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# The Book of Philippians

## A Practical Bible Commentary by Terry Baxter



Philippi is named after Philip of Macedonia, who was the father of Alexander the Great. It was a crucial port city on the sea trading route from east to west and was strategically located on a major trading route, which made it the ideal place to spread the gospel into all of Macedonia. When God gave Paul a call to carry the gospel to Macedonia, he and Silas were instantly obedient. Their faithfulness resulted in a public beating, a jail ministry, an earth-shaking midnight praise service that ended with broken chains and doors flung open, the conversion of many prisoners, and the salvation of the jail-keeper and his family! The local magistrates, who had unlawfully beaten and imprisoned them not knowing they were Roman citizens wanted them to leave Philippi quietly. Paul and Silas did leave, but not before they gathered the believers together and formed them into a true church. It is one of the most moving stories in early church history. Paul wrote this book a full decade later from a prison in Rome. This favorite small book that has blessed many believers over the past two millenniums was part of a collection of letters known as, "The Prison Epistles." In it, Paul shares his personal heart more than in any of his other writings. It provides crucial insight into the growth and maturity of Paul well beyond the close of the book of Acts.

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## **Introduction to Philippians: Philippians 1:1-2**

“1) Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons: 2) Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

The city of Philippi had a fascinating history. It was named after Philip of Macedonia. He seized the city in 358 B. C. from the Thracians. Philip was the father of none other than Alexander the Great. In 42 B.C., the city was seized by Mark Anthony and Octavius and transferred to the Roman Empire. Later, Augustus Caesar made Philippi a Roman Colony.

It was a crucial port city on the sea trading route from East to West. It was also strategically located on the land trading route into all of Macedonia. This made for the ideal spread of the gospel into all of Macedonia.

The biblical story of the start of this church is recorded in Acts 16:6-40. It started with Paul's famed Macedonian vision as recorded in Acts 16:6-10.

After several closed doors, God gave Paul a vision that included a call to carry the Gospel to Macedonia. This happened early in his second missionary journey. He and Silas were instantly obedient to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Their time in Philippi started with attendance at a daily prayer meeting. It ended with a public beating, a jail ministry, an earth-shaking midnight praise service, and the conversion of many prisoners and the jail keeper. What a mixed congregation of new believers!

Paul and Silas were shortly requested to leave the city by the magistrates who had wrongfully beaten them publicly and placed them in chains. They were unaware that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens. This gave them considerable leverage against the city magistrates.

Before taking leave of the city, Paul and Silas gathered the believers together and formed them into what was most likely a house church. Acts 16 is one of the most moving stories in early church history. I will leave you to read the full account in the book of Acts.

Another irony unfolds with the book of Philippians. It was written by Paul a full decade later from another prison in Rome. This favorite small book that has blessed many believers over the past two millennia was part of a collection of letters known as, “The Prison Epistles.”

In this short Epistle, Paul shares his personal heart more than in any of his other writings. It provides crucial insight into the growth and maturity of Paul well beyond the close of the book of Acts.

He was determined, if necessary, to give his life to defend the pure gospel message against any and all adversaries and opponents. In fact, the word “gospel” is used six times in the first chapter of Philippians alone. Oh, that the modern church was as devoted to defending the pure and true gospel in our day.

## **Grace and Peace: Philippians 1:2**

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

There are tangible benefits to knowing God and walking with God. Two of them are found in this common greeting Paul often used in opening his letters.

**The first benefit is living in the grace of God.** Many years ago God helped me understand daily grace versus redemptive grace.

Redemptive grace relates to salvation. This is often defined as “unmerited favor” or “undeserved kindness.” We do not deserve what Jesus did for us on the cross. Salvation is not earned by works, it is a gift of God based on simple faith in Christ. (See Ephesians 2:8-9)

But, how does grace relate to daily living for the Christian? I look at daily grace as “God’s divine enablement or power made available to help me do what in and of myself I otherwise would not or could not do!”

Grace lifts me beyond my own strength and resources. It is connected to the presence of the Holy Spirit in my life. Grace means I can live moment by moment in God’s favor and power. I both consciously and subconsciously embrace this truth.

**The second benefit is living in the peace of God.** The third fruit of the Spirit is “peace.” Listen carefully, being in relationship with the God of peace means I have constant access to the peace of God.

I believe there is an umbilical cord in the born-again human spirit that is connected to God. The fallen human flesh and soul are plagued with fear, guilt, condemnation, and even despair. But despite our outward circumstances, God wants to pour His peace into our lives through His Spirit.

There is a simple verse in Colossians 3:15 that illustrates this concept. It says, “15) And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful.” If you know Jesus and are a child of God, His peace is always present. Why? Because the Holy Spirit abides in us!

Our only responsibility is to “let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts.” That means we need to pull our flesh and soul off the inner throne and let our renewed spirit rule. This is the process of learning how to walk in the spirit/Spirit.

The early believers lived in the reality of these two benefits. They actually greeted each other with these truths. They opened each conversation with the reminder of these two benefits of knowing Jesus as Savior and Lord. They lived in God’s presence, favor, power, and peace.

Part of Christian growth and maturity is learning to embrace and walk daily in grace and peace. Never cut this umbilical cord to God. These are basic provisions for every believer, but as Colossians 3:15 says, you need to “let them rule in your heart!”

### **Praying with Joy: Philippians 1:3-5**

“3) I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, 4) always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all, 5) in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now.”

We now have a small glimpse of Paul's prayer life. He and Silas had suffered much in Philippi for the sake of the gospel. (Acts 16:16-30) Yet at midnight in the middle of their ordeal they sang hymns of praise to God. This resulted in an earthquake and a spiritual awakening.

Though it was now nearly ten years later, Paul was still filled with joy as he prayed for them. The main reason he gave was that they actively participated in the spread of the gospel.

This can be understood in two ways. First, they financially supported Paul in his mission work of carrying out the gospel to others. (See Philippians 4:10-20) God wants His people to step up and support those on the front lines of spreading the gospel. The church at Philippi was mission-minded.

Second, they themselves were sharing the gospel within their own city and sphere of influence. The church at Philippi was fruitful in the cause of the gospel locally. They were impacting their city with the gospel.

These two components are primary indicators of a healthy church and dedicated disciples of Jesus Christ. God wants every believer to be active on these two levels. (See John 15:1-16). This is not an “either-or” scenario. This is a “both-and” calling.

Two things happen in the lives of believers and churches who participate actively on these two levels with the spread of the gospel. They are filled with joy and they witness God's miraculous power at work. (Acts 1:8)

If you want to experience God, you must live a Great Commission lifestyle. That means both doing and giving. Step up and make participating in the spread of the gospel one of your highest priorities and passions.

When you do this, buckle your seat belt! You are about to experience the power of God at work. You will start living in stories like those recorded in the book of Acts.

But be warned, your little theology boxes where you have intellectually stuffed God will be shattered in the process. Why? God always confirms His words with signs that follow. (See Mark 16:20 and Hebrews 2:4)

God is passionate about the spread of the gospel. (John 3:16-17) If you want to connect with His heart, start telling people about His Son! If you want to start living in the power of the Holy Spirit, tap into His promise. (Acts 1:4-8)

### **God Finishes What He Starts: Philippians 1:6**

“6) For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.”

God finishes what He starts. He is active in our salvation and He is active in our sanctification. He changes those who genuinely trust in Him.

We can grieve and quench the Holy Spirit through sin, but He is committed to the growth and maturity of every true child of God. He will not remain passive.

Because He loves us, He will discipline every Christian who strays into sin. (See Hebrews 12:4-1:3) His goal is our growth, maturity, and righteousness.

But don't hold Him at arms length or walk in willful disobedience. There are plenty of examples in the Bible of God turning His people over to wrath. (1 Corinthians 10:1-13)

God expects us to do our part in seeking and obeying Him. It is our responsibility to abide in Him, study His Word, renew our mind, put on the new self, walk in the Spirit, be in community with other believers, and be salt and light in the world through good works.

He is eager to work in us and through us by His love, grace, and power. We need not wander in the wilderness of sin for forty years as Israel did in the Old Testament. He wants to fill us with the power of the Holy Spirit and work through us in glorious ways.

Paul had confidence in the active work of God in and through the believers in Philippi. They displayed the fruits of genuine conversion. They were zealous for God! They were deeply rooted in his heart.

### **Selfless Love: Philippians 1:7**

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

Paul was not self-focused. He endured much for the sake of others. He carried them in his heart. He genuinely cared for others.



What he endured for the defense of the pure gospel, he did for the sake of every true believer. He gave his life to defend the gospel of grace against legalism and every works-based system of religion.

He carried them in his heart through his entire imprisonment and sufferings. He often stood alone to defend the simple message of the gospel.

This verse challenges me to live for Christ and others and not for myself. Paul became an imitator of Christ. We are called to the same kind of radical and selfless love.

### **The Bond of Love: Philippians 1:8**

“8) For God is my witness, how I long for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus.”

This short verse forces us to investigate the relational bond that is often formed between believers during the spread of the gospel. It surpasses anything the world can understand or experience.

You can tell by this verse that Paul had a very special relationship with the believers in the city of Philippi. They were his first venture and fruit in Macedonia.

This was a big step for the former Pharisee who had spent much of his life in Jerusalem studying and defending Orthodox Judaism. He had single-handedly launched the first persecution against the Christians. He was calloused and ruthless.

What a change! Jesus had given him a heart not only for Jesus Christ and Christians, but now for Gentiles. His love for them was as sincere as if Jesus was supernaturally loving them through him.

Now he was missing them and their sweet fellowship. He was in prison in Rome for the sake of the gospel and was longing for the friendships forged a full decade earlier back in Philippi.

Keep in mind his time there qualified as a short-term mission trip. It ended because of persecution and adversity, but they had a bond “in Christ.”

I’ve seen it happen many times. Deep relationships are often forged between former strangers who meet for the cause of Christ.

The spreading of the gospel is more than a mere message or ideology. It is based in Agape love and results in an Agape bond between brethren. Agape love is a glue that forms a spirit-to-spirit bond between believers. It surpasses geography, gender, ethnicity, age, and socio-economic barriers.

So was the mystery of the bond between Paul and these Christians among the Gentiles. It surpassed his kinship with his own countrymen back in Jerusalem. It actually caused them to hate and despise Paul.

So is my love for Africans, Asians, those in Europe, Mexico, South America, India, native Americans, and every people group, religion, and political persuasion around the world. God has torn down the walls of prejudice between me and others. I see all people as having dignity and value and being worthy of hearing the gospel. Jesus died for all people. I love and reach out to the rich and poor alike. When the externals are stripped away, all people are alike and in need of Jesus Christ.

My goal and passion is to reach everyone, everywhere with the good news of the gospel. I leave the changing to the Holy Spirit and the power of God. The result is that I love sinful and lost people who need Jesus. I have developed a genuine compassion for them through Christ.

I am not unique. This should happen in the life of every born-again Christian. This reveals the deep heart healing God wants to do in the life of every true believer. This is basically what John said in 1 John 4:7-21. Let me summarize; "Agape love between people is the validation of a genuine relationship with God."

### **Transformational Praying: Philippians 1:9-11**

"9) And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, 19) so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ; 11) having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God."

Paul now records the specifics of what he was praying for the believers in Philippi. This should be added to his prayers as recorded in Ephesians 1:15-23; 3:14-21 and Colossians 1:9-15. These four prayers color in the goal of discipleship and what godly maturity looks like.

He started by praying for Agape love to continue abounding more and more in real knowledge and all discernment. This love is the baseline for godly discernment and knowledge. (See also Ephesians 3:17-19) Agape love is tied to the very character of God.

But notice that this love produces discernment, holiness, and godliness in Christians. The word "sincere" in verse 10 means "without wax." It was borrowed from a term describing the highest quality of furniture with no flaws or gouges filled with wax or putty.

God does not want patchwork in our lives. He does not want us to ignore or cover sin, compromise, and past wounds with a facade. His love brings healing and true holiness into our lives.

The word “blameless” amplifies this deep and transforming work of God. The idea is a clear conscience with no cause of stumbling.

Christians are to be pure and not like the Pharisees who outwardly were filled with false pretense but inwardly sinful and wicked. They were whitewashed tombs. They were painted over and not genuine. They were fakes!

Paul prayed that they might be filled with the fruit of righteousness. This is the standard for Agape love. It always produced purity, holiness, and righteousness. It doesn't twist love to condone sin and wickedness in self and other people. It doesn't become an excuse, ticket, or guise for sinful living.

Much of what is promoted as Christian love today is nothing short of secular tolerance. It results in a distorted gospel that promotes the notion that God loves and accepts everyone and any moral value system. The end logic says; “Because God is love we can live as we please!”

They forget that God is both light and love. (See 1 John 1:5-7 and 1 John 5:7-19) Agape love is absolutely pure and holy.

So why is this important to this context of Philippians 1:9-11? Because Paul was praying that they would have discernment in what they approved as good, godly, and acceptable moral behavior.

He concluded by saying that their moral value system had to live up to the standard of bringing glory and praise to God. (See Vs 11)

But it's one thing to have a godly moral value system; it's another to consistently live within it! That's the power of the gospel and the indwelling Holy Spirit. He changes people from the inside out. That change was the thrust of Paul's prayer for them. He wanted them to be real, genuine, and holy.

### **Living Above Your Circumstances: Philippians 1:12-14**

“12) Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel, 13) so that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else, 14) and that most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear.”

These verses are profound! Paul understood and declared that Jesus Christ was Lord over His circumstances. Being a prisoner and sent to Rome was not his plan or idea, but God used it to greatly advance the gospel. How?

First, the seeds of the gospel were planted all the way to Rome as he traveled. Second, many elite Roman soldiers in the praetorian guard heard the gospel. Third, believers everywhere were filled with confidence and courage to speak the gospel as they heard Paul's story. Fourth, apparently some members of Caesar's own household in Rome became Christians. (See Philippians 4:22) Finally, much of the New Testament was written in the form of the Prison Epistles.

This screams of a truth not understood by most Christians: "Jesus Christ is Lord over our circumstances." No wonder Paul and Silas could have a praise and worship service at midnight after being beaten and thrown in jail. (See Acts 16:25-31)

Paul did not view himself as a prisoner of his circumstances, rather he exploited every opportunity to advance the gospel. As he boldly and courageously made Jesus Christ and the gospel known, God directed his path. Signs and wonders and the power of the Holy Spirit accompanied him all the way to Rome. (See Acts 27-28)

There is a huge difference between viewing yourself as a victim of your circumstances and living through the power of God above your circumstances. The first surrenders to the enemy; the second ensures that God is in control. The first leads to a defeatist mindset, the second expects the miraculous power of God to turn all things toward His glory. The first leads to despair, the second leads to victory and new opportunities for the gospel.

Paul did not endorse turning the doctrine of the Sovereignty of God into complacency. He viewed it as an opportunity to surf on the wake of the supernatural. He consciously invited the power of God into his daily life and circumstances. He consciously viewed every event in his life through the lens of advancing the gospel!

These three verses have shaped my understanding of God, the Christian life and the Great Commission. Paul never surrendered to mediocrity. He lived daily on the raw edge of faith! As a result, the power and glory of God surrounded his life!

I believe God wants us to live this way as well. He wants us to invite His mighty power, glory, and Spirit into our every circumstance. It is about making Jesus the focus rather than our own plans or agenda. His ways are so much higher than ours. He directs our path so that we might be a mouthpiece for His glory.

Where are you stuck right now? Switch from fear to faith. Turn from anger and bitterness to love and forgiveness. Stop being silent and suppressed. Open your mouth for Jesus and the gospel. Speak into your circumstances for the glory of God. Bring yourself into alignment with God's Word, will, and purpose. Then expect God to work in miraculous ways. Put faith and not fate on display in your life.

## **The Refiners Fire: Philippians 1:14**

“14) and that most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear.”

Paul's afflictions for the cause of Christ had an unusual benefit. Those won to Christ through his sufferings were filled with more courage and boldness.

A soft gospel produces soft believers. But, those who come to Christ under the shadow and threat of persecution have an unusual substance to their faith. “ – they have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear.”

Such is the case of the persecuted church. It produces followers of Christ who have courage and boldness. They do not come to Christ for what they can gain, they come to Christ despite what it might cost them.

Paul viewed this as an unusual benefit of his personal sufferings. His willingness to suffer for Christ and the gospel validated his message. God used his sufferings to pour a courageous spirit on the believers.

This same mystery surfaces again and again throughout the book of Acts. Threats, adversities, and persecution added fuel to their praying and power to their preaching. (See Acts 4:28-31)

It was the wealthy church in Laodicea that became lukewarm. (See Revelation 3:14-22). Their gospel and walk with God was distorted by wealth, ease, and luxury.

So it is with the western church today. It produces distorted faith and a distorted gospel that is self-centered rather than Christ-centered. Christianity always thrives under the shadows of persecution and suffering. The refiner's fire always produces pure gold.

## **The Gospel Cannot Be Stopped: Philippians 1:15-18**

“15) Some, to be sure, are preaching Christ even from envy and strife, but some also from good will; 16) the latter do it out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel; 17) the former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition rather than from pure motives, thinking to cause me distress in my imprisonment. 18) What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice,”

The gospel has always had both true and false workers. The genuine workers preach the truth in love through the power of the Holy Spirit. They clearly proclaim the gospel message that Paul gave his life to defend.

False workers twist and distort the gospel message. They do ministry from false motives. Often they seek to exploit people or prey on the poor and ignorant. Their goal is personal wealth while

they leave people wounded, confused, and disillusioned. Their ultimate goal is to hinder the spread of the gospel.

But Paul rejoiced that the ultimate goal of the good news about Jesus Christ was under the active and dynamic power of the Holy Spirit. He has a way of directing sincerely-seeking people to the truth about Jesus Christ.

Saul himself had become a prime example of this principle. He thought he was serving God by killing Christians and hindering the message of Jesus Christ. But God miraculously saved and transformed Saul into the Apostle Paul.

The true gospel cannot be stopped because it is tied to the active power of the Holy Spirit. He has ways to miraculously move people to the truth of the gospel and transform them.

Harsh opponents can become zealous proponents of Jesus Christ and the gospel. Persecutors can become preachers. Sinners can be forgiven and set free. These kinds of miracles happen constantly on the front lines of spreading the gospel. The gospel changes people.

Never give up on anyone nor get distracted from your call to faithfully proclaim Jesus Christ and the gospel. God always prevails and His Word accomplishes its purpose. (See Isaiah 55:10-11)

### **Living Well and Dying Well: Philippians 1:19-21**

“19) for I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayers and the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, 20) according to my earnest expectation and hope, that I will not be put to shame in anything, but that with all boldness, Christ will even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. 21) For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.”

Paul had confidence in his coming freedom. Why? He knew the power of prayer and He knew the ways of the Holy Spirit. That is an amazing combination. And sure enough, church tradition holds that Paul was set free and subsequently arrested again and became a martyr for the sake of the gospel.

His monumental spiritual secret is found in the next two verses. According to verses 20-21, Jesus Christ came to mean more to Paul than life itself! His only goal was that Christ be exalted in him whether it meant life or death. He lived to the glory of God and he was committed to die for the glory of God.

Verse 21 defined the explanation point to the life of the Apostle Paul: “For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” Persecution, fear and death had lost its grip on Paul. He was a winner with Christ no matter what happened. He had totally surrendered his will to the glory of God and the advancement of the kingdom.

These were more than mere words for Paul. They were his reality. Jesus Christ was the source of his bold confidence. Fear of man and fear of death lost its grip on him.

He was like Shadrach, Meshack, and Abed-nego in Daniel 3:16-18. The threats of the king and the heat of the fire did not curb their love and commitment to God. The end result was unshakable confidence and courage.

Paul was able to stand alone, look fear and death in the eye and defeat them through his faith. Why? Jesus Christ Himself had become his confidence, joy, peace, and hope. He walked with God!

We should settle for nothing less in our own lives. This is the goal of the Christian life and spiritual maturity. This is the point at which the world, the flesh and the devil lose their grip on us! This is the point at which faith becomes sight and glorifying God becomes our only ambition.

### **“Depart” as an understanding of Death: Philippians 1:21-24**

“21) For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. 22) But if I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose. 23) But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better; 24) yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake.”

These were not empty words for Paul. Life here meant more fruitful labor for the glory of God. Dying was a promotion to the heavenly presence of Christ. He was hard pressed and well content with either option.

It was in this context that he picked the word "depart" to describe death for a Christian. In the process, he used a Greek word that captured the meaning of death more than any other text in the New Testament. Let me explain.

The word “depart” was a secular term commonly applied to four events. Each paints a word picture or analogy of Paul’s understanding of death for the Christian. Let’s briefly look at each secular usage:

First, the word “depart” was used of an oxen that had faithfully pulled the yoke for years for its master. When it became old and ready to retire, a unique ceremony sometimes happened. The owner would take the yoke off for the last time, and the oxen was free to “depart” to the open pasture never to bear a yoke again. Paul pictured death as removing the yoke.

Second, the word “depart” was used of a soldier on the front lines of war with many casualties and much suffering. When victory was finally won, the war-torn soldier would roll up his tent and

supplies for the last time and put any booty in his pack. He was then free to “depart” from the war back to civilian life never to fight again. Paul pictured death as the war being over!

Third, the word “depart” was used of a prisoner who had served his sentence. His prison clothes were removed, he bathed and put on civilian clothes. When the prison door opened this time, he was free to “depart” bondage into a life of freedom. Paul pictured death as freedom from prison.

Finally, the word “depart” was used for a wooden cargo ship that had become storm-torn and was no longer seaworthy. The cargo in a ship was called “the burden.” The cargo was unloaded for the last time, any useful gear was stripped off and the ship was taken out of port for the last time. The crew would hoist a sail and set the rudder. Then they abandoned the ship to the open sea. It was free to “depart” never to bear a burden again.

I often use this text and these four word pictures during a funeral service. They are positive pictures of amazing comfort. Death means the yoke is lifted, the war is over, the prison cell is opened and the burden is removed.

No wonder Paul was undecided between life and death. Either way he was a winner. To remain meant more fruitful labor for Christ. To die meant freedom, glory, and great gain in the very presence of Jesus.

Ironically, Paul used the picture of taking down a storm-torn tent in 2 Corinthians 4:16-5:10 to describe death. The analogy fits the four word pictures mentioned above. The early Christians viewed death as a promotion with the woes, pains, suffering and burden of this life forever removed.

### **For the Sake of Christ and Others: Philippians 1:24-26**

“24) yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake. 25) Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith, 26) so that your proud confidence in me may abound in Christ Jesus through my coming to you again.”

Paul longed to step into his heavenly calling, but he could sense his earthly mission was not yet complete. For this reason, he was willing to tarry longer in his afflictions and circumstances to fully establish and build up the body of Christ.

His mind was fixed on others and not himself. He was constantly setting himself aside so he could fully minister to others. Much of the rest of the book of Philippians illustrates this servant's heart and calling.

The point at which abundant fruitfulness begins is where self-centeredness ends. The eye fixed on self is blind to the heart and call of Christ. This attitude was exemplified most by Christ Himself. He laid down His life that we might find life.



Every believer needs to wrestle through the call to die to self. If your focus is on self, you can never be a channel of Agape love or gospel living. True influence and power will be absent from your life. All key relationships around you will suffer and dry up. This includes marriage, family, friends, and others.

Paul was effective because he laid himself aside completely to serve God and others. He was a giver and not a taker. He was a servant and not a master. His interests were last and not first. This is the point at which the book of Philippians becomes so profound. It screams of the call and importance of dying to self so you can truly serve God and others.

Buckle your seat belt, the Holy Spirit is about to use this small book to expose the stench of self-focus and self-promotion. He is about to point you down the path that Christ walked and the path that every believer is called to walk. It is a path that puts the interests of Christ and others first.

### **The Validation of Godly Maturity: Philippians 1:27-28**

“27) Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel; 28) in no way alarmed by your opponents—which is a sign of destruction for them, but of salvation for you, and that too, from God.”

Paul was making no promise of a return trip to Philippi. It was his desire but not a guarantee. He knew he could be of benefit to them, but at the same time they had “in Christ” everything they needed to stand strong and be fruitful.

So he opted for strong advice on interpersonal relationships. This is where the enemy often attacks. He seeks to hinder Agape love and create conflict between Christians. So Paul exhorted them to focus on three things.

First, stand firm in one spirit. This is behavior worthy of the gospel.

Second, maintain one mind. The enemy will pull every trick to divide and distract.

Finally, strive and even strain together to advance the gospel. This is the calling of every church and every believer.

As simple as it may sound, if they embraced these three basics, they would maintain a positive testimony and bear much fruit for the glory of God.

A Christian testimony and witness is validated on the level of interpersonal relationships. This is the fulfillment of the words of Jesus in John 13:35; "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

### **The Often-Unclaimed Promise: Philippians 1:29-30**

"29) For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, 30) experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear to be in me."

These are two of the least understood and acclaimed verses in the New Testament. It has been granted us for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake. The early believers counted suffering for Jesus an honor and a privilege.

This concept is exemplified in Acts 5:17-42. After the apostles were arrested by the Council, then subsequently delivered by an angel of the Lord during the night, only to be brought back into custody the next day. Then they were threatened and commanded not to preach or teach again in the name of Jesus.

They not only stood their ground, but told the Council they would obey God rather than men. (Vs 29-32) After some brief words by Gamaliel, the apostles were called back in before the Council and were flogged in public and then ordered to preach no more in the name of Jesus. Look at their response:

Acts 5:41-42 says; "41) So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name. 42) And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ."

Notice, they went on their way "rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name." This captures the substance of Philippians 1:29-30. They punctuated their love and devotion for Jesus by being willing to suffer for Him!

In Galatians 6:17 Paul wrote; "From now on let no one cause trouble for me, for I bear on my body the brand-marks of Jesus." His body was scarred from head to foot from the beatings, stoning and abuse he endured for the sake of the gospel. They were a testimony of his love and devotion for Jesus.

Western Christians get their feelings hurt and walk away from Jesus and the church for the smallest reasons. You don't earn respect and trust in the underground church in China until you've suffered at least one or two prison terms for the sake of Jesus and the gospel.

In both the early church and the modern underground church, trust was and is important. Lives are at stake. Traitors are everywhere. In verse 30, Paul was saying; “if you need proof of my love and devotion for Jesus, start counting the scars I have joyfully earned for Jesus and the cause of the gospel.”

As the end times unfold, a willingness to suffer for Jesus and other believers will become the true validation of conversion. Remaining faithful through suffering for the gospel is the refining furnace of true faith.

### **Spiritual Diagnosis: Philippians 2:1-2**

“1) Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, 2) make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.”

If one were to guess what prompted Paul to write these words, the church in Philippi was likely suffering from numerous internal conflicts. Such is often the case between believers.

He opens Chapter Two by asking four rhetorical questions. Let me summarize in my own words:

1) Is there any encouragement and affirmation in Christ? 2) Does Agape love really make a difference in interpersonal relationships? 3) Does the Holy Spirit foster positive fellowship between believers? 4) Is there natural affection and compassion among God's people?

The answer to each question should be “yes”. But honestly and practically, the church in Philippi had to answer “no”. These qualities had vanished from among them.

The irony is that even non-Christians expect these qualities from believers. They expect those who know and love Jesus Christ to be loving, gentle, kind, and caring. When these qualities are missing, it is a denial of the inner presence and work of Jesus Christ. At the very least it is a sign of immaturity and carnality.

In verse two, Paul gives a practical application to each question. He would be filled with joy to learn that they were of the same mind as Christ, displaying Agape love, united in spirit and focused on the common purpose of spreading the gospel.

This is almost a repeat of Philippians 1:27. It is a clue that this church was divided and struggling with internal conflict. They had become critical and filled with grumbling and complaining. The light of their witness was flickering and about to go out. Such is the case in many churches.

Notice that Paul did not examine their theology or Bible knowledge. He simply evaluated their interpersonal relationships and looked for evidence of Agape love between them.

They came up short. They needed intervention. Their spiritual pulse was very weak. This church was dying and ready for critical care. So how can you help a dying church?

Well, Paul did not give up on them and start a second church in Philippi. But, that's what we do today.

We shuffle believers who agree with each other into segmented groups and divide the church like a piece of pie. But that does nothing to fix the root problem. In fact, it amplifies the problem and turns Christianity into a joke and opens it to public mockery.

So what's the fix? Like a first responder, in the next two verses Paul makes a spiritual diagnosis and immediately starts critical care on each individual believer in the church at Philippi. We will look at his immediate first aid in the next section. (Philippians 2:3-4)

Then, in the balance of the book, he admits them into a spiritual hospital and begins total life transformation therapy. The rest of the book of Philippians becomes spiritual chemotherapy to kill every cancer cell of sin, carnality, self-promotion, criticism, and arrogance within every believer in the church at Philippi.

There were no exceptions. Every Christian was in need of the treatment in order to restore life and vibrance to every marriage and family within the church.

The modern church is in need of the same resuscitation and attempt to revive genuine spiritual life that Paul administered to the church in Philippi. Some call this process "revival."

### **Relational Resuscitation: Philippians 2:3-4**

"3) Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; 4) do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others."

Like a first responder, with these two verses Paul begins relational resuscitation. That's how powerful these two verses are to restore broken relationships. They were emergency measures he used to keep the church alive. There were two parts.

First, "do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves." Take your selfish eyes off from yourself and start valuing those around you! View others as more important than yourself. This is huge!

Second, "do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others." Now Paul moves from attitudes to actions. Start caring for others above yourself.

Nothing jump-starts Agape love faster than these two verses. It involves a new way of thinking, speaking and acting toward others. It includes a change of heart, mind, and actions.

If you want your relationships to change, then you must first change! Your relationships are a reflection of you! That's a hard pill to swallow, but it's true!

These two verses activate the Law of the Sower in your key relationships. (Galatians 6:7-8) What you sow you will reap. If your relationships are falling apart, start sowing different seeds. If you want love and respect, start sowing love and respect!

Can you imagine the impact when everyone starts consistently applying these two principles?

Even the most broken and toxic relationships can be resuscitated in short order. Marriages, families and churches can be transformed.

Anger, bitterness, criticism and complaining will lose their grip. In their place forgiveness, grace, patience and love will begin to flow into your relationships.

It only takes one to start the transformation. In short order Agape love will become contagious. Here is the big key, be the one to start sowing the new seed. Invite the Holy Spirit to change your heart, mind and actions. Repent of your selfish and self-centered ways and put others first.

These two verses are powerful and they work. Start the change in yourself immediately. It is so much better than separation, divorce and church splits! Is it really that easy? YES! And in the next section you will discover why this is so powerful.

### **Agape Therapy: Philippians 2:5-11**

"5) Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, 6) who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7) but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. 8) And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. 9) For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, 10) so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11) and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

There is so much doctrine and theology packed into these verses, we are in danger of straying from the main subject that Paul was addressing. In verses 1-4, he set the theme of injecting Agape love into every relationship. He set out to repair broken relationships within the church at Philippi.

In this context, he exemplifies the principles set forth in Philippians 2:1-4 by the way Jesus lived. He saw following the example of Jesus Christ as the key to building healthy relationships. (Philippians 2:5-11) This truth can be applied to repairing damaged marriages, families, churches and our witness in the world.

At first glance, Philippians 2:3-4 seems impossible to fulfill. Can we really empty ourselves to the point of putting others first in every relationship at all times? Is this really what it means to be a conduit of Agape love? Was this really what Jesus taught and lived? (Review John 13:34-35) Paul anticipated those questions and in the balance of this chapter he presents three compelling examples of Agape love in action. They are:

1. Philippians 2:5-11 The Example of Christ Jesus.
2. Philippians 2:19-24 The Example of Timothy.
3. Philippians 2:25-30 The Example of Epaphroditus.

This is significant. All excuses to not live out Agape love are removed. Bringing Agape love into every relationship is the defining characteristic of a genuine relationship with Jesus Christ.

By contrast, having right theology but broken relationships is a return to Pharisee culture. It is toxic and damaging to those around us.

The Pharisees were so deceived and self-righteous in their approach to God, they hurt and wounded people around them. They trampled on people in their attempt to please God. They had no concept of "the law of love." (Matthew 22:35-49, Galatians 5:14)

So why do I inject the Pharisees into this conversation? According to Philippians 3:1-16, that's the background Paul came from. He becomes the fourth example of the transforming power of Agape love. Jesus changed him from a rigid, legalistic, and self-righteous Pharisee into a humble and loving servant/leader. In keeping with this theme, Paul laid down his life for Jesus and others.

Back to our context. In Philippians 2:5-11, Paul sets forth Jesus as his first example of the principle of Agape love relationships. Jesus consistently emptied Himself.

He left heaven to come to earth. He set aside the full exercise of Deity to put on the limitations of humanity. He avoided claiming His royal rights as a direct descendant of King David and instead put on the clothes of a common bond-servant. He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of a shameful death on a cross.

Paul's description of Jesus Christ in this context is the ultimate expression of self-emptying. It was love that prompted Him to put sinful humanity above Himself. He went to the cross to reach lost and sinful people. You and I need to go to the cross as well for the sake of our key relationships.

Here is the thrust of this context: Philippians 2:5 says, "Have this attitude in yourself which was also in Christ Jesus." This verse sets the tone of what follows. God expects us to live the same way Jesus did and bring selfless Agape love into every relationship.

Do not miss this point in the book of Philippians. It is Paul's basic thesis in this letter. God expects us to live with the same selfless Agape love Jesus and the early Christians had. Until you empty yourself of yourself you can never be a channel of Agape love. You will use religion to control and abuse people around you. Tragically, you will use the Bible to hurt rather than heal people. You will build walls rather than bridges. You will start treating your mission field like a battlefield. You will do more damage than good.

At some point you need to stop and do an honest and courageous inventory of your key relationships. If they are broken... the problem is within you!

If there are walls everywhere, you are not walking in the Spirit. If you have become critical and condescending, you are in desperate need of relational chemotherapy. You are in need of an infusion of Agape Love!

This has been the single most difficult challenge in my Christian life. Treating others with Agape love is not natural. After fifty years of walking with God, studying theology and ministering around the world, God is bringing me back to Agape love as the single most important ingredient in impacting others. This is the Jesus way!

### **Self-Emptying: Philippians 2:5-7**

"5) Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, 6) who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7) but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men."

The "self emptying" of Jesus Christ described in these verses contain one of the greatest theological mysteries in the entire Bible. It is based on the Greek word "Kenoo." It is an emptying that results in a permanent new state.

When Jesus emptied Himself of equality with the Father to take on the likeness of man, it was a long-term commitment. For example, is Jesus omnipresent today? Technically, He is standing at the right hand of the Father. (Acts 7:56) He is present with us through the Holy Spirit.

The self-emptying included leaving heaven to come to earth, stepping out of eternity, and entering into time, laying aside deity to take on humanity and moving from immortality to mortality for the sake of dying on a cross. Scholars and Bible students alike are fascinated with the full implications of the self-emptying of Jesus for the purpose of human redemption. Yet, during His public ministry, Jesus performed many signs and wonders associated with His divine nature. Multiple times He displayed words of knowledge and had authority over demons,

sickness, disease, and even the natural environment. He changed the weather and walked on water!

The big question is, “To what extent does the Holy Spirit allow us to share in His divine nature as manifest while on earth?” (See 2 Peter 1:4) Through the “kenoo”, He became what we are apart from the fallen human nature, that we might become what He is.”

This is the other side of the coin. The indwelling Holy Spirit transforms us into His glorious state. According to 1 John 3:1-2, when He comes we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is and be like Him. But beloved, now we are children of God. The morphosis begins in this life. At the moment of salvation, we are transformed out of the kingdom of darkness and into the kingdom of His beloved Son. (Colossians 1:9-14) Permanent change and transformation begins immediately by the inner working of the Holy Spirit.

This is the basis for relational change between believers. The indwelling Holy Spirit changes us from self centeredness to Christ likeness. That change should show up in every human relationship. That is why Paul included this discussion in the context of transformed relationships.

We should go through a self-emptying in our life and our relationships the way Jesus did. The old self is gone and the new self begins to emerge and take over. This new self is created in the likeness of God. (See Ephesians 4:29-24)

Now, apply this to the discussion of key relationships according to the context of Philippians 1-2. Paul is not asking us to try harder or do better, he is expecting us to be transformed by the inner working of the Holy Spirit into new people. This transformation should infuse Agape love into our relationships and radically change them.

If your relationships are falling apart, the change must begin in you. Invite the Holy to radically and permanently change you. The change in you will begin to impact your relationships.

### **The Name Above All Names: Philippians 2:9-11**

“9) For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, 10) so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11) and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

Jesus Christ is the name above all names. His name carries more authority and power than any other name.

At the mention of His name, every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.



It is the highest name in heaven. That's higher than angels. It is the highest name on earth. That means He is higher than humans, animals, sickness, disease, or any earthly phenomenon like wind, water, or fire. It is the highest name under the earth. That includes the devil, demons, and fallen angels. Jesus is higher than them all. This verse means all recognize Him and all will one day bow before Him.

He has no challenger, and He has no equal. Jesus Christ is absolutely higher. He is number one! And He has given His followers authority to live, walk, and minister in His Name. When unwavering faith is placed in His name, miracles happen. Mountains move, sickness flees and demons tremble. Learn who He is and take your stand on His Name!

### **Work Out Your Salvation With Fear and Trembling. Philippians 2:12-13**

“12) So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; 13) for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.”

Salvation is not earned by good works, but it takes diligence, obedience and hard work to embrace and apply the full benefits of salvation.

By grace, Jesus did everything on the cross and through His resurrection to purchase our salvation. But we cannot be passive in seeking and applying His precious and magnificent promises in our life. (See 2 Peter 1-2-11)

We need to roll up our sleeves, get focused, and engage our faith for the glory of God. We need to make knowing, obeying, and serving God our relentless pursuit.

Jesus ended His sermon on the mount with the story of two men building houses. Both endured the same storms. One house stood fast while the other collapsed. What was the difference?

One diligently acted on the word of God, the other did not.

At the moment of salvation, every believer has equal potential in Christ. Jesus is an amazing foundation. As Paul said in 1 Corinthians 3:10-15, some build on this foundation with gold, silver, and precious stone while others build with wood, hay, or straw. The difference comes down to the builder. Paul's admonishment in this text was for the builder to apply diligence when building your Christian life.

This amplifies the last phrase in Philippians 2:12; "... work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." If salvation is not working for you, it's most likely because you are not being diligent to apply truth and embrace every benefit of knowing Christ.

There is a huge promise in Philippians 2:13. God always works in what we work out. As you step out, He steps in. God always fulfills His role, the breakdown comes within us.

Spiritual growth doesn't just happen, it happens just according to what you put into it. Double down and build your walk with Jesus big for the glory of God!

### **The Poison of Grumbling and Disputing: Philippians 2:14**

"Do all things without grumbling or disputing;"

The problem with grumbling and disputing, murmuring, and complaining is that the flesh is in control. It gives way to a constant dripping of bad attitudes. It destroys momentum and kills vision. It is the expression of rebellion. There is no place for it in the church.

Paul mentioned this in 1 Corinthians 10:10. It was one of the big problems among some of the children of Israel who came out of Egypt under Moses. They were rebels.

They ended up being destroyed by the destroyer. They followed the rebellion of Korah. (See numbers 16.) Korah and his followers rejected both God and His choice of leadership. They disputed with Moses and challenged his authority.

Grumbles and complainers poison other people. They can never be pleased or satisfied. Nothing is ever good enough for them.

If you are a constant grumbler and complainer, then repent and die to self. The world is not about you!

### **Lights in the World: Philippians 2:14-16**

"14) Do all things without grumbling or disputing; 15) so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world, 16) holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I will have reason to glory because I did not run in vain nor toil in vain."

God wants us to be blameless and innocent in this world. We are to be "children of God beyond reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation." The contrast between a believer and the world should be huge!

We are to appear as lights in this present darkness. Why? Because we are the light of the world. (Matthew 5:14)

Think about this: The very first thing the Spirit of God did in the Bible was separate light from darkness. (Genesis 1:2-5) According to 1 John 1:5, "God is light and in Him there is no darkness at all." The moment the Spirit of God comes into a believer after being born-again, He starts separating light from darkness in our lives. The source of light abides in us.

Ephesians 5:8 says, "for you were formerly darkness, but now you are light in the Lord: walk as children of light." We become what He is! The next verse talks about the fruit of light, which consists of all goodness and righteousness and truth. After salvation we are to no longer participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness.

Furthermore, Colossians 1:12 says our inheritance is with the saints in light. Why? The very next verse says we are translated out of the kingdom of darkness and into the kingdom of His beloved Son. The Holy Spirit places us in the Kingdom of Light. Every Christian should shine like a lighthouse in the world. We are reflectors of the light of God.

Light and life are connected. Light is the source of life. (See John 1:3-4) God wants every Christian to hold forth the word of life as they go through each day. Let's keep it simple, just shine for Jesus and whenever or wherever possible share the gospel!

Much of this comes down to your attitudes. Stop grumbling and complaining and being sour about everything. If Jesus is in you, share the joy! It's contagious. The gospel is good news!

### **Becoming A Drink Offering For Others: Philippians 2:17-18**

"17) But even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with you all. 18) You too, I urge you, rejoice in the same way and share your joy with me."

Paul poured his life out as a drink offering for the sake of others. He was willing to sacrifice his time, resources, gifts, and talents so that others might be reached, strengthened, built up, and established in the faith.

His life was spent to defend and confirm the gospel message. (See Philippians 1:7) He was not selfish or self-centered. Eventually he became a martyr for the sake of Christ and the gospel.

In one sense, it was like pouring good wine out of a cup and onto the ground. To some, serving the Lord looks like a waste. But to Paul, it was a gift of service to God.

So it is with everyone who gives their time, talents, and resources to serve others. Paul gave so others could gain.

Many of his contemporaries gained the world, but Paul gained eternity both for himself and countless others. When you hold a Bible in your hands, you are holding the legacy of his

sufferings. Nearly 1/3 of the New Testament is the result of Him pouring himself out as a drink offering for others.

The sacrifices you make for the cause of Christ and the Great Commission are not wasted. God uses them for His glory.

### **The Joy Test: Philippians 2:17-18**

“17) But even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with you all. 18) You too, I urge you, rejoice in the same way and share your joy with me.”

Some have observed that one of the themes of the book of Philippians is “joy” or “rejoice.” Paul used these two words 16 times in this small book. That’s a lot. He was making a point!

It should be noted that joy is the second fruit of the Spirit mentioned in Galatians 5:22-23. It became a distinguishing characteristic of the early Christians and often showed up in the midst of persecution and suffering. (See 1 Thessalonians 1:6 and James 1:2-4)

Joy changes our perspective and is contagious. Paul found joy in pouring his life out to serve others and they in turn shared their joy with him.

Joy is not the same as happiness, but they are close relatives. Joy is not dependent on outer circumstances. It seems to be more the umbilical cord connecting us to the presence of God despite external circumstances. Joy is not the absence of suffering but the overflow of walking in the Spirit.

Love, joy, and peace are the most common denominators found among true believers world-wide. They are present despite poverty or prosperity, sickness or health, times of peace or times of persecution. To the natural person this seems odd.

This phenomenon is true because joy is a function of the spirit and not the body or soul. Happiness is more connected to the soul. The absence of joy is an indication that your spirit is not alive or functioning.

I question the salvation of an habitually grumpy and grouchy person. As mentioned, joy is one of the underlying themes of the book of Philippians. Paul was using joy as a measuring stick for a genuine relationship with God.

Be honest, do you pass the joy test? If you fail, I encourage you to run to the cross for a personal faith encounter with Jesus Christ. You might be religious but lost. The flesh cannot fake these crucial fruits of the Spirit.

### **The Example of Timothy: Philippians 2:19-24**

“19) But I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, so that I also may be encouraged when I learn of your condition. 20) For I have no one else of kindred spirit who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare. 21) For they all seek after their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus. 22) But you know of his proven worth, that he served with me in the furtherance of the gospel like a child serving his father. 23) Therefore I hope to send him immediately, as soon as I see how things go with me; 24) and I trust in the Lord that I myself also will be coming shortly.”

Paul now uses Timothy as an example of selfless service. He set himself aside to look after the needs of Paul. He served him like a son serving his father. He displayed the mind of Christ.

The result was that the gospel was greatly advanced. Paul was freed up from menial tasks so he could focus his time, energies, talents, and gifts on the ministry.

This was by no means a waste for Timothy. He was mentored by Paul Himself. In the process of serving Paul he learned how to minister to others and develop his own gifts.

Soon, Paul was sending Timothy out to lead an itinerant ministry. Paul sent him because he could trust his character, doctrine, and work ethic. He had proven himself and his servants' heart. He was a proven and fruitful disciple of Jesus Christ.

I take these six verses seriously. Paul was committed to Timothy's success. He later wrote two pastoral epistles to him. The books of 1 & 2 Timothy have shaped many pastors and spiritual leaders.

Paul made it clear in these six verses that the core qualities for ministry success came down to selfless and humble service of others. Self-promotion is contrary to the gospel. Putting others above self is the Jesus way.

### **Example of Epaphroditus: Philippians 2:25-30**

“25) But I thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger and minister to my need; 26) because he was longing for you all and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick. 27) For indeed he was sick to the point of death, but God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, so that I would not have sorrow upon sorrow. 28) Therefore I have sent him all the more eagerly so that when you see him again you may rejoice and I may be less concerned about you. 29) Receive him then in the Lord with all joy, and hold men like him in high regard; 30) because he came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was deficient in your service to me.”

Epaphroditus now becomes Paul's third example of selfless living and godly service. He had originally been sent from the church at Philippi to minister to Paul. In the process, he became sick and close to death, but risked his own life to fulfill his mission.

Paul regarded him as a fellow worker and fellow soldier. We have no idea what his sickness was, but he came close to death for the cause of Christ. But God had mercy on him and spared his life.

Was he healed or did he naturally recover? The text does not say, but Paul credits God for sparing his life.

Notice the word "joy" emerges in verse 29 again, Paul joyously sent him back from his imprisonment in Rome to Philippi. Paul went without for the sake of others. Are you starting to notice the depth of love, devotion, and consideration the early believers had toward one another? The Holy Spirit created a deep bond between them.

The message of the gospel translated into exercising Agape love toward one another. It became the tangible validation of their testimony of faith in Jesus Christ.

### **The Case For Rejoicing Always: Philippians 3:1**

"1) Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things again is no trouble to me, and it is a safeguard for you."

Paul again returns to the theme of rejoicing in the Lord. He returns to this theme again in Philippians 4:4; "Rejoice in the Lord always, again I say rejoice!" Why is "rejoicing in the Lord" so important?

First, rejoicing is a function of the spirit and not the soul. It ensures that you are walking in the spirit rather than in your flesh or soul.

Second, rejoicing in the Lord is the gateway to worship. It ensures that your focus is on God and not self or your circumstances.

Third, rejoicing in the Lord sets the direction for our emotions to follow. Our emotions are rooted in the soul, God is good whether our soul feels like it or not.

Fourth, rejoicing in the Lord can be an expression of our faith. It points our focus in a God-ward direction.

Finally, Paul stated that rejoicing in the Lord is a safeguard for us. It protects us from complaining, self-pity, or chronic pessimism. If we are not careful, we can become our own worst enemy.

So, is “rejoicing in the Lord always” disingenuous or simplistic? That’s a good question.

It depends on your true view of God! If you doubt His presence, power, and sovereignty, then it is pretentious. But if you know His sovereignty and immutability, it becomes logical to acknowledge Him in the face of every trial and opposition. In that case, rejoicing changes everything.

### **Beware of Evil Workers: Philippians 3:2**

“2) Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision;”

Rejoicing in the Lord and acknowledging His presence is not an excuse to become careless and sloppy with people. If you see a sign that says “beware of dogs”, it means there is danger ahead. If you proceed, you are likely to get bit!

Technically, the word “dog” in this verse meant a male cult prostitute. A “dog” was any man hired for a despicable purpose. There were evil workers and false Christians in the Roman Empire who infiltrated the church to prey on innocent and unsuspecting people.

On the one hand, we are to be loving, trusting, and gentle in our relationships. On the other hand, we are to be wise and discerning. We are to protect our hearts, family, and loved ones from spiritual, physical, and emotional abuse.

Physical and sexual abuse of children comes from people you may suspect the least. It is a good idea to have safety measures in place in your church and home to ensure safe boundaries. Simple precautions can prevent huge damage from evil workers who see Christians as easy targets.

### **Three Characteristics of True Believers: Philippians 3:4**

“3) Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision; 4) for we are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh,”

So, if we are to beware of evil workers and the false circumcision, who can we trust? Keep in mind, both Jesus and the early Christians suffered much at the hands of the Sanhedrin and Jewish religious zealots.

What Paul says in verse three is absolutely profound. He gives three characteristics of true believers and the body of Christ. Let's examine them carefully.

First, the true circumcision worship in the Spirit of God. They are characterized by the fruit and inner workings of the Holy Spirit. When I meet so-called "Christians" who are religious but have no understanding of or communion with the Holy Spirit, something is tragically wrong! The absence of the inner workings of the Holy Spirit is a huge caution light.

Second, those of the true circumcision glory in Christ Jesus. They don't mock or ridicule those who love Jesus Christ, rather they rejoice and glory together "in Him." Jesus is their common joy and focal point. True believers love and embrace Jesus Christ.

Third, those of the true circumcision put no confidence in the flesh. They are spiritual and not carnal. (See 2 Corinthians 2:6-3:3, Galatians 5:16-26) Carnal or fleshly governed people are void of Spirit no matter how religious they sound.

Paul was not impressed with religion. As he shares in the next several verses, he was devoutly religious before he met Jesus Christ and was transformed into a new man.

Let me say it clearly, Paul embraced Spirit-filled people who genuinely loved and worshiped Jesus Christ. In the absence of the inner flow of living water, he walked carefully. (See John 7:37-39) He suffered much at the hands of merely religious people.

If you do not resonate with or understand Scriptures like 1 Corinthians 2:4-13, Galatians 3:2-5, Galatians 5:16-26 and Philippians 3:3-16, something is woefully missing in your life. You are void of the Spirit. By biblical definition you are fleshly and carnal. You are religious but lost. You are part of the mission field and not the mission force.

Slow down and walk very slowly through Paul's personal testimony in Philippians 3:3-16. If you have not found a surpassing value in Jesus Christ, something is missing! You may be religious but your flesh is in control of your life. We may embrace the same theology, but we cannot worship together "in the Spirit."

### **Religious But Lost: Philippians 3:3-6**

"4) although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more: 5) circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; 6) as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless."

If salvation could be earned by religious works or self-effort, Paul had the perfect resume. He was Jewish, which meant he was one of God's chosen people.



His parents were Orthodox Jews and raised him according to strict adherence to the Law. He was circumcised the eighth day after birth and could trace his lineage back to Abraham through the tribe of Benjamin. He could prove he had a pure pedigree.

As to his devotion to the Law, he was a practicing Pharisee. His life was governed by strict legalism. He was quickly becoming a religious leader.

There was no question about his religious zeal. He had become a persecutor of the early Christian church. Acts 8:1-3 tells his story. He single-handedly led the charge to destroy Christianity at its inception.

He could brag that according to the external righteousness earned by strictly keeping the Law, he was blameless. He undoubtedly was no stranger at the temple and kept every Jewish holiday, sacrifice, and ceremony. If salvation could be earned, he had every reason to believe he was approved by God.

There is only one problem: He was blameless according to the Law, but his conscience still condemned him. There was a void in his life. He was driven but yet empty. He tried everything to gain salvation and approval from God, yet all of his works left a void in him. He had a huge void within that religion could not satisfy.

That all changed when he met Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus. He was changed into a new man. Through faith in Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit started changing him from the inside out!

His personal relationship with God was launched. The next several verses tell his story.

You might relate to Paul's story. You are going to your church, synagogue, or mosque trying to find God, but deep inside you know you are lost. You are going through the motions of religious devotion but are terribly deceived and empty. Only a personal relationship with Jesus Christ can fill your void. Stay tuned for the rest of Paul's story.

### **Surpassing Value of Knowing Jesus Christ. Philippians 3:7-9**

"7) But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. 8) More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, 9) and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith,"

Herein is Paul's testimony. Though he was blameless according to a works-based system of religion grounded in the Law, he threw it all away for a personal relationship with Jesus Christ based on faith. Paul did not go backward in spirituality, rather he made a huge leap forward. Compared to the surpassing value he found in knowing Christ Jesus, his previous system of religion amounted to sewage. It was a garbage heap. Those are strong words in the Greek language. His illustration is very graphic.

He was not only voluntarily willing to leave his previous system of Judaism behind, he was attacked viciously by his former colleagues. He became the new target of hatred against Christianity. He received the brunt of their savage attacks.

The amazing thing about these three verses is that Paul did not mourn what he lost, rather he rejoiced in what he gained in knowing Jesus Christ. He found a surpassing value.

Such is the case of every person who has been born-again unto new life in Christ. There is no looking back. The gains of knowing Christ far surpass any loss from the old life.

In the next section we will focus on what Paul gained in knowing Jesus Christ. But I want to stress from these three verses the intentional and complete way Paul crucified his old life. It was gone! He put it behind him. He viewed it as stinking sewage.

This is the meaning of repentance. It involves a complete and thorough turning from our former life of sin and self. Being double-minded will result in a huge inner war. You cannot embrace Jesus Christ while hanging on to your old life.

Ephesians 4:22-24 talks about putting off the old self, being renewed in the spirit of your mind and putting on the new self which is created in the likeness of God. I encourage you to study these verses. They embody what Paul was describing in his testimony here in Philippians.

Paul was not calling Christians into a journey he was unwilling to walk his own life. He was inviting all believers to embrace the surpassing value he found in knowing Jesus Christ.

We have access to the same grace and filling of the Holy Spirit that Paul received and lived in daily. We can share in the same value that surpasses all other values that Paul found in knowing Jesus Christ. It's within our reach!

### **Precious Values: Philippians 3:7-11**

"7) But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. 8) More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, 9) and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which

comes from God on the basis of faith, 10) that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; 11) in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.”

So what were some of the precious values that Paul found in Jesus Christ? Let's let the text speak for itself:

First, he gained Christ. He was no longer walking alone. Jesus became his personal Savior, friend and advocate. He found peace with God. (Vs 8)

Second, he found righteousness based on faith in Christ and not from trying to keep the Law. At the moment of salvation, Jesus imparts His righteousness to us through faith, so we no longer stand in our own self-righteousness as a basis of acceptance from God. (Vs 9)

Third, he was able to “know” Jesus Christ and the power of His resurrection. He had the power of God working in his life. The Holy Spirit was strengthening His inner man. (See Ephesians 1:19; 3:16-17) This power was the same that God used to raise Jesus from the dead. He walked and lived in divine power and authority. (Vs 10a)

Fourth, he was able to enter into the fellowship of His sufferings and be conformed to His death. He was able to pour himself out for others and for the gospel. He found cause and purpose in life. His struggles and sufferings were no longer in vain. God was working through him to change the course of human history. (Vs 10b)

Finally, he was able to attain the resurrection from the dead. He finally found absolute assurance of salvation before God. The wall between him and God was forever removed. (Vs 11)

To summarize, Paul lived and walked in the presence of God. The Holy Spirit empowered his life and delivered continual fellowship with God. For Paul, to live was Christ and to die was gain. (See Philippians 1:21-24)

None of these are the byproduct of mere religion. He was no longer driven by fear, tradition, or empty religious rituals. He was enjoying uninterrupted fellowship with God through Jesus Christ!

### **Press On: Philippians 3:12-14**

“12) Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. 13) Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, 14) I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Paul had a simple approach to the Christian life: "Press On." Never go backward.

Forget the past. It is gone. You cannot change it! You can learn from it. You can forgive and be forgiven. You can make things right, but you cannot relive it! At some point you need to break free and move on.

But, you need to make Jesus Christ and godly maturity your new goal. It's not a clean start so you can mess up all over again. If that's your attitude, nothing has changed.

Aim to glorify God with everything you do. Live your new life "in Christ." Put off the flesh that messed up your old life and start walking in the Spirit! Leave the kingdom of darkness behind and start walking in the kingdom of light. (Colossians 1:12-13)

We teach people to pull down the seven sinful strongholds of 1) deception, 2) rebellion, 3) anger and bitterness, 4) sexual immorality, 5) substance abuse, 6) pride and greed, and 7) every association with spiritism and the occult. You will never press on in life until you pull down these until these are pulled down.

With these pulled down, put on the new self which is in the likeness of God in righteousness and holiness of the truth. (See Ephesians 4:17-5:21) As you thoroughly do this, the hindrances to your spiritual growth will be removed and you can reach forward to what lies ahead. Don't fool yourself into thinking you can drag the rotting corpse of your old life behind you. It doesn't work! It will drag you down! Resolve your past, let go and move on.

From that point onward, press on and reach upward. Never ever go back. Reach upward toward your new calling "in Christ." If you want your life circumstances to change, then you must first change.

### **Transformed: Philippians 3:15-16**

"15) Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this attitude; and if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you; 16) however, let us keep living by that same standard to which we have attained."

The word translated "perfect" might better be translated as "mature" or "completed." The idea is fully embracing and living out the benefits of being "in Christ" to the point of living a transformed life.

This is not a static life or a life in neutral. It is fully embracing and living out Christ-likeness. It means that the Holy Spirit has transformed you into a new person. (See 2 Corinthians 5:17) The old life is gone and the new life has come.

The word “attitude” is much deeper than an emotion or feeling. It includes a new mindset, will and moral composition.

The Holy Spirit actively works to change us into a new person. Being born-again involves a metamorphosis in our life. Faith in Jesus Christ affects body, soul, and spirit.

Though this is a process, we can arrive at functional maturity in this life as Christians. We are to stop making excuses, going backward, or living double-minded. We are to press on and reach upward.

In this chapter, Paul contrasts his old life of legalism and self-righteousness to his new life “in Christ.” His new life was filled with faith, grace, Agape love, hope, and power. He had become a new man through the inner working of the Holy Spirit.

Becoming a Christian is the starting point of a new and transforming journey. The possibilities of growth and change are unfathomable. It is exemplified by the transition from Saul to Paul. Every believer should have a similar story.

### **Follow the Example: Philippians 3:17-19**

“17) Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us. 18) For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ, 19) whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things.”  
Philippians

Paul had an amazing personal testimony. He dedicated the previous sixteen verses in this chapter to his personal story. Jesus Christ had radically changed him.

He found a surpassing value in his relationship with Jesus Christ for which he was willing to lose everything in his former life. He let go of his past life and fully embraced his new life in Christ.

He was determined to lay hold of every blessing and benefit of walking with Jesus Christ in the Spirit.

Now, in these three verses he admonished every Christian to follow his example and that of other believers with a similar story. The Christian life works if you work it!

But you cannot remain passive. You cannot be double-minded. You cannot give your flesh an opportunity.

Paul then warns that there are many who started well, only to turn their backs on Jesus Christ. They become enemies of the cross of Christ.

Verse 19 is very sobering; “whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things.” What is the true testimony of their life? What kind of fruit are they producing?

Shortly, they defend and embrace shameful sins and set their minds on the things of the world. It is impossible to distinguish them from non-Christian's

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True salvation always produces the fruit of a transformed life. The Bible gives no guarantee of salvation to anyone who says they believe in Christ but live an ungodly life. Saving faith is transforming faith.

These three verses admonish us to pick the right godly examples to follow. Become an imitator of Christ and learn from the example of those who walk with Jesus.

A good practice is found in Hebrews 12:1-2. Learn from the great cloud of faithful witnesses, but fix your eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith. In the end, people will let you down, but Jesus never falters.

As a young believer, I knew a Christian man that I greatly respected and admired. I looked up to him as a spiritual example. He later walked away from Jesus for several years. It crushed me!

I humbly went to him and lovingly confronted him about his sinful ways. It was difficult to do, but it was the right thing to do. I was not willing to concede to his deception, excuses or self-justification. I was respectful but firm. That encounter planted seeds for his eventual repentance and return to Christ.

But that encounter was also important for me because it unmasked the deceitfulness of sin. I knew only too well that I was a candidate for the same shameful fall. I did not want his story to become my story.

God used it in my life as a huge warning. It motivated me to tighten up my boundaries and to fix my eyes completely on Jesus.

I walked away determined to win the battles within me. That encounter added fuel to my own freedom quest and longing to walk in the Spirit.

It set me on the Philippians 3:7-16 path. I needed Jesus to become my top passion and God's Word to become my foundation. I wanted to know Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit in my life.

I had to repent, confess and pull down some sinful strongholds in my own life. Then I had to silence the accuser of the brethren by forgiving and forgetting my past. Then it was time to “press on” and embrace my new life in Christ.

This sanctification process encompassed my first fifteen years of walking with Jesus. It was an intense battle, but it was worth it!

I am far from perfect, but completeness “in Christ” has come. I have left my Egypt behind and entered the promised land of unhindered fellowship with Jesus and walking in the Spirit.

We need testimonies like this! Every believer needs to know they can embrace and live in all spiritual blessings in heavenly places “in Christ.” The prayers of Paul in Ephesians 1:15-23; 3:14-21, and Colossians 1:9-14 can happen in your life.

Let me be blunt: If it is unattainable in this life, the Bible is a lie, the Christian life is a farce and we are forever stuck in sin and failure.

I reject that notion! Rather, I choose to walk the Philippians 3:7-16 path! I admonish you to do the same! This is the story of Paul and many others. It can also become your story.

### **Heavenly Citizenship: Philippians 3:20-21**

“20) For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; 21) who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.

By contrast to the backsliders in the previous verse, the overcomers focus on Jesus Christ and their heavenly citizenship. This begs the question of where you are setting your mind. In Colossians 3:2, Paul admonished believers to set their mind on things above and not on the things that are on earth.

At some point in your spiritual journey, this world will not be your home any more! The Holy Spirit will give you the mind of Christ and you will begin to embrace all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ. (Ephesians 1:3)

Your values will change and you will begin to crave the things of the Spirit much more than the passing pleasures of this present world. It is part of being born-again!

Bios life will be replaced by Zoe life. Let me say it this way: Physical and fleshly life will be replaced with spiritual life. Rivers of living water will begin to flow from your innermost being. (See John 4:13-14; 7:37-38)

The secret of Paul and the early Christians was that they started embracing and living in their heavenly citizenship while still in this life. They walked and lived in kingdom principles, blessings, and dominion while still in this world.

They also embraced the promise of the next life that will be ours when Christ returns and transforms us into our new and glorified bodies. We will be conformed into the body of His glory.

We will see Him as He is and be like Him. (See 1 John 3:1-2)

This mystery is unpacked in Scriptures like 1 Corinthians 15:42-58 and 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. We are going to put on glorious, immortal, powerful, and imperishable heavenly bodies. We will no longer be restricted to the physical realm with all of its limitations and suffering. The laws of physics will be replaced with the laws of the Spirit. Time and space will no longer be master over us!

I can only imagine. 1 Corinthians 2:9 gives a glimpse of the glory to come; “9) but just as it is written, “Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, And which have not entered the heart of man, All that God has prepared for those who love Him.””

But don’t stop there, the next verse says “For to us God reveals them through the Spirit.” The Holy Spirit helps us walk in heavenly citizenship while still in this life! Don’t wait until you die to embrace heavenly citizenship privileges, start embracing them now! This involves living in kingdom authority and blessings while still in this life.

I know this is a huge and fascinating study that we cannot fully unpack at this time. Ask Jesus to reveal these mysteries to you through His Spirit. He *will* answer your prayer.

But keep this thought in mind; “When He comes in His glory, we shall be like Him, but through His Spirit we can enter into the fulness of what He was and did when He walked among us.” We can be conformed to His likeness in this life. (Pause and read John 14:12) Stop being small in mind and spirit.

### **In This Way: Philippians 4:1**

“Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and crown, in this way stand firm in the Lord, my beloved.”

This verse belongs at the end of the previous chapter. What Paul says is connected to embracing our heavenly citizenship and future estate in our glorified bodies.

The Philippians were his joy and crown. Paul’s goal was to populate heaven. But he recognized that the journey from salvation to glorification was long and hard. This life has trials, hardships, and opposition.

So what was his secret to get home safely?



The final phrase says it all; “in this way stand firm in the Lord, my beloved.” The obvious question must be asked; “in what way?”

I believe he was referring to the Philippians 3:7-21 way! Make knowing Jesus Christ and the power of His resurrection your surpassing value. Forget your past and press on toward the goal for the prize for the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Live as a citizen of heaven and not of this world!

“In this way” you will stand firm in the Lord! It worked for Paul. It worked for the early Christians. And it will work for you and me!

The power of His resurrection involves embracing the ministry of the Holy Spirit. This is what moves us from surviving to thriving in this life.

“In this way” you and I can stand firm in the Lord.

### **The Key to Harmony in the Lord: Philippians 4:2-3**

“I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord. Indeed, true companion, I ask you also to help these women who have shared my struggle in the cause of the gospel, together with Clement also and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.”

As we have noticed, the book of Philippians deals extensively with interpersonal relationships. Paul talked at length about serving others and not promoting himself. Why? Most of the problems in our churches can be traced back to conflicts between people.

Such was the case in Philippi. Paul had to admonish Euodia and Syntyche to “live in harmony in the Lord.” Their names are not very common. Let’s have a little fun with this text by slightly changing their names to “irritable” and “soon touchy.” Some people are like that. They have a short fuse and are prone to tension.

As we look deeper at the text, we have a clue as to the root problem. These two were overworked. They were laboring hard with menial tasks in the church and most likely missing out on the worship, Word, and fellowship times. That often happens.

The solution was simple. Paul instructed the others to roll up their sleeves and help the overworked. The overworked included Clement as well. The principle is true that 20% of the people do 80% of the work in most churches. These become friction prone.

The cause of the gospel takes hard work. If we are not careful we can deceive ourselves into thinking that we are indispensable and in charge. The danger sign is that we become “irritable” and “soon touchy.” We take control, lose our joy, and begin to grumble and complain. The next thing that happens is that key relationships like our marriage and family begin to fall apart.

Beware! This is one of Satan's primary traps. If your marriage and family are falling apart, you are no longer serving Jesus Christ; you are merely serving your own ego or sense of self-significance. You are becoming part of the problem. You have lost your focus and calling.

Many gifted and hard-working believers are on the sidelines of life with ruined key relationships because they lost sight of basic biblical priorities and boundaries. In the end, they drop out of ministry and become angry, bitter, critical, and syndical. I have met many of them. They are harder to reach than non-Christians. They need love, healing, and restoration.

Are you in these verses? Paul included two groups of people in this context. The overworked and the lazy and uncommitted. Both positions are dangerous to proper spiritual growth and fruitfulness. Do you need to step back or step up? Either might be needed for Jesus to become your surpassing value and heart song.

### **Rejoice in the Lord Always: Philippians 4:4-5**

"Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near."

Paul returns again to his theme of joy and rejoicing. The timing for joy and rejoicing is "always." That doesn't leave room for grumbling, complaining, or pity parties. Rejoicing focuses on the Lord. Grumbling and complaining focuses on self.

To be clear, verse 4 is a command and not a suggestion. We are to rejoice in the Lord always. This spiritual discipline will take time to incorporate into your daily life, but it will transform your attitude and your outlook.

According to the first part of verse 5; it will result in a gentle spirit, peaceful, or tranquil spirit. Rejoicing always is the biblical treatment for stress, anxiety, and fear. No pharmacy can match the healing power of the discipline of rejoicing in the Lord.

But the big question is "Why?" What is the reason or basis for rejoicing? Without a logical reason for rejoicing the whole concept sounds disingenuous.

The last phrase in verse 5 identifies the reason. Paul based rejoicing on the fact that the "Lord is near" or "at hand." Rejoicing acknowledges and focuses on the presence of God!

Think about this: God is absolutely present both in terms of time and space! Both can be used to measure distance.

For example, if you were waiting for me to arrive at an appointment, I could text you and say; “I am five minutes away.” I just used time to express distance. Or I could say; “I am five miles away.” I just used space to express distance.

Let’s now use these measurements to establish the ever present nature of God. At any moment, how far away is God? Is He five minutes away? Is He five miles away?

You chuckle and say; “God is omnipresent. That means He is absolutely present both in terms of time and space.”

Bingo! You just discovered the reason Paul said we should rejoice always; “the Lord is at hand!”

Rejoicing both acknowledges and celebrates the absolute presence of God in your life and circumstances. It leaves no room for worry, stress, fear, or anxiety. Rejoicing focuses on God! Let me cite a quick biblical example. In Acts 16:16-24, Paul and Silas had a bad day. They were beaten in public and thrown in jail with their feet in stocks. That’s not conducive to a positive attitude or a good night of sleep.

But look at verse 25; “ And about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.” What happened next was miraculous. An earthquake shook the prison and all chains fell off and every door was opened. Even the jail keeper trusted in Jesus for salvation.

But there is more to the story: This is what started the church in Philippi. Paul practiced what he preached. I guarantee the recipients of Philippians 4:4-5 understood the power and value of “rejoicing always.”

So, how are these two verses going to impact your life? Are you ready to live and walk in the presence of God? If so, then you better learn the secret of rejoicing in the Lord always! This spiritual discipline can radically change your life!

### **Conquer Your Anxiety: Philippians 4: 6-7**

“6) Be anxious for nothing, 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 comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

These verses contain a unique answer for stress and anxiety. Paul’s simple outlook was; “Why worry when you can pray?” You don’t have to be anxious about anything when you learn the secret of praying about everything.

Make sure you season your prayers with thanksgiving. Because God is and He is compassionate, powerful, and in control, He invites us to bring our requests to Him. In doing so, we make God responsible for the results. The outcome is His responsibility and not ours.

When we sincerely bring our requests to Him, He promised to flood us with the peace of God. His peace trumps our worry, stress and anxiety.

But this kind of praying does something even more amazing. It becomes a guard around our heart and mind. What does that mean?

God's peace becomes a garrison guard to protect us from our own racing emotions and futile thoughts. Worry makes us our own worst enemy.

He replaces our racing emotions and futile thoughts with faith and truth. Our job is to "let the peace of God rule in our hearts." (See Colossians 3:15) Sincere prayer can conquer stress and anxiety.

But there is another thought that must be understood. We do not pray simply as a means of self-hypnosis. We pray because God answers prayer. Though prayer does help change our attitude, God also answers prayer over things of which we have no control.

Such was the case of Elijah as mentioned in James 5:17-18. He prayed and God changed the weather. We pray because God has power to change things over which we have no influence.

### **The Battle of the Mind: Philippians 4:8**

"Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things."

God wants us to take control of our thinking. Racing and random thoughts are Satan's playground.

This verse lays down high standards for our thought life. It also exposes that the battle is in the mind.

This verse started me on the path of renewing my mind. (See Ephesians 4:23) It provides boundaries for right thinking. It has been a long battle, but my thought life is radically different than in the early years of my Christian life.

According to this verse, my thoughts should be true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, and good. If they are not, I consciously reject them and change my mental script.

This verse opened up a new level of freedom and moral purity for me. The following are five powerful lessons I've learned about my thought life.

First, I discovered that I could control my mental script. If my spirit does not control my thought life, my flesh and soul have an automatic “go to” menu.

Second, I discovered that if I did not control my mental script, it would control me. What I dwell on mentally affects my attitudes and actions.

Third, I discovered that my mind was like a garden. I need to choose my mental seeds carefully and constantly pull weeds. I am very selective about what I allow into my mind. I no longer feed on mental junk food.

Fourth, I discovered that a consistent pattern of positive and wholesome thinking set my life and relationships on a different course. As a man thinks in his heart so it happens in his life.

Finally, I came to realize that God holds me accountable for every thought, word, and deed. That means I am responsible for managing my thought life. If you want to change your life, take control of your thinking!

A good starting point is memorizing Philippians 4:8. It screams that our minds matter to God! The battles of life are won or lost in your mind!

### **Imitating Paul: Philippians 4:9**

“9) The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.”

If this sounds like a mundane verse, buckle your seat belt!

Most of us have the false notion that we could never have a walk with God like Paul or be used by God the way he was. The truth is that we do not understand the gospel, discipleship, or the power of God.

In Matthew 10:24-45, Jesus said; “(24) A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a slave above his master. 25) It is enough for the disciple that he becomes like his teacher, and the slave like his master...” Jesus set out to make His followers just like Him.

In 1 Corinthians 11:1 Paul said; “Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ.” That sounds a lot like Jesus in the two verses above.

Now back to our text in Philippians 4:9. Paul lived, taught, and modeled “Christ likeness.” He was being sincere when he told them to apply and practice what they saw and heard in him. He was living out the gospel of the kingdom. He was teaching the gospel of the kingdom. (See Acts 28:23 & 31) He was teaching them to embrace all the principles and dynamics of living in the kingdom of light. (See Colossians 1:9-14)

The gospel is more than “believe in Jesus Christ and you will be saved.” That is a confusing and watered down message. It includes a whole new way of life. It is not merely leaving Egypt, it includes entering a spiritual Promised Land.

Jesus preached “the gospel of the kingdom.” (See Matthew 4:23) He then modeled kingdom living. He was full of holiness, power, and miracles. He then commanded His followers to live the same way. How is that possible?

The gospel is living and walking in kingdom truth, light, love, dominion, and power. According to Acts 1:3; Jesus spent time between his resurrection and ascension teaching them things concerning the kingdom of God. He was coloring in the full details of the life that awaited them after Pentecost.

Paul taught people how to put off the old self of walking according to the kingdom of darkness and to put on the new self which included walking in the fulness of the kingdom of light. (Colossians 1:9-14)

This is how Paul and the early Christians understood the gospel. It was more than a mere salvation message. It was a new way of life lived out according to the power of the Holy Spirit. Paul taught new Christians to understand and embrace the full scope of kingdom living. He was living kingdom life and he was teaching them to walk in the same dynamics. He was duplicating himself.

If you doubt what I am saying, study the words “kingdom” and “gospel” through the New Testament. Many times they will appear together. A glorious revelation awaits you of the life God calls us into.

You and I are called to be like both Jesus and Paul. We are called to kingdom living. Raise your understanding of your potential and calling “in Christ.” Don’t surrender to the enemy called “average.”

### **Trusting Jesus as Provider: Philippians 4:10**

“But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned before, but you lacked opportunity.”

With this verse, Paul begins to talk about the subject of financial support. He was a faith-biased missionary, totally dependent on God to supply his needs as he and his team set about itinerant ministry in spreading the gospel.

Sometimes he worked with his own hands to raise money to support himself in ministry. (See Acts 18:1-3; 1 Corinthians 4:11-12; 1 Thessalonians 2:9; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-10) He and his

team did whatever was necessary to earn money to support their own way in ministry. In the Bible, hard work has dignity!

Other times Paul and his team were supported by gifts sent from churches they had planted or from fellow believers. Either way they saw God as the Provider. Sometimes God provided in the form of a job. Other times He provided through missionary gifts.

At the time of his writing this Epistle, Paul was in prison in Rome. Some of his expenses were provided by the state of Rome, but he had to raise the money for his rented quarters and food beyond a common prison cell. Again, God provided for the Apostle.

In this context, Paul is thanking the church in Philippi for stepping up and sending financial support. As this context unfolds, we gain huge insight on the calling every Christian has to be a giver.

My wife and I have been faith-based missionaries for nearly 40 years. We have watched God supply our needs in miraculous ways. We raised a family of eight children and traveled the world in evangelistic work as faith based missionaries.

GoServ Global which I helped start back in 2010, is also a faith-based ministry. We are totally donor supported.

Many volunteers work with us. They are the backbone of GoServ Global. My cofounder is self-supported as a farmer. He gets no compensation from GoServ Global. I do not get a salary from GoServ Global either, but have to trust God for my own monthly support.

Dennis Anderson, who is our Domestic Disaster Relief Director often works long hours on the side to raise additional resources for himself and his ministry position. He is a faith hero as well.

The funds for every project we undertake are raised by faith. We are thankful for the many donors and churches God has raised up to stand with us in reaching the world with the good news of the gospel. This ministry would be impossible without them.

At this point, we do not take administrative overhead out of gifts given for orphan support, projects or national staff in other countries. We are dependent on undesigned gifts from faithful donors to help underwrite our staff and administrative expenses.

Why do I share this information? We know first-hand what it is to live in Philippians 4:10-20. We are 100% dependent on God as Provider. We also have the joy of being givers from our own resources.

In order to do this, my wife and I sacrifice, live debt-free, drive old vehicles, shop clearances, buy used items, and often work with our own hands to make ends meet. We also have the joy of giving to help others.

God is so good! He has taken care of us for over 50 years of ministry in miraculous ways. We can tell hundreds of stories of God's amazing provisions reaching back to our early days of ministry and marriage. God is so good!

Jesus cares for you as well. He wants you to know Him as Provider. Some He blesses greatly so they can give greatly. This also is a journey of faith.

Others learn faith through poverty. This also is a great journey of faith. He wants the body of Christ to be one and serve Him in love, faith, purity, and unity.

No matter your situation in life, Jesus is calling you to get to know Him as Lord and Provider. This context in Philippians has amazing insights for every Christian. Stay tuned as we unpack biblical principles for trusting Jesus as Provider.

### **The Secret of Contentment: Philippians 4:11**

"11) Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am."

You will never be happy with what you get if you are not content with what you've got!  
Contentment is one of the secrets of happiness.

This does not mean that you no longer "press on" or "reach higher" for the glory of God. It simply means that you enjoy every leg of your journey.

Seek God first and foremost and trust Him with your external circumstances. This is especially true during times of trials and persecution such as endured by the early church.

Philippians is the book of joy and rejoicing, yet Paul wrote it while being a prisoner in Rome. His external circumstances did not diminish the inward joy he found in Jesus Christ nor did it taint his view of the love of God.

Keep in mind, the context is about giving. Some people say "I will not give until I get a surplus." If Jesus is not Lord of your giving now He will never be Lord of your giving in the future.

External circumstances are a terrible condition for joy, praise and worship. Why? They are constantly changing. If you cannot develop an attitude of thanksgiving with what you've got you will never be satisfied with what you get!

Come to the point where you love, worship and celebrate God despite your external circumstances. This is a key to walking in the spirit and not the flesh. This was the phenomenon experienced by the early church. (See 1 Thessalonians 1:6)



## **The Full Spectrum of “All Things.”: Philippians 4:13**

“11) Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. 12) I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. 13) I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.”

God gave Paul the grace both to enjoy great blessings and endure severe trials for the sake of the gospel. His life in the cause of the gospel was full of both extremes.

To fully understand what Paul meant in the above three verses, it would be helpful to pause and read 2 Corinthians 11:22-33 followed immediately by 2 Corinthians 12:1-10.

This guy endured unimaginable persecution and suffering for the cause of the gospel. By contrast, he was often blessed with spiritual revelation and power like few others in his walk in the Spirit. There were times he was treated like a prisoner and other times he was treated like a king.

He had learned to be content and rejoice in Jesus on both sides of the spectrum. He could both go hungry and be beaten for the cause of Christ and the gospel, and he could dine with dignitaries and enjoy company with kings and magistrates for the cause of Christ and the gospel.

He had “learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need.” (Philippians 4:12b)

His external circumstances did not affect his internal joy or relationship with Jesus. He walked and lived in the spirit and not the flesh. His citizenship was in heaven and not on earth. He embraced Jesus and not the value system of the world.

With this background, we can now understand the meaning of Philippians 4:13; “I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.” Paul was saying Jesus gave him the grace and strength to both endure beatings and speak before kings.

He could literally “do all things through Christ who strengthened him.” (Philippians 4:13)

Therefore, he was willing to go where others wouldn’t go and endure the unthinkable for the cause of Christ. He also enjoyed fellowship with God on a level most Christians deem unimaginable. He lived in the constant fullness of all spiritual blessings in the heavenly places in Christ no matter his circumstances on earth. (Ephesians 1:3)

Years ago, I heard Warren Wiersbe make the statement that “more people pass the test of adversity than prosperity.” I have found that to be true. The suffering church enjoys much more

glory in the presence of Christ than the spoiled church. I see great danger in the Laodicean church. (Revelation 3:14-22)

We all want to claim Philippians 4:13, but few want to live on both sides of the coin of blessings and sufferings. We love the idea of prosperity, but we shun the thought of persecution. "All things" applies equally to both sides of the spectrum.

### **Accept the Challenge: Philippians 4:14-16**

"14) Nevertheless, you have done well to share with me in my affliction. 15) You yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the gospel, after I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone; 16) for even in Thessalonica you sent a gift more than once for my needs."

Ministry takes money. Food, travel, lodging, and facility costs can add up. When these verses are examined, the people and church in Philippi became a consistent financial support for Paul and his ministry team.

If you go back and look at the historical record in Acts 16-17, Paul and his team left Philippi as a new church and headed to Thessalonica. They were in Thessalonica for only three weeks preaching the gospel. There was no time to find jobs or create an income to become self-supportive. So how did they survive? Philippians 4:16 says those new believers back in Philippi sent regular gifts to help underwrite the spread of the gospel. That's amazing!

Think about this, the new believers in the church back in Philippi stepped up and made giving and mission support a priority! They supported Paul and his team as they went to Thessalonica.

But wait, as Paul wrote this text, it was now at least ten years later and they were still underwriting Paul and the spread of the gospel even though he was in prison. Let me make two observations:

First, giving and stewardship should start right away in the spiritual journey of every believer. Don't wait. You will never connect with the giving heart of God until you become a giver to His work.

I became a believer at age 16. I had a great work ethic and God led me to start giving right away. I made giving tithes and offerings a spiritual discipline immediately. Even after getting married and raising a family, we maintained the priority. We have discovered the faithfulness of God in taking care of us and our needs for over fifty years.

Why have I made giving such a priority in my walk with God? It is partly because I want Jesus to be my first passion. He taught that where your money is there your heart will be also. (Matthew 6:20-21) I want Jesus Christ to be absolutely # 1 in my heart and life.

But we have been faithful givers because Malachi 3:8-12 talks about robbing God by not giving. Then, in the context, God invites His people to test Him through faithful and consistent giving. He promises to be the abundant supplier for them. We accepted the challenge! For over fifty years God has been so faithful and good to us!

Second, gifts should be consistent and regular. Ten years later Paul was still receiving regular and faithful support from the church in Philippi. That enabled him and his growing team to devote full time to ministry. This may be part of the reason the church in Philippi was baptized in joy! Nothing compares to the joy of giving.

Let me encourage you to become a consistent giver to your church and to mission endeavors dedicated to the spread of the gospel around the world. Find a ministry that God is using and join them by faithfully giving and thereby make an impact for the glory of God. Accept the challenge!

### **The Blessing of Being a Giver: Philippians 4:17**

“(27) Not that I seek the gift itself, but I seek for the profit which increases to your account.”

Paul understood the blessing of being a giver and building godly disciplines into his life. God loves a cheerful giver! (See 2 Corinthians 9:6-8) It is impossible to out-give God!

Paul was not encouraging them to give because he was greedy or needy. He trusted God to supply all of his needs!

Paul was encouraging them to become faithful givers to the spread of the gospel, because it is the surest means of tapping into the grace of God as Provider. (See verse 19) Giving is an essential discipline for every believer who strives for godliness and spiritual maturity.

Giving is part of the character and nature of God. (See John 3:16) He loves us so much he gave His only begotten Son.

If you want true profit in your life, become a giver. That's exactly what Paul said in this verse. He wanted the “profit” which increased to their account! The more you cheerfully give, the more seed God gives you for a fruitful harvest on every plane in your life. (See 2 Corinthians 9:10-11)

This is not a health, wealth, and prosperity message, it is solid biblical truth. Giving does not mean you will never have trials or shortcomings. Cheerfully giving to what matters most to the heart of God means you will walk in His favor and reap eternal rewards.

### **Becoming the Supply Chain: Philippians 4:18**

“(18) But I have received everything in full and have an abundance; I am amply supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent, a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God.”

Paul was not greedy. He did not exploit ministry or people as a means to gain personal wealth or to get rich. He personally sacrificed to spread the gospel. Because of his itinerant lifestyle, he most likely had few personal belongings and owned no property. His citizenship was truly in heaven.

As a result, his support needs were small and it didn't take much to have an abundance. He was able to tell the Philippians that his needs were fully supplied.

What they gave was pleasing to God. It was a fragrant aroma. It was an acceptable sacrifice. They had become his primary support base.

Can you imagine the return on investment being the primary support for the Apostle Paul and his ministry team?

This brings up an important point. Have you ever thought about becoming the primary support for a third-world pastor and his family? What about an entire church? It can easily be done.

The average income of a pastor in many countries around the world is \$100 to \$200 US dollars a month. A church building can be built for between \$25,000 and \$35,000 US dollars.

I know of a few privately-owned businesses that provide the full support for 300 to 800 third world pastors and evangelists. It's amazing. These Christian business owners are not only godly, they are being greatly blessed.

The challenge is vetting the recipients and making sure they are theologically sound, morally pure, and financially responsible. Often, it's good to have a wall of separation between the recipient and the giver to prevent reverse exploitation. There are many clever scams among some third-world Christian workers. We have heard many heart breaking stories.

I have a dream of GoServ Global becoming a vetting and accountability organization to connect godly donors with approved workers. We already have orphan sponsorships. This has been heavy on my heart for a long time.

But there is another urgent twist. The United Nations and other organizations are trying to close down orphanages. In some cases they place children in private homes. Unfortunately, I suspect many end up caught up in the ravages of human trafficking.

Think with me!

What if we could merge godly pastor and Christian worker sponsorships with orphan care? Granted, we would need some guidelines, oversight, and accountability, but the potential and timing for both is urgent. Why?

Let me make another observation about our text today in the book of Philippians: The context related to helping Paul through a time of unimaginable persecution and suffering. He was a prisoner in Rome.

We have four factors colliding today making the need for such a program very urgent and timely. They are: 1) poverty, 2) persecution, 3) wars and natural disasters, and 4) escalating human trafficking. In my fifty-plus years of being a Christian, I have never witnessed times like these.

Here is a daunting realization: Western Christians have the resources to address these needs. A third-world pastor and his family could be fully supported for the price of a cup of coffee a day. God would look at this as an acceptable sacrifice and fragrant aroma.

This burden is so heavy on my heart that I am currently in a time of extended fasting and prayer. A vision is being birthed within me. Together we can make a difference, especially if GoServ Global can continue our current practice of delivering 100% of every specified gift directly to the need.

I fully suspect that Epaphroditus delivered 100% of the gift and supplies from the Philippians to Paul! There is a biblical principle in this verse. GoServ Global is an Epaphroditus ministry.

Join me in prayer and reach out to me if this post resonates with you! Together we can make a difference!

### **Aligning Yourself with the God's Blessings: Philippians 4:19**

"19) And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus."  
Philippians 4:19

Many try to claim this verse without honoring the context of first being a giver to meet the needs of others. Paul is thanking the believers in Philippi for their faithful gift to meet his needs.

There is a principle in the Bible that says God abundantly meets the needs of generous givers to the needs of others, especially those giving to the spread of the gospel. Let me encourage you to study 2 Corinthians 8-9. These chapters contain God's supply system.

I would couple that with Malachi 3:8-12. In these verses God asks us to test him with a faithful tithe. Those who put God first in their finances will experience two things.

First, God will open the windows of heaven and pour out His blessing until it overflows. His blessings come in many areas and many ways.

Second, God promises to rebuke the devourer that destroys your increase. That is so important. The devourer can work against you. People can become rich but be miserable! Life is not about money!

I also encourage you to study the teaching of Jesus on the subject of finances and giving. The most comprehensive text is found in Matthew 6:19-34. Wise is the person who invests this life in storing up treasures in heaven.

In Philippians 4:19, Paul was not talking randomly. He was observing that by becoming part of God's supply chain the Philippians were positioning themselves under the blessings of God.

It should also be noted that Paul promised that God would meet their needs and not their greed! Needs have a very broad spectrum. It includes family, friends, food, clothing, shelter, peace, joy, and health.

By contrast, greed has a very narrow perspective. It boils down to personal net worth. Judas got a lot of money but in the process he became a traitor. Beware of what you become in the pursuit of what you want.

### **Paul Closes the Book of Joy and Rejoicing: Philippians 4:20-23**

“20) Now to our God and Father be the glory forever and ever. Amen. 21) Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brethren 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.”

Paul now closes the book of Philippians with four short verses. In doing so, he says four very important things.

First, he gives all glory to God the Father. He recognized the plan of salvation originated with Him. (See John 3:16-17)

Second, he greeted the saints in Christ Jesus and sent greetings from them. The word “saint” means a “holy one.” Faith in Jesus Christ makes people holy both inwardly and outwardly. Keep in mind, he was writing to a group of former criminals he met while in jail in Philippi.

Third, he pointed out that many in Caesar’s own household had become believers. Paul called them “saints!” And so the seeds of the gospel were being firmly planted in Rome. Within a few hundred years, Rome was destined to adopt Christianity as its official state religion. God was at work in unimaginable ways and places.

Finally, he blessed them by saying, “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.” This is very enlightening. Paul blessed their spirit and not their body or soul. This adds weight to the idea that walking in the spirit is first and foremost the renewed human spirit taking governorship over our lives.

The Holy Spirit indwells the newly alive human spirit at the moment of being born-again. He imparts Zoe life. Everything changes at the moment of salvation. Grace begins to flow through our spirit into every area of our lives.

And so the book of joy and rejoicing is finished. What an amazing book. God has used it to feed, bless and inspire many of His holy ones over the centuries.