

JOY-FILLED PRAYER

Philippians 1 v 1M1

talk about

1. What do you think you can tell about someone from whether they pray, who they pray to, and what they pray?

investigate

Read Philippians 1 v 1M

DICTIONARY

Saints (v 1): holy ones: those who are set apart by, and for, God.

Overseers and deacons (v 1): leaders.

Partakers (v 7): sharers.

2. What is notable about the way the writers of this letter—the apostle Paul and his co-worker Timothy—describe themselves (v 1)?

- How do they describe the recipients?

explore more

Read Acts 16 v 6M0

Why did Paul go to Philippi (v 6–10)?

Whom did God call to saving faith through Paul (v 11–34)?

What do you think this taught Paul, and this new church, about:

- *who God can save?*
- *what circumstances God can work in?*

3. What is Paul doing, and how is he feeling (v 3–4)?

- Where is Paul as he writes (v 7, see also v 13–14)?
- How does this make his prayer and his emotion in verses 3–4 all the more striking?

getting personal

In the midst of our own adversities, we should never lose sight of praying for others. When offering intercessory prayers, we are diverted away from our own problems to the lives of others. This kind of selfless praying is good medicine for our own troubled souls because it takes our gaze off of ourselves and refocuses it upon others.

Have you experienced this in your own life?

How might you reshape your prayers in light of this?

4. What is the cause of Paul's joyful thanksgiving (v 5, 7)?
5. Why is Paul sure his Christian friends will keep going in their faith (v 6)?
 - Why is this confidence necessary for enabling him to pray with joyful thanks?
6. What impression of Paul do these verses give you?

apply

7. Given who Christ is and what he offers (v 2), why is it a privilege, rather than oppressive, to be one of his "bond-servants"?

investigate

Read **Philippians 1 v 9M 1**

DICTIONARY

Sincere (v 10): authentic; with integrity.

Blameless (v 10): literally, not stumbling.

8. What does Paul's prayer teach us about what love in action looks like?

getting personal

No matter how doctrinally sound we may be, if we are without love, we are "as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal" (1 Corinthians 13 v 1). Without love for others, regardless of how involved we are in Christian activities, we are "nothing."

Does this encourage you, or challenge you, or both?

9. What does Paul's prayer teach us about what the purpose of the Christian life is (v 11)?

The word "sincere" or "pure" (NIV/ESV) in verse 10 comes from two words for "sun" and "to judge." In ancient times, devious merchants would conceal flaws in their expensive pottery with wax. The authenticity of valuable pottery was revealed when held up to the light of the sun—it was "sincere."

10. So what is Paul teaching in verse 10 about what our aim must be as Christians?

apply

11. How do the priorities of Paul's prayer here compare with our prayers?

- If or where yours are different, what might this suggest about your view of God, or what matters to you in life?

12. In what areas is your sincerity tested? What would an authentically loving Christian life look like when those tests come?

pray

Use verses 3–6 to thank God for each other, and for the members of your church.

Then use verses 9–11 to pray for one another and for your church. Share any personal circumstances you would like to pray about, discussing together how these verses might shape your prayers for each other.

2

JOY IN HARSHIPS

Philippians 1 v 12-18

The story so far

Paul is writing to the church in Philippi, thanking God joyfully and confidently for their faith and praying that they would abound in love, to God's glory.

talk about

1. What makes you feel joyful?

- What types of circumstances, or what actions of other people, can make you feel less good?

investigate

Read Philippians 1 v 12-20

DICTIONARY

Brethren (v 12): family; brothers and sisters.

Praetorian guard (v 13): elite Roman soldiers; the emperor's personal guard, they were often very influential.

Exalted (v 20): lifted up; seen to be valuable.

2. What reasons does Paul have for not feeling good about life (v 12–17)?

3. How is he responding (v 18)?

- Why?
- v 12–13
- v 14
- v 18

In one sense, Paul is facing a very uncertain and difficult future.

4. But what is he confident of (v 19–20)?

explore more

What are the gospel preachers Paul mentions in verses 15–17 motivated by?

Read 1 Thessalonians 2 v 3M

What was Paul's gospel proclamation motivated by?

Read 1 Peter 5 v 1M

What wrong motives could drive church leaders?

What right motives should drive church leaders?

What would bad motivations and godly motivations look like in your own life, in terms of your gospel proclamation and your serving within your church?

apply

5. What prevents us from responding to difficult times as Paul did?

- Think of a trial you have recently faced (or are facing now). What would it look like to respond in the same way as Paul?

getting personal

Do you care more about your reputation or your Redeemer's? About your comfort or about Christ being made known?

You are not where you are—in good times and in bad—by accident. You are where you are by divine appointment, for the purposes of sharing the gospel.

In which part of your life does this need to transform your perspective and your priorities? How?

investigate

Read Philippians 1 v 21M6

DICTIONARY

Flesh (v 22, 24): here, Paul means his mortal body.

6. What reason does verse 21 reveal for Paul's attitude in verses 12–20?

7. What is Paul's dilemma (v 22–26)?

- What does he conclude is the best outcome, and why?

getting personal

It is only when you know that death will usher you into the presence of God that you will live with fearless faith. No one is ready to live until they are ready to die.

Can you say of your own outlook on life, “To live is Christ and to die is gain”? Why / why not? If not, what would it take for your answer to change?

Read Philippians 1 v 27

DICTIONARY

Conduct (v 27): behave.

8. How does Paul tell his readers to conduct their lives (v 27)?
9. What words does Paul use in these verses to describe the faithful Christian life (v 27b–29)?

apply

10. The gospel is good news, but it is not easy news. How has Paul shown us this in verses 21–30?
11. What goes wrong when we forget that ...
 - the gospel is good news?
 - the gospel is not easy news?
12. What have these verses shown us about how to live a joyful life?

pray

Spend time praising God together, and thanking him that “to die is gain.” Then share ways that you are struggling to live for Christ, and hold loose to your comfort and reputation—and pray for a joyful, uncompromising approach to obeying him.

3

JOY AND HUMILITY

Philippians 2 v 1M1, 19M10

The story so far

Paul is writing to the church in Philippi, thanking God joyfully and confidently for their faith and praying that they would abound in love, to God's glory. For the believer, to live is Christ and to die is gain—so the Philippians (and we) can live with joy, even in difficult circumstances, standing firm in faith together.

talk about

1. What is humility?

- In what circumstances does your society celebrate humility? In what ways does it see humility as negative?

investigate

Humility is the central theme that runs throughout Philippians 2. The actual word “humility” is found in verse 3, but the concept is seen throughout this entire section.

Read Philippians 2 v 1M1

DICTIONARY

Consolation (v 1): comfort; solace.

Conceit (v 3): hunger for your own honor and praise.

Each “if” in verse 1 can equally accurately be translated “since” or “because.”

2. What do the Philippian Christians enjoy (v 1)?

3. If/since this is true of them, what does Paul appeal for (v 2–4)?

4. How do verses 2–4 define what it means to have “humility” of mind?

Read Philippians 2 v 5M1

DICTIONARY

Bestowed on (v 9): gave.

5. Why is Jesus the supreme example of humility (v 6–8)?
 - How does this make verse 5 a great challenge to us?
6. How did God the Father respond to the humility of God the Son (v 9–11)?
 - How does this encourage us to live with “humility” of mind?

explore more

Read Luke 18 v 9M4

How does Jesus teach here what Paul does in Philippians 2 about pride, humility, and exaltation?

What does this teach us about the link between our humility and our prayers?

apply

7. Think of some specific ways in which living with this kind of attitude would mean blessing for those around you in ...
 - your church?
 - your home?
 - your workplace?

getting personal

Given this example of Jesus, it is clear that none of us can ever humble ourselves too much. None of us may ever say, “Enough. I deserve better, so I will stop here.”

How does this challenge you? When do you find it hardest to live with Christ-like humility?

True humility will never be forgotten by God. He will see it, note it, and reward it. No one ever truly humbles themselves before God without being exalted by God, in this life or in the life to come.

How does this encourage you? How will it change how you live in those times when it is hard to be humble?

investigate

Read Philippians 2 v 19-30

DICTIONARY

Kindred (v 20): family-like.

Furtherance (v 22): advance.

Minister (v 25): here, meaning one who attends to, or looks out for.

Deficient (v 30): lacking.

8. How does Timothy show us what humility looks like in real life (v 19–23)?
9. Likewise, how does Epaphroditus show us what humility looks like in real life (v 26–30)?
10. How should the Philippian Christians think of and treat Epaphroditus (v 29)?

apply

11. Who is held “in high regard” (or “honored,” NIV/ESV) in your church, and why? Would Timothy and Epaphroditus be? Why / why not?
12. Do you find their examples more or less challenging than the example of the Lord Jesus? Why?

getting personal

What would it look like for your life humbly to be given to God in a manner worthy of Paul’s commendations of Epaphroditus? Be specific.

pray

Use verses 6–11 to praise the Lord Jesus Christ. Work through each verse, thanking him for who he is, what he has done, and where he is now.

Share an aspect of Timothy or Epaphroditus’ humility that you would like God to grow in your own life, and use your answers as the basis of your prayers for one another.

4

JOY AND OBEDIENCE

Philippians 2 v 12M8

The story so far

Paul is writing to the church in Philippi, thanking God joyfully and confidently for their faith and praying that they would abound in love, to God's glory.

For the believer, to live is Christ and to die is gain—so the Philippians (and we) can live with joy, even in difficult circumstances, standing firm in faith together.

Humility, as exemplified by Jesus in his incarnation and crucifixion, is a central tenet of the Christian life, to be pursued and highly regarded by all of us.

talk about

1. What should a Christian aim to do in the time between being saved and going to heaven?

investigate

Read Philippians 2 v 12M8

DICTIONARY

Fear (v 12): healthy, reverential awe.

Disputing (v 14): arguing.

Perverse (v 15): distorted.

Lights (v 15): stars.

Drink offering (v 17): this was poured on top of an animal sacrifice to God. Paul's life is being poured out for the sake of the Philippians' faith.

This is addressed to Paul's "beloved" or "dear friends"—that is, Christians. If we miss this, it will lead us to falsely see these verses as teaching that someone must work to earn their salvation.

2. With that in mind, what do you understand Paul to be saying in verse 13?
3. Who is at work in the process of "sanctification"—that is, growing in holiness (v 12–13)?

4. In what way does verse 13 explain why Christians obey “with fear and trembling”? What should our view of God be?

apply

5. What goes wrong in our Christian lives if we ...
- forget that we are called to work out our salvation, rather than work for our salvation?
 - forget that God is at work?
 - forget that we must be at work?
6. Why does a right view of God produce both joy and trembling?
- How can we encourage each other to have this view?

getting personal

Spiritual couch potatoes grow little in grace or holiness. Being in prayer, studying the Bible, and then obeying it in your life require serious work.

How have you been motivated to enjoy growing in sanctification? In which areas in particular will you pray for God to work in you as you work at growing in godliness?

investigate

In verses 14–18, Paul gives us some specific application for daily living.

7. Why is verse 14 challenging?
- How does verse 15 motivate us to obey verse 14?
- “Holding fast” (or “hold[ing] firmly” (v 16) more correctly carries the idea of “holding forth” or “holding out.”
8. What is the link between obeying verse 14 and being able to “appear as lights [or stars, NIV] in the world, holding fast the word of life” (v 15–16)?

9. How will Paul feel as he sees the Philippians working out their salvation and holding out the word of life (v 17)?

- How should the Philippians feel about it (v 18)?

explore more

Read 1 Thessalonians 2 v 19 ~~M~~ v 10

How does this passage give us further insight into:

- *how Paul feels about his Christian friends?*
- *what Paul's priorities are for his Christian friends?*
- *what Paul told young churches they could expect their Christian lives to involve?*

getting personal

You can be, and should be, a channel for joy to flow through your life to other believers.

Do you share joy in the Lord with others, particularly when they are living through trying circumstances? Do you allow others to share Christian joy with you, particularly when you are in those trials?

apply

10. When do you find it easiest to grumble? How could you turn those moments into opportunities to praise God and hold out the word of life?

11. What have we learned is necessary for effective witness?

- How have you seen this kind of effective witness, either in your own life or in those around you?

12. What have these verses shown you about how to shine with joy?

pray

Praise God for his work in you and purposes for you. Pray with humble thanks for ways you have seen him working in your lives.

Ask God to be at work in you, and to help you work as he works. Speak to him about particular ways you struggle to obey him, or ways you struggle to obey without grumbling.

Thank God that you are able to shine as a light in a dark world. Pray for particular people with whom you would love to share his gospel.¹

¹ Steven J. Lawson, [*Philippians: Shining with Joy*](#), Good Book Guides Series (The Good Book Company, 2017), 7–29.