



The McColl Series

PHILIPPIANS

A Pastoral Commentary

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The McCol Series

Started in McCol, SC in 2025, **The McCol Series** is a collection of short, pastoral commentaries based on the sermons of Taylor Drake. Each volume explores how the Gospel is uniquely presented in the individual books of Scripture. These books are also not exhaustive and should be used supplementally to other, more rigorous commentaries. The McCol series is designed around the **Wesleyan Quadrilateral** to ensure the message, context, and application of the text are clearly understood.

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Philippians:

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Prologue: The Wesleyan Quadrilateral

The Wesleyan Quadrilateral is a hermeneutical tool to help Christians address matters of doctrine and life. Though John Wesley (1703-1791) did not create this system, his followers noticed a constant pattern in his studies as described below:

1. **Scripture** – The primary and most important source of truth.
2. **Tradition** – The wisdom and practices passed down through the Church.
3. **Reason** – Using clear thinking and logic to understand faith.
4. **Experience** – Personal and communal encounters with God.

John Wesley emphasized that **Scripture is central**, but the other three help interpret and apply it. In other words, Scripture is the primary means of knowing and understanding the Christian faith, and all beliefs and practices must have their foundation in “the whole counsel of God.”

However, Wesley also understood that there were many **Traditions** within the Church that, while disagreeing with ours with the Christian faith, still had merit. Wesley also believed that **Reason** should not be left outside the faith, but rather that the two should inform each other. Finally, Wesley did not ignore **Experiences** but recognized that individual experiences help us determine certain beliefs and practices within the faith.

Following Wesley’s example, these volumes will break down each chapter into **4 Sections: Scripture, Tradition, Reason, and Experience**. We hope that believers will not only find these books helpful but also enjoyable.

Unless specified, the author will be utilizing the *New Revised Standard Version (updated edition)* for scripture reference.

Additionally, in chapter citations will be foregone in favor of a **Bibliography** compiled at the end of this book.

1. Context: Paul & Philippi

If the Gospel is the music, Paul is the conductor. He has not written the notes, but he helps the Church understand the melody, the tempo, and the tone, and he teaches us to carry the music of Christ wherever we go.

After receiving a vision of a man begging for help, Paul goes to Philippi in Macedonia (modern-day northern Greece) in Acts 16, along with Timothy, Silas, and Luke (author of The Gospel According to Luke and Acts). There, these four Christians planted the first European church; they baptized Lydia and her household; Paul and Silas were beaten and thrown into prison, only to be freed by God; the jailer and his household were baptized; Paul and Silas revealed to the Philippi magistrate that they were Roman citizens; and then they left the city.

Years later, while in prison again (this time in Rome and probably at the end of his life), Paul writes a letter to the Philippians and, despite his circumstances, it has become one of the most celebrated correspondences of joy ever written. In fact, Paul is writing the equivalent of a “Thank You” card for a simple reason: the church in Philippi has sent him money to ease his imprisonment. At this time, Roman prisons did not provide food, water, or other amenities: these had to be purchased or provided for or by the prisoners. Prisons were not places of punishment as they are today; they were places of waiting for trial. Readers can almost feel Paul’s gratitude in every word.

But, Paul also takes this opportunity to remind the Philippians why he is in such a predicament: the Gospel. For Paul, everything built up to and flowed from the good news of Christ’s death and resurrection. In this letter, Paul weaves **four themes** through his thankful message:

1. Heavenly Citizenship Over Roman Citizenship:

Philippi was a Roman colony, inhabited by wealthy military veterans. It also had a growing poverty population who did not receive all the benefits of Roman citizenship, which included rights to fair trials, legal appeals to the Emperor, protection from crucifixion or other “barbaric” punishments, and safety from arbitrary arrest and abuse (like Paul and Silas experienced). Additionally, Roman citizenship allowed for birthright citizenship, owning property, and possibly voting or holding public office. Roman citizenship was not granted to

everyone within the Roman Empire. To be a citizen of Rome was considered a very high honor. But, Paul reminds the Church that no matter how good it was to be a Roman citizen, to be a citizen of Heaven was a better honor; to suffer with Christ was more valuable than to loaf in the comforts of the Empire. Rome would one day end; the Kingdom of God is eternal.

2. **The Church is a Fellowship:**

The Gospel is a communal story, even when it's personally believed. The Church is repeatedly referred to as "the Body of Christ." The Christian life is not to be lived in isolation or even in competition with other believers. Rather, Christians have been saved to the community of God, in partnership with each other, to share the good news of Jesus Christ's death and resurrection. No other story truly saves us; no other story truly identifies us. Paul encourages the Philippians to keep on doing the good works they're doing: don't stop! Sin is easy; holiness takes effort. Continue being the Church together!

3. **Humility:**

Paul never misses an opportunity to encourage his readers to compare themselves only to Christ Jesus. What does faithfulness to the Father look like? Christ Jesus. What does suffering well look like? Christ Jesus. What does humility look like? Christ Jesus. While there is nothing wrong with finding inspiration in other Christians, we must always remember that Jesus is not only our Savior and King, but that he is also our model for true humanity. For many, humility is a thing to achieve; however, humility is far more subtle and surprising. A humble person doesn't try to be humble: they try to obey God's commands and do good for their neighbors. Jesus shows us true humility, and we would do well to follow his example.

4. **The Gospel Changes Everything:**

The Gospel is simple: Christ dies for us while we were still sinners. Because of this straightforward message, the Church has been able to explore its application and implications in every area of life: vocations, governments, practices, philosophies, economies, etc. This has led to the idea that everyone "knows" the Gospel. Unfortunately, this is not the case. Each generation must be reminded of the atoning work of Christ Jesus on behalf of believers, and even mature Christians need to be reminded from time to time. The Gospel touches every area of our lives, whether we want it to or not. And this should cause believers to rejoice in all circumstances.

So, in gratitude and joy, Paul and Timothy pen this letter to the church they planted, to thank them for their generous financial gift and to encourage them to “keep the faith.”

Philippians is also a unique letter of *consolation*. While the Philippians have comforted Paul in his distress, he comforts them in theirs. Both Paul and the Church are consoling each other from their own places of persecution. This idea is not unique to Philippians, but weaves throughout the Prophets and Epistles: suffering produces something good by God’s redemptive work.

As a final thought, in John Wesley’s “General Rules”, he prescribes three rules for believers to follow, regardless of circumstances or situations: 1) *Do No Harm*, 2) *Do Good*, and 3) *Stay In Love With God*. These three principles are immensely helpful for practically living out a gospel centered life where suffering is normal and rejoicing is a choice. I think Paul would find great comfort in Wesley’s ‘rules’ as they point believers towards the Gospel as the means by which they can find their daily joy.

Questions for Discussion:

1. Which of the four above themes do you wrestle with in your daily walk with Christ Jesus? Why do you think that is?
2. Is there an aspect of the Christian faith that makes you nervous? Perhaps witnessing, being made fun of, “messing up,” etc.?
3. How do you practice rejoicing because of the Gospel?

Notes:

2. 1:1-11, A Personal Gospel

Scripture:
Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all God's holy people in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart and, whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me. God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.

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

Tradition:

As mentioned above, Paul and Timothy are writing a letter to the members of the church they planted in Philippi. They introduce themselves as “servants of Christ Jesus.” However, a better translation of that particular Greek word would be “slave.” Knowing that Philippi is a town that prides itself on having many Roman citizens, this greeting would have been a shocking reminder of where a believer’s loyalty truly lies: Jesus is Lord, and Caesar is not.

The letter continues with a wonderful affirmation: Paul remembers this Church, in particular, from among the other Christian communities he has helped found. Why? Because they are his partners, and not just his partners, but Christ’s partners. How are they Christ’s partners? By believing in the Gospel story, and by doing so,

being convinced that Christ Jesus, and that Christ Jesus, alone, will sustain them until either their deaths or his return.

Paul also believes his affection for this community of believers is a good thing. Why? Because they are all sharing in God's grace. It doesn't matter if they have money or are poor, if they are mature or recent converts, if they understand everything about God or have doubts, all believers experience God's grace through Christ Jesus.

So, Paul tells the Philippians what he is praying for them: Grow in love! Grow in discerning right from wrong through knowledge of God! Grow the good fruit of righteousness!

R **eason:**

If Paul had not believed in the power of the Gospel, he would not have committed his life to sharing the good news through missionary journeys and planting churches. This may seem obvious, but the point deserves our attention: *each believer must believe the Gospel*. The Gospel is personal in that it affects each of us directly. Christ died for "us," yes, and "I" and "you" are a part of "us."

Who Is Your King?

Paul reminds the Philippian church that they are citizens of Heaven before they are citizens of Rome. Their loyalty is not first to Caesar but to Christ. This truth was radical in a Roman colony built on pride, privilege, and power. To call Jesus Lord was to declare that Caesar was not. What the world calls salvation - wealth, success, security - Christ calls slavery. And what the world calls enslavement - surrender, obedience, and holiness - Christ calls freedom. We will all serve someone. The only question is who. Whoever we serve, we begin to resemble.

Who Are Your People?

Faith is never solitary. Each believer must personally receive the Gospel, yet none of us walks alone. Paul writes to the saints - plural - to a people joined together in Christ. Personal identity in Christ is discovered within the Body of Christ. We are individually together, each saved personally yet placed in community. The Gospel is not mine or yours alone; it is ours. God has saved each of us as His people, not isolated souls but a unified family - the Church, the new humanity in Christ.

Who Are You Working With?

Every life partners with something — either with Christ or against Him. Paul draws the contrast clearly:

1. God's enemies are the Devil, the World, and the Flesh.
2. God's work is love, truth, and redemption.

The Devil opposes God as the great antagonist of our faith.

The World organizes itself in rebellion, fostering pride, greed, and self-worship. *The Flesh* is our fallen nature, resisting God's purposes and clinging to sin. To partner with Christ is to join His mission and to bear the fruit of His Spirit: "Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control." IN obeying God, we are the antagonists of the Devil, the World, and the Flesh.

Obedience to God is the natural outflow of salvation. It is seen in the fruit of the Spirit and in care for the poor and marginalized. Where Rome despises, the Church prizes.

Who Gets Your Prayers?

Paul's prayers reveal his priorities - and they should shape ours. He prays that love would abound, that believers would grow in wisdom, holiness, and affection for both God and neighbor. True spirituality leads to deeper love. If our worship and gifts do not move us to love God and our neighbors more deeply, we have missed the Spirit's true work. As William Seymour once said, "*The Pentecostal power, when you sum it all up, is just more of God's love. If it does not bring more love, it is simply a counterfeit.*"

We pray to the One in whom we place our hope. Prayer is not a wish list but a faith-filled alignment of our will to God's will. So we must ask honestly: Whose will do I really want done - mine or God's?

E xperience:

dfghjJesus Is Our King, and We Are His Servants

Obedience to Christ and care for others are the marks of faithfulness. To obey Christ is not extraordinary — it is simply what we were made to do. Our purpose is to live as willing servants under a gracious King.

We Are God's "Others"

Like Abraham, we are chosen - not for privilege, but for purpose. God set Abraham apart to bless the world, and He sets us apart to do the same.

We are not spectators but partners in God's work. To partner with Paul is to partner with Christ Himself. So the question remains: Whose business are we about - our Father's or our own?

Our Prayers Reveal Our Priorities

Prayer always discloses the heart. What we value most shows up in what we pray for - and how we pray. Do we pray like Paul, whose petitions overflowed with gratitude, love, and intercession?

Do we pray like Christ, who said, "Not my will, but Yours be done"?

To whom do we carry our fears and worries? If to God, then we can trust His answers - whether *yes*, *no*, or *not right now*. Faith-filled prayer submits to God's timing. It chooses trust over control. It rests in the truth that our King hears, our King reigns, and our King is good.

Questions for Discussion:

1. What does it mean for you, practically, to live as a citizen of Heaven rather than of the world?
2. How do your daily prayers reveal what matters most to you — your will or God's?
3. In what ways can you partner more fully with Christ in His work of love, justice, and redemption?

Notes:

3. 1:12-20, An Unstoppable Gospel

S

cripture:

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

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

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

T

radition:

The church in Philippi was discouraged. When Paul and Silas were once imprisoned in Philippi (Acts 16:11-40), they were beaten, shackled, and yet sang praises to God. In response, God broke their chains and set them free. That moment burned in the Philippians' memory - an image of divine deliverance and victory.

Now, however, Paul sits again in chains. But this time, the chains remain. The believers expect God to act as He had before, yet Paul's imprisonment stretches on for years instead of a day. Confused and disheartened, they wonder if the Gospel has stalled, if Paul's ministry has failed, and if God has forgotten His servant.

In a society obsessed with power and status, Paul's apparent fall, from bold missionary to lowly prisoner, looks like defeat. But Paul assures them that what seems like failure is actually God's strategy. His imprisonment, he says, has advanced the Gospel, not hindered it.

Like Joseph in Genesis 45:5, who saw that God had sent him into Egypt "to preserve life," Paul recognizes divine purpose in his suffering. The whole imperial guard has heard the Gospel. Others, emboldened by Paul's courage, now preach Christ fearlessly.

Some preach from pure motives - love for Jesus and Paul - while others preach out of selfish ambition, hoping to elevate themselves or even spite Paul. Yet Paul rejoices all the same, for Christ is being proclaimed. Whether by love or rivalry, the name of Jesus is spreading.

Paul's faith is unwavering: whether in life or death, Christ will be exalted. God's will - not Paul's comfort - governs the story. The Gospel cannot be chained.

R eason:

Paul's chains did not silence him; they became his pulpit. Everyone who came into contact with him - guards, officials, fellow prisoners - heard about Jesus. Across Scripture, this truth repeats: nothing can stop God's Word. Not imprisonment. Not persecution. Not even death.

From the suffering of the prophets to the martyrdom of the apostles, from the cross of Christ to the courage of Paul, the Gospel advances through suffering, not around it. God transforms pain into proclamation.

Faithful suffering creates faithful believers. Paul's courage ignites courage in others. His boldness in chains makes the message credible; his endurance makes the Gospel believable. Courage is contagious.

Paul shows that the Good News is worth more than comfort or survival. His example reminds us that trials often inspire faith more deeply than success ever could. What matters most is not how we suffer, but whether we suffer well - trusting that God will use even our pain to magnify His Son.

False Gospels Will Arise - But Christ Remains Supreme

Wherever truth spreads, falsehood follows. Even in Paul's day, preachers arose who distorted the Gospel for selfish gain. Yet Paul's response is striking: Rejoice that Christ is being preached.

History is filled with false teachers and heresies, yet none has stopped the advance of the Good News. Pride and ambition will always attempt to infiltrate the Church, but Jesus has no rival. The truth prevails. Our task is to discern, stay focused, and keep proclaiming Christ.

For Paul, the Gospel itself is the goal - not fame, not safety, not even survival. Whether through prosperity or persecution, he desires that Jesus be magnified. As John Wesley once said, "The world is my parish." For Paul, and for us, Christ exalted is all that matters.

E xperience:

Every believer suffers - but do we suffer like Paul, or like the Israelites who grumbled in the wilderness? In suffering, the world watches closely. Our response becomes our witness. Faithful endurance today may lead someone else to faith tomorrow.

Paul, like Jesus, found joy in suffering. We are called to do the same: to practice what we preach and live what we believe.

Do You Spend More Time Correcting or Sharing?

Paul faced opposition, false teachers, and rivalry. Yet he rejoiced whenever Christ was proclaimed. Likewise, we must not be distracted by competition, hypocrisy, or hostility. Stay focused on Jesus. Keep spreading the Gospel. Let God deal with the rest.

What Matters Most to You?

Is your greatest concern your reputation - or Christ's glory? Your comfort - or your faithfulness?

Paul declares, "To live is Christ, to die is gain." (Philippians 1:21) To live means to exalt the name of Jesus; to die means to be with Him. Jesus Himself said, "Whoever loses their life for Me and for the Gospel will save it." (Mark 8:35)

Putting Christ at the center of your purpose brings freedom and joy. It frees you from anxiety and striving. You were made for one

purpose: *to magnify and glorify the name above all names - Jesus Christ.*
Even in suffering, especially in suffering

Questions for Discussion:

1. How does Paul's example in chains challenge the way you view hardship or delay in your own life?
2. What does it look like to "suffer well" in a world that values comfort and self-preservation?
3. In what ways can your response to trials help others see that the Gospel is unstoppable?

Notes:

4. 1:21-30, A Patient Gospel

S

cripture:

For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me, yet I cannot say which I will choose. I am hard pressed between the two: my desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better, but to remain in the flesh is more necessary for you. Since I am convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with all of you for your progress and joy in faith, so that, by my presence again with you, your boast might abound in Christ Jesus because of me.

Only, live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that, whether I come and see you or am absent and hear about you, I will know that you are standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel and in no way frightened by those opposing you. For them, this is evidence of their destruction but of your salvation. And this is God's doing. For he has graciously granted you the privilege not only of believing in Christ but of suffering for him as well, since you are having the same struggle that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

T

radition:

The question, “*Why do bad things happen to good people?*” has echoed through every age. Scripture reframes that question by asking: *What are bad things - and who are good people?*

In truth, “bad things” are the fruit or evidence of a fallen creation and brokenness born from humanity’s sinful nature and the rebellion of fallen angels. And as for “good people,” none exist apart from Christ, as Paul reminds us in Romans 3:23, “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” In this fallen world, there are two kinds of people:

1. Those who repent and believe in Jesus Christ, and
2. Those who refuse and continue in rebellion against God.

Paul does not call his suffering “bad,” but “necessary.” His trials serve to spread the Gospel and strengthen the Church. For the believer, whatever happens after salvation is not punishment - it is sanctification. God uses even our suffering as an instrument of holiness to make us more Christlike, though at the time we may not see how.

R eason:

Suffering will end - eventually. It is not eternal. There is a proverb that says, “Life is hard. Suffering is normal. God is good.” At first glance, these three truths may seem almost contradictory, but they truly coexist without contradiction.

For Paul, suffering finds its end not in escaping life through death, but in the completion of his life, culminating in death. Death, for Paul, is not defeat but fulfillment: the moment when he will be with Christ fully and completely. While many fear dying, Paul’s great fear is that we will live a life unworthily of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, especially since we are Christ’s and Paul’s partners in sharing the good news.

Yes, heaven will be wonderful, but it is not here yet. Death will come, but it will not only usher in the end of life - it will bring about the beginning of eternal life. Until that day, we have good news to share, and there is still time.

Time. Time itself may be one of God’s greatest kindnesses to us: continuous opportunities for repentance, obedience, and transformation. Every moment of life after salvation is a gift of sanctification - a chance to be made more like Christ.

E xperience:

Paul teaches that both belief and suffering are privileges. Alone or in community, in public or in private, the question remains: Are you living a life worthy of the Gospel of Christ?

This does not mean sinless perfection, but humble obedience, repentance when you fall, compassion toward the needy, prayer for those you love, and those who oppose you. A Gospel-worthy life is one of continual confession, repentance, and service.

Death comes for us all, and while it is certain, it is not ultimate. The believer need not fear death; we should fear a life lived unworthily of the Gospel. Death will only catch you once. The next time you meet it, it will be as a conquered enemy - cast forever into the lake of fire.

Patience, or “long-suffering” in Greek, paints an image of “enduring without complaint.” Unfortunately, we are expert complainers. However, our model of patience is not ourselves, but is Christ Himself upon the cross. You can be patient as He was because His Spirit lives within you. Yet patience does not mature in comfort; it is learned in suffering.

Therefore, let your trials be your teachers, and your endurance be your witness. Whatever happens after salvation is for your sanctification. Let us be quick to obey God and to care for our neighbors. Let us endure with patience the suffering that refines us, and wait with hope for either Christ’s return or our own home-going. For everything that happens after salvation - every trial, every delay, every cross we bear - is not in vain. It is the Spirit’s work of sanctification, preparing us to see Christ face to face.

Questions for Discussion:

1. How does Paul’s view of suffering as “necessary” challenge your understanding of hardship in the Christian life?
2. In what ways can patience and endurance become acts of worship rather than mere survival?
3. How might viewing time as “God’s kindness” change the way you live day to day?

Notes:

5. 2:1-11, A Humble Gospel

S

cripture:

If, then, there is any comfort in Christ, any consolation from love, any partnership in the Spirit, any tender affection and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or empty conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,

*who, though he existed in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be grasped,
but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
assuming human likeness.*

*And being found in appearance as a human,
he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death—
even death on a cross.*

*Therefore God exalted him even more highly
and gave him the name
that is above every other name,
so that at the name given to Jesus
every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.*

T radition:

Paul goes out of his way to make one thing clear: believers have the mind of Christ because of the Holy Spirit. This is why his earnest desire is for us to walk in the Spirit as Christ did - in humility.

Humility: Knowing Thyself Rightly

True humility begins with “rightly knowing oneself,” which is probably why true humility is so difficult: we are very good at lying to ourselves about ourselves and our circumstances. True humility is not the deceitful posture of smallness to receive praise, nor the despair of doormat self-esteem, which says, “I am nothing, of no good.” Genuine humility, or kenosis (Greek for “to be emptied”), is a self-understanding grounded in the truth of God’s Word and Spirit.

The Roman gods, heroes, and even citizens (as the members Church in Philippi prided themselves in being) never stooped to serve others—they demanded honor and glory. But Christ shows a different kind of majesty: the humility of a God who stoops to save.

The Humble God

Only God can save, and therefore only God does save. *This* is the Gospel. In Jesus’ obedience - subjecting Himself to the Father’s justice though innocent and blameless - we witness the humility of God Himself. God always rightly knows himself within the triune Godhead. He does not act out of weakness but out of love: “I should, so I will. They can’t, so I shall.” In Christ, humility is perfectly revealed. When Jesus “emptied himself,” He did not cease to be God; rather, He demonstrated what it means to be truly divine and truly human. He humbled Himself, not by losing His divinity, but by thinking rightly about Himself and submitting to the Father’s will.

Paul’s description of Christ is scandalous to the Philippian church: a humble God? Can such a being exist? Yes, and it is Christ Jesus. God considered us more important than Himself. This is the humble Gospel: God is both sacrificer and sacrifice. He both gives up the most and suffers the most for his enemies, because they are worth it. Paul presses even further with his implication: *this is the outcome of faith in Christ, that we would imitate his humility in our everyday lives.*

R eason:

Humility allows us to participate in the life of God by acknowledging our dependence upon Him. It brings order to our thoughts and balance to our actions. Without humility, reason becomes arrogance; with humility, reason becomes worship.

Three Enemies of Humility

In our daily lives, three great enemies threaten humility: doubt, fear, and pride.

Doubt says, “*I know better than God.*” It believes our imagination, or perception, is more trustworthy than God’s vantage. Now, doubt is not always a sin. However, it is always an opportunity to either trust more deeply in the Gospel story or to reject it and take matters into our own hands.

Fear says, “*I see better than God.*” It assumes that because we cannot perceive God’s presence in our future, He must not be there, and so we take matters into our own hands. Like doubt, fear is not always a sin, and in those moments when we encounter fear, we will either trust more deeply in the Gospel story or reject it and take matters into our own hands.

Pride, the final enemy, says, “*I am better than God.*” It arises because of our fallen nature. This kind of pride is always sinful because it suggests that God is not who He says He is and He does not do what Scripture tells us He does.

E xperience:

For believers, Christ is both the perfect revelation of the humility of God and the perfect prophetic model of truly humble man.

The Mind of Christ

How, then, do we cultivate “the Mind of Christ”? *By listening and believing what God says about us.* This “mind” is given to us by the presence of the Holy Spirit, read about in Scripture, and fostered within the Body of Christ - His Church. Humility accepts God’s word as reality, even when our experience or emotions protest otherwise. To live humbly is to live truthfully before God - trusting

His declarations of who we are and what we are worth. *Whatever God says about you is truer than what you say about yourself.*

Questions for Discussion:

1. How does Jesus' example of humility challenge the way we think about strength, power, and self-worth?
2. In what ways do doubt, fear, or pride prevent you from having "the mind of Christ"?
3. What would it look like in your daily life to truly believe what God says about you rather than what you say about yourself?

Notes:

6. 2:12-18, A Bright Gospel

Scripture:

Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence but much more now in my absence, work on your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

Do all things without murmuring and arguing, so that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, in which you shine like stars in the world, holding forth the word of life so that I can boast on the day of Christ that I did not run in vain or labor in vain.

But even if I am being poured out as a libation over the sacrifice and the service of your faith, I rejoice, and I rejoice together with all of you; in the same way also you should rejoice and rejoice together with me.

Tradition:

Sanctification is the ongoing work of God within us, shaping us into the likeness of Christ. It's both His work in us and our work with Him. Paul writes, "It is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill His good purpose" (Philippians 2:13). God's work is our salvation - from beginning to end - and our response is obedience from beginning to end. His work in us is our joy, and our obedient response is His joy. This partnership doesn't earn our salvation; it expresses it. Sanctification is a holy rhythm: God transforms us inwardly, and we walk it out daily in faithfulness.

Growing in Spirit-Led Obedience

Spiritual maturity is not about age or knowledge, but about alignment - placing God's preferences above our own and yielding to His Spirit's direction. Paul tells us to "walk by the Spirit" so that we "will not gratify the desires of the flesh" (Galatians 5:16). As we grow, our obedience becomes less about rule-keeping and more

about relationship. We learn to desire what God desires. Maturity means embracing Spirit-willed obedience, even when it's uncomfortable. It's about letting God refine our motives, soften our hearts, and shape our priorities until we reflect His Son more clearly in thought, word, and action.

Shine Like Stars: Living as God's Messengers

Throughout Scripture, stars and angels symbolize light and a divine message. Angels announce God's will - at the Nativity, at the Resurrection, and in Revelation - and they worship and serve Him faithfully. Daniel declares, "Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever" (Daniel 12:3). Likewise, believers are called to "shine like lights in the world" (Philippians 2:15), reflecting the glory of God to a dark world. When we live wisely, love deeply, and lead others toward righteousness, we become living messengers of God's truth - stars that point to His light, not our own.

Responding Rightly: The Discipline of Self-Control

While we can't control every circumstance or person, we can control our own responses. Proverbs teaches that "a man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls" (Proverbs 25:28). Spiritual maturity means choosing faithfulness even when emotions pull elsewhere. We can't always stop the first thought, but we can decide the second; we can't always manage the situation, but we can manage our spirit. These choices matter because they reveal our hearts - to ourselves, to others, and to God. The fruit of the Spirit includes self-control (Galatians 5:22-23), meaning that every Spirit-led response is an act of worship and witness.

R*eason:*

Paul's instruction in Philippians 2:12-13 calls believers to participate reverently in their sanctification. To "work out" salvation means to cultivate it - to live out what God has already worked in. Growth doesn't happen by accident; we grow up *on purpose* in Christ. God is already working in you, shaping your desires and empowering your will. Our part is to respond in

obedience, not resistance. When we cooperate with His work, His joy becomes ours, and our faithful obedience becomes His delight.

The message every believer carries is the Gospel: “Repent and believe the good news” (Mark 1:15). Our message is one of hope - God forgives sinners and redeems the broken. The implication of this message is staggering: you are worth saving, not because of your merit, but because of His mercy. “While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). God believes you are worth His time, His love, and His attention. Therefore, our lives and words should echo His invitation to the world - repentance, restoration, and relationship through Jesus Christ.

What we rejoice in reveals what we treasure. Jesus said, “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matthew 6:21). Follow your emotions and spending, and you’ll find your idols; follow what you celebrate and what you condemn, and you’ll find your ideals. True joy is rooted not in circumstances but in Christ Himself - “Rejoice in the Lord always” (Philippians 4:4). When we rejoice in what God rejoices in - justice, mercy, humility, and salvation - we align our hearts with His. And even when joy is hard to feel, we can rest in the truth that God is with us always, working in all things for our good.

Experience:

While the last passage’s focus was on humility, this passage’s focus is on obedience. The two belong together. Humility bends the knee before God; obedience walks forward in faith. Jesus modeled both perfectly - He “humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:8). As we follow Him, we discover that obedience is not a burden but a blessing, not a duty but a doorway into joy.

Questions for Discussion:

1. How do I work out my salvation in fear and trembling?
2. What message do I bring?
3. How and in what do I rejoice?

Notes:

7. 2:19-30, A Communal Gospel

S

cripture:

I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I, too, may be consoled by news of you. I have no one so like myself who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. All of them are seeking their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But Timothy's worth you know, how like a son with a father he has served with me in the work of the gospel. I hope therefore to send him as soon as I see how things go with me, and I trust in the Lord that I will also come soon.

Still, I think it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus—my brother and coworker and fellow soldier, your messenger and minister to my need, for he has been longing for all of you and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill. He was indeed so ill that he nearly died. But God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, so that I would not have one sorrow after another. I am the more eager to send him, therefore, in order that you may rejoice at seeing him again and that I may be less anxious. Welcome him, then, in the Lord with all joy, and honor such people, because he came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up for those services that you could not give me.

T

radition:

At its best, tradition is not about nostalgia—it's about continuity. Every generation of believers receives the Gospel, not as a museum piece but as a living message, entrusted to them for safekeeping and transmission. The Christian faith is a generational story: from the patriarchs to the prophets, to the apostles, to the church today, the faith has been handed down through people who lived it out before others.

Generational Gospel: Living the Shema

In Deuteronomy 6:4-9, God's people are commanded: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one... You shall teach [these words] diligently to your children..." The Shema reminds us that

faith is not first taught in sermons or schools - it's formed in homes, through daily rhythms and ordinary faithfulness.

Faith is modeled; models are imitated; imitations become habits; habits become character. What we consistently live before others becomes the faith others will learn to imitate. Every believer, parent, mentor, or friend participates in this spiritual lineage. This is both a biological and spiritual calling. Parents model faith for their children, but believers also model it for spiritual sons and daughters in the faith. Both lineages matter in the Kingdom of God.

Speak Well of Fellow Believers

Our words either build or break the household of faith. Scripture calls us not only to “speak the truth in love” but also to *speak well* of one another. The Apostle Paul gives us a beautiful example: in Philippians 2, he celebrates Timothy and Epaphroditus publicly.

Timothy, Paul’s “true son in the faith,” mirrors his mentor’s heart. Paul says there is no one else like him - he genuinely cares for others’ welfare.

Epaphroditus, a messenger from the Philippian church, risked his life to serve both Paul and the Gospel. Even in grave illness, he embodied selfless devotion.

Paul takes the time to honor them, not out of flattery, but to model what Gospel encouragement looks like. *“Complaining is easy; celebration takes work.”* Paul could have focused on his hardships or the failures of others. Instead, he lifts faithful servants to show the church what love and partnership in the Gospel really mean. How different would we feel if our first instinct were to celebrate rather than criticize?

The Gospel or Nothing

At the core of all this modeling, mentoring, and mutual encouragement is the Gospel itself: the story of Christ’s death and resurrection, our sin and salvation. Without the Gospel, all our efforts to pass down faith or build character are hollow. But when the Gospel fills the center, everything else - our teaching, imitation, and encouragement - comes alive with purpose. The question is not whether we are passing something down, but *what* we are passing down. The only inheritance worth giving is Christ Himself.

R eason:

The faith we model should be one rooted in obedience and trust, not merely belief in words. James reminds us that “faith without works is dead” (James 2:17), and Jesus said, “Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:16). The faith we demonstrate daily—through our patience, forgiveness, humility, and integrity—teaches others what it truly means to follow Christ. Like Paul, we should be able to say, “Imitate me, as I imitate Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1). A modeled faith is not perfect, but it is sincere, repentant, and steadfast in hope, showing others that the Gospel transforms ordinary lives.

Our words reveal our hearts, and Scripture calls us to use our speech to build up, not tear down. Paul commands, “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up” (Ephesians 4:29). Gossip, criticism, or harsh words grieve the Holy Spirit and fracture the unity of Christ’s body. Instead, we’re called to “encourage one another and build each other up” (1 Thessalonians 5:11), speaking with grace and truth. When we speak well of fellow believers, as Paul did of Timothy and Epaphroditus, we honor Christ Himself, who prayed for our unity in John 17. Our speech should sound like citizens of heaven—words that heal, honor, and point others toward Jesus.

To value the Gospel is to treasure Christ above everything else. Paul wrote, “I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord” (Philippians 3:8). The Gospel is not one truth among many- it is *the* truth that gives meaning to all things: that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8). When we value the Gospel rightly, it shapes our priorities, our joy, and our mission. It compels us to share the good news and live lives that reflect its power. To love the Gospel is to love the God who gave it - because it tells the story of our rescue, our redemption, and our eternal hope in Christ.

E xperience:

It was once said, “*The Christian life is the most mundane life.*” There is wisdom in the saying, to be sure.

The radicalness once experienced of the new life in Christ slowly becomes our everyday habits and routines. This is not a bad thing! It's actually quite comforting. God did not call believers to an "exciting" or "thrilling" life (though I'm sure there will be moments of excitement and thrills, planned or otherwise). Rather, God has called us to a holy life: a life of prayer, compassion, forgiveness, love, obedience, and intentionality. We do not have to fill our faith with exotic moments; we are to be filled and continually filled by the Spirit who gives us the mind of Christ. The most surprising thing about our life will be just how different it is from the rest of the world. We live differently because God has made us different.

Questions for Discussion:

1. What faith are you modeling?
2. How do you talk about fellow believers?
3. Do you value the Gospel?

Notes:

8. 3:1-11, A Knowable Gospel

S

cripture:

Finally, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is not troublesome to me, and for you it is a source of steadfastness.

Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of those who mutilate the flesh! For it is we who are the circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and boast in Christ Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh — even though I, too, have reason for confidence in the flesh.

If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

T

radition:

Paul does not “pull his punches,” as it were. Even in this letter, which overflows with love and affection, he is adamant: it is only the Gospel that saves God’s people from their sins and to eternal life. Which begs the question: who are God’s people? The answer is perhaps cliché to some, but it demands to be reiterated: God’s people are those who hear the Gospel and believe.

The Gospel + Nothing Else

A repeated theme woven throughout Paul's epistles is that nothing *can be added* or *needs to be added* to the Gospel for it to be "the power of God to save" (Romans 1:16). It is pride, and even vanity, to believe that the Gospel is partially sufficient for salvation. This is why Paul warns the Philippians about the "dogs," the "evil workers," and "those who mutilate the flesh," all of whom were people or groups who wanted to add to the Gospel narrative, which would stop it from actually being the Gospel, deforming into something else entirely.

Knowing vs. Knowing

Imagine having a cookbook, and after reading and rereading the ingredient list and the cooking instructions, memorizing every word and step, you never actually cooked the dish! While you may have *knowledge of information* about the dish, you don't have *knowledge of experiencing* the dish.

It is the same with God. There are plenty of people who have information about God but who refuse, or at least suppress and resist, experiencing him. The same idea is used in the Old Testament when a husband and wife "know" each other. That word "yada" in Hebrew means to know relationally, intimacy, and personally. In other words, a husband and wife know each other uniquely in comparison to those who know the spouses generally. So too is it with God. Our "yada" of God, and more importantly, His "yada" with us, is what separates His people from the rest of humanity.

It's important to remember, as Robert Jenson reminds us, God is both knowable and available to be known.

Reason: Why is Paul so adamant about the preservation of the Gospel? Why does he offer so many warnings about the Philippians (and others in his letters) to protect their hearts and minds from the corruption and pollution of a distorted Gospel? I think it is because even Christians can be misled, though I am convinced that if they are truly seeking truth, they will eventually return to the pure Gospel.

The Gospel Will Last

All other stories end; the Gospel only continues. It is only when we conclude our own stories apart from God's great narrative that our true tales begin. The Gospel will endure long after all institutions close, after all nations crumble, after all strivings cease.

There, at the “end of all things,” will be God and His people. The story is eternal because God is.

The Rest is Rubbish

Paul uses an interesting word when he writes, “*I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish*” (emphasis mine). The word, which is translated to rubbish in the Greek, is *σκύβαλον* (pronounced *skoo'ball'uh*). “Rubbish” is a polite translation, as there is debate among scholars as to whether or not Paul is cussing. Why the debate? *σκύβαλον* means *dung, fecal matter, and even manure*, but with a “slang” tone. However, the imagery is what is shocking, and the word encapsulates that illustration. Paul is clear: faith in Christ is all that matters. It informs everything about Believers: tastes, habits, preferences, activities, identity.

This emphasis that everything outside of faith in Christ is “rubbish” should remind the Philippians, and us, that, as B.B. Warbled notes, “Man provides only the sinner to be saved: God provides the entire salvation.” Believers have God’s righteousness given to them through faith; they do not bring their own, as if God would be impressed with our actions or works, which were carried out in our rebellion against him. No, “am I good enough to be saved” is a question that should never be in the believer’s mind since the question comes from a place of selfish preservation and not of holy affection.

E xperience:

If we’re being honest, the Gospel is often “too good to be true.” We agree that the world, and ourselves, are thoroughly rotten, in need of saving and fixing. The initial idea that all we must do to be saved is “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved” (Acts 16:31). However, what that “belief” entails is far from “too good to be true.” In fact, that belief is the most precious thing a believer has been given. We must protect it, preserve it, re-tell it, remember it, celebrate it, cherish it, teach it, share it. For if we are not careful, we will bring our rubbish to God’s story, thinking we are bearing treasure.

Questions for Discussion:

1. How difficult am I making it to be a Christian for myself and others?
2. Do I have *information* about Jesus, or do I have *intimacy* with Jesus?
3. Which story am I telling: Mine or Christ's?

Notes:

9. 3:12-4:1, An Imitable Gospel

S

cripture:

Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal, but I press on to lay hold of that for which Christ has laid hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider that I have laid hold of it, but one thing I have laid hold of: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal, toward the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus. Let those of us, then, who are mature think this way, and if you think differently about anything, this, too, God will reveal to you. Only let us hold fast to what we have attained.

Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us. For many live as enemies of the cross of Christ; I have often told you of them, and now I tell you even with tears. Their end is destruction, their god is the belly, and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself. Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved.

T

radition:

Many earnest Christians misunderstand what the believer's reward is. I remember hearing how "heaven is my reward," since it is there that believers will experience eternity with God. This, though the cause of much joy, is false. Revelation depicts a new heaven *and* a new earth, fused, inseparable, as intended. It is in this new heaven and new earth where the reward is lived out. Again, the new heaven and new earth are not the reward! They are where the reward is experienced.

Resurrection is the Reward

Paul depicts the goal, the reward, the prize of a faithful life is the *resurrection of the body*. This is why he reminds the reader that he hasn't obtained the reward: he's not yet physically dead, and the

resurrection of the dead has not yet happened. The resurrection of Jesus is the promised, even prophesied, reward for believers: we will be like Jesus in this respect. Paul famously writes in his first epistle to the Corinth church,

“...and if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation is in vain and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified of God that he raised Christ—whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised. If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile, and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have died in Christ have perished. If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.”

The *death* of Christ is not what separates Christianity from all other religions: it is the *resurrection* of Christ.

Christianity is Discipleship

“Follow the Leader” is a staple of childhood games. The premise is simple: there is a “leader” and whoever they go and whatever they do, so too do the “followers.” In other words, while there is only *one* leader, and the rest are followers, the leader and followers are going in the same direction and doing the same actions. Paul encouraged the Philippians, and by extension, us the readers, to follow him because he is following Jesus! At its most basic premise, a disciple is “one who imitates the one discipling.” So, as Jesus disciplines Paul, Paul disciplines us, and we in turn disciple others, creating a perpetual lineage of “following the leader.” This is what the citizens of heaven will be like: eternal imitators of Christ, forever following Him.

R*eason:*

If the resurrection is indeed the reward, what are we to make of the business of heaven and hell?

Heaven is Not the Reward & Hell is Not the Punishment

As stated previously, heaven is not the reward: the resurrection is. So, with this in mind, what are we to make of hell? We should think of it in the same terms: hell is not the punishment, but it is where the punishment is experienced. So there are “already citizens” of both heaven and hell.

Citizenship always reveals something about where a person belongs. The way we think, the way we speak, and the way we live all quietly (or loudly) declare what kingdom we truly represent. In the same way, our lives are meant to be a living preview of heaven - an advance showing of what is to come. To live as a citizen of heaven, then, is to live prophetically, saying to the world with both our words and deeds, "Here's what comes next... follow me." We do not boast because we are perfect and not because we always get it right, never stumbling, or never sinning. Rather, we invite others to follow Christ not on the strength of our performance, but on the certainty of Christ's love displayed in His death and resurrection. We are being discipled, working out our faith, convinced of the love of Jesus Christ in His death and resurrection. And when the lingering question rises - "But what about my _____?" - the answer of citizenship remains the same: leave _____ behind! Heaven is ahead, and we are called to walk toward it together.

Experience:

The last idea a Christian should take seriously is "do as the Romans do." Instead, we should be thinking "do as Christ does." This implies that we actually *know* Christ, that we are imitating him and following him. We are practicing for the resurrected life, and we are rehearsing together as his people, as his body.

And there's the rub: Rome is still attractive. Salvation doesn't end Rome's allure, but it does peel back the lacquer, revealing that all of evil's beauty really is just a clever paint job, hiding all the rot and decay beneath the fresh coat.

Questions for Discussion:

1. Do you want heaven more than Christ?
2. Are you practicing for eternity?
3. Are you discipling and being discipled?

Notes:

10. 4:2-9, A Joyful Gospel

S

cripture:

I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion, help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my coworkers, whose names are in the book of life.

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. As for the things that you have learned and received and heard and noticed in me, do them, and the God of peace will be with you.

T

radition:

I think Paul is an intimidating figure. Here is a mature Christian, versed in the Old Testament, author of 2/3 of the New Testament, the missionary for the Gentiles, and, next to Moses and Jesus, the most influential person within Scripture, if not throughout history! Is it any wonder Peter called Paul's teachings “hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other scriptures.” I think I can agree with Peter! Paul can be tough. But I am convinced the reason Paul is “tough” is because “Christianity is hard.”

Faith is Difficult

Whomever these women are, Euodia and Syntyche, Paul wants the Philippians to encourage them, because they are following him as he follows Christ. Some commentators have suggested that these

two women are recent converts who may be wrestling with just how to live out their new faith in a world that is adamantly against that faith. Along with Clement and other “coworkers,” their names will be remembered by God. A minister once quipped, “It is not the intensity of our faith that saves us, but the object of our faith.” I think G.K. Chesterton said it best:

The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting. It has been found difficult; and left untried.

Wow. I find that statement encouraging. I, a Christian, will find faith difficult at times...because it is! However, a difficult thing is not impossible: it's just difficult! Faith is an on purpose loyalty to God which we must live out intentionally. And here's the good news: through the Holy Spirit, God has prepared you for the good, hard work of faith. You **can** be faithful **because** He is faithful!

Rejoice! On Purpose!

Paul is almost screaming through the ink a paper: be glad for grace! Celebrate your salvation! Delight in what God has done and is doing!

What if things are bad? Celebrate your salvation!

What if I just lost my job? Celebrate your salvation!

What about when I worry about the future? Celebrate your salvation!

Joy, for Paul, is a choice. Though we may not be able to control our circumstances, we are able to control ourselves, for the most part. So, whatever has happened, is happening, or will happen, our salvation in Jesus Christ will not change! Rejoice, and again we should say, Rejoice! Paul continues with what is produced by intentional joy: a *Known Gentleness, Calmed Anxiety, Confident Prayer, and a Peaceful Guarding* of our hearts and minds.

Think About Your Thoughts

We cannot always control the thoughts that pop into our minds. In fact, I think many of us would blush from embarrassment (whether we are believers or not) if someone were to have access to what runs through our minds each day. This should not trouble us, our thinking “bad thoughts.” What should concern us is *how* we think about *what* we think about.

When the “bad thought” creeps into your mind, what will you do about it? Will you continue with the “bad thought,” aimlessly following to whatever end it will lead, or do you address it with the “mind of Christ?” Paul encourages us to capture our thoughts, good

and bad, and think about them rightly, and since we “have the mind of Christ (see Chapter 5, 2:1-11, A Humble Gospel),” we should think about things, good and bad, as Christ would.

R **eason:**

Paul has begun concluding his ideas, wrapping everything up as neatly as he can. In this letter, Paul has given us a wonderful guide to the Christian life: how to live and not live. Here, Paul provides, perhaps, two immediately helpful thoughts for all Christians to consider, regardless of how far along they find themselves in their faith journey.

Faith is Worth It

The world is against faith or, at the very least, faith in Jesus Christ. It even seems that most of life is a distraction intended to dissuade us from that faith: entertainment, news, media, you name it. But here’s the thing: these things (entertainment, news, media, you name it) are *not* in and of themselves *bad things*. It’s all about how they are *used*.

This is why discipleship is so important. Eugene Peterson has suggested that discipleship is “a long obedience in the same direction.” In other words, discipleship *takes the time it takes*. So, don’t worry. Keep going. Don’t give up. When you stumble, God is there to lift you again. Dust off the dirt and shame, and keep on keeping on. I heard it once said that “faith is a pot roast and not a microwave,” and I have to agree! Very few things within our Christian faith come to us immediately: we are called to constant, steady, continual obedience to the Father, empowered by the Spirit, for the sake of the Son. And so, while every believer *has the time* to be discipled, not every believer will *take the time* to be discipled.

Everything in Prayer

There is a wonderful hymn that reads,

What a friend we have in Jesus,
all our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry
everything to God in prayer!
O what peace we often forfeit,
O what needless pain we bear,

all because we do not carry
everything to God in prayer!

I'm inclined to believe that Paul would agree. As N.T. Wright once suggested, "If it's important to you, it's important to God." I would clarify that whatever is important to God should be important to us, especially since we have the "mind of Christ," and, like Christ, we should "be about our Father's business."

Nevertheless, God is deeply concerned about His people and, as his children, we get to take everything to God. Everything? Everything!

Our fears and our dreams; our victories and disappointments; our struggles and accomplishments; our tears and our songs; our major and minor issues; our whining and our complaints; our affection and our adoration. Paul encourages us to bring everything to God in prayer because that is precisely where our hearts and minds find peace and comfort and strength: in God's faithfulness to His people.

In other words, God invites us to inconvenience Him with our prayers! Not because our prayers *are* inconvenient, but because we *think* they are. Not so, says Paul. Bring it all to God because He bears all things since He is love. God delights in honest prayers of His children. So pray!

E xperience:

Paul may be hard to follow as he follows Jesus, but he is also encouraging. I think Paul would make a good coach. He has taught the Philippians about Jesus, how to know Jesus, and how to imitate Jesus, but then, he doesn't leave them alone to figure the rest out by themselves. Instead, he urges them forward, encouraging them, pushing them, challenging them, all for the sake of the Gospel. Our faith should be filled with intentional rejoicing, honest prayers, and considered thoughts. Paul's faith was, and we are imitating him, after all.

Questions for Discussion:

1. Are you doing your best for Christ?
2. Are you rejoicing in Christ?
3. Are you praying?
4. Are you thinking well?

Notes:

11. 4:10-23, Conclusion: Gratitude

S

cripture:

I rejoice in the Lord greatly that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned for me but had no opportunity to show it. Not that I am referring to being in need, for I have learned to be content with whatever I have. I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me. In any case, it was kind of you to share my distress.

You Philippians indeed know that in the early days of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving except you alone. For even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me help for my needs more than once. Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the profit that accumulates to your account. I have been paid in full and have more than enough; I am fully satisfied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. And my God will fully satisfy every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.

Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brothers and sisters who are with me greet you. All the saints greet you, especially those of the emperor's household.

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

T

radition:

If I were to ask you to tell me whether or not a Christian was "mature," how would you measure? Would you look at how much Scripture they had memorized? Or how much they had given in tithes and offerings? Or how few services had they missed? Paul would probably tell you that while these are good things (scripture,

memorization, cheerful giving, and community participation), his answer might surprise you.

Contentment

Paul is a mature Christian. This is not arrogance or pride speaking. I think, if we're being honest, most of us know whether or not we or others are mature in the faith. However, putting into words why we consider someone mature or immature in the faith is often difficult to put into words. Don't worry - Paul helps us out:

I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

In other words, Paul is able to continue to trust God in the Christian life cause he knows where his *strength* comes from: God. Paul has not made himself strong through the mastery of his will (like the Stoics taught). Instead, Paul's strength comes from God. So, what does this strength look like? It looks like contentment.

This contentment from strength from God could be described as "*God produced self-sufficiency.*" How can Paul continue when he is hungry or satisfied? *God produced self-sufficiency.* How is he able to handle being in chains or being in freedom? *God produced self-sufficiency.* How can Paul be faithful in all circumstances? *God produced self-sufficiency.* I am often envious of Paul's faithfulness until I remember what produced that faithfulness: persecution and difficulties.

Accepting Blessings

If we're not careful, we will think that *God produced self-sufficiency* implies that we are not to accept charity from fellow believers or even from our enemies. This is not the case. Paul appears to reprimand the Philippians for sending him their gift! He doesn't *need it!* He is content. And yet, he doesn't send the gift back. He welcomes it, because he knows the Philippians love him and care for his well-being. This is the paradox: as Christians, we will grow in *God produced self-sufficiency* and still accept blessings. One day, we will be mature enough to accept the gifts we don't need.

R eason:

Perhaps we should reconsider what "mature Christians" look like. Perhaps that is an underlying idea that Paul hints at: maturity *is* measurable, but it's not exactly what you think it is.

Contentment Measures Maturity

I am often amazed at how Christians are able to suffer and suffer well. I wish that no one would suffer, Christian or not.

Suffering is an ugly thing, difficult to watch as it is to experience. And yet, it is precisely within suffering that faith is matured. I think Paul provides *the* ultimate litmus test for measuring maturation in the faith: contentment. Is a believer content, that is, are they exhibiting *God produced self-sufficiency*? That is a mature Christian. Is a believer whining, complaining, negative, bemoaning their existence and their circumstances? That is an immature Christian. While both are saved, one is just further along in their faith journey. If you are the latter Christian, imitate the former believer: do as they do, for they are imitating Paul, who is imitating Christ. Yes, even Christ, who suffered more than anyone, exhibited *God produced self-sufficiency*. So, like Christ and Paul, we have *God produced self-sufficiency*, and this allows us to care for our neighbor in their suffering while we are suffering ourselves, and in turn, we then accept what care is given to us by those neighbors who are also suffering.

Look for Opportunities to Serve

The church of Philippi had helped Paul before. He was grateful then as he was now. Though the *gift* was not needed, it was received in the manner in which it was intended. Paul even commends the Philippians for desiring to serve him in their perception of his needs. They were *wrong the right way*.

This is how we should be: looking for opportunities to serve our neighbors (believer or not). I think about when God chose Abram in Genesis, that part of Abram's being chosen was that he would "bless the world" in his chosen-ness. God chose Abram to bless the world. So too are believers chosen: to bless the world. It is for the world that Jesus Christ died, so that all who believe would be saved and not perish, but have everlasting, reconciled, resurrected life with the Father forever and always (John 3:16). Christ obeyed the Father's will, empowered by the Spirit; so did Paul; so, now do we. Or, at least, we should.

Together, Moving Forward in Grace

There's an interesting bit in the penultimate verse: ...*especially those in the emperor's household*. Paul, being in prison in Rome, has somehow come in contact (or was part of the conversion) with believers who are serving or employed, or are the family members of the Emperor of the Roman Empire. Their unnamed inclusion emphasizes what Paul has been getting at throughout the epistle's entirety: only heavenly citizenship matters.

Ethnicity? Secondary to Christ.

Gender? Secondary to Christ.

Class? Secondary to Christ.

Income? Secondary to Christ.

For Paul, faith and not status is what saves a person. Not their socio-economic-political status. Not their title. Not their reputation. Not their vocation. Faith and faith alone. Period.

So, since we are all part of the family of God, we should mature graciously in both giving and receiving grace. After all, it's God's grace that Paul wants to be with the spirits of the Philippians, the same grace I'm sure he would want to be with yours.

Experience:

If anything can be learned from Paul in this final section of his joyful letter, let it be that Paul has embraced a faithful life of inconvenience.

Humility? Inconvenient.

Faithfulness? Inconvenient.

Suffering? Inconvenient.

Serving others? Inconvenient.

God invites us to participate in His inconveniencing of our lives because that's what the Gospel does: it interrupts everything to show God's love for us, that while we were once sinners, Christ died to save us. This is the story that informed Paul's ministry; it's the story we are invited to participate in; it's the daily grind of mundane faithfulness; it's celebrating God's salvation of His people; it's the encouragement to keep going, especially when it's difficult. Paul's Epistle to the Philippians is stitched together with the Gospel, just like God's people should be.

That's the invitation, to come and be a part of God's great story of inconvenient grace and intentional joy.

Questions for Discussion:

1. Are you growing in contentment?
2. Are you looking for opportunities to serve?
3. Are you treating others graciously?

Notes:

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