the high king of the universe, the likes of which is greater than our wildest comprehension, humbles himself to a lower position than has ever been known. Jesus, Wow! He is quite incredible. If you consider Jesus coming from God to becoming man, what thoughts do you have?
- What is the greatest humility you have ever seen, heard of or experienced?
- You need to be serious and honest for this one; do you consider yourself to be humble? Why, why not?

Read: Philippians 2:1-11

LOOK:

***Context:** This passage is one of the most widely read, widely studied and widely written upon out of any passage in the Bible. It is rich with theology, mystery and challenge. Therefore, we will take a bit more of an exegetical approach to this lesson. You must see all the powerful nuances in wording that Paul gives us.

Gospel over Self- Philippians 1:1-4

Verse 2:1- "So if there is" (since there is)

Paul's appeal here is rhetorical, but not in a condescending tone, but rather that of close friendship assured of their participation in Christ.

"any encouragement in Christ",

(encouragement= Greek "paraklesis") means "a calling to one's side" (para, "beside," kaleo, "to call");

1. What is the encouragement that we find in Christ? How does finding yourself united with Christ encourage you? What courage does that give you? Look at Ephesians 1:3-11. What is true of one who is "in Christ"? What sticks out to you the most? What do you need to believe the most? If you really believed all that, what effect would it have upon your heart.... Actions?

Verse 1b-"any comfort from love"

(love= Greek "agape")

(comfort= Greek "paramythion") which has the same meaning as "paramuthia", the difference being that paramuthia stresses the process or progress of the act, paramythion stresses the instrument as used by the agent ie. the comfort as emanating from God's unconditional love.)

2. What is the difference between “encouragement” and “comfort” given the Greek definitions? It seems that encouragement is a broader term relating to being “in Christ”. The comfort seems to stem specifically from Christ’s love. How does Christ’s love in particular comfort you? Where do you need “comfort” in life? What do you think that this type of comfort is? I.e. Is it physical? Spiritual? Emotional? All or none? Is it wrong to desire physical comfort?

Perhaps God does want physical comfort for us, wouldn't he? Isn't the problem that we make physical comfort our goal... even our god? Don't we think that physical comfort will bring us spiritual, emotional comfort? Perhaps physical comfort is not "bad" but it is the priority we place on it that is tainted.

Verse 1b- any participation in the Spirit,

(participation= Greek “koinonea”) –fellowship, association, community, communion, joint participation, intercourse)

-The share which one has in something, participation

-The right hand as a sign and pledge of fellowship

-A gift jointly contributed, a collection, a contribution, as exhibiting an embodiment and proof of fellowship

3. How have you experienced “participation” in the spirit? I know you see that word in the definition! “Intercourse”- fellowship so strong that sexual language is used. Have you sensed the Spirit of God in your life in a deep, real way? How should we sense the participation in the Spirit? (See John 14-16 for an understanding of how the spirit of God works.)

Verse 1b- any affection and sympathy

(affection= Greek “splanchnon”) –Connotation of ‘bowels’: always in the plural, properly denotes “the physical organs of the intestines,” The Revised Version of the Bible substitutes the following for the word “bowels:” “affections,” 2 Cr 6:12; “affection,” 2 Cr 7:15; “tender mercies,” Phl 1:8; 2:1; “a heart (of compassion),” Col 3:12; “heart,” Phm 1:12, 20; “hearts,” Phm 1:7; “compassion,” 1 Jo 3:17.

(sympathy= Greek “oiktirmos”)– compassion, pity, mercy

-The bowels in which affection resides, “a heart of affection”

-Emotions, longings, manifestations of pity

These two words are very similar. They are both translated as coming from the “bowels”. That is deep within us. Ill be honest, these do not come easy or natural for me. For some of you they may. In the context of “participation in the Spirit”, Paul is saying that the experience of participation is so deep that it would go down to our bowels. Would you say that you have experienced Christ in that way?

The danger here is that we think Paul is just referring to an emotional state that we need to “feel”. In Paul’s theology, the depth of our experience with Christ is never simply conjuring up warm feelings through singing praise choruses over and over or having a warm bosom. For Paul, the depth of experience always stems from the truth of God’s character as revealed in the

person of Christ. Look at Eph 3:17-24. From where does the change in these people take place. It is from their "minds", their "intellects", their "thinking". If we really want to experience Christ, if we really want to experience the depth of his affection and sympathy in our bowels, we need to pursue learning about Him in truth. The truth of Christ found in His word translates into deep and powerful worship experiences. The truth of Christ found in His word translates into deep and powerful encounters with His creation.

Verse 2- complete my joy by
being of the same mind,
having the same love,
being in full accord (united in soul)
and (being) of one mind. (thinking the same thing)

Same mind, same love, united in soul... and one mind again- these could be interpreted two ways. 1) A command to "Have the same mind of Christ (referring to 2:1)", or 2) "have the same mind" as one another (referring to the context of disunity) as those that have experienced Christ. The second makes more sense in the context, though the 1st is still a true thought. The emphasis in Paul's letter is unity and love between the Philippians. They are to have the same mind and love for one-another. This is to stem from their experience with Christ but to be lived out with one-another. His emphasis here is on the practical rather than the theological. His emphasis is on the "doing" rather than the "being" from which it stems. Therefore, he moves on to vs. 3- 4:

Verse 3- Do (doing) nothing from
selfish ambition or
(ambition=Greek "eritheia") denotes "ambition, self-seeking, rivalry," self-will being an underlying idea in the word; hence it denotes "party-making." It is derived, not from *eris*, "strife," but from *erithos*, "a hireling;" hence the meaning of "seeking to win followers," "factions,"
(doing nothing from) conceit,
(conceit= Greek "enodoxia") literally, "wise with one's self," i.e. "in one's own opinion," vain glory, groundless, self esteem, empty pride, a vain opinion, error (considering) but in humility count others more significant (higher in rank and authority) than yourselves.

[4] Let each of you look not only to his own interests,
but also (look) to the interests of others.

4. Well, how are you doing in this list of "smack me's"? If you let this stuff sink in it's pretty overwhelming. To consider others greater than our selves even at person expense is not easy. In fact, I really think I would get a failing grade if there was such a thing. As you look at this section, what challenges to you find personally?

***Summary-** We have to be really careful with this section. The danger is that we treat Paul's words as simple moralism based on the great example, Jesus. WWJD! The problem is that you will never do what Jesus would do. You will never experience a great enough depth with Jesus to simply copy His character. But, because we have experienced him in part, it motivates us to pursue a life centered on others as He gives us His life centered on us. Because He allows us to experience the fullness of his love, we are freed up to love others because our "love tank" is full. We can overflow to others because our emotional and spiritual needs for love are filled.

We are all desperately needy for tenderness, love and compassion. He created us for these things. But He also created us as SO needy for these things that no one else can meet them for us. As we realize all that He thinks of us, desires for us and actually gives us, we are no longer trapped in desperation looking for these things. We are then free to exercise our free choices in the constraint of loving others rather than being trapped by our desperate attempt to use our freedom to pursue things that will make us feel loved and satisfied. Limiting our freedom to free others actually sets us free!

-If we are to put the interest of others ahead of our own, we must relinquish our fascination with personalities, including our own, and get busy with the unimpressive tasks of helping our brothers and sisters at their points of need. NIV application pg 108

Thus, Paul admonishes the Philippians to promote others rather than self. That was Christ's attitude and so should be ours. The way we think about such things will lead to action. "Same mind, one accord (spirit) one mind, (count) having this in mind."

A prayer of need: Oh God, how I do not think of others' interests but rather solely and simply my own. Whatever serves me is given priority. Whatever gives me fame, respect, value, feeling good about myself. Oh God I can't live with myself in this state. I am tired, anxious, worn out. Others are an affront to me and my identity. I have a self-validation project going on constantly. Faithful Jesus, treasure and light, come in and change, transform, hold up, minister to my heart and mind. Amen

Train Your Minds- Philippians 2:5-11

***Context:** These few verses are amongst the most hotly debated sections in Philippians and in all of scripture are perhaps some of the most studied. They reveal a great deal about the nature of Jesus' incarnation. They speak to Christ's preexistence, His nature on earth, His equality with God and His identification with humanity. Surely these are all very important considerations about the nature and character of Jesus.

The following has been widely considered to be a pre-Pauline hymn since 1899. However, the NIV Commentary calls this into question. Particularly, it's beginning of "who" is not hymnal. Also, only recent scholarship has found such a conclusion... 1899 and on. Furthermore, there is wide disagreement as to the Hymn's structure leading to the conclusion that it is not a common poetic hymn structure at all. Finally, hymns of this time period were songs of praise and worship. This section does not have that type of quality but rather is compatible with other Pauline prose. Paul makes statements about Christ (vs. 6-8), draws inference from these statements (v. 9), and then describes the result of this inference (vs. 10-11)

Verse 5- Have this mind

There are several different interpretations of these few words, which are quite significant.

1) Christ as a model interpretation- Have the same mind that Christ had- (Literal Greek- "which also in Christ Jesus"- could be interpreted, "Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus") Connects to the following verses, 6-8 rather than the previous 1-4.

2) The kyrgematic interpretation- Conversely, this view would interpret the passage that "they should remember what is theirs' "in Christ"". (Literal Greek- "which also in Christ Jesus"- is thus translated- "Have this attitude in yourselves which you also have in Christ Jesus.") Both lead to "right living" one out of the model of Christ, the second out of believing what is true of them in Christ.

Here, the first seems in more accord with the way that Paul is exhorting the Philippians as a whole from 1:27 "Live in a manner worthy", on. Thus, His concern is not merely with the inner attitudes of the believers, but with the outward expression. However, this is not the way that Paul usually encourages and exhorts and so care should be taken in its application. As in the book of Ephesians, typically Paul claims all that we have "in Christ" and thus tells us to live in a manner worthy of what we have received. Here Paul seems to put the pragmatic example of Christ more forward. Look at Jesus, he is the supreme example. But, as I said earlier. Beware of the temptation to follow human ingenuity, strap down your boots and just try hard to follow. You will never follow well enough. You will never be complete. You will never repeat WWJD enough to finally reach a level of maturity. It is only with a remembrance of the work of Jesus on the cross that both motivates and empowers us to live like Jesus did.

Christ's condescension- Philippians 2:6-8

Verse 6- who, though he was in the form of God, (not Trinitarian, but equality in being, see vs. 6b)

did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped

(or did not see it as something to be taken advantage of, not as a matter of privilege)

[7] but emptied himself,

(emptied= Greek "kenoo")- Here is a hotly debated word. Orthodox Christian teaching says that he did not literally empty himself of divine attributes, but rather figuratively as of nullifying something, making it of no account. He revealed the form of God in a slave. The Kenosis theory teaches that he gave up some of his divine nature making him not fully God. This is not traditional orthodox Christian teaching nonetheless a view often held.

by taking the form of a servant,

(not by removing deity, but taking "form" of a servant. Greek= "doulos" Slave)

being born in the likeness of men.

(Not "likeness" as essentially different than man but still similar. Rather emphasizing the similarity above the difference. He identifies with humanity in the central nature of identity... similar in the "exact" sense- in every sense that makes one human.)

Verse 8- And being found in human form,
he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death,
even death on a cross.

This was the lowest social point one could obtain during Paul's day. It was usually reserved for the lowest class of people. It was social taboo to even mention. Thus Jesus went from the highest of high positions, to the very lowest of lows. This takes the claim of his selfless denial to new depths. No wonder many throughout history have found the cross to be a stumbling block and foolishness. 1 Corinthians 1:23

1. Reflect on this section together. Verbalize what you see and key in on. What is hard to believe? What affect does this passage have on you? If it is true, what does it say about Christ?

2. When considering the world's religions and all of their dealing with human frailty in some way, ie. Buddhism, balancing your Karma through the 8-fold path, Islam following the 4 pillars in order to earn God's mercy, Judaism following the Law in order to gain acceptance before God- it could be asked what it cost their Gods to forgive them? For forgiveness must cost for it to be true forgiveness. Think about that, it's always the case. For me to forgive you costs me the pain of what I have experienced from you and does not make me ask you to pay me back. In Christian faith it cost our God everything! It cost God his life. He has made the ultimate sacrifice. Think about it and talk amongst yourselves. Reflect on this passage and other instances you know of Jesus' life. What exactly did it cost Jesus to forgive you?

Christ's Glorification Philippians 2:9-11

Verse 9- Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name,

If the Philippians follow Christ's example, there is therefore also benefit waiting ahead for them! This is particularly significant to the Philippians as pressures against following Christ mount all around. Are we close to seeing the day when pressures will mount for present day Christians as well. Sure, we already endure minor sufferings for aligning with Christ. But the day is perhaps not far off when further persecutions, job, family, even physical harm might come.

1. What's this saying? Hasn't Christ always been exalted from the beginning of time? Indeed is he not one with God the Father and so always exalted? Try and make sense of this statement together. As food for thought, consider similar statements of Hebrews 1:4, "after making purification for their sins... having become superior to angels." Was he not superior before? And Hebrews 2:10 "It was fitting that he... should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering". Wasn't he already perfect?

Yes, he has always had the name superior. He has always been higher than angels. He was always perfect, but now He has backed it up. Now he has proved it. Now his perfection is on display. Get this, if you have never contemplated it before. Jesus' humility and death on the

cross was God's plan A! God did not wake up after the fall of humans and realize he needed to provide a correction to the system, a plan B. Jesus has always been the Father's pride and joy. The Son's glory is what is most preeminent in the mind of the Father just as my son's is to me. By rescuing sinners on the cross, the whole universe is to look at Jesus and worship who He is and what He has done. Therefore, the Son's death brings the most glory possible to the Son and honor and reward to the Father.

Verse 10- so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth, (paraphrase of Isaiah 45:23-24)

Someday the small Philippians community will worship as one with all creation, those willingly and those not willingly. Paul's emphasis is the urge to continue on in the faith whether it is easy or not. The Father will one day triumph and it is the "right" way. None of this will be given as "payment earned" but rather God is working to bring this to fruition for his own renown. Ie. Phil 2:13

[11] and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

Christ is central in all that Paul teaches. He considers Christ to be of preeminent value. Knowing Him and being found in Him is above all other priorities.

In this section we find the antithesis to the world's priority of individual dominance and freedom to self-gratification. Christ herein is the example and the power of the highest being in the world stooping down to suffer humanity for their own sake. Who has known a love like this, a character like this, a God like this?

9-11 stands in contrast to 6-8. In the former, God the Father is the focal point. In the first, Christ becomes the emerging central figure. All that Christ experienced was actually at the hand of the Father. He has always been and always will be behind all things. Christ's agony was all to the glory of the father as was mentioned after vs. 9.

2. To end this section, process the material and create discussion do the following notebook assignment and share with the group.

***Notebooks:** Summarize 2:1-11. In your own words, what has Paul said? How has this rich theology about Christ affected your heart?

TOOK:

What was most helpful, challenging or thought provoking?
What did you learn about the Character of God?
How should you respond?

***Assignment:**

- Read through Philippians for 3rd time this week following Inductive Bible Study Methods steps.
- Begin to make an outline of the letter to the Philippians. Include 2 or 3 major section headings that you see. Next identify each section under those main headings.

Suggested Reading: Seeing and Savoring Jesus Christ by John Piper

Lesson 4- Shine as Lights

Philippians 2:12-18

HOOK:

Ask:

- Consider a room that is pitch black. You are fumbling about literally not able to see your hand in front of your face. Maybe some of you have been in a cavern where this is true. It is a bit unnerving. I have even found myself getting dizzy with no reference point of balance. Now imagine a flashlight is mentioned. You look all around but still you can't see. Then suddenly, someone flicks the switch and a beam of light appears. It is immediate, without even trying your eyes go to the area on which the light is pointed, then to the source of light. That is what Paul likens the Christian to in this section. Those of you that follow Christ are to be as a light in darkness. We are not the source of light, we merely point to where the light comes from.
- Can you as a group think of other "light" examples? What does light do? What happens if there is no light? What happens if light flickers on and off? What happens if the source of light burns out?

**Context: The exposition of Philippians 1:1-11 is so lofty and profound, Paul finds himself automatically moving towards application though he is in the middle of his letter. With no hesitation of pen, he glides into a response from the encounter he has painted of Christ. Therefore....*

Read: Philippians 2:12-18

LOOK:

Work it out- Philippians 2:12-13

1. "Work", isn't that a bad word in Christian theology? It's "by grace we have been saved", Ephesians tells us, "not by works"! Yet this is the same author as Ephesians. What do you think it means to "work out your salvation with fear and trembling"?

Here's the crucial distinction. NOT work "for" salvation, but rather if they are justified already, work to live out their justification. I.e. work "out of" salvation. For Paul, salvation is almost always future orientated on the "day of judgment" while justification is by faith in the past. ie. "Conduct your selves in a manner worthy of the Gospel, (justification by grace) of Christ". Phil 1:27. Peter says: "Be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure", 2 Peter 1:10-11. Paul makes sure readers do not misunderstand and attribute a works righteousness to his words by following up with vs. 13- "For it is God who works in you". But note, the Christian life is work! It is not work to get a gift from God. It is work in response to a gift from God. For if we really realize how much we have been given, we ought to fight to maintain fellowship with the giver of that gift. We live in a day and age where we think that somehow God owes us easy spiritual transformation. But think about it, anything really worth something costs something. If I

want to succeed in athletics, I had better put in the time. If I want to grow in relationship with my wife, I had better pursue her. If I want to do well financially I had better learn the trade. So with the Christian life, in response to all that God has done for us he says run hard after me. It is not to earn his love but rather to experience His love more fully.

2. "Work out your salvation.... For it is God who works". So which is it? Is it God that works in us, or is it us that work "in God"? Is it more him or more us?

- o There are volumes written on this apparent contradiction. I have a book on my shelf by theologian D.A. Carson titled, God's sovereignty or Man's Responsibility? Hebrews commands us to "strive to enter rest", Hebrews 4:11. Those sentiments sum it up perfectly. Which is it? Strife or rest, God or man? What do you think?

At first this seems to be a blatant contradiction. The command is for us to work, but then that God is the one working. Both are in the context of being afraid of God! What if it is rather, "work out your salvation" not with "fear" as in cowering in a corner, but rather with the Bible's common use of "fear" as "reverence" towards God. And what if it is not in contradiction to God's working in us, but in harmony with God working in us. It is God who gives us both the desire/will and ability to work out our salvation. Herein is encouragement to work hard in that if there is a reverent desire to follow God, that means that God is alive and working in your life. Realizing that our changed desires actually come from God gives us confidence and boldness upon which to move forward. A non-renewed heart does not have the desire to honor and glorify God. Only a justified heart has this desire but the desire will not automatically produce action. Realize this and work with Him towards the goal of being more like Him. It is not an either or but rather a harmonious response to the change of heart that God gives us. But we must still act! We are still responsible to act in obedience to the prompting of the new spirit within our hearts. So which one is it, God or us? Yes is the answer...!

***Prayer-** Notice in vs. 13 that it is God who changes our will... and then the motivation for action. When I was in college someone brought this verse to my attention. In particular notice which comes first. God changes our will or desires first. Often times I found myself praying for God to "help me do the right thing". However, when I really was honest, I didn't want to do the right thing! I was pretty content in areas of sin in which I was living. So I began to change my prayer after being challenged to do so. (I often pray this way for others now as well.) My prayer became, "God change what I want so that I want to do what you want." I saw profound answers to that prayer. God changed what I wanted so that as I lived out what I wanted it was also what He wanted. Think about it... we always do what we want to do, the problem is often that what we want to do is not the right thing. Even hard things that we do, they must be what we really want to do... there is some benefit we are after. So God must change the things that we want. Then we must obey. Practice this thought. What is it that you need to ask God to change about what you want to be more in line with what He wants? Then act upon that change in desire.

3. This is really interesting; vs. 14 "Do all things without grumbling or disputing". Working out our salvation in reverence for God's first application is "stop being whiners"! There is a context you must see here: Remember Israel in the desert. What did they do right after God saved them from the Egyptians? They complained! God saved them but they didn't like the way He did it- bringing them to

a desert. Hebrews tells us their real error was that they didn't believe God. They forgot to revere and worship Him and looked for their circumstances to fulfill. Paul then goes on (vs. 15) to say that the lack of grumbling and complaining will be a mark to the culture around them that they are "children of God". Why will their attitudes about life, and in particular given the context of inner church turmoil, attitudes towards leaders in the church be such a statement to the outside world?

These attitudes quickly reveal who or what you worship. They reveal who you think is in control. A person that goes through easy times and praises God is of no rarity. But a person who goes through hard times, a person who has disagreements with leaders, a person who is dealt the bad end of the stick, yet still does not complain or argue is rare indeed. There is something different going on in the soul of such a person. God indeed has changed their perspective and He is honored as this person's trust is in God not in man.

***Notebooks:** This is one to spend time on. Where do you find yourself grumbling and complaining? Towards circumstances? Towards people? Towards leaders? Spend 5 minutes and consider your heart attitude of complaining or arguing. Towards whom, what and how does it come out for you?

4. Verse- 15- "That you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation". Here, Deuteronomy 32:4-5 is quoted. "Crooked and depraved generation". Like vs. 14, the connotation is Israel's historic desert rebellion. Again, the issue according to the book of Hebrews was their lack of "Belief". They did not believe God's goodness nor obey Him. Because of disbelief in God stemming from overwhelming self-concern, the Jewish people did not obey God's calling and it did not go well for them. They definitely did not "shine as lights in the world" for their God!

Is there any danger in the way that you live your life that you may not "shine as lights in the world" for God? If you are a follower of Christ, is there disbelief that takes over your heart and causes you to live for yourself rather than for God?

In the Philippian context, the infighting and disunity stood to tarnish the name of Christ and cause them NOT to live as lights in the world changed by the Gospel. Furthermore, Paul's goal of living his life worthy of Christ and standing before God without having labored in vain stands in jeopardy! Paul urges his brothers and sisters to take their disunity seriously and acknowledge how it gives the Gospel, even Christ a bad name.

5. "It's all good" is one of my LEAST favorite statements! Why? Because it is NOT "all good"! I don't know where that statement came from. I know it is used in the context of saying, "It's cool, don't worry about it". But it is overly used because it is not all good! There is real evil at hand. This is a "crooked and twisted generation". I see it and hear about it. I am even am a part of it every day! As followers of Christ we need to be able to discern evil in this world and act against it. God created all things as good, but they have been tainted and now things are definitely not all good. Yet, the great hope of the Christian is that one-day they will be "all good" again. Right now we bear the joy of joining Christ in returning things to good.

Let's acknowledge "crooked and twistedness" together... What are the things that you see, hear about, are even a part of that truly are an affront to the goodness and character of God?

6. This is the only antidote! Vs. 16 "Holding fast to the Word of Life"! Share thoughts on what it means to "hold fast to the Word of life? Have you seen the affects in your own life?

*(Holding fast= apply, observe, attend to/give attention to, attach, fasten, unite, "cling like ivy")
(The WORD of LIFE= Greek, "Logos of zoe")*

The way to avoid crookedness and "twistedness" is to gravitate towards the "Word". There cannot be enough emphasis here. If we are to live in a crooked and twisted generation, our lifeline must be the Word of God. How else are we to survive living in a countercultural, counter fleshly way? The Logos is zoe. It gives life, it sustains life, it is life. It becomes alive in us and changes us, strengthens us and empowers us. How can you live 24/7 in a crooked and twisted world and not absorb its values? You can't avoid it, you will slowly acquiesce like the proverbial frog in a pot slowly brought to boil that dies instead of jumping out. There are 168 hours a week. If you only spend 10 minutes a day for 6 days a week (which is better than nothing, but not enough!) thinking about the things of God in his word, that is only 1/168 of your week. What if you were given a drink of water and were told 167/168% is toxic, but there is 1/168 that is pure... would you drink it? How will you ever grow in Godly reverence and belief with so little invested into God's Word? If you and I treat the Word of God lightly, there is no way to stand as light in the world.

Can I really preach for a minute? As a generation of students you are so impassioned, opinionated and powerful. But often your passions and opinions have nothing to do with the passions and opinions of God, which we learn about in the Bible. We are a Biblically illiterate culture that simply has no idea what God really thinks because we have trusted our own passions and opinions rather than searching for God's. He wants to be known. He wants to reveal his concerns, his will, his goodness and his plans for us. But we must engage with him and learn how to respond to all that he is. We can't do that without investing time learning from the source of his revelation, the Bible. Singing songs of worship is good and healthy, but genuine, powerful worship is in response to who he reveals himself to be in the Word rather than an emotive state which music can produce. Instead of listening to others teach the Bible, spending hours listening to and singing worship songs, we must go the timeless Word of God, the Logos Him/Itself.

***Notebooks:** The #1 reason that people don't hold fast to the Word of God is that they don't know how. I am convinced that more of us would engage in the Bible if we knew what we were doing. The old "open and point a finger and read from there" just won't do. Let me suggest three practical options to engage in God's Word regularly.

1) Can I give you a 30 day challenge? Keep reading Philippians along with this study. But now that you are familiar with the Cru website, go to personal resources and download "Four Sevens". It is designed for 4x7 days of Bible reading through the Gospel of Luke. Commit to 28 days of holding fast to the Word of life.

- 2) At the beginning of this Philippians study is a section on "Inductive Bible Study" method. Use this method with Philippians during the remainder of the time. See if it keeps you engaged.
- 3) Read through the Bible. However, DO NOT just start reading. On the "Personal Study Resources" at cruatunc.com purchase the book called "For the Love of God" and read alongside. This will give you small daily insights into your reading and particularly give you help through the tougher parts of the OT.
- 4) Finally, read the book, "God's Big Picture" by Vaughan Roberts. It will give you invaluable insight into how the Bible is put together, it's overall themes and ultimately transform how you see, read and engage with the Bible.

*In your notebook entry, mark down the day and commitment of what you are going to do.

7. Verse 17- "Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith". What does Paul say this for? What's the point as it relates to the theme of this close personal letter?

In the ancient Jewish sacrificial system, drink offerings were "secondary offerings" poured over the "1st offering" which was the sacrifice itself. Paul sees both the Philippians' obedience and His suffering as an offering of worship to God. In equating his own suffering and persecution as the secondary offering to their faith he is taking a profoundly humble view of his role in their lives. He sees his offering as secondary compared to the first offering- their faith. The faith of others is his supreme goal. He cares little about his own circumstances in light of the benefit it has had on those to whom he has led and taught. "Rejoicing with them" is more motivating to him than experiencing a comfortable, easy life. Once again, Paul's life theme is Gospel over Self. This small statement should be profoundly challenging to us.

***Notebooks-** Open up your notebook and write a list of priorities. List in order of significance all the things to which you are devoting time, effort and thought currently. (For an interesting test, this next week when your mind wanders, when you go to sleep at night... what occupies your thoughts? What are recurring themes that you continue back to over and over?)

***Notebooks:** Summarize 2:12-18. In your own words, what has Paul said? What has challenged you? How does Paul view Christ in this section?

TOOK:

What was most helpful, challenging or thought provoking?
What did you learn about the Character of God?
How should you respond?

***Assignment:**

- Solidify your outline of the letter to the Philippians. In each section under the main headings, outline in detail what the section says. Follow the section called "diagram" in the inductive Bible study section.

Suggested Reading: God's Big Picture by Vaughan Roberts

Lesson 5- Examples of Lights

Philippians 2:19-30

HOOK:

Context: Last week Paul challenged us to live as lights holding fast to the Word of God. As his mind keeps going, he remembers Timothy and Epaphroditus, his close personal friends and disciples. These are two great examples of guys that have held fast. The Philippians know them too and they are concerned about their well-being. Epaphroditus in particular was sent with support for Paul from the church but became very ill. The report is great news, "Epy" is doing well and Paul is going to send him back to Philippi to encourage them. "Receive him with joy and honor such men" summarizes his feelings about how they have lived in faithful obedience to God with no concern for their own well-being.

For this section, you must sense the close personal nature of the letter. Put yourself in Paul's shoes sending your son to encourage some other group of people. He loves Tim and Epy intensely. If Paul was not married, these were his closest family. He is writing with care, compassion and a sense of close intimacy with these men and the church at Philippi. The church's quarreling and infighting is emotionally trying for him and he is tired of it. Paul gives another glimpse into his heartbeat. It is of great maturity and depth to put the concerns of others over one's own and the Philippians need to grow up in their faith. This is a practical way to worship God and show the weight of his surpassing value and worth.

Ask:

- Do you have anyone who you look up to in the example they set in their pursuit of God?
- Have you ever endured personal loss for the sake of another's benefit? What was the circumstance(s)? What did it cost you/benefit the other? Did you look for recognition in what you did?

Read: *Philippians 2:19-30*

LOOK:

Young Tim- Philippians 2:19-24

1. Let's get to know Tim. Read 2 Timothy 1:3-18. What insight into Tim do you get? Do you relate to Tim?

2. How does Tim serve as an example for us to learn from? Like Paul, we must ask a greater question than "how did Tim live?". We must gain insight into what Tim thought of Jesus. What drove him to live a life of self-denial for the benefit of others? Speculate... What does the 2nd Timothy passage tell us about how he came to know Christ? Look at 1 Timothy 1:12-20, assuming Timothy believed the teaching of Paul, what may have impacted Timothy about this teaching on Christ?

“Philippians 2:19-30 places the examples of Timothy, Epaphroditus and Paul himself. Because of their commitment to the gospel, Paul and Timothy have adopted the role of slaves and both have been willing to put the spiritual welfare of the Philippians above their own interests. Epaphroditus, likewise has been willing to risk his life to help Paul as he seeks to fulfill his apostolic calling. Timothy Epaphroditus and Paul, then, have understood that Christian commitment means losing one’s life in order to find it, forfeiting the whole world but gaining one’s soul. A divided commitment to the gospel, as Jesus never tired of saying in various ways, is actually no commitment at all.” NIV Application Commentary pgs. 161-162

3. There are certain people that you do not want to be in the Bible. Judas! Hymaneus and Alexander (1 Timothy 1:20)! But there are certain people that we would count ourselves as having lived a worthy life if we were to be found among them. Timothy is such a man. He “proved his worth as a son, serving in the gospel”. How are you serving the gospel presently? How is your small group serving the gospel? Here is an opportunity to set the Biblical forefathers appropriately as right examples. Is there anything about living as a son to Jesus that would call you to concern for the gospel in greater ways?

***Notebooks:** Take 5 minutes for self-examination and then share with the group. The more honest and vulnerable you are here, the greater depth your group can journey.

Can you think of a way that your group can serve with the gospel even tonight (the night you are doing this study together? The lesson is short tonight with the thought that maybe you could put Timothy’s example into practice.)

Epy’s the Man- Philippians 2:25-30

1. Epy’s another guy that it would be good to be. At least looking back... to be him during Paul’s day would have been hard! “Indeed he was ill, near to death.” But of course, if we were to have the right perspective of Paul, it would indeed be worthy of rejoicing to suffer for the gospel as Epy did. Let’s be honest... how can it be good to be near death in order that Christ might be glorified? Can anyone today really have that perspective? Of course hindsight is 20/20 and it may be easier to say after, “it was hard but I am glad I went through it, God was honored”. But during the midst of hardship for the sake of another, how are we to have Paul’s perspective?

Perhaps we are confused about the true goal of life. Is the goal of life safety and comfort? Or perhaps there is something greater, much greater, knowing God himself. Not just knowing about God, but knowing Him. I have a Ken Griffey Jr. rookie year baseball card that is worth quite a bit. I can look at the stats on the back and know a lot about Him. However, I have never met Ken Griffey. I would actually be willing to sell that card for the right price! However, if I really knew Griffey personally and we were friends, I doubt I would ever sell that right to friendship. There is something quite different in “knowing about” and actually “knowing”. Perhaps we are inundated with a modern western version of Christianity where Christ is know about and furthermore what we focus on in our knowledge is that he is there to take care of us and provide for us. Perhaps there is something much more, much deeper, much more powerful, much more dangerous about truly knowing Christ. Maybe its richer, more consuming, more

intoxicating to know God than to simply have a comfortable life. That is what Paul, Epy and Tim must have known is it not?

2. When you think of "Knowing God" what thoughts come to mind? Is it a crazy thought? Is it a joyful thought? Is it an overwhelming thought? Does it place freedom on you? Burden?

3. In Verse 30 Paul oddly says the Philippians' gifts to Paul were "lacking" and that Epy tried to complete them. What's going on? Why does he say that and what might he mean?

The gifts sent to Paul were probably financial and even food. Those are good and helpful things. But don't we really need personal touch and presence? Maybe that is what Paul is referring to. The challenge to us is forthcoming. We are a well-meaning generous culture in many instances. As Christians we are commanded to give financially and a lot of us do. But I wonder if Paul might say that simple giving of money is rather easy and comfortable for us and really challenges us or interferes with our comfort very little.

In the accounts of Jesus, a poor widow (a poor woman and also widowed... two of the lowest states during Jesus' day) gives Jesus 2 small copper coins as an offering. "As Jesus looked up, he saw the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury. ² He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins. ³ "Truly I tell you," he said, "this poor widow has put in more than all the others. ⁴ All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on." It seems like Jesus was remarking not at the value of the gift, but what it cost to give them to give their gifts. What does it cost for you to give, to serve, to put others first. Is there any place or particular instance where Jesus might ask you to give more- Financially maybe? Time maybe? Reputation maybe?

4. When you think about "Gospel over Self" and giving of yourself rather than just giving something... what practical examples can you think of? Are there ways to implement that thought? Personally? As a group?

***Notebooks:** Summarize 2:19-30. In your own words, what has Paul said? How does your view of Christ need to grow in order to have the mindset and live the life as Paul, Epy and Tim did?

TOOK:

What was most helpful, challenging or thought provoking?
What did you learn about the Character of God?
How should you respond?

***Assignment:**

- Take a theme from Philippians and study it in more depth. How about joy/rejoice? How use Bible.com and find out what other places it is used in the Bible. How is it used in the English language? What insight do you have into how found joy? Where do you struggle to find joy? Write a short paper of the Bible's meaning of joy and how it is found.

Suggested Reading: Pleasures Evermore by Sam Storms

Part II—Keep on Keepin On

Lesson 6— Mini Romans

Philippians 3:1-11

HOOK:

Context: We are moving on to the second half of the letter. In fact, he already starts winding down beginning with “Finally, my brothers”. But for Paul, finally may mean that he has a long way to go as indeed he is only half way done here and in typical Pauline fashion, with passion continues to preach and exhort.

The Philippian church is on the brink of great persecution. They are his friends and he cares greatly. There is danger that as the heat gets turned up externally, they will take it out on each other internally. That is exactly what has begun to happen and it grieves Paul greatly. In order that they see the weight of his challenge Paul is going to build a theological argument as he so often does. For Paul, action cannot be separated from theology nor theology from action. The next session has been called “mini Romans” in that it lays out the foundation so clearly proclaimed in that, his *magnus opus*. Here we will mine the depths of Christian teaching as we see what Paul says about the work of Christ on the cross.

In particular Paul is probably concerned about some teachers invading Philippi with a message of salvation through the cross of Jesus, PLUS adopting some of the Jewish law. Paul has no easy words for these people. They want to add the yoke of religious performance to the list of what it means to be a Christian. Paul’s central message in Romans is that salvation is by grace through faith alone and any addition is an anathema to Christian teaching.

Ask:

1. What types of things tend to get added to what is necessary for salvation in Christian faith circles? Maybe explicit, but more likely there are many implicit additions.
2. Do you tend to live as if there are two sets of rules to Christianity? What gets you in and what keeps you in? What makes God love you initially and what keeps God loving you? Share your thoughts.

Read: Philippians 3:1-11

LOOK:

Watch out- Philippians 3:1-3

***Commentary:** Many of you will not be “in the church” in five years. The stats are rather astounding. Some reports say 70% of those claiming faith in Jesus at the start of college will “fall away”. Most likely it will be in the name of “freedom”. It might be communicated in other terms... “I can’t agree with all the Bible says, I don’t feel the church is the way it should be, I just don’t have time”. But Paul would say the reason is that we don’t understand God’s grace and it’s compelling motivation to give up one’s own self interest for the interests of others, for Christ and indeed the church. We don’t understand the greatness of Christ who is both mystery, revelation and king. How did Paul stay the course? He experienced persecution, darkness, losing friendships. It wasn’t that Paul was that great, it was that Paul believed Christ to be that great. Don’t focus on trying to do the right things. Focus on knowing the greatness of the king that is worthy of your affections and whole life. That is Paul’s message in this section.

Verse 3:1b- “Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord”

***Commentary:** This is the binding theme of the letter. “Rejoice” in the Lord no matter what the situation. Previous Paul referred to his imprisonment 1:27-2:18 and Epaphroditus and Timothy 2:19-30. Both sections ended with the admonition to rejoice in the face of trouble. Now 3:1 begins in the face of theological battle with the continuing call to joy in the face of tough times. The qualifier is “in the Lord”. Of course troubles are not something to be seen as desirable, but there is a greater call to look to the one in control and behind all things. See Pslam 32:11, 33:1

Verse 3:1b- “To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you.”

***Commentary:** We need to hear the same thing over and over! Paul is not afraid to repeat himself. In a culture that seeks to constantly be aware of the newest and greatest, Paul sticks to the same message. He indeed has one central message, Christ crucified for the salvation of sinners. Does this message get old to you!? Do you want to move on to more advanced things!? Paul might warn you sternly. You can’t get more central or more advanced than the King of the universe dying on the cross, raising again to pay the debt of the world.

1. Paul uses harsh language for those that are adding to the message of the Gospel, “Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers”. How does this attitude strike you? Isn’t Paul’s message to the Philippians to “love” one another selflessly?

Notice that Paul’s harshest language is used for those against the freedom of the gospel that are “within” the church. He is not lamenting the “outside” world, but rather those that would claim allegiance to the Gospel that have added to it.

Thus to love one-another is not to just “tolerate”. Love might entail conflict! Love might demand gracious truth spoken... in love. Can’t we all just get along and agree... that’s naïve. There are real affronts to the Gospel and to God. We are not called to pull out the tolerance card and agree with one another. I believe the Gospel would call us to stand up for what is right and wrong, but do so in a gentle, kind and gracious way.

2. Has “tolerance” shackled you? Are you at all fearful of the “bigotry language” that is tied to those that have religious truth convictions in today’s culture? How could we find ways to speak truth in love and showing love to be greater than tolerance?

3. Let’s continue the above question. Paul actually gives us a framework in this passage where we might use our own personal stories to communicate Biblical truth. What can you take from Paul’s argument below?

Paul has tried to find life apart from Christ. It did not work for him. For him it was following the Jewish law to perfection. That is not the issue with today’s audience, but everyone has tried in their own way to find life apart from God have they not? You have I am sure! I have! Can you use your own story of finding life in Christ to graciously share in love how God is truth and the way to life?

4. Let’s talk about circumcision! Awkward, sorry. What is the argument Paul is making when he calls himself the “real circumcision” and by using the plural pronoun “we” includes the largely gentile (traditionally uncircumcised) audience of Philippi? This is a tricky question but it is central to Paul’s whole life and message!

Short answer: Paul’s argument is that once the Jewish nation had a special relationship with God displayed in the sign of their covenant with God through circumcision. There were those that counted this outward (not too outward hopefully) sign as the mark of one who truly has favor with God. Paul’s message is that circumcision was simply a mark of God’s promise until the true shedding of blood came in a person, Christ. Now outward circumcision is of no special value to God. It is circumcision “of the heart” that is required. Confidence of a relationship with God does not come in an outward symbol, or a “prayer”, or a good work, or giving to the poor, but in a changed heart. This of course should of course lead to changed actions, but those outward actions are not what save us.

Longer investigation of circumcision: Read 1 Samuel 16:7, Jer 4:4, 6:10 Deut 10:16, 30:6. NT-Roman 2:25-29, 1 Cor 7:19, Gal 5:6, 6:15

Circumcision was given to the people of Abraham as a marking of God’s covenantal faithfulness to His people. It seems a bit weird, but there was deep historical significance to this sign. In the early ancient east, when two kings would make a treaty (covenant) with each other, they would kill an animal, tear it in two and then walk between the animal together as if to say, “we are as good as this if we go back on our agreement”. In Gen 15, Abraham has a dream in which God tears some animals apart and walks between them. In this instance it is only he that goes between. God alone is worthy to establish a covenant and no one else’s word need to agree. Abraham awakes and God gives him the sign. God makes a covenant with His people that He will be their God and never turn his back on them.

Thus, when we get to the NT, God’s promise is still valid, but a simple cutting of the flesh does not mean that one is under the promise. Actually it never did. Faith in God’s work to make a way back to him has always marked true faith and a simple sign never guaranteed covenantal relationship. It was always a sign of God’s faithfulness by which to remember rather than create God’s faithfulness.

Over time, the Jewish community placed such confidence in the outward signs of obedience and the possession of the physical mutilation through circumcision itself they felt that their election was secure even if their hearts strayed after other gods.

Now Paul says, "we are the circumcision" referring to a Gentile, Uncircumcised Philippian audience! This was radical news! There are no outward signs that guarantee that one is in covenant relationship with God. What God is looking for is a heart that has been circumcised. A heart that has been cut open and laid bare before God and has humbly, gratefully allowed him to unite himself with the person's heart. Circumcision was a temporary sign to show God's gracious desire and initiative guaranteed by him self to unite with us. Now that He has come in the person of Christ, the old way is no longer needed. The new way of heart renewal has come.

"The OT remains God's eternally valid word, but the dawn of the new covenant has radically altered its interpretation. (For instance) The church is no longer a political entity like Biblical Israel and its boundaries are no longer primarily ethnic as they were prior to the coming of Jesus. Thus the sanctity of the people of God under the Old Covenant takes a radically different shape from the sanctity of the people of God under the New. The Mosaic law, since it was intended to govern national and ethnic Israel is no longer completely valid. Nevertheless, the pattern of the believers' relationship with god as defined in the OT remains the paradigm that God's people under the New Covenant must follow. Membership among God's people comes at God's initiative and sanctity is important because it sets God's people apart from the "crooked and depraved" generation within which they live. The element of continuity between the new people of God and the old is strong and believers today like the Philippians in their time have much to learn about God' character and his expectations for his people from the OT." NIV application pg. 144

True Spirituality- Philippians 3:4-12

1. What does it mean when Paul says that they "worship by the Spirit of God" as opposed to being circumcised?

Worship is more than performing outward religious signs. I.e. circumcision, obeying the law, saying certain words. We worship with heart attitudes, which the Spirit of God has produced, in our lives. In contrast to the belief that God only pursued the Jewish nation, now Gentile believers of the early church had demonstrated the presence of the spirit of God in their lives- miraculously even in Acts- 10:44, 11:15-17, 15:7-9. Paul announces that these are the signs of a true believer, not physical circumcision- Rom 2:25-29, 1 Cor 7;19, Gal 5:6, 6:15, Eph 2:11, Col 2:11)

Furthermore, the sign of a believer is a dependence on Christ and His spirit that now lives within the believer. True belief is marked by an acknowledgement of one's own bankruptcy if depending on any symbol, sign or effort apart from Christ

Did you get that? The signs of a true believer are not necessarily overcoming all sin, (putting confidence in the flesh) but putting glory in Christ. Putting no confidence in one's own efforts, worshipping God rather than self. Yes, those attitudes will eradicate sin from our lives but the eradication of sin is not necessarily the sign of a true believer. Many people, by

discipline and accountability can change their actions. But it is the location of the motivation of the change of actions... the heart that worships God... that God is really looking for. BTW- you can't change your heart and that is the beautiful thing that God does for us. See Phil 2:13-14

2. Where does your confidence before God come from? Do you relate to Paul's list of good works and pedigree? (vs. 4-6) Of course not specifically, but how about as you extrapolate his accomplishments for the modern day Christian? Be very introspective and honest. What are the things that you do, have done, come from etc. that give you confidence before God that may be false confidences when you think about Paul's message here?

Still need some help. Here is my list-

- Baptized on the 20th day of May 1990
- Of a Christian family and heritage
- Am a full-time campus director of a large ministry
- Read my Bible regularly and try to apply it and teach it
- Share my faith with others regularly
- Try to focus on righteous behavior

3. Verse 7- "But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ."

Think about that for a bit. Get out your list you wrote above. What would it mean for you to count them loss in the sense that Paul counts them loss? Do you really live/think this way? Before you get into the "Paul was just so great and humble" routine, remember the better question, "What did Paul think about Christ that allowed him to have such an attitude?" What had Christ done to Paul to change his heart to see this perspective? What do you need God to do to your heart given that you probably do rest on your accomplishments and pedigree quite a bit just as Paul did at one time?

***Commentary:** *The following is an exegetical outline of vs. 8-11 for your own observation. I will ask questions to follow. Vs. 8-11 are one theologically rich run-on sentence in Greek!*

Verse 8- Indeed, I count everything as loss

because of the surpassing (Greek "huperecho"- to hold above, supreme) worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.

-Here, Paul continues the theme from vs. 2-6. Again, this is the theme of Romans- righteousness by faith alone. The Philippians must have been needing reminder that their right conduct stems from right relationship with God which is a free gift of faith.

-See here that "Knowing Christ" is not simply an emotional connection, but for Paul it is a lived out response to that knowledge. It is living out faithful obedience to God and His Word.

For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things
and count them as rubbish,
in order that I may gain Christ
[9] and be found in him,

To Paul, Christ is of preeminent value. Having him makes all other things pale in comparison. There is such close intimacy, that Paul actually not only knows the presence of Christ through faith, but somehow feels the very intimate presence. This is what we all long for. Oh God, give us more of you.

not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law,

but that which comes through faith in Christ,
the righteousness from God that depends on faith—

In the Bible, righteousness is our primary need. It is the fundamental need of the human race. We tend to think that we have a lot of more pressing needs, but that is an illusion. Health, wealth, family, world peace, clean drinking water are all important, but not the most important! We were all born as “unrighteous” but righteousness is the requirement to be united with our creator which is the way so life was intended to be lived. Jesus took the penalty that we deserved to take away our sin. Most of you are quite clear on that. But have you ever really contemplated that in his resurrection he gave us something, not just took something away from us? He gave us righteousness, “rightness”. We are not only cleared of our guilt, but we are given the perfect righteousness of Christ. When God looks at us, he not only sees a slate wiped clean, He sees a perfect righteous life in the place of our worn out, stained, tired, tattered life. As the Father runs to the prodigal son’s return in Luke 15, the Father God runs to us with a gift of beauty, of perfection of wholeness given to us by His son.

-This has some profound implications for the religions of the world. One cannot get away from the question, what makes one righteous when approaching different systems of belief. Certainly that is at the core of every thinking person? How do we deal with our deep realization that we are not as we “should” be? We don’t do what we “should” do. So how will a perfect righteous God accept our tainted souls? Every religion must answer the question, what makes us right before their god? Isn’t it pure logic that if god is a perfect, holy being then he must require perfect holiness to join in his presence? Of course, god could not be perfect and holy, but then we must find a different word other than god to describe such a being. So, logically, we must be either make ourselves right or be made right. The former is what every other religion besides Christianity is based upon. Somehow, by effort, obedience, meditation, worship etc. the wall can be shattered and we can break through to the divine. But we must ask, how, can our effort deal with our hearts that can never truly be clean? Have you ever by your discipline and obedience experienced a truly pure heart towards others and towards God? Isn’t it so clear that we need God to help us!? We need another to make a payment on our behalf for our lack of righteousness. We are broken and we need to be fixed. When something is fixed it always requires effort. But our effort is not and cannot be enough to bring a perfect fix. A perfect payment must be made to make the imperfect perfect. There is only one who has ever lived who is adequate to make that payment. Salvation based on the work of another perfectly righteous one who will give us his righteousness is the only way. Referring back to “flesh” in vs. 4, listen to Martin Luther who wrote over 500 years ago:

For Paul, “flesh”, means the highest righteousness, wisdom, worship, religion, understanding and will of which the world is capable. Therefore the monk is not [cannot] be justified by his order, nor the priest by Mass and the canonical hours, nor the philosopher by wisdom, nor the theologian by theology, nor the Turk by the Koran nor the Jew by Moses. In other words, nor matter how wise and righteous men may be according to reason and the divine Law, yet with all their works merits, Masses, “righteousnesses” and acts of worship they are not justified.

Questions based on the above

4. What if our righteousness was based on our behavior? What would be the ramifications? Assuming it would even be possible to live “righteously”, what would the ramifications be if you could do it on your own?

5. So what if our righteousness is NOT based on our behavior? How does that change your motivations and actions? If you truly believed that you are righteous before God, how would this impact your life, heart, actions?

6. The ramifications of this section are overwhelming and profound. What are some of them?

7. Verse 10- "that I may know him". Can you "know" God? Let's cut to the chase. Don't not your head right away, "of course you can know God". "That's what the Bible is all about"! Paul wants to know God. If you are studying Philippians in a group or alone, you probably want to know God. But let's peel back the religious lesson. Pull back the putting on a show for the others around you. Look inside your heart. Do you know God? It is truly possible or is this all a psychological illusion?

Though Paul constantly uses relational terms for his/our connection with God using the "heart knowledge" form of the verb "to know", there is danger if we think ONLY in terms of emotional "feelings based" experience with God. In the Biblical sense, to know God always has the connotation of by FAITH being aware of God's reality and following in obedience no matter what you feel. Paul thought it possible to know God by faith and at times have profound experiential knowledge. But his experiential feelings were not what drove Paul. Rather the experiences he had were his great desire and he rightfully wanted them for others. But mostly, he was convinced that knowing God was possible but that it involved a costly death on Christ's behalf and a costly obedience for Paul. Paul uses the knowledge of God in faith as His main motivation for following in obedience no matter what the "feeling" or consequence. Does your response of obedience no matter the feelings associated factor into your understanding of "knowing God"?

8. The great Paul ends his theological treaty with a simple, yet mysterious statement Vs. 11-"that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead." Why does he ends this section with this verse?

Herein is the real quandary that we as humans face. We need new life. We are born alive physically, but dead spiritually. You were not "born a Christian". Please never say that! You were born in prideful opposition to God. Your heart was tainted from the beginning stemming all the way back to Adam's first turning from God. Think about it, what is the first word a child proclaims? "Mine"! Ok, maybe mama, dada first. But then mine! A selfish heart taints all our words, actions and heart. This creates a grand canyon sized gap between us and a holy God. We need to be set free from the consequences of our selfishness and only a perfect man that lived on our behalf, died for our sins and rose from the dead can do that. Paul knows this and proclaims with precision accuracy the need of us all to attain the "resurrection of the dead" with Christ.

***Notebooks:** Summarize 3:1-12. In your own words, what has Paul said? What do you find is the greatest thing he recons to be true of his calling and desire?

TOOK:

What was most helpful, challenging or thought provoking?
What did you learn about the Character of God?
How should you respond?

***Assignment:**

- Take an hour with your notebook. Write down, "righteousness by faith" at the top of a page. Write down all the things that are true about those words. Look them up other places in the Bible. Look at Romans 1-3 for a start. Do a google search of those words. Write down all the things that come to mind or impact you about the foundational teaching of righteousness by faith. Then tell someone else what you wrote.

Suggested Reading: The Ragamuffin Gospel by Brennan Manning

Lesson 7- Maturity

Philippians 3:12-21

HOOK:

***Context:** *In the last several years, I have gotten into running. I hated running growing up, but now I don't hate it so much... don't get me wrong, I still hate it, but it's more of a love/hate thing now. Anyway, I have started running long distances, a bunch of marathons so on and so on. This section of Philippians reminds me of language you might use in training for a marathon. "Straining towards what lies ahead". "Press on towards the goal". I wonder if Paul was a runner? At least he knew the reality of working hard and pursuing a goal. He is not content with a lackadaisical Christian life. In fact the byword of modern Christianity might be "apathy". Typical American church culture looks nothing like what Paul talks about when he exhorts the church of Philippi does it?*

In this section, Paul is speaking to a particular problem that is surfacing in Philippi. It seems that one of the main problems in the Philippian church is not coming from the outside, but spiritual pride from within. There seems to be a group that was teaching that one could attain spiritual perfection before Christ's return. Paul adamantly preaches to the contrary. Even the great Paul has not reached a state of perfection. He strains ahead to conform to the image of Christ. He presses on towards the goal. These are words of hard work and discipline. But be clear, his motivation is not that he needs to earn something from God. Rather, Christ has already united Paul to the Father and ultimately the Father sees His son in the place of Paul and so perfection is imputed to Paul. Yet at the same time, experiential perfection is still ahead at the return of Jesus to this earth. Paul warns those in opposition to this teaching to listen carefully and move on to maturity.

Ask:

3. There are probably none of you that would struggle with thinking that you are spiritually perfect. But spiritual arrogance is something most of us face. We tend to think more highly of ourselves than we ought and less of others than we ought. How about for you? Do you tend towards spiritual arrogance or towards spiritual apathy? What are the situations that move you either way?
4. Here is a deep question. How does the gospel give us the ability to have a right view of ourselves and a right view of others?

Read: Philippians 3:12-21

LOOK:

Not there Yet- Philippians 3:12-13

Verse 12- Not that I have already obtained

("arrived" this in Greek there is no "this" and obtained is closer to the modern meaning of arrived. The reading is probably closer to what we might say today as: "I have not arrived".)
or am already perfect,

1. The emphasis is on “not having arrived”, but it is also implicit that he has not arrived at attaining something to which he strives toward. What has Paul not attained? Towards what does Paul strive and what are his goals? Are those your goals? What in your heart keeps you from wanting the same things that Paul desires and in the strenuous form that he desires them?

**Context:* This “perfection” teaching may have stemmed from the thought that maturity was found in knowledge and outward signs of power to the neglect of basic ethical requirements such as sexual purity, loving one-another and avoiding idolatry. Paul realizes that his opposition to the requirements of the law as a means to obtain righteousness may fuel this understanding and so makes it clear that even he is not perfected.

2. To engage with this section rightly, you have to recall the section one chapter ago starting in 2:12- “Work out your salvation, for it is God who works in you” 2:12b-2:13a. Because God has worked in us, we must strain ahead as an athlete to win the prize. But, what is the balance of self-effort towards righteousness and the reality that God already sees us as righteous because of His son’s death? “Let go and let God” is not just a popular song, it is also a subtle teaching that seems to fly against what Paul admonishes here. On the contrary, in this passage Paul is also incredibly harsh in his language against legalistic dutiful obedience. What is the balance a follower of Christ should seek after? Don’t just use your own language to answer this question. Look back at Philippians. What are the words/phrases Paul uses to teach our role in moving towards righteousness? What also are the words/phrases Paul uses to teach God’s role in our righteousness?

**Context:* This section has been the focus of much debate. There are two major camps that interpret the application of Paul’s words here. There is the “reformed” side, which is typical of Presbyterians. And there is the Keswick/Wesleyan side, which is typical of Methodists. The debate is whether spiritual perfection may be obtained by the power of God’s Spirit. The reformed tradition emphasizes the complete depravity of man and the depth of sin intricately woven to the heart. They would teach that while the Father indeed sees us as holy and righteous, true, experiential righteousness will never be achieved in this life. The Keswick/Wesleyans believe through the giving up of one’s will to the Spirit, the Spirit then overtakes and leads one to holy perfection. They tend to rely on a crisis moment where self-effort is relinquished and the Spirit takes over. This might be an experience at a conference, a retreat, a special time in church. Thus, to them there are two levels of Christian faith- Carnal and Spiritual. The first is only a dim experience of the Christian life. The latter is what God really wants for us and is obtained by spiritual awakening. To the Reformed there is only one level of Spiritual life and Carnal refers rather to those w/o the spirit controlled by the “carnal/flesh”.

3. Verse 12b- “But I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.” Has Christ taken hold of you? How did Christ take hold of you? Think about that. Paul’s language is not that he grew up in a Christian community and believed some things about God and the Bible. Nor is it emotional language that he somehow felt at one time that God was real. He says Christ “took hold” of him; powerfully, radically, from death to life. Has Christ taken hold of you? Do you want Him to?

***Notebooks:** Take five minutes and just express your desire...or lack of desire for Christ to take hold of you... all of you! What would that look like? What has have you not given over? What do you not believe about Him? What do you need to believe more? Where has he or has he not taken hold of you?

4. Verse 13- "Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead..." (*sports imagery- like a runner NOT looking in the rear for fear of slowing*) What do you think about this verse in the context of growing in a faith relationship with God? What motivates Paul straining ahead?

This is one of the major battles you and I face in the context of growing in Christ and allowing Him to free us up from the guilt and shame of stained pasts. Before you look past this question and say, I don't really have a guilt stained past and it's easy for me to look ahead. Actually, Paul has you in mind here. His first context is probably more to those who look at their good record in the past and base their current standing with God on their performance or lack of "immorality". This if for all of you that were the good kids growing up! Have you based your standing before God on your moral effort? Do you feel better than others and more deserving of God's love because of your lack of straying off the path? The Bible has a story for you in Luke 15. You could be the older brother who glories in his performance rather than seeing that at a heart level we have all strayed from God. Your moral behavior might have been just as much an act of self-worship as the wild kids were living "going out" every night.

On the other hand, the context also supports those of you that have a past that keeps haunting you and brings guilt and shame. If Christ has come into your life you are a new creation! The old is gone, the new has come. It is time to release your self. God already has! When you don't forgive yourself for your past, you might actually be saying that God is not good or big enough to release you. You might actually be trying to pay the price that God has already paid for you. You feel that your guilty feelings actually are what God wants as he deals with you and your sin. Guilt brings us to God, but only grace keeps us in his hands. Only grace motivates moving forward. God has given you full grace and pardon. Believe it. Ask Him to help you experience it. Live in freedom and move forward like a runner reaching for the finish line.

Shame is the emotional component of Guilt. Yes, you were guilty before God and shame is a right component when we have sinned. But God releases us from our guilt and so we are not under the consequence of true guilt any longer and thus shame has no place. What does guilt motivation produce in your life? What does grace motivation produce?

***Notebooks:** Are there areas in your life that you can't release to God's forgiveness? Write them down in a confession to God. Ask Him to take away the guilt and shame. If you want, tear the page out. Rip it up. Throw it away. He doesn't see the any longer. Stop looking at them yourself!

Straight Ahead- Philippians 3:14-21

5. Verses 14-15- "I press on (*military context of going into battle*) toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. 15 Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything

you think otherwise, *(that spiritual perfection and sinlessness can be reached)* God will reveal that also to you.

Has there ever been anything someone has told you that was true, but was hard to hear? Has the Bible ever challenged you on something that was hard to hear? Share.

Can I preach at you a little here!? How does God reveal truth to us? How does he teach us what He thinks and what you should think? The main way is through the Bible. I have students disagree with what I teach all the time. They don't like some things that I have to say. They say that I am arrogant or "out of touch". I understand that some things I tell students are hard to hear and are countercultural. I may be wrong at times as well and I can admit that. However, can I warn you that you better form your opinions based on what God says in His Word rather than what you feel based on cultural assumptions. The Bible transcends culture. The Bible is to shape culture not to be shaped by culture. God will never change nor has He ever. God will reveal Himself and His will in the Bible if you search for it. The Word of God should be as gold to mine. It should be light to our paths and a lamp to our feet. A cursory reading from time to time will never suffice. You have to dig deep. Spend time. Read like your life depends on it. It does! The Word of God is living and active sharper than any two edged sword and will do a profound work in your heart and mind. It will change you to think like God thinks rather than change God to think like you think!

Verse 3:16- Only let us hold true to what we have attained. *(For Paul- spiritual awakening on the road to Damascus. For the Philippians whatever their salvation experience was.) This was Paul's motivation. He has received the eternal gift, now he must live accordingly.*

[17] Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. *(Paul is bold in saying this, yet he says "follow me" as he in turn imitates Christ out of humility)*

6. Do you have models of faith in your life? Our heroes tend to be famous people. Sports stars. People magazine profiles. Maybe the real heroes are much quieter. People that faithfully walk with God for a lifetime and live for Him. Ultimately the example to follow is Jesus. But Paul here admonishes us to follow good examples of following Christ.

***Notebooks:** Do you have a spiritual mentor to follow? Write down someone to pursue. Write down some questions to ask them about their view of God and their walk with Him. What do you want to learn from someone else's journey and relationship with God?

7. Verses 18-19- What a strong warning. Be careful not to pass it by and assume it applies to others. Are there areas in your life in which your heart is set on earthly things? Is your god your belly at times? What does that even mean? Do you eat too much? Seriously, we are more apt to talk about homosexuality and masturbation today than we are about gluttony or eating to ease the pain. Take these two verses home with you today. Evaluate. How is your mind and heart set on earthly things right now?

***Context:** *The audience may have been influenced by a teaching that said spiritual maturity had to do with learning and spiritual knowledge. They thought that they were exempt from living out God's moral commands since they had such great knowledge. Absurd right? Again, be careful. Don't you do the same at times?*

Verse 3:20- But our citizenship is in heaven,
We don't belong here. Our eternal, long lasting home is some other place in god's pure presence. Live like this is true.

and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,

He is waiting as waiting for a gift, a great vacation, a wonderful experience, marriage...

[21] who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body,

He looks forward to a resurrection body! No more pain, injury, limitations, envy, pride, longing...

by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

He has a single hearted devotion to the call and the master. Paul models giving up in order that Christ might be honored. There is no room for personal pride. If anyone deserved personal accolades it was he. But he denies those in favor of Christ's approval.

You cannot read this section without being challenged. Paul's attitude is so vastly different than most of our experience of Christianity today. He lives in the reality of knowing a savior that loves him in a way that we can barely comprehend. He looks forward to a future that guides everything he does today.

***Notebooks:** Summarize 3:12-21. In your own words, what has Paul said? How does your view of Christ need to grow in order to have the mindset and live the life as Paul? What needs to change in your life?

TOOK:

What was most helpful, challenging or thought provoking?
What did you learn about the Character of God?
How should you respond?

*Assignment:

- Take the Notebook assignments from this lesson to heart. Take each one of them and spend a morning processing each. Write some thoughts out in your notebook. Be honest with God. Process with Him. Pray that He would change you to be more like Him.

Suggested Reading: Desiring God by John Piper

Lesson 8- The Lord is at Hand

Philippians 4:1-9

HOOK:

***Context:** Paul is now moving directly towards a close of his letter. He mentions a very specific situation where two women are in conflict with one another that seems to be having a significant impact. He subtly moves towards a solution to their problem with one another and indeed it's all of our main problem. We have a disordered view of reality. If we would realize that, "The Lord is at hand", it would change everything. In this second to last section, Paul gives us some practical implications of God's present reality that touch the core of who we are.

Ask:

- Here is a thought about conflict in relationships: "St. Augustine taught that all people seek happiness as their primary goal. They attach themselves to things that they think will make them happy. The attachment is experienced as love. The main human problem, however, is because of sin we misidentify what will make us happy. The result is disordered lives, lives out of order. We either love what we ought not to love, or we fail to love what we ought to love, or we love more what we should love less, or love less what we should love more." (Tim Keller, *Prayer* pg. 193) Therefore, when someone interferes with our happiness by any sort of thing; perhaps they get more attention than us, perhaps they do something to harm our reputation etc., they may be interfering with our greatest love and anger wells up in our hearts. Our real problem is not the other person but rather the ordering of our loves. Ponder these thoughts. What do you think? How could the simple yet profound statement that "The Lord is at hand" fix the order of our loves?

Read: Philippians 4:1-9

LOOK:

Conflict hurts- Philippians 4:1-3

1. Can you imagine if you were Euodia or Syntyche and this is how you made it into the Bible? Conflict amongst God's people really matters and really hurts. Paul is grieved about their conflict. It is having an affect obviously. These are good women who have been used by God, but they have gone astray. Have you ever seen something like this happen? Have you ever had conflict with another person that had a negative impact on others around you? What kind of impact on God's name can conflict amongst God's people have?

2. What does Paul teach us about communication about conflict by addressing these women? What might be counter-intuitive compared to what our culture says about communicating about conflict? Communicating *truth in love* is a good admonition to our relationships. What might this mean?

What Paul has to say in particular to the two women following does not affect his loving disposition toward them. In fact it is his loving disposition towards them that call him to communicate the truth of their error. In our culture, we are truth avoiders. We aim to keep the peace through tolerance at any cost. In fact to be "intolerant" is equated with hatred. Paul might argue that to be intolerant of sin is one of the greatest expressions of love towards another. To "tolerate" is simply to ignore, marginalize or "put up" with someone else. That can't be loving can it? Truth without love is condescending, arrogant and brutal. Love without truth is pithy, narrow minded and weak. But truth with love is beautiful, gracious and others' centered.

3. Does this admonition take on special meaning for any of you? Are there conflicts among you? Are some of you not talking to others because of "bad blood"? Do some of you have rifts in your relationships because you refuse to forgive and give grace? Paul says that these types of relational sin patterns have no place in the Church! Some of you may read your Bibles regularly, pray regularly, stay away from glaring sin patterns... but you have not forgiven or sought understanding in a relationship with another believer. Paul counts that type of sin just as weighty as some other sin you might place in higher regard.

***Notebooks:** Take five minutes and think of any relationships in which you might need to move towards openness, understanding or forgiveness. Write down your thoughts honestly to God. Are there action steps you need to take?

Reordering of our hearts- Philippians 4:4-9

1. It seems like Paul mentions the above conflict and then sort of changes themes and moves on towards closing his letter. But I wonder if there is a greater connection to the women's conflict than readily observed. What if verses 4-9 are actually the solution to the conflict? Paul understands that they have to reorder the worship of their hearts. They must come to terms with what they are seeking for happiness and what they truly love. (See Augustine quote in the "Ask" section) What *could* they be "worshipping" that is root cause of their conflict? What *could* their hearts be loving that has lead to division?

Obviously we don't know specifics. I just wonder thinking about my heart as I have experienced conflict if these women were not too different than me. I love people's respect and approval. I love comfort and getting my own way. I love to love myself and have others serve me. Any of you relate? Could they be experiencing the results of any of these selfish heart attitudes? Gospel over self is the challenge. The Lord is at hand is the solution. If God is at hand then our worship reorientates itself to center on Him rather than on ourselves. As we worship and rejoice in Him our own wants and desires fade and our hearts become infatuated with someone greater. It can change how we think of ourselves and how we relate to others.

Philippians 4:4-7

The Lord is at hand;

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.

[5] Let your reasonableness be known to everyone.

[6] do not be anxious about anything,

but in everything

by prayer and supplication

with thanksgiving

let your requests be made known to God.

[7] And the peace of God,

which surpasses all understanding,

will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

1. Observe verses 4-7. What stands out to you?

I like to organize passages in a way that gives emphasis to the commands and the subordinate clauses underneath those commands. That's what I have done above. The central command is 1) "Rejoice in the Lord", Secondary and flowing out of rejoicing is 2) "Let your reasonableness be known", and 3) "Do not be anxious". The rest of the words serve to modify and expound upon those commands. However, I put "The Lord is at Hand" at the front of the whole phrase. This statements serves to shape all that Paul says. The Lord is at hand so we can rejoice! As we rejoice in what is true, we might think reasonably about what is ultimately good and worth our love. As we rejoice we are focused on the reality of God's presence and need not be anxious. As we rejoice we acknowledge that the Lord is accessible so we can talk to God and peace will come!

***Notebooks:** Take this section and write it out in your notebooks. Write it out as I did or in another form that helps you focus in on the commands of Paul and the motivation to strive towards them.

2. How could these phrases reorder or hearts and change the way we interact with God, ourselves, and others? How could they lead to Gospel over self?

If God is the great object of admiration behind all other beauties and magnificence, then to praise and admire him would be "simply to be awake, to have entered the real world". While not doing so would be to become far more profoundly crippled than those who are blind, deaf and bedridden. When you find anything great or enthralling you have an almost visceral instinctive need to praise it to others and get others to recognize it. *Paraphrased from C.S. Lewis*

When you are rejoicing in the Lord you are focusing on what is true "entering the real world". You are removing what is not true, from your heart and mind. In faith, you claim that you believe what He says about Himself and what he says about you and others. Rejoicing is a transformation to believe the truth of the gospel, his expression of His love on the cross. Our view of ourselves and others flows out of this reordering of reality.

Tim Keller on C.S. Lewis and "Rejoicing" (Tim Keller, Prayer, pg 192)- We must praise God or live in unreality and poverty. We cannot merely believe in our minds that he is loving or wise or great. We must praise Him for those things- and praise him to others- if we are to move beyond abstract knowledge to heart changing engagement. Learning to Praise then changes us. Lewis couldn't help but notice that-

(Lewis noticed) "The humblest and at the same time most balanced and capacious minds, praised most while the cranks, misfits and malcontents praised least. The good critics found something to praise in many imperfect works; the bad ones continually narrowed the list of books we might be allowed to read. ... Except where intolerably adverse circumstances interfere, praise almost seems to be inner health made audible."

3. In your prayer life how often do you rejoice? If you think about spending time with God in prayer, how does it usually go? Is most of your prayer filled with "supplication"? God, I want or God, give me? If you consider the ACTS model of prayer, Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving and Supplication how long do you spend on each and does Adoration even make it in the list? If you were to write a model of prayer from verses 4-7 what would it be?

4. Look over verse 8. Out loud with one another, define each "whatever is" and process what would fit under each category that Paul mentions to "think" about.

Verse 8- Finally, brothers,

whatever is true,

What are true truths? All truth stems from who God is- His sovereignty, His love, the beauty of His creation, His grace, "His" truth

whatever is honorable,

What are honorable things? Anything that stems from the truth of who God is, is honorable- What He thinks about, what He desires, what is beautiful to Him. It is that which is worthy to be talked about in any company of people. It is that which can be brought in front of God with no shame.

whatever is just,

What is justice? It is whatever is "right" according to God's character and thoughts. Anything that deviates from God's character is not just. It is just to be loved. It is un-just not to be loved. Just would be our punishment before God. Un-just is what He did on the cross for us to make us just before Himself.

whatever is pure,

What is purity? It is that which has no blemish. It has no shame attached. It is something that is not halfway good, but totally good. A glass of water is pure, but adding one infinitesimally small drop of dye into the container makes it impure.

whatever is lovely,

What is lovely? It is what is pretty and beautiful. It is something that attracts our gaze but has no impurity associated with it. It draws a tear from our eyes. It gives warmth and a sense that it is "right". When I see an act that is done out of selflessness it seems lovely. When I encounter someone doing something that shows that they are living out God's design for them it seems lovely. It is not outward but inward.

whatever is commendable,

What is commendable? It is something worth giving praise. It is something worth telling others about its greatness.

if there is any excellence,

What is excellent? It is something of no reproach. It is something without blemish.

if there is anything worthy of praise,

What is worthy of praise? Ultimately, God is the greatest deserver of praise. It is natural to praise Him. He is greater than any thing. To not praise Him is to not live in reality. To not praise Him denies our very deepest inclinations.

THINK about these things.

Can I meddle here? I guess if your answer is “no” you should not read on. I want to push you a little bit. Feel my finger pushing into your chest! Think about your day, your week... think about the things you have put your hearts and minds and eyes into. Are the things that you pay attention to true, honorable, pure? Oh sure... you are “better” than some others around you... but is your standard purity, excellence!? Paul’s list here is not a list to check off in order to feel morally superior to others. Rather this is a list to put up against the reality of the way you live your lives given that there is a pure, right, holy God to whom you give allegiance. He, his character, his ways stand in contrast to a world that has placed “the gods of their bellies” at the forefront of what is “cool” and satisfying. God has a higher calling. It is both for your best and his glory. Christians have acquiesced to a low standard of holy living and God’s character is maligned as we who are created in God’s image and claim his name give into things that are debased and deadly. Slowly, surely, like the proverbial frog in water slowly brought to boil, we have given into what is not Godly, true, honorable and think nothing of it. But God thinks something of it and he would call us to a higher place. Think of the lyrics to the songs you listen to. Think of the images and themes of the visual media you watch. Think of the things you wear. Think about your views on moral and social issues. Think of your relational patterns and desires. Do all these things give glory to a God who created humanity and calls us to live in submission to his character of holiness and purity? Jesus has died for us so that we might live in purity and freedom set apart for Him in a pattern of holiness. Why do we taint our hearts and minds with something that is far less than Him?

***Notebooks:** Write out your response to this paragraph and these words above.

5. Read verse 9. If Christ is in your life, isn’t he always “with you”? “For he has said, never will I leave you or forsake you,” (Hebrews 13:5). “In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.” (Ephesians 1:13-14) How do you then make sense of the end of vs. 9?

Yes, Romans 5:1. Paul is not talking here about God literally coming and going from your life if you obey or don’t obey Him. He is talking about the experiential reality of God’s peace coming and going though. I remember the first time I used the word “depression”. I later experienced true clinical depression and so my use of the word was a bit flimsy at that time. However what I meant was that I was really not experiencing peace and felt the weight of something being

wrong. What I later came to realize was that there was disobedience to God in my life and my lack of peace was a clear symptom. I don't think Paul would say that every time you are feeling down, nor even if you are truly depressed that these are automatic signs of sin in our lives. However, the lack of "peace" (that is a mysterious word I know and can be misconstrued), but the lack of deep down peace can definitely be a warning sign of something going on in your heart that is not right with God. Do you know this experience? Would anyone be willing to share if you are doing this study in a group?

***Notebooks:** Is there anything that could be leading towards a lack of peace with God in your life?

***Notebooks:** Train yourself to rejoice in the Lord. How do you rejoice? Take vs. 8 to heart! Write it out in your notebooks and leave spaces between the words. Write down some things that are "True", "Right" etc. This is rejoicing? This is turning your heart AND mind to worship. God is the central answer to each of the words and anything else that answers those words stems from Him.

***Notebooks:** Summarize 4:1-9. In your own words, what has Paul said? How does your view of Christ need to grow in order to rejoice like Paul admonishes?

TOOK:

What was most helpful, challenging or thought provoking?
What did you learn about the Character of God?
How should you respond?

***Assignment:**

- Rejoice this week. Write out, "The Lord is at hand" somewhere noticeable, that you will see often. Let this thought shape your week, what you focus on and how you see God, yourself and others.

Suggested Reading: Prayer- Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God by Tim Keller

Lesson 9– Thanks and see you soon!

Philippians 4:10-23

HOOK:

Context: One of the main reasons for Paul sending this letter seems to be as a thank you for the help that the Philippian church has sent. Here Paul gives the gifts he has received specific mention as he closes, says thanks and goodbye. This is a really specific section talking about Paul receiving support in terms of finances. While specific its application is actually broad when you consider that how we personally handle our finances has a lot to do with our heart, and our heart is the most foundational part of our lives.

Ask:

- I have heard it said that if you want to know how someone is doing in their walk with God, ask to see their day timer (iCal!), Bible, and bank account. The last one, bank account says a lot about your life, where you put your money shows where your heart is Jesus tells us. Why do you think money has such a hold on us?
- What are your thoughts about tithing part of your income to God's work? Have you ever thought about it? What are your questions?

Read: Philippians 4:10-23

LOOK:

Contentment- Philippians 4:10-13

1. Paul is in prison. He is not living a comfortable life. He is probably not working a rock quarry. Most scholars think that he was under house arrest with a guard constantly by his side. He could probably receive guests from time to time. But he is not in great circumstances. What about Paul's response to the Philippian gifts surprises you? (Look at 4:10-20 for this question)

2. Look at vs. 13. Have you ever read this or seen it displayed before? (Think Tim Tebow!) Athletes often use it. I have heard it used as people are hiking a hard hike! I have heard it applied to a lot of "tough" circumstances actually. However, given the context in this passage, how does Paul use the statement and how could it be potentially misused?

This is a great section to observe context before you appropriate vs. 13 erroneously. When you have seen this verse quoted or referenced, what were the circumstances? Did they warrant the use of this verse given the context? I am not saying that vs. 13 isn't a powerful sentiment that can be applied to many circumstances where a Christian faces trial. But be careful if you think it can be a magic bullet to apply to any circumstance in which you want to come out on top. Can you throw the football better than others because you are a Christian? If your team wins and another team loses is it because God is on your side and not another's? Paul here is facing

desperate need for God in the face of hunger, prison, emotional and physical hardship. He has learned that no matter what the need, God will supply and answer and in that He rejoices. It does not mean that he will "win" if God blesses him. It does not even mean that he will not die. It rather means that he can endure and stand up under the hardships he faces because God is his strength and hope. In that he rejoices. Do you secretly have the outlook that if you are a Christian, things will be easy and go your way all the time? What if things are hard? What if things are never easy? Is this verse still true? Is Jesus still worth following?

Lessons in giving- Philippians 4:14-20

1. What principles of giving to God's work can you derive from this passage?

Principles:

- a) *The Philippians are commended not for "giving money" but "sharing Paul's trouble". Isn't that interesting? Many times when we "tithe" it is simply to do our duty. But Paul sees in the Philippians a caring for the work AND the person they are supporting.*
- b) *In Paul's perspective, the Philippian's giving was actually ultimately for their own benefit more than his! He realizes that God blesses the giver. (This is not the sole motivation to give, but a principle to apply. God will honor one's giving to his work.)*
- c) *There are few that will actually give sacrificially. Paul acknowledges that they are one of the few and commends them for being pro-active to God's call.*
- d) *God will supply what the Philippians need as they give to others' needs. If we think we don't have enough to give, perhaps we don't have enough because we don't give enough!*

The Philippians served a great need in the church by caring for and supporting the physical needs of Paul. Herein is a great admonishment for you as you think about the roles of serving the ministry of God. Amy Carmichael, the great missionary, has said, "If you aren't willing to pray, to give or to go, don't be so bold as to claim you are concerned with missions". What is your role in missions? Paul's indeed was to "go". Perhaps that is your role too. But perhaps your role will be to occupy the other two offices. Praying and giving are essential to the work of God around the world. As you consider what God is calling you to do with your life, does giving and praying for the work of God enter your vision of your future? The average giving of evangelical Christians in the United States is 2.5% of their income. Only 2.5%! What if the church were to give even just 10%? What sort of impact would that fuel? But let's not stop there. 10% is a good base mark, but 10% giving really would not be a significant detriment to most American households. Let's think boldly. What if American Christians gave 15%, 20%, 50% of their income to the work of the Gospel? Instead of increasing one's standard of living with a salary increase, what if Christians were committed to increasing the proclamation of the Gospel? Money does not give the Gospel power, but money does help the distribution and ability for people to take the Gospel out. Would you consider your future income as belonging to God and your role as simply a steward of what God allows you to manage? Would you consider that your money is actually not yours but a resource God allows you to manage for his kingdom? Talk about that amongst your selves. What do you think about these thoughts I am raising in the context of the Philippians' commitment to Paul's ministry?

2. Verse- 19- "And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus." What do you think of this verse? Do you believe it?

Isn't this the main hindrance to our healthy stewardship of God's finances? Do we really think God will supply all of our needs? Better yet, do we consider what our true "needs" are vs. our "desires"? Are our desires inline with our actual needs? Where we put our money and our time says a lot about what we care about and where we are invested. I mentioned it at the beginning, but money is so powerful, Jesus says that it can actually guide our hearts... the opposite of what we might think. "Where your money is, there your heart will be also". (Luke 12:34) Do you see that? Where you put your money, your heart will follow. NOT, where your heart is, there you will put your money. The reality is that if you chose to put your money places, it will capture your heart. If you choose to invest your money in kingdom minded pursuits, your heart will be captured by the kingdom in which you are investing. What do you think about this principle?

3. Verse 20- "To our God and Father be glory forever and ever, Amen." This is not just a sweet sounding outro that Paul uses without thought. This truly is Paul's guiding principle in life and indeed summarizes his total reality for living. As a final question to this study, consider this: How can God desire the sum of our lives to be about his glory? Isn't this a bit self-gratifying on his part? Isn't this arrogant and even a bit ugly? The theme of this study, "Gospel over Self" could be said, "God over self" for God is really the good news. But again, isn't God over all just a bit aggrandizing? You may not feel this way, but much of the culture does. How do you respond to these comments? How would you respond if someone who does not subscribe to Christianity asked you these questions?

In C.S. Lewis' book, Reflection on the Psalms, Lewis begins recounting a problem he had with many of the Psalms, namely that God so often calls people to praise him. "We despise the man who demands continued assurance of his own virtue, intelligence, or delightfulness," Lewis observed. It almost seemed as if God were saying, "What I most want is to be told that I am good and great."

As time went on, Lewis began to reflect on why we praise anything at all. What do we mean for example when we say that a picture, a piece of music, or a book is "admirable"? We mean that people ought to admire those things and if they do not they will lose out and miss something wonderful. This began to help Lewis understand the calls to praise God.... "I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment; it is its appointed consummation. It is not out of compliment that lovers keep on telling one another how beautiful they are; the delight is incomplete until it is expressed..." This insight was a breakthrough for Lewis. We cannot merely believe in our minds that he is loving or wise or great. We must praise him for those things- and praise him to others- if we are to move beyond abstract knowledge to hear changing engagement. Learning to praise then changes us. Tim Keller, Prayer, pg. 191-192

Thus Keller and Lewis point out that it is for our own benefit that God calls us to praise him or glorify him. Of course it is also for God himself. So praising Him for his glory is both for God's glory and our satisfaction. John Piper has famously made the point that both are then one in the same. God's glory and our satisfaction are one in the same, for when "God is most glorified we are most satisfied in him". Thus you were created to glorify God, for there is no

greater thing than to make the greatest thing known. God could desire not greater thing than his own glory-which results in our satisfaction.

Lata...- Philippians 4:21-23

Verse 21- Greet every saint in Christ Jesus.

The brothers who are with me greet you.

[22] All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household.

[23] The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

Conclusion: *In Paul's letter to the Philippian church, he gives very practical challenges. The Christian life can be very ethereal, heart centered and sometimes lack concrete reality. For example, we can do "good" things on the exterior, but the interior desire of the heart is really what makes them "good" or not. In other words, I can do a good deed out of self-motivation to look good to others. Or I can do a good thing in order to honor God and live according to his desires. Jesus would actually say that the former "good" deed is actually sin and the root of evil! While the second "good" deed is actually "good" not because of what you have done, but why you have done it. However, like I said, this can lead to a very mystical view of the Christian life based on heart motivations and underlying motives. In Philippians, along with stimulating heart motivations, Paul gives very practical admonitions related to the Christian life. Love others making peace. Keep the unity of the Church based on Christ's example and power source. Sacrifice for the sake of the Kingdom of God. Care about the mission of God in your actions and with your finances. In summary, "Gospel over Self"! In Paul's concluding section, these rise to the forefront of Paul's concerns.*

***Notebooks:** Take 10 minutes and review Philippians on your own. What are the main sections you want to remember? What are one or two themes of action that you want to implement? What is one or two of the ways that Paul views Christ that you want to be your motivation to live out your actions?
-What is one verse that you can select as a reminder and theme of the Philippian letter?

TOOK:

What have you learned about who God is?
What have you learned about who you are?
What have you learned about who others are?
What have you learned about what you are called to?
What heart motivations are there to follow Christ?

Suggested Reading: "The Treasure Principal" by Randy Alcorn

Notes: