

# Shine Like Stars

## EXPLORING PHILIPPIANS WITH WORSHIP TRACKS FOR EVERY SESSION



Spotify Playlist

### Introduction: A Letter from Prison, A Song of Joy

If you were writing from a Roman prison cell, knowing you could be executed at any moment, would joy be the first word that comes to mind? Probably not. Most of us would think help or get me out of here! Yet Paul's letter to the Philippians overflows with joy, even as chains clatter at his feet. But that's exactly what makes Paul's letter to the Philippians so extraordinary. It is, without a doubt, his most joyful and affectionate letter, penned from a place of deep suffering and uncertainty.

### WHY JOY IN CHAINS?

*"Rugged joy can sing in a jail cell"*

The words "joy" and "rejoice" pop up about sixteen times in just four short chapters. This isn't some cheap, plastic happiness that depends on everything going your way. This is a rugged, resilient, all-weather joy that can sing in a jail cell and find purpose in pain. It's a joy that transcends circumstance because it's rooted in someone who is above all circumstances: Jesus Christ. To get a handle on this radical message, we first have to understand the unique city it was sent to and the wild story of how the church there got its start.

## The Setting: Welcome to Little Rome

Philippi wasn't your typical Greek town. Think of it more like a slice of Rome that had been airlifted and dropped into Greece. It was a Roman colony, a military outpost, and a retirement community for decorated soldiers from the Roman legions. It sat right on the Via Egnatia, a major highway that was the economic artery connecting Rome to the East. Basically, it was a big deal.

Founded by Emperor Augustus, Philippi was bursting with Roman patriotism. Its people were fiercely proud of their Roman citizenship, a status that came with some serious perks. This place was soaked in the culture of Roman power and the worship of the emperor. So, when Paul shows up proclaiming that there's another King, Jesus, and another citizenship that really matters - one "in heaven" (Philippians 3:20) - it wasn't just religious talk. It was a direct and subversive challenge to the deepest allegiances of the Philippian people. It was, to put it mildly, picking a fight.

## The Founding: Talk About a Rough Start

The story of how the Philippian church began, found in Acts 16, is just as dramatic as the letter is joyful. Paul's arrival in town was the result of a vision from God, pulling him west into Europe with the gospel for the very first time. And who were the charter members of this new church? You couldn't have picked a more motley crew if you tried.

There was Lydia, a successful businesswoman who sold luxury purple goods. There was a nameless slave girl, tormented by a demon and cruelly exploited by her owners for her fortune-telling abilities. And there was a tough, blue-collar Roman jailer, a servant of the empire. A businesswoman, a slave, and a cop. That's who God decided to build his church with.

This little community was born in conflict. After Paul cast the demon out of the slave girl, her furious owners had him and Silas arrested, publicly beaten with rods, and tossed into the maximum-security part of the prison. So there they are, in the dark, feet locked in stocks, their backs a bloody mess. And what do they do? Complain? Demand a lawyer? No. They start a worship service. They're praying and singing hymns to God so loudly that the other prisoners are listening in.

Their joyful worship in the middle of unbearable suffering was the opening act for a miracle. A violent earthquake rocks the prison, springing open the doors and breaking their chains. The terrified jailer, assuming all the prisoners have escaped (which would have cost him his life), is about to kill himself when Paul stops him. This raw display of God's power leads directly to the jailer and his entire family putting their faith in Christ. This wild origin story marked by supernatural guidance, diverse converts, public suffering, and miraculous freedom sets the stage for all the major themes of this letter: gospel advancement through opposition, joy in hardship, and the deep fellowship forged in shared struggle.

## How to Use This Study

So, how does this thing work? This 7 session study is built to go hand-in-hand with the seven songs written from the book of Philippians. To get the most out of it, here's a little roadmap I'd suggest:

**Listen:** Start each session by just listening to the song for that week. Don't analyze it, just let the music and lyrics wash over you and get your heart ready.

**Read:** Next, prayerfully read the scripture passage for the session. Take your time. Let the words sink in.

**Study:** Now, dig into the commentary provided in these pages. It'll give you some historical context, theological insights, and connect the dots between the scripture and the song.

**Listen Again:** Go back and listen to the song one more time. I think

you’ll find that it hits differently. The lyrics will feel richer and the music will illuminate the scripture in a new way.

**Reflect:** Finally, use the discussion questions for your own journaling or, even better, as a conversation guide for a small group.

This journey is an invitation to discover the same resilient joy that fired up Paul and the first believers in Philippi. Joy that isn’t found in our circumstances, but in our partnership with Jesus and his people.

## Table 1: An Overview of the Philippians Project

Here’s the 30,000-foot view of our journey. This table maps out how the themes unfold through the songs and the letter, giving you a clear roadmap for the adventure ahead.

Session	Song Title	Scripture Passage	Core Theme
1	Partners in the Gospel	Philippians 1:1-11	Thanksgiving and Partnership
2	To Live is Christ	Philippians 1:12-30	Joy and Purpose in Suffering
3	The Mind of Christ	Philippians 2:1-11	Humility and Selfless Love
4	Shining as Lights	Philippians 2:12-18	Living Out Our Salvation
5	Pressing Toward the Goal	Philippians 3:1-21	The Surpassing Worth of Christ
6	Rejoice in the Lord Always	Philippians 4:1-9	The Peace of God
7	The Secret of Contentment	Philippians 4:10-23	Christ-Centered Contentment

# Partners in The Gospel

(Based on Philippians 1:1-11)

Partners in the gospel, we  
Bound by love's sweet tie  
He who started this good work  
Will bring it to the sky

From prison chains I lift my voice  
With joy that overflows  
For every prayer I breathe  
your name  
My heart with gladness glows  
Your partnership in gospel work  
From first day until now  
Has been the fuel that  
keeps me strong  
The grace upon my brow

Partners in the gospel, we  
Bound by love's sweet tie  
He who started this good work  
Will bring it to the sky  
Partners in the gospel, we  
United heart and soul  
Your love abounding  
more and more  
Makes every prayer whole

The tender mercies of our Christ  
Flow through my every thought  
For you I long with deep desire  
The love that cannot be bought  
I pray your love may overflow  
With knowledge and with sight  
That you may choose  
what's excellent  
And walk in heaven's light

Partners in the gospel, we  
Bound by love's sweet tie  
He who started this good work  
Will bring it to the sky  
Partners in the gospel, we  
United heart and soul  
Your love abounding  
more and more  
Makes every prayer whole

And this my prayer, that  
love may grow  
In knowledge rich and deep,  
Discerning what is best to know,  
The promises you'll keep.  
Then pure and blameless  
you will stand,  
Until the day of Christ,  
The fruit of righteousness in hand,  
A fragrant sacrifice.

Partners in the gospel, we  
Bound by love's sweet tie  
He who started this good work  
Will bring it to the sky  
Partners in the gospel, we  
United heart and soul  
Your love abounding  
more and more  
Makes every prayer whole

Partners in the gospel, we  
Until the day of Christ  
He who began will complete  
This work of sacrifice

# Session 1: Partners in the Gospel

Listen: “Partners in the Gospel”

Read: Philippians 1:1-11

## 1.1 The Foundation of Joy: A Deeply Held Affection

Paul doesn’t waste any time with formalities. He jumps right in with a big bear hug of a greeting. After the standard “Grace and peace,” he immediately gushes with affection: “I thank my God whenever I remember you, always in every request of mine on behalf of you all making my requests with joy”. This isn’t some abstract spiritual mood; it’s a joy that’s tied directly to people. The very memory of his friends in Philippi makes his heart swell with gratitude.

And this feeling isn’t a one-way street. Paul says, “It is even right for me to think this way on behalf of all of you, because I have you in my heart”. He’s not just being sentimental. He holds them in his heart right in the middle of his own suffering, in his “bonds” and in the “defense of the Good News.” Their connection is so real that he calls God as his witness to how much he longs for them, a feeling he describes as being “in the tender mercies of Christ Jesus”. This is the foundation for everything else in the letter: deep, authentic, Christ-centered relationships are a main-line source of profound Christian joy.

## 1.2 The Heart of the Matter: Koinonia

So, why is he so joyful? He tells us plainly: it’s because of their “partnership in furtherance of the Good News from the first day until now”. The

Greek word here for “partnership” is *koinonia*, and it’s a word you’ll want to underline. It’s so much richer than our English word “fellowship.” Think of it less like a church potluck and more like a shared bank account, a shared mission, and a shared life. The song lyric “Partners in the gospel, we / Bound by love’s sweet tie” gets it just right.

This *koinonia* wasn’t just a warm, fuzzy feeling. It was gritty and practical. The Philippians had partnered with Paul by working alongside him, by sharing in his sufferings, and by supporting him financially. Their partnership wasn’t a one-time donation; it was a steady, faithful reality “from the first day until now.”

This shared life between believers is only possible because it’s plugged into something deeper: a shared life with God Himself. The partnership we have with each other is a direct result of the partnership we’ve been invited into with God through Jesus. That’s why Paul later talks about the “*koinonia* of the Spirit” (2:1) and the *koinonia* of his sufferings” (3:10). Christian community isn’t something we manufacture; it’s a gift that flows from being swept up into God’s grand story. When Paul thanks the Philippians, he’s recognizing that they’re all in on this divine adventure together.

## 1.3 The Confidence of Faith: God’s Finishing Work

Paul’s joy isn’t just about the past; it’s also about the future. He’s “confident of this very thing, that he who began a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ”. This is one of those verses you might want to get tattooed on your arm. It anchors our hope, not in our own wobbly efforts, but in the rock-solid faithfulness of God.

The “good work” is the whole package of salvation, from the first spark of faith to the final day of glory. God is the one who starts it, and God is the one who will finish it. The song echoes this promise beautifully: “He who started this good work / Will bring it to the sky.” This is why Paul can pray

with such confidence. He knows that his prayers for his friends are perfectly in sync with God's unstoppable plan. It's a profound comfort to know that our ultimate security rests in the hands of a God who always finishes what He starts.

## 1.4 The Prayer of a Partner: Abounding in Love and Discernment

So, what does Paul pray for his partners? Not for health, wealth, or comfort, but for something far more valuable: spiritual maturity. "This I pray," he writes, "that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and all discernment".

He's praying for a specific kind of love not a mushy, sentimental, uninformed emotion, but a tough, smart love. A love that's sharpened by knowledge and guided by discernment. Why? So that they can "approve the things that are excellent". A discerning love helps us navigate the messy gray areas of life, telling the difference between the good and the best.

The ultimate goal is a life of integrity that makes a difference. Paul prays they'll be "sincere and without offense to the day of Christ", which leads to being "filled with the fruits of righteousness". A life overflowing with this kind of love will naturally produce good character and good actions, all of which point back to God and bring him glory. The song's bridge sums it up perfectly, praying for a love that grows "in knowledge rich and deep," leading to a life that's a "fragrant sacrifice."

## REFLECTION & DISCUSSION

- Let's get real for a moment. What does "partnership in the gospel" actually look like in our church today? How can we practically share in the work and the giving?



- How does the promise that God will finish the work He started in you (Phil. 1:6) change the way you look at your own spiritual struggles? How about the struggles of others?
- What would it look like to start praying for each other the way Paul does not just for needs to be met, but for love to grow smarter and deeper?

# To Live Is Christ

(Based on Philippians 1:12-30)

The chains that bind my  
hands and feet  
Have opened heaven's door  
The guards who watch me  
day and night  
Now hear the gospel roar  
My brothers, seeing my distress  
Grow bolder in their faith  
The word of God spreads  
far and wide  
Through every trial and test

For to me to live is Christ  
And to die is gain  
Whether by life or by death  
His name I will proclaim  
For to me to live is Christ  
And to die is gain  
In my body He is magnified  
Through joy and through pain

Some preach from envy  
and from strife  
Some from a heart of love  
But Christ is preached  
in every way  
And I rejoice above  
My earnest expectation waits  
With hope that will not fail  
That Christ will be exalted high  
Through every storm and gale

For to me to live is Christ  
And to die is gain  
Whether by life or by death  
His name I will proclaim  
For to me to live is Christ  
And to die is gain  
In my body He is magnified  
Through joy and through pain

Let your manner of life be worthy  
Of the gospel of our King  
Standing firm in one spirit  
With one soul, let us sing  
Not frightened by the adversaries  
For this is proof to them  
Of their destruction, our salvation  
Praise God, amen!

For to me to live is Christ  
And to die is gain  
Whether by life or by death  
His name I will proclaim  
For to me to live is Christ  
And to die is gain  
In my body He is magnified  
Through joy and through pain

For to me to live is Christ  
And to die is gain

# Session 2: To Live is Christ

Listen: “To Live is Christ”

Read: Philippians 1:12-30

## 2.1 A Paradoxical Progress: The Gospel Advances Through Chains

Paul now pivots from his prayers to a report on his own situation, and his perspective is just stunning. Where we would see a disaster, Paul sees a golden opportunity. “Hey brothers,” he says (I’m paraphrasing), “I want you to know that this whole ‘being locked up in prison’ thing has actually been great for the gospel”. His imprisonment has launched the gospel forward in two ways he couldn’t have expected.

First, his chains have become a pulpit. He reports that “it became evident to the whole praetorian guard... that my bonds are in Christ”. Now, to get the impact of this, you need to know who these guys were. The Praetorian Guard weren’t just any old grunts. They were the emperor’s personal bodyguards, the Secret Service of their day. They were highly paid, politically powerful, and the ultimate symbol of Roman might. And Paul is turning them into a captive audience for the gospel. You’ve got to love the irony. The song lyric “The guards who watch me day and night / Now hear the gospel roar” isn’t an exaggeration. Paul is telling his friends that the message of the true King, Jesus, has infiltrated the very heart of Caesar’s power structure.

Second, his courage is contagious. He says that because of his chains, “most of the brothers in the Lord... are more abundantly bold to speak the word of God without fear”. His joy in the face of a death sentence has lit a fire under the other Christians. His suffering produced courage, not fear. This reveals a profound truth: in God’s kingdom, our greatest weakness can become the stage for his greatest power. Paul’s joyful suffering was a deeply counter-cultural witness in a world that ran on power and self-preservation. Even when others preached Christ from rotten motives like “envy and strife,”

Paul could rejoice, because his goal wasn't to build his own brand, but to make Christ's name famous.

## 2.2 The Great Dilemma: To Live or to Die?

This leads Paul to one of the most incredible statements in the whole Bible. He's confident that, one way or another, this will all turn out for his ultimate deliverance. His main goal, he says, is that "Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life, or by death". His body is just the arena where Christ's glory is put on display.

This brings us to the mic-drop moment of the chapter in verse 21: "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." Paul boils his entire existence down to this one, earth-shattering statement. "To live is Christ" means that Jesus is the substance, the purpose, and the engine of his life. Life isn't about Paul anymore; it's about Christ. And because of that, "to die is gain." Death isn't a loss; it's a promotion. It's the moment he can finally "depart and be with Christ, which is far better".

This puts him in a real dilemma. His heart pulls him toward heaven, but his love for the Philippians pulls him back to earth. He resolves it not based on what he wants, but on what they need. "To remain in the flesh is more needful for your sake," he says. His desire to keep living is an act of selfless love, all for their "progress and joy in the faith".

## 2.3 The Call to Corporate Courage: A Life Worthy of the Gospel

Paul then turns this personal conviction into a command for the whole church. "Only let your manner of life be worthy of the Good News of Christ". The verb for "manner of life" is a politically charged word. It literally

means “to live as a citizen.” In a city like Philippi, which was obsessed with Roman citizenship, this language would have landed with a thud. Paul is calling them to live like citizens of a different kingdom the kingdom of heaven.

What does this heavenly citizenship look like? It looks like unity stand firm in one spirit, with one soul striving” and courage ”in nothing frightened by the adversaries”. He then re-frames their suffering completely. It’s not a tragedy; it’s a gift. “It has been granted to you,” he says, “not only to believe in him, but also to suffer on his behalf”. The word for “granted” is related to the word for “grace.” Suffering for Jesus is a privilege that connects them to Jesus. It’s the “same conflict which you saw in me,” he tells them, reminding them that they’re in this fight together.

## REFLECTION & DISCUSSION

- How can we start to see our own difficulties as potential opportunities for the gospel, just like Paul did?
- What does “For to me to live is Christ” mean for you, practically, in your job, your family, or your daily choices?
- In what specific ways are we called to live as “citizens of heaven” in our culture today, which is constantly demanding our allegiance?

# The Mind Of Christ

(Based on Philippians 2:1-11)

If there's encouragement in Christ  
If comfort from His love  
If fellowship of Spirit's touch  
If mercy from above  
Then make my joy complete in you  
Be like-minded, one in heart  
In humility count others  
Better than yourself, your part

Have this mind in you  
Which was also in Christ Jesus  
Who, though He was in  
the form of God  
Did not count equality with God  
A thing to be grasped  
But emptied Himself  
Taking the form of a servant  
Being born in the likeness of men

Each one not looking to his own  
But to the things of others  
In lowliness of mind esteeming  
All as sisters and brothers  
Have this mind that was in Christ  
The mind of humble love  
Who left the throne  
of heaven's height  
To serve us from above

Have this mind in you  
Which was also in Christ Jesus  
Who, though He was in  
the form of God

Did not count equality with God  
A thing to be grasped  
But emptied Himself  
Taking the form of a servant  
Being born in the likeness of men

And being found in human form  
He humbled Himself still  
Becoming obedient unto death  
Even death on a hill  
Therefore God has highly  
exalted Him  
And given Him the name  
That is above every name  
That at the name of Jesus  
Every knee should bow  
Every tongue confess  
That Jesus Christ is Lord  
To the glory of God the Father

Have this mind in you  
Which was also in Christ Jesus  
Who, though He was in the  
form of God  
Did not count equality with God  
A thing to be grasped  
But emptied Himself  
Taking the form of a servant  
Being born in the likeness of men

Have this mind in you  
Have this mind in you  
The mind of Christ

# Session 3: The Mind of Christ

Listen: “The Mind of Christ”

Read: Philippians 2:1-11

## 3.1 The Grounding for Unity: The “Ifs” of Christian Experience

Paul kicks off this section with a series of four “if” clauses that aren’t really “ifs” at all. It’s a bit like saying, “If the sky is blue and water is wet...” He’s not wondering if these things are true; he’s reminding them of what they already possess: “If there is therefore any exhortation in Christ, if any consolation of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any tender mercies and compassion...”.

His point is simple: “Since you have all these amazing spiritual realities in common, then live like it!” His plea is that they “make my joy full, by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind”. He’s arguing that their outward unity should just be a reflection of their inward, spiritual union. They already have all the resources they need for a deep, healthy community.

## 3.2 The Enemy of Unity: Rivalry and Conceit

If they have the resources, what’s getting in the way? Paul puts his finger on the two things that kill community faster than anything else: “rivalry” and “conceit”. “Rivalry” is that selfish ambition that’s always trying to get ahead. “Conceit” is what the Greeks called “vainglory” or “empty glory” it’s being addicted to the approval and praise of others. Both of these attitudes put the self at the center, and they are poison to real fellowship.

The antidote? A radical re-shuffling of the deck. “In humility,” he commands, “each counting others better than himself”. This doesn’t mean having low self-esteem or pretending you don’t have any gifts. It’s the active, conscious choice to consider the needs of others as more important than your own. It’s a mindset that asks, “How can I serve you?” before it asks, “What’s in it for me?”

## 3.3 The Paradigm of Humility: The Christ Hymn

What Paul does next is brilliant. To fix their very practical problem of disunity, he doesn’t give them a five-step plan for conflict resolution. He gives them a song. He lifts their eyes from their own squabbles to the most stunning story of humility the universe has ever known. This section is widely believed to be an early Christian hymn, and it’s presented as the ultimate model for their lives: “Have this in your mind, which was also in Christ Jesus”.

The hymn tells the story of Jesus in two movements: down, and then up.

First, the Humiliation: The story starts in eternity. Christ was “existing in the form of God,” meaning He shared the very essence of God’s nature. He had full equality with God. But unlike Adam, who grasped for equality with God in the Garden, Jesus “didn’t consider equality with God a thing to be grasped.” He didn’t cling to his divine rights and privileges.

Instead, he “emptied himself”. This is the famous idea of *\*kenosis\**. So what did he empty himself of? Not his divinity. He never stopped being God. It’s more like a king who willingly sets aside his crown and royal robes to live as a humble peasant, all without ceasing to be the king. He veiled his glory and accepted the genuine limitations of being human. And he didn’t stop there. He humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, yes, the death of the cross the most shameful, agonizing death imaginable.



Then, the Exaltation: Because of this radical, willing humiliation, “Therefore God also highly exalted him”. The path down led to the highest place of honor. God the Father lifts the Son to the supreme place of glory and gives him “the name which is above every name.”

This has a cosmic result: “that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow... and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father”. The final destiny of the universe is the universal worship of the humbled-and-exalted Jesus.

This incredible hymn isn’t a theological detour; it’s Paul’s master plan for fixing the church. The problem was rivalry and conceit. His solution is to show them Jesus. The logic is overwhelming: if the eternally glorious Son of God was willing to do all that for others, how can we possibly cling to our petty pride and personal agendas? The story of Jesus is both the model for us to follow and the motivation that makes it possible.

## REFLECTION & DISCUSSION

- In what practical, everyday situations can you “count others better than” yourself this week at home, at work, or at church?
- How does the story of Christ’s self-emptying (\*kenosis\*) challenge our culture’s ideas about success, power, and getting ahead?
- The hymn ends with the future reality that every knee will bow to Jesus. How does remembering this ultimate outcome change how we should handle conflicts today?

# Shining As Lights

(Based on Philippians 2:12-18)

With reverence and with  
trembling hands,  
We work out what You've  
placed inside.  
It is Your hand, by Your command,  
That turns the will and  
shifts the tide.  
You give the grace to run this race,  
Your pleasure is our guide.

And we are shining out like stars  
in the night,  
In a world of crooked ways, we are  
Your burning light.  
Holding fast the Word of life,  
Blameless children in the fight,  
Shining out, shining out for You.

Let no complaint or bitter word  
Escape from what you say.  
Do everything in selfless love,  
And walk in a more gentle way.  
So we reflect the Son's effect,

A pure and brilliant ray.  
And we are shining out like stars  
in the night,  
In a world of crooked ways, we are  
Your burning light.  
Holding fast the Word of life,  
Blameless children in the fight,  
Shining out, shining out for You.

So on that day, I will not say  
My work was all in vain.  
Poured out for you, a sacrifice,  
I'll count my loss as gain.  
And in your faith, I will rejoice,  
So you rejoice with me again.

And we are shining out like stars  
in the night,  
In a world of crooked ways, we are  
Your burning light.  
Holding fast the Word of life,  
Blameless children in the fight,  
Shining out, shining out for You.

# Session 4: Shining as Lights

Listen: “Shining as Lights”

Read: Philippians 2:12-18

## 4.1 The Great Paradox: Our Work and God’s Work

Right after that magnificent hymn, Paul says, “So then, my beloved...” Because of Christ’s perfect, humble obedience, we’re now called to live a life that reflects it. The command? “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling”.

Now, this is one of those phrases that can really trip people up. It absolutely does not mean “work *for* your salvation,” as if we could earn it. The Bible is crystal clear that salvation is a free gift. What Paul means is something more like, “Take the salvation you’ve been given and actively work it out into every corner of your life.” It’s about letting the reality of your salvation transform your character, your habits, and your relationships. It’s the ongoing project of becoming in practice who you already are in Christ.

And just when you start feeling the pressure of all that “work,” Paul hits you with the other side of the coin in the very next verse: “...for it is God who works in you both to will and to work, for his good pleasure”. Here we have a glorious biblical paradox that can make your brain hurt in the best possible way. We are 100% responsible to work, and God is 100% sovereign in empowering that work. It’s a beautiful dance. God’s sovereign work *in* us shaping our desires and empowering our actions is the very reason we can and should responsibly work it *out*. The song lyric “It is Your hand, by Your command, / That turns the will and shifts the tide” captures this divine power perfectly.

## 4.2 The Purpose of Our Work: A Stellar Witness

So what does this look like in real life? Paul gets very practical: “Do all things without murmurings and disputes”. Basically, stop complaining and arguing. Grumbling is what we do when we think we deserve better, which is the polar opposite of the “mind of Christ” we just saw. If we truly believe that a good and sovereign God is at work in us, it pulls the rug out from under our complaints.

The reason for this complaint-free living is profoundly missional. It’s so “that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you are seen as lights in the world”. Our transformed character is meant to be a powerful witness. In a dark world that runs on outrage, selfishness, and argument, a community marked by joyful, humble service will shine like a supernova in the night sky. The song powerfully develops this image: “And we are shining out like stars in the night, / In a world of crooked ways, we are Your burning light.”

This witness isn’t just about being nice people; it’s about “holding up the word of life”. Our attractive lives become the platform that makes the gospel message believable to a watching world.

## 4.3 The Joy of a Mentor: A Life Poured Out

Paul then brings it back to his own life, viewing his potential death through this same lens. He uses the beautiful Old Testament image of a drink offering, which was wine poured out over a sacrifice. “Yes,” he says, “and if I am poured out on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice”. He sees the faithful, obedient lives of the Philippians as the main sacrifice offered to God. His own life and potential death? That’s just the wine poured

out over it in celebration.

What a perspective! His joy is completely wrapped up in their spiritual success. If they are shining as lights, then his life's work won't be "in vain" Then he calls them to have the same attitude, to rejoice \*with him\* in this shared mission. It's a joy rooted not in personal safety, but in the advance of the gospel.

## REFLECTION & DISCUSSION

- How does the truth that "God is at work in you" give you the courage to "work out your salvation" in a specific, practical area of your life this week?
- What are the things our culture loves to complain about most? How does the command in verse 14 challenge us to be different?
- In what tangible ways can our church community be a "light" in our specific neighborhood, city, or even in our online interactions?

# Pressing Toward The Goal

(Based on Philippians 3:1-21)

Finally, my brothers,  
rejoice in the Lord,  
Let His great name be now adored.  
Beware of those who trust in flesh,  
Of pride in works  
that they have done.  
For we are those who  
praise by Spirit,  
And glory in Christ Jesus,  
God's own Son.  
We put no confidence in works,  
Our hope is in His grace alone.

I count all things as loss  
For the excellency of  
the knowledge  
Of Christ Jesus my Lord,  
For whom I suffered the  
loss of all things  
And count them only as a loss,  
That I may gain Christ  
And be found in Him.

If any could have trusted flesh,  
Then I could trust it more.  
A Hebrew of the purest line,  
A Pharisee of lore.  
My zeal, it persecuted saints,  
I thought my hands were clean.  
Found blameless in the written law,  
A perfect, flawless scene.

I count all things as loss  
For the excellency of the

knowledge  
Of Christ Jesus my Lord,  
For whom I suffered the  
loss of all things  
And count them only as a loss,  
That I may gain Christ  
And be found in Him.

Not that I have already obtained  
Or am already made perfect,  
But I press on, if it is so t  
hat I may take hold  
Of that for which also I was taken  
hold of by Christ Jesus.  
Brothers, I don't regard myself as  
yet having taken hold,  
But one thing I do: forgetting the  
things which are behind  
And stretching forward to the  
things which are before,  
I press on toward the  
goal for the prize  
Of the high calling of God  
in Christ Jesus.

I count all things as loss  
For the excellency of  
the knowledge  
Of Christ Jesus my Lord,  
For whom I suffered the  
loss of all things  
And count them only as a loss,  
That I may gain Christ  
And be found in Him.

# Session 5: Pressing Toward the Goal

Listen: “Pressing Toward the Goal”

Read: Philippians 3:1-21

## 5.1 A Stern Warning: Confidence in the Flesh

Whoa. Paul’s tone just changed, didn’t it? After the warmth of the last two chapters, he goes from pastor to pit bull in a heartbeat. “Rejoice in the Lord,” he starts, but then immediately follows it with, “Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision”.

This fiery language is aimed at a group of false teachers, probably Judaizers, who were causing trouble. These teachers insisted that faith in Jesus was a good start, but to be a truly first-class Christian, Gentile believers had to adopt the whole Jewish package especially circumcision and the Law of Moses. Their big mistake was putting their “confidence in the flesh,” relying on their heritage, religious rule-following, and moral effort to make them right with God.

To tear this teaching down, Paul uses his own life as Exhibit A. If anyone had a reason to be confident in the flesh, it was him. He then rattles off his spiritual resume, and it is impressive. He was circumcised on the eighth day (perfect obedience), from the tribe of Benjamin (a loyal tribe), a “Hebrew of Hebrews” (pure lineage), a Pharisee (the most zealous religious party), a persecutor of the church (proof of his passion), and as for the law, he was “blameless” (a straight-A student). By any human standard, Paul was a spiritual superstar.

# 5.2 A Radical Re-evaluation: From Gain to Loss

What he says next is one of the most stunning reversals you'll ever read. "However," he declares, "what things were gain to me, these have I counted loss for Christ". He takes his entire list of spiritual assets, everything he had built his identity on, and moves it into the liability column.

He doubles down in the next verse, saying he counts it all as "loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, my Lord," for whom he lost everything. And then he says he considers it all to be "nothing but refuse". The Greek word here is *\*skubala\**. It's a very coarse, strong word. It means "dung" or "garbage." Paul isn't just saying his religious achievements are worthless compared to knowing Jesus; he's saying they are utterly disgusting if they are the basis of his trust.

He threw it all in the trash for one reason: "that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own... but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God". This is the heart of it all. There are two kinds of righteousness: the kind you try to earn by being good, and the kind you receive as a free gift by trusting Jesus. Paul is shouting from the rooftops that the only one that matters is the free gift.

## Table 2: The Great Reversal - Paul's Spiritual Balance Sheet

This table shows the radical flip in Paul's value system. It's a spiritual accounting of his life, before and after Christ.



<b>Confidence in the Flesh (Ph 3:5-6)</b>	<b>Paul's Reevaluation (Ph 3:7-8)</b>	<b>The Surpassing Gain (Ph 3:8-9)</b>
Circumcised the eighth day	Counted as <b>LOSS</b>	The excellency of knowing Christ
Stock of Israel, Tribe of Benjamin	Counted as <b>LOSS</b>	To gain Christ
A Hebrew of Hebrews	Counted as <b>LOSS</b>	To be found in Him
Concerning the law, a Pharisee	Counted as <b>LOSS</b>	Righteousness from God by faith
Concerning zeal, persecuting the assembly	Counted as <b>LOSS</b>	
Concerning righteousness in the law, blameless	Counted as <b>REFUSE</b> ( <i>skubala</i> )	

## 5.3 A Forward-Looking Faith: Pressing On

Being declared righteous by God isn't the finish line; it's the starting block. Some people think that if our salvation is a free gift, it will make us lazy. Paul's life proves the exact opposite. Because he was totally secure in his relationship with God, he was finally free from the exhausting treadmill of trying to earn God's approval. And that freed him up to pursue Christ with everything he had.

His one great ambition now is "that I may know him" not just know \*about\* him, but to know him personally, deeply, and experientially. This means knowing the power of his resurrection, the fellowship of his sufferings, and being conformed to his death by dying to his own self-will every day.

Paul is quick to say he hasn't arrived yet. "Not that I have already obtained, or am already made perfect; but I press on". He paints a picture of a runner straining for the finish line. "Forgetting the things which are behind, and stretching forward to the things which are before, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus". His past both his sins and his proudest achievements is behind him. His eyes are locked on the future prize: being with Jesus forever.

## 5.4 A Tale of Two Citizenships

Paul wraps up the chapter by showing two competing ways to live, based on two competing citizenships. He begs the Philippians to imitate him and warns them, with tears, about the "enemies of the cross of Christ". These are people "whose god is the belly... who think about earthly things". Their lives are all about satisfying temporary, earthly appetites.

In stark contrast, Paul declares, "For our citizenship is in heaven". Remember how proud the Philippians were of their Roman citizenship? Paul is telling them their true passport is from another kingdom entirely. And it's from that heavenly home that "we also wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will change the body of our humiliation to be conformed to the body of his glory". This incredible promise of a glorified, resurrected body is the ultimate hope that fuels the Christian race.

## REFLECTION & DISCUSSION

- What are the modern-day things we're tempted to put our "confidence in the flesh" in? (E.g., our career, our education, our moral reputation, our political party?)
- What does it mean for you to "press on toward the goal" in this season of your life? What might you need to "forget" in order to "stretch forward"?
- How does knowing your ultimate citizenship is in heaven change how you view your responsibilities and ambitions here on earth?



# Rejoice in the Lord Always

(Based on Philippians 4:1-9)

My dear beloved, whom I long for,  
You are my joy and so much more.  
My cherished crown, my victory,  
So stand steadfast and  
stand with me.  
Be of one mind within the Lord,  
United by His faithful word.  
Help all the ones who  
shared the fight,  
Whose names are in the  
Book of Life.

Rejoice in the Lord always,  
Again I will say, Rejoice!  
Rejoice in the Lord always,  
Again I will say, Rejoice!

Let gentleness be known to all,  
The Lord is near, so heed His call.  
Don't be anxious over anything,  
To God in prayer  
your worries bring.  
With thankfulness,  
now make your plea,  
And let your mind and  
heart be free.  
Just make your every need  
known to God,  
On every path that must be trod.

Rejoice in the Lord always,  
Again I will say, Rejoice!  
Rejoice in the Lord always,  
Again I will say, Rejoice!

And then God's peace, which  
has no end,  
Your heart and thoughts  
will guard and tend.  
A peace that knowledge  
can't explain,  
Will keep you safe in  
Christ's domain.  
So fix your mind on what is true,  
On what is pure and right for you.  
On all that's lovely, just, and good,  
And rightly understood.

Rejoice in the Lord always,  
Again I will say, Rejoice!  
Rejoice in the Lord always,  
Again I will say, Rejoice!

Whatever you have  
learned from me,  
Or heard or seen for you to be—  
The things you have  
received as true,  
Go now and put them into view.  
Put all these lessons into place,  
And walk with Him in  
truth and grace.  
And then the God of peace will be,  
Your strength for all eternity.

Rejoice in the Lord always,  
Again I will say, Rejoice!  
Rejoice in the Lord always,  
Again I will say, Rejoice!

# Session 6: Rejoice in the Lord Always

Listen: “Rejoice in the Lord Always”

Read: Philippians 4:1-9

## 6.1 A Plea for Unity and a Call to Joy

As Paul begins his final chapter, he just lavishes the Philippians with affection. He calls them “my brothers, beloved and longed for, my joy and crown”. They aren’t just a project for him; they are his pride and joy. This deep love is what fuels his plea for them to “stand firm in the Lord.”

Then, he gets very specific. He calls out two women in the church by name: “I exhort Euodia, and I exhort Syntyche, to think the same way in the Lord”. Now, you don’t do something like this in a public letter unless the situation is serious. This wasn’t to shame them. It shows us that these were prominent, important women in the church who had “labored with me in the Good News”, but their disagreement was now threatening the unity of the whole community. The calls for humility back in chapter 2 were aimed at a very real problem.

Right after this specific plea for unity, Paul zooms out and gives one of his most famous commands: “Rejoice in the Lord always! Again I will say, Rejoice!”. The exclamation points are mine, but I think they’re warranted. The repetition shows how critical this is. This isn’t a suggestion to feel happy when things are going well. It’s a command to make a deliberate choice. And the key is the location of this joy: it is “in the Lord.” It’s a joy that’s grounded in the unchanging reality of who Jesus is, which is constant even when life feels like a roller coaster.

## 6.2 The Antidote to Anxiety: Prayer and Thanksgiving

Paul then gives us a clear, practical, step-by-step strategy for dealing with anxiety.

Step one is to cultivate a gentle spirit and remember God is near. “Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand”. A gentle, non-anxious presence is the natural fruit of a heart that knows the Lord is in control and coming back.

Step two is to actively trade your worry for prayer. “In nothing be anxious,” he says, “but in everything, by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God”. He’s telling us to take all the energy we would normally spend on “what-if” scenarios and redirect it into conversation with God. And notice that “thanksgiving” isn’t optional. Gratitude is the secret sauce. Thanking God for his past faithfulness even while we’re asking for future help re-frames the whole situation and builds our trust.

And what’s the result? “And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus”. This peace is a supernatural gift. It doesn’t make sense by human logic. And the word for “guard” is a military term. It’s like God posts an entire garrison of soldiers around your heart and mind to protect them from the invasion of anxiety.

## 6.3 The Power of Example: A Disciplined Mind

Getting this peace is one thing; keeping it is another. The prayer in verse 6 is the emergency response to anxiety, but the mental discipline of verse 8 is the long-term health plan. Anxiety loves to feed on junk food: lies, negativity, and fear. Paul tells us to go on a different mental diet.

“Finally, brothers,” he says, “whatever things are true, whatever things are honorable, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report... think about these things”. This is a call to be the master of what we meditate on. We have to intentionally fix our minds on what is good and true. Prayer ushers God’s peace in, and disciplined thinking keeps that peace from leaking out.

Paul finishes by pointing to his own life as the textbook. “The things which you learned... and saw in me: do these things”. And the result of this obedient lifestyle? “The God of peace will be with you.” Notice the subtle shift. In verse 7, the \*peace of God\* is our guard. But here, the \*God of peace\* Himself is our companion. It’s a promise of His very presence.

## REFLECTION & DISCUSSION

- Think of a specific worry in your life right now. How can you practically follow Paul’s instructions in verse 6 to turn that anxiety into a prayer of petition and thanksgiving?
- What does the “mental diet” of verse 8 look like for you this week? What “true, honorable, just” things can you choose to think about when you’re tempted by negativity?
- Paul points to his own life as an example. Who are the people in your life whose joy and peace make you want to “do these things”? How can you learn from them?

# The Secret of Contentment

(Based on Philippians 4:10-23)

I've known the feast when wine is  
poured, a table overflowing.  
I've known the ache of wanting  
more with barren fields for sowing.  
I've known the praise of loyal  
friends, a gift of fragrant care.  
I've known the silence when it  
ends, with no one standing there.

But I have learned the secret now,  
a peace that will not cease.  
In every high and every low, He is  
my strength and increase.  
I can do all things through the  
One who lifts my weary head.  
The secret isn't what I have, but  
trusting what He said.

I've known a strength that's  
not my own, when I had  
nothing left to give.  
I've known a joy when I'm alone,  
the grace by which my spirit lives.  
I've known the calm of victory's  
prize, a triumph clear and bright.  
I've known that same calm in my  
eyes, when failure stole the light.

And I have learned the secret now,  
a peace that will not cease.  
In every high and every low, He is  
my strength and increase.  
I can do all things through the  
One who lifts my weary head.  
The secret isn't what I have, but  
trusting what He said.

I've known His promise to provide,  
from riches of His grace.  
I've known His comfort as my  
guide, in every trying place.  
And so I've known a reason why  
my heart can praise His name,  
And why His glory fills the sky,  
forever and the same.

For I have learned the secret now, a  
peace that will not cease.  
In every high and every low, He is  
my strength and increase.  
I can do all things through the  
One who lifts my weary head.  
The secret isn't what I have, but  
trusting what He said.



# Session 7: The Secret of Contentment

Listen: “The Secret of Contentment”

Read: Philippians 4:10-23

## 7.1 A Renewed Partnership and a Learned Secret

In his final section, Paul finally gets around to saying “thank you” for the financial gift the Philippians had sent him. But he’s very careful about how he says it. He’s overjoyed, not primarily because of the money, but because their gift showed that their “thought for me” had “revived”. It was proof of their active partnership and care. This brings the theme of *koinonia* from chapter 1 full circle, beautifully bookending the letter.

This thank-you note becomes the setup for Paul to share one of the most profound lessons of his life. He wants to make it clear that his joy isn’t dependent on their gift. “Not that I speak in respect to lack,” he clarifies, “for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content in it”.

I love that he says he “learned” to be content. It wasn’t a personality trait he was born with. It was a spiritual discipline he acquired in the school of God’s providence, with a curriculum that included both feasts and famines. The song’s opening verse captures this perfectly: “I’ve known the feast when wine is poured... I’ve known the ache of wanting more.” Paul has been through it all, and he says, “I have learned the secret both to be filled and to be hungry, both to abound and to be in need”. His inner stability wasn’t tied to his outer circumstances.

## 7.2 The Source of Contentment: Christ's Strength

And now, he reveals the secret. This brings us to one of the most beloved, and most frequently butchered, verses in the entire Bible: “I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me”.

To get this verse right, we have to read it in context. This isn't a blank check from God to help you win the Super Bowl or slam-dunk a basketball. The “all things” Paul can do are the “all things” he just listed in verse 12: being humbled and abounding, being hungry and being full. The verse isn't a promise of unlimited personal achievement; it's a promise of unlimited endurance.

The real meaning is something like, “I have the Christ-given strength to remain joyful and faithful whether I have everything or nothing at all.” This transforms the verse from a slogan for self-empowerment into a profound declaration of Christ-sufficiency. The secret to contentment isn't what you have in the bank; it's Who you have in your heart. As the song's chorus puts it, “The secret isn't what I have, but trusting what He said.”

## 7.3 The Beauty of Giving and Receiving

Even though he doesn't \*need\* their gift to be content, Paul doesn't dismiss it. He celebrates it. “However you did well,” he says, “that you shared in my affliction”. He reminds them that they were the only church that supported him financially when he first started out.

Then he re-frames their gift in a beautiful way. He's not primarily excited about what the gift does for him; he's excited about what it does for \*them\*. He seeks “the fruit that increases to your account”. Their generosity is a spiritual investment that is storing up eternal dividends for them in heaven. He even describes their gift as an act of worship, a “sweet-smelling fragrance, an

acceptable and well-pleasing sacrifice to God”.

And because they have sacrificially met his need, Paul makes a staggering promise: “My God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus”. Their generosity toward Paul unlocks God’s generous provision for them, drawn from the inexhaustible bank account of heaven.

## 7.4 Final Greetings and Benediction

The letter closes with a final burst of praise and some personal greetings. And then there’s one last little detail that I just love. He passes on greetings from “all the saints... especially those who are of Caesar’s household”. It’s a quiet confirmation of his report back in chapter 1. The good news of King Jesus really had invaded the very heart of the Roman empire. From a prison cell, Paul had launched an invasion of love that was changing the world from the inside out.

His final words are a blessing that sums up the whole letter: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all”. It’s this grace that makes partnership possible, fuels joy in suffering, models humility, empowers us to shine as lights, gives us a righteousness that isn’t our own, and teaches us the secret of unshakable contentment. It all flows from the amazing grace of Jesus.

## REFLECTION & DISCUSSION

- Paul says he learned to be content in both abundance and in need. Which is a bigger test for your contentment right now: having too much or having too little?
- We often treat Philippians 4:13 as a promise for worldly success. How does its true meaning—Christ’s strength to endure any circumstance—change how you view a specific challenge you are facing?
- Paul calls the Philippians’ gift “fruit that increases to your account”. Think of one opportunity to be generous this week. How can you intentionally view that act not as a loss, but as an act of worship and a spiritual investment?

# A Final Word

And with that, we've reached the end of our journey through this incredible letter.

My hope, as we close this study, is that this has been more than just an exercise in learning facts about the Bible. I pray it's been an opportunity to let the living Word of God get into the very fabric of your life. The same grace that runs through every line of Philippians—the grace that makes partnership possible, fuels joy in hardship, and teaches the secret of unshakable contentment—is the same grace available to you right now.

So, keep pressing on. Keep your eyes fixed on Jesus. And trust that the God who began this good work in you will be faithful to see it through to the end.

Grace and peace to you all.