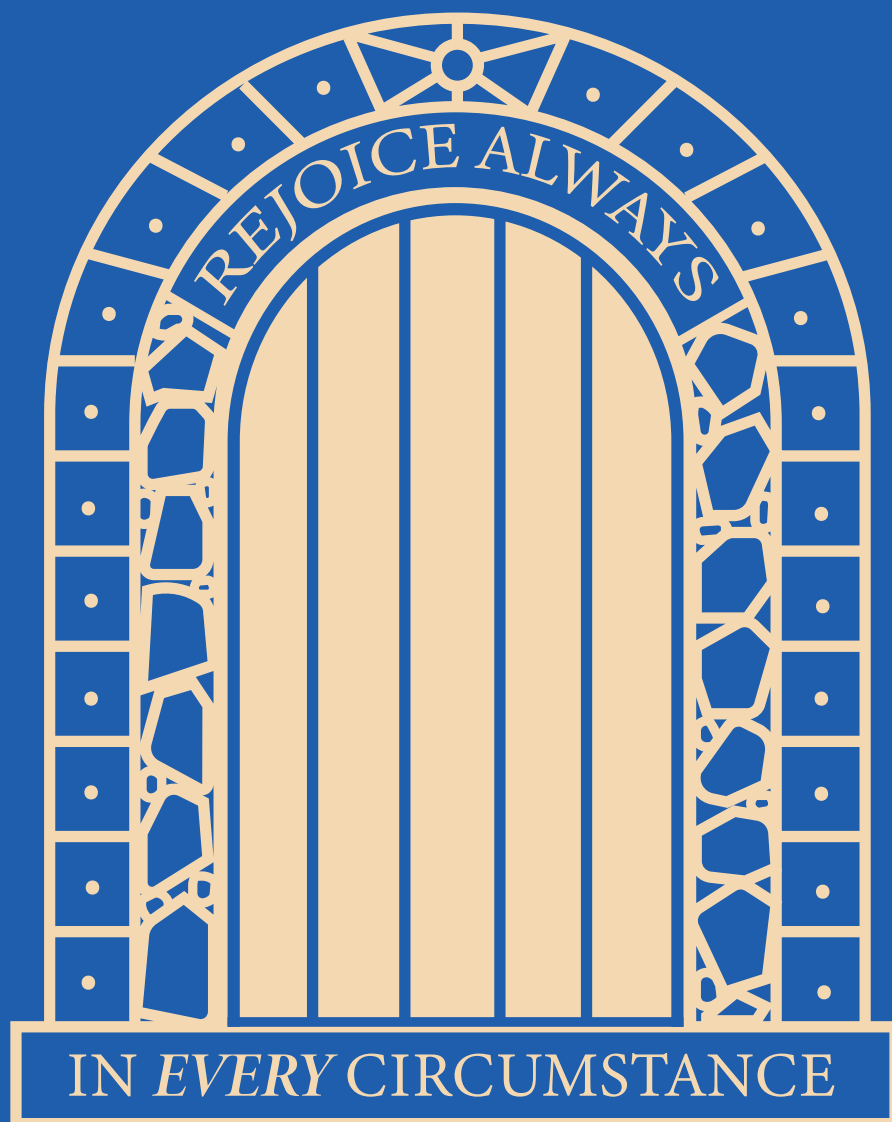


Philippians Devotional



Philippians 1:1–11

Written by: Jacob Parton

Thought:

Paul addresses his letter to the church community in the city of Philippi, a Roman colony located in northern Greece. He planted the Philippian church about a decade before (see Acts 16). Now, he is imprisoned for telling others about Jesus and writes to thank his friends for their emotional and financial support, along with instructing them on how to live lives for Jesus in an alienated and hostile world.

Paul clearly has a deep affection for the Philippians. He speaks God's grace and peace over them, tells them that he consistently thanks God for them and that he prays on their behalf. These prayers are marked by joy, an emphasis that Paul will return to throughout the letter. This is remarkable because of Paul's current situation of suffering. His prayer, he says, is not even for his own deliverance, but that the church's love may "abound" and their discernment grow. Then they will know what's "best" and live fruitful lives that are pleasing to God.

In times of difficulty, distress, and isolation - prayer is a crucial source of strength to the one praying and a vital means of encouragement to the one being prayed for. We can learn from Paul about the interconnection between love & discernment and how to live as Christians. Love is the foundation for our understanding of God, the God we see in Jesus, who revealed Himself most clearly through His own crucifixion, where He gave His life for the world. In seeking to become more like God, we must learn to assess what is right and love must be our teacher. It is through the lens of wanting to love God and to love our neighbours well that we see the world rightly, in order to behave as disciples of Jesus. Love leads us, like it led Paul, to pray for those around us with affection, fervency, and even joy when we may be in the depths of despair ourselves.

So, may we grow in our experience of God's love, receiving greater revelation, and share His love with others as we pray for them.

Meditation:

Welcome the presence of the Holy Spirit and allow Him to fill you afresh with God's love.

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Spend some time reflecting on Paul's prayer for the Philippian church and what this means for you. He prayed:

"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."

.....

Ask the Spirit to bring people to your mind that you need to pray for today. Pray that their love may abound, their revelation of God grow, and that they can lead a fruitful life for Jesus.

.....

Prayer

Lord Jesus, You have shown us true love through giving Your life for us. Help us to unceasingly seek to know You more, to be filled to overflowing with Your death-defying love, and to faithfully pray for others with affection, fervency, and joy. Amen.

Philippians 1:12–18a

Written by: Emily Aduah

Thought:

Paul is writing to encourage his friends in Philippi. They had heard that he was in prison and were understandably anxious. Paul, however, is full of confidence and challenges the church to see things from a different perspective: that things might look bad, but they are really turning out well because the message of Jesus is being proclaimed.

In this passage we have a rare glimpse into what was going on in Paul's life at the time. Wrongfully imprisoned for preaching the good news of Jesus, and now awaiting trial, things weren't looking good for him. He had also heard reports that some people were preaching about Jesus just to make even more trouble. But Paul doesn't respond with self-pity; he isn't angry at God or full of doubt. He sees these problems as opportunities: the local church had been inspired by his example and were fearlessly sharing the message of Jesus; and the palace guard, soldiers assigned to high-ranking officials in the Roman Empire, were all talking about it too. In the midst of a difficult situation Paul was able to celebrate how the good news of Jesus was reaching further and further into the fabric of society.

Times of suffering and trial have a way of testing what we know, or what we thought we knew. Faced with difficulties many of us can only imagine, Paul was unshakeably convinced of what he wrote in Romans 8: "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."

Out of this situation, God was working good.

It's easy to see the parallels today. Whilst there is tremendous suffering around us, and many of us feel trapped, we can be confident that God is somehow bringing good out of it all. Lots of people are now hearing the message of Jesus for the first time and many have responded by giving their lives to Him. As we focus on God's Kingdom breaking out, we will also inspire others to share their faith with courage and without fear.

Meditation:

Take a moment to welcome the Holy Spirit. You may want to close your eyes and open your hands out.

.....

Paul said “what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel.” God wants to give us his perspective on this season, a way to respond that is at odds with the fear and anxiety that is all around us. Reflect on the truth that in all things, He is working things out for good.

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Pray that you would have the eyes to see the opportunities right in front of you and the courage to speak about Jesus.

.....

Prayer

Father, thank You that, even when we don't see how, You are working out all things for good. We pray for courage and confidence in Your message. And wherever Jesus' name is spoken today, let Your Kingdom come. Amen.

Philippians 1:18b–26

Written by: Josh Dillingham

Thought:

From his prison cell, Paul considers the possibility that his days on earth are numbered. He lays himself bare to his readers, vulnerably, yet joyfully, outlining the dichotomy in his spirit; to live is Christ and to die is gain. Paul senses though that the Lord still has good works prepared for him on earth, and so he finishes this section of the letter with an emphatic restatement of his apostolic mission.

It's easy to read this passage and feel like Paul is expressing either reckless bravado that pretends not to care whether he lives or dies, or deep fatigue that says, "I really don't want to go another round here Lord." Both of these sentiments could mistakenly be attributed to a desperate man longing to be done with his earthly suffering. But that's not the picture of Paul we get in this passage. In verse 18, we see how he actively rejoices, in verse 19, we see how he believes, and in verse 20 we see how he hopes. Paul's statement in verse 21 is not the musings of a resigned man who is done with life, but of a man who is so in love with his Lord that every decision, every situation, every ambition, even those that relate to his own freedom and security, are filtered through the lens of "will this help me pursue more of God's presence, and bring more glory to the name of Jesus?"

Few of us are in prison now, waiting on verdicts like Paul, but all of us are living in fairly uncertain times. The last few months may have caused us to re-evaluate our priorities, reconsider our vocations, redraw our routines and have greater regard for our own security and wellbeing. As we contemplate those things, it's tempting to make decisions that are sensible and are in our interests. However, this season also provides us with the opportunity to follow the example of Paul, and begin to view the shifting sands in our lives through the lens of "how will this help me pursue more of the presence of Jesus and bring more glory to His name?" It may require difficult decisions to be made, and will certainly require the help of the Holy Spirit, but in this process of realignment I am certain that we will find, as Paul found, a strength and a joy that will sustain us even in the most trying of times. So, day by day, regardless of our circumstances, may we be driven by a deep desire to bring glory to Jesus in all that we do, and seek His presence above all else.

Meditation:

Welcome the presence of God right now, it's His presence which we seek.

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In your head, reflect on your upcoming day. Picture all of the distinct moments, interactions, and tasks that you are anticipating. Give God any anxiety or worries that may arise as you do this.

.....

Take a moment to ask Jesus to show you how you can use all those distinct moments to bring glory to His name. Pray for His strength, His love and His joy to fill you as you do this.

.....

Prayer

Lord Jesus, You are our heart's desire; we pray this today even if we don't feel like it. We long for more of Your presence in our lives. May we bring Your name glory through all our daily actions, decisions and discourses. Help us love and pursue You above all other things. Amen.

Philippians 1:27 – 2:4

Written by: Amy Prinsloo

Thought:

As we know from previous readings, Paul is locked up in prison! He'd love to visit his friends in Philippi, but where he can't see them physically, he still wants to encourage them. In his absence, Paul writes to teach the believers about how to live in accordance with the example laid out for them by Jesus.

Philippi was a Roman colony in the region of modern day Macedonia; known for its patriotism and large population of retired Roman soldiers. As you can imagine, Paul faced a lot of resistance there, and consequently so did the Philippian believers after he left. Like Paul, these believers knew what it meant to suffer, but the church of Philippi remained faithful. As he writes, Paul encourages them to stay united - not turning to "selfish ambition" like others he mentions in verse 15 - and it will be through their love for each other and the strength of their community that they'll be able to face this persecution.

Jesus once said: "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." In times of hardship and suffering, it can be easy to turn our eyes inwards and focus on our own needs. Like the familiar words of the cabin crew aboard a flight, we feel as though we should secure our own oxygen mask before helping others. And though it's true that we can't take care of others if we aren't taking care of ourselves, Paul is echoing the words of Jesus when he encourages the Philippian believers not to look to their "own interests but each... to the interests of others." This is no easy task! In order to value others above ourselves we may have to lay down our differences and probably make some sacrifices. But the rewards, he suggests, are greater than the cost. When we extend compassion to each other, we can stand firm; propped up and held tight by each other.

When we carry this "same love" Paul talks about, we have a chance to show our world what it means to truly follow Jesus.

Meditation:

Invite the Holy Spirit, ask Him to show you the love of Jesus.

.....

As you wait, reflect on Paul's challenge to the believers in chapter 2, verse 4:

"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others."

Ask Jesus to fill you with His love and humble your heart.

.....

Ask the Holy Spirit to point out ways you could love the people around you. Ask Him to show you who you need to extend His compassion to right now.

.....

Prayer

Lord Jesus, we thank You that You came to save us. Though we will face difficulty, we are not alone. Help us to love each other with this same love You've shown us. Fill us with Your compassion we pray. Amen.

Philippians 2:5–11

Written by: Jacob Parton

Thought:

In today's passage, the Apostle Paul now presents Jesus as a model for the Philippians to imitate, to reinforce what he's been saying in chapter 2, verses 1-4. The Christians are meant to serve and honour one another, just as Jesus has served and honoured us above himself.

This passage, which some think Paul bases on an early Christian hymn, tracks the downward spiral of Jesus' status. Though sharing the same high status as God the Father, Jesus descends and takes the lower status as a human being: a servant. Jesus then descends to a lower status again, as his obedience leads him to death, even death on a cross. Crucifixion is a torturous execution designed to destroy someone not only physically and emotionally, but also socially, as they hung naked, suffering in a public place, often for days. Furthermore, the language Paul uses here is striking. According to many Bible scholars, the Greek word translated as "servant" is better rendered as "slave." This highlights even more Jesus' low status through his incarnation, and especially through his death, as he's depicted as a crucified slave - the lowest status of all. Importantly, Jesus chose this downward spiral, as the passage said: "he did not consider equality..."; "he made himself nothing"; "he humbled himself." Incredibly, it was because Jesus lowered himself that God the Father then restored him to the highest place, the highest status, as God reveals to the world that Jesus is Lord.

This is the same path that Paul encourages the Philippians to take and which we must take, too. The church in Philippi was a mixture of high and low status people, from Roman citizens at the top, all the way to slaves at the very bottom. Our church is also a mixture of people from different backgrounds, different economic brackets, different levels of education. God calls each of us, just as Paul encouraged the Philippians, to imitate Jesus by giving up our social status, honour and prestige through serving, loving and sacrificing for one another .

So, may we join in with Paul and Timothy, who began their letter saying, "Paul and Timothy, slaves of Christ Jesus," and may we have the same mindset as Jesus himself..

Meditation:

Welcome the presence of the Holy Spirit right now, let Him reveal Jesus to you afresh.

.....

Reflect for a few moments on Jesus' chosen downward spiral of status:

⁶ Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;

⁷ rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.

⁸ And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death—
even death on a cross!

.....

Ask the Spirit to reveal to you anywhere you might be holding on to social status, how you may give up this status, and for whom. Prayerfully commit yourself to loving these people.

.....

Prayer

Father God, we thank You that You have revealed who You are through Jesus Your Son: You are the God who descends, who sacrifices, who serves. May we imitate You today through the love and power of Your Holy Spirit. Amen. You've shown us. Fill us with Your compassion we pray. Amen.

Philippians 2:12-18

Written by: Israel Bucko

Thought:

In the verses leading up to our reading for today, the Apostle Paul encourages the Philippians to love one another, with the same mindset Jesus had, who despite having equality with God, became a servant of all, to offer us the gift of salvation. With this in mind, Paul now calls the Philippians to grab firmly onto the salvation they've been graciously given, and to flourish in living it out.

Paul's hopes are set on the maturity of his dear Philippian friends. He calls for their faith to keep growing, regardless of whether he's able to be present with them physically. He doesn't ask them to add to their salvation with extra moral, good deeds on top, but he does ask them to take seriously the work of applying it to their lives in order to mature and grow as a church following Jesus. This is to be done with a fear and trembling, coming from an awareness of the Spirit of God in them - the One causing this growth to happen. Paul describes how as they hold onto this gospel of Jesus and apply it to their lives, they will look different to the wider community in which they live, and "shine like stars in the sky." Their growth is so important to Paul, that he would not only lay down his life to build up and encourage their faith, but do it while rejoicing.

As I write this devotional, it's Maundy Thursday just before Easter. All those years ago, this was a day where Jesus anticipated the heavy burden and weight of the cross on His shoulders. And it is with this heaviness and awe that I think of Paul's invitation for our spiritual growth.

Jesus loves you so deeply, with an affection that led His life to be poured out for you. So let's grab a hold of this wonderful gospel. Let's feel the weight of the presence of the living God in us. Let's continue to work out what it looks like to follow Him in the 21st century. And let's keep growing through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Meditation:

Welcome the Holy Spirit, let Him remind you of Jesus, and how He loved you through the cross.

.....

Take a moment to reflect on the words of Paul,

“Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed - not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence - continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfil his good purpose.”

.....

Ask the Spirit to bring to mind an area in which you're working out your salvation well and where you need His grace to improve.

.....

Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank You for Your gospel, and for helping me grow mature in living it out. Please continue all that You're doing in me. Amen.

Philippians 2:19–24

Written by: Ali Courtney

Thought:

Through chapter 2 of Philippians, the Apostle Paul has been painting a picture of what it looks like for us to have a mindset like Jesus and as it draws to a close Paul commends two men known to the church at Philippi.

In today's reading we see Paul recommending his friend and co-worker, Timothy, and saying that he will send Timothy to them as soon as the outcome of his own trial is clear. He commends Timothy's attitude as "that of Christ Jesus," someone who thinks with the mindset of Jesus, not only looking out for his own interests but the interests of others. He holds Timothy up as a model for them to imitate, a man of proven character who will come and serve the church by looking out for their welfare with genuine concern.

In the times that we are living in, fear, anxiety and panic are easily spread through conversation, news and social media. However, encouragement can also spread far and wide and be transmitted from person to person. Before long, a wave of positivity and joy can engulf whole families, friendship groups, neighbourhoods and communities. Like Timothy, we are called to think of others and consider their welfare as well as our own. The joy we have to offer is not empty, but has been tested through difficult times, throughout the generations and across the world.

May we, like Timothy, be bringers and spreaders of encouragement, thinking not only about our needs in this season but also the welfare of others around us.

Meditation:

Quiet yourself now and spend a moment allowing the Holy Spirit to come and speak to your heart.

.....

Being present for other people requires our sacrifice, like Timothy, stepping out of that which will solely benefit us in order to also live for the benefit of others. In this time, when we're not able to see the people we know face to face, we can find new ways to encourage and help one another. Maybe a phone call, sending an encouraging verse or text or helping someone practically. Reflect for a few moments on how God might be speaking to you about this.

.....

Allow the Holy Spirit to bring someone that needs your help and encouragement to mind. Ask Him how you can "show genuine concern for their welfare" today.

.....

Prayer

Lord, thank You that we all have the opportunity at this time to be an encouraging presence in the lives of those around us. Help us make the decision to spread joy and encouragement rather than fear and panic and to consider serving the needs of others as well as our own during a challenging time. Amen.

Philippians 2:25–30

Written by: Sarah Pickup

Thought:

Epaphroditus was originally from Philippi, and had been sent as an apostle and messenger from the Philippian church to provide support for the Apostle Paul. Epaphroditus is clearly someone who is held in high esteem; and Paul lovingly refers to him as his brother, coworker and fellow soldier. Despite being from different places - these words show a powerful description of the unity of the church; the family Jesus has called us to be part of.

Unfortunately, during his trip Epaphroditus had fallen ill and sadly nearly died. It appears that word travelled about his illness, and many were worried about him. Paul wrote to the Philippian church to encourage them that Epaphroditus was okay and would be on his way back to them soon – so to welcome him home with joy and honour!

At this time, many of us will have friends and family who we are concerned about becoming ill, or who may even be ill right now. The Philippians were similarly worried for Epaphroditus. Amazingly, Paul shares with us that even though Epaphroditus had been the one who was so ill, he was actually “distressed” because those in Philippi were worried about him! Despite being so sick that he was near death – Epaphroditus was still thinking of others above himself. He longed to see them, to spare everyone the worry and sorrow.

Now I don't know about you, but I hate being ill. That feeling of not being able to do anything; not being able to live out your normal day. That feeling of being confined to your house; and more often than not – I end up feeling pretty sorry for myself. It can be a pretty low point in life, right? How often when we feel like that do we think about the interests of others above our own?

This story of Epaphroditus shows us a wonderful model of the gospel; of the way Jesus calls us to live. May we remember that even when we're unwell, or at our lowest points, we are united as brothers and sisters of Christ, and out of humility and love, may we learn to still value others above ourselves.

Meditation:

Welcome the presence of the Holy Spirit to come and meet with you afresh in this moment.

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Reflect on this story of Epaphroditus – the willingness he had to do the Lord's work and his heart of humility even amongst suffering.

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We all have low moments – take this time to give them to the Lord, and ask Him to remind you of who He is – full of grace, love and humility. Invite Him to fill your heart with His ways and lead you to share His love with those around you.

.....

Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank You that Your grace is always enough. Thank You that even in our weakness, You still choose to use us for Your glory. Fill me with Your love, Lord, and help me to be a model of Your gospel throughout all the days of my life – full of humility. Amen.

Philippians 3:1–6

Written by: Jacob Parton

Thought:

Paul makes a sharp turn in his letter to warn the Philippians about some enemies that were close by. He seeks to dismantle the enemies' arguments before they have actually been given, writing in a similar fiery tone to that found in his letter to the Galatians.

It's clear that a similar threat in Galatia was now impending upon the church in Philippi: some Jewish Christian teachers were travelling to tell Paul's gentile (non-Jewish) converts that they must follow Jewish customs in order to be truly faithful to God. Paul challenges this by sharing about his own life as a radical Pharisee, before he had encountered Jesus: he was of impeccable Jewish heritage; he had meticulously obeyed the Law; and his zeal or passion for God had been so strong that he had killed Christians. (Oh, the irony!) But, Jesus showed him that his obedience to the Law had actually led him to work against God, because he was persecuting God's church. Now, Paul understood that these false teachers heading for Philippi were similarly deeply mistaken. In their devotion to the Law, they were forcing non-Jewish Christians to obey it, and so were actually working against God, just as he had once been. In this passage, Paul asserts that the ultimate question for the Christians isn't about whether to do or not to do something, but about where their confidence rests: in themselves and their actions or in Christ and his actions?

For those of us who have been following Jesus for a while, we can find ourselves drifting into a place of self-reliance. I grew up in a Christian household and have been involved in the Church for all of my life. From a young age, I've been taught about Jesus, the Bible, and how to live as a Christian. Though thankful for all these things, it can be easy to start depending upon my own knowledge and actions, instead of God's. As Paul realised once he encountered Jesus, we can all be self-deceived and think we're doing right, when we're actually being un-Christlike. We must repeatedly choose to look to the Spirit, who teaches us to rely not on ourselves, but on God.

So, may we boast not in ourselves but only in our Lord Jesus, in whom we see the supreme revelation of God.

Meditation:

Welcome the presence of the Holy Spirit, let Him reveal Jesus to you afresh.

.....

Take some time reflecting on the following words from Paul:

“For it is we who are the circumcision, we who serve God by his Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh.”

.....

Ask the Spirit to identify areas of your life where you may be relying on yourself. Give those to God and ask Him to change your perspective.

.....

Prayer

Lord Jesus, we thank You that You are enough. Through You all things were made and in You all things hold together. Teach us to rely better on You and not ourselves. May You be our only boast. Amen.

Philippians 3:7–11

Written by: Caroline Seal

Thought:

In these verses, Paul explains what it means to belong to Jesus. To Paul, knowing Jesus is worth more than anything else.

Everything he's done before this, his status, his qualifications, is worth nothing if he can't know Jesus. He's in prison, in worldly terms he has nothing anyway, but knowing Jesus and being able to be found in Jesus is of the highest importance to him.

Paul wants to know Jesus in three ways. He wants to be found in Him, an image of intimacy, of personal relationship. He wants to know the power of His resurrection, an image of the dynamic power we can access when we pray in the power of the Spirit. And he wants to know the fellowship of sharing in Jesus' sufferings.

I was a trained teacher when I felt called by God to work in Brazil. However, it wasn't what I thought it would be. I tried to speak but people looked at me as if I was babbling. I had a lot of knowledge in my head, but I couldn't share it with people, as I had no language. I was frustrated, as they couldn't even say my name properly! It felt as if I'd given up so much of myself to even be there, but had nothing to offer.

When people feel called to serve God abroad they often have to give up even more than that in order to help others to know Jesus. They may lose status or financial independence; they're far from family, they miss out on many of life's big occasions. Many of us will also be feeling some of those losses in these unprecedented times as well, as we miss birthdays, weddings and are even unable to say final farewells to loved ones.

Is seeking to know Jesus – in our intimacy with Him, through the power of prayer and also in His sufferings – our highest priority in the same way that it was for Paul?

Meditation:

Ask the Holy Spirit to give you a fresh understanding to Jesus.

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Ponder these words, a paraphrase by Graham Kendrick of part of the passage:

"All I once held dear, built my life upon
All this world reveres and wants to own
All I once thought gain I have counted loss
Spent and worthless now compared to this."

.....

We've all had no choice in letting go of some things, both positive and negative, in these times, but is there something that Jesus is asking you to release so you can know Him more.

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Prayer

Let's close with the chorus of the Graham Kendrick song Knowing You Jesus, Knowing You:

"There is no greater thing
You're my all, you're the best
You're my joy my righteousness
And I love you, Lord."

May these words go with us into the coming days as we seek to know Jesus more. Amen

Philippians 3:12-16

Written by: James Lainchbury

Thought:

In chapter three, Paul encourages the Philippian church to avoid unnecessary rules and to steer clear of appetites that don't please God. Between these two warnings we have some inspiring verses, which describe a balanced and purposeful life in Jesus!

As followers of Jesus, we are "New Creations" (2 Cor, chapter 5, verse 17). In one sense we have arrived. In accepting Jesus as Lord and Saviour, we have received right relationship with God and we've been given a new identity as His Children. Yet Paul says that he has not yet arrived at his goal? Paul describes in verse 13 that he hasn't nailed it, he's not attained perfection or reached his final destination. This is exactly the situation we all find ourselves in. And don't I know it! I struggle daily with anxieties, frustrations and fears. I don't always feel close to Jesus, and I sometimes run in the opposite direction – to other things which I hope will satisfy me. In this difficult time, it's clear I certainly haven't attained perfection, or arrived fully at my goal.

When character flaws bubble to the surface, it's often the same ones over and over, and it can be so frustrating realising that "I'm not quite over this yet". It's easy to despair as you look at "what is behind." But, it's actually also possible to justify bad behaviour when you look back and say, "Hey, I've had a pretty good run recently, messing up this time around's not that big of a deal when you look back at how well I've been doing." Whilst Paul encourages those who are "Mature" to recognise we've not yet reached our final goal, he also says the best way is NOT to focus on what is behind. Paul encourages us to "press on toward the goal." And, of course, the goal is Jesus, ultimate satisfaction and union with Him. We must learn to look ahead and focus on Him. Don't fixate on failures and don't slip-up after being satisfied by last week's achievements. This is often hard, and won't mean we will be perfect every day. But by fixing our attentions on Jesus, He will lead us, step by step into His eternally gracious and loving embrace. And we will slowly begin to look more and more like Him each day.

Meditation:

Get yourself comfy, close your eyes. Take a deep breath in and out. Invite the Holy Spirit in your own words.

.....

What does it look like for you to “Forget what is behind”? Maybe you fixate on a certain previous season of your life. Or maybe you’re repeatedly making the same mistakes and you’re beginning to lose hope. Jesus wants to free you from living in the past. Reflect on what it might look like for you to “Forget what is behind.”

.....

Now focus your prayer on Jesus. Thank Him for the parts of Him which you really appreciate. Invite Him to speak to you in this moment.

.....

Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank You that You long to be with us. Thank You for Your forgiveness and for Your love. Thank You for the grace to forget what is behind and to press on into today, fixing our eyes on You. Thank You that You lead us and that You are always with us. Amen.

Philippians 3:17 – 4:1

Written by: Lauren Parton

Thought:

Paul begins by encouraging the Philippians to live as followers of Jesus. Paganism (or the belief in many false gods) was practiced widely across Philippi, but in this passage Paul highlights how the pagans were on a path to self-destruction, as they lived a lifestyle different to how those who are followers of Jesus are called to live. Paul urges the Philippians to be a united people, as citizens of heaven, who live radically different lifestyles to those around them.

Paul starts this passage by telling the Philippians to follow his example. This may sound strange to us, as it is not something we often hear from our leaders. However, for the Philippians, they didn't have the privilege that we do now, 2000 years later, of being surrounded with examples of what it looks like to be a faithful follower of Jesus. Therefore, it was up to Paul to model what that looked like. For Paul, to follow Jesus meant rejecting his status as a respected Jewish leader and instead sacrificially serving others. Similarly, he was asking the Philippians to do the same. Should their status as a citizen of Philippi come into conflict with their loyalty to Jesus, they needed to be prepared to reject the former, just as Paul did.

In verse 18, we see Paul's compassion on those in Philippi who weren't following Jesus, the pagans. Their lifestyle may not have seemed that different to the Christians, many of whom had previously been pagans themselves. But Paul calls them to see the pagan lifestyle through a different lens – as destructive to their humanity and therefore, God's creation. This truth moved Paul to tears.

In contrast, we are citizens of heaven. We live on the earth but are also people of God, demonstrating God's desire for heaven and earth to come together. We see this first with the temple where God's presence dwelt on earth. Then, through Jesus, when God came to earth. And now, through the Holy Spirit, who lives in God's people on earth. We, just as the Philippians, are to bring the grace and peace of heaven to earth, as we "eagerly await" here for Jesus to bring God's Kingdom fully to earth in the New Creation!

Therefore, our aim now, is to be people of heaven, living under God, but living on

the earth. Not through using oppressive power, but through being servants and loving our enemies, as Paul and Jesus did.

In this current situation, may we be people who act differently from those whose “minds are set on earthly things” and instead, embody what it means to be people of grace and peace as citizens of heaven.

Meditation:

Welcome the presence of the Holy Spirit. Let Him fill you with His grace and peace.

.....

Take some time reflecting on the following words from Jesus in

John 13:34-35:

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

.....

Ask the Spirit to highlight any areas where you haven’t been acting as though you are a citizen of heaven. Ask Him to change your perspective and to give you opportunity to love and serve your neighbours in this season.

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Prayer

Lord Jesus, we thank You that You have called us citizens of heaven and children of God. Through Your example, You have shown us that we are to love and serve those who are vulnerable, lonely and lost. Please help us to better represent You in our world. In Your beautiful name. Amen.

Philippians 4:2–9

Written by: Anita Schwartz

Thought:

Paul comes towards the end of his letter with some directives for two women as well as the whole church, and ultimately to all believers who hear or read his letter. Paul mentioned earlier in chapter 3, verse 1 that it is no trouble for him to write the same things to them again and so he does exactly that – making the point once more, and instructing them to rejoice in the Lord. In chapter 2, Paul said how important it is to be of one mind. Now he pleads with Euodia and Syntyche to apply this, and be of the same mind in the Lord.

I wonder what the word joy means to you? When Paul speaks of joy he doesn't mean happiness relating solely to positive emotions, experiences or current life circumstances. It is joy in the Lord, for what He has done, is doing and will do. This joy comes from God Himself, it's not man-made. Because of this, Paul can say "rejoice always." Remember, Paul was in prison when he wrote this letter, perfectly illustrating his point. He knows how important it is to turn to God in prayer, and give thanks for all the excellent and praiseworthy things in this world despite difficult circumstances. God will hold us close to Him, His peace guarding our hearts and minds in Christ.

Rejoice in the Lord always! Paul's command is quite demanding. Sometimes people think it means we should smile all the time, especially in church, no matter what our circumstances are. Others will then see that we are happy and everything is fine. But that is not the point. It's not about smiling and it's not about what others think!

It is demanding, but it is possible. Knowing Jesus is the key. When life gets difficult or depressing, it helps me immensely to look at the cross, to remember what Jesus has done for me. He paid the price for my sins so I can be reconciled to God. He rose again. He gave me His Spirit and works in me and through me. I think about the New Creation and the promise that there will be no more death, mourning, crying or pain. With this in mind, I find I can rejoice even in difficult circumstances. The peace of God has reached my heart and mind.

So let us rejoice in the Lord always, I will say it again, rejoice!

Meditation:

Welcome the Holy Spirit and allow Him to fill you afresh with God's joy and peace.

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Spend some time reflecting on the following words from Paul:

"Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things."

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Ask the Spirit to help you see the true, noble, right, pure, lovely and admirable things around you and in the wider world. Praise God for those excellent things.

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Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank You that our joy is rooted in You and not our circumstances. Help us to see the good things You are doing, but also show us where we need to go and play our part in this world. Amen.

Philippians 4:10–13

Written by: Ed Earnshaw

Thought:

In this chapter, Paul thanks the Philippians for their support. He urges them to not let worry get the better of them and to remain united, putting into practice what he has taught them. Paul expresses his confidence that God will bless them for their faithfulness.

In chapter 4 verses 10 to 13, Paul expresses his joy and gratitude to the church in Philippi, as they have taken the opportunity to demonstrate their care by sending gifts to him. Paul was imprisoned as he wrote this letter and was likely hungry and fragile, so such support would have been really valuable. However, Paul stresses that his joy is not because he felt he was in need, but because the Philippians chose to be generous. Paul explains that he knows what it is like to be in need and to have plenty, to be hungry as well as being well fed. But he has learned to be content whatever his circumstance by relying on God to give him strength.

By being in prison Paul would have had plenty to be anxious about, yet he did not worry about whether his various needs would be met or not. He recognised that dissatisfaction and worry wouldn't help him. Instead, he discovered that the "secret" of being content in every situation, whether in plenty or in want, was to ask God to give him the strength to do whatever was needed. As we navigate this unique and unprecedented season, we will be facing many tough situations as we are asked to stay at home and distance ourselves from one another. We may have real needs when it comes to family, finance, community, and our health. The anxiety this can cause can easily overwhelm us. We can become trapped in what Corrie ten Boom defined as "a cycle of inefficient thoughts whirling around a centre of fear." However, if we trust in and ask God, He will strengthen us to come through whatever situation we are in.

Like Paul, let's ask God to give us strength to be content in Him, whatever our circumstances may be.

Meditation:

Let us open our hearts and be still, inviting the Holy Spirit to increase His presence. Come Holy Spirit.

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Reflect on verse 11 where Paul writes:

"I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances."

What are you in need of, or discontented about, that you should bring to God? Are you finding contentment in Him?

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Pray now, asking God to give you the strength to do whatever is needed in your life. Ask God to let you trust and rely on Him more.

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Prayer

Father God, as we face trying times, let us focus on and put our trust in You. May we learn to ask You to give us the strength to come through whatever situation we are facing. Amen.

Philippians 4:14–20

Written by: Dan Turner

Thought:

As Paul's letter is drawing to a conclusion, he takes time to thank the believers in Philippi for their generosity. They have given financially to support him whilst he is imprisoned and unable to provide for himself.

It's clear from the text that this isn't the first time that this church has given from their own pockets and Paul is plainly grateful. He's also keen to recognise that their giving was motivated by a sense of partnership. This isn't charity or an unwelcome burden upon them, Paul's work – spreading the gospel – is something in which they share. They are collaborators in his mission, he even uses the language that through their gifts they "share in" his troubles. In fact, he goes beyond this, saying that it is a "fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice" – it's an act of worship – pleasing to God. Money and giving can be such sensitive and even divisive subjects yet Paul doesn't shy away. He celebrates and recognises the blessing that is inherent in generosity, not just for the recipient but also for the giver.

We may be familiar with the concept that it's "more blessed to give than receive," but perhaps we perceive this as something done from arm's length. Paul's message to the Philippians, and now to us, goes further. When we give with a heart of worship and sacrifice, we share in the circumstances. We can become partners and protagonists in the story. It's not simply about the money, it's about connectedness. I've been deeply touched by stories from around the world. Families in lockdown with no food, no income... how will God respond to such suffering? Could it be that He wants to use me? At this time, when so many are volunteering time and sacrificing their own safety to serve others, it may feel for some like there is little practically we can do to help.

Paul's thoughts here may help. We can still choose to "share in other's troubles" through our generosity and sacrifice. Both in the UK and also further afield – at a time when finances for many will become much more stretched – we can play our part in bringing God's Kingdom practically and also by providing for the needs of others.

Meditation:

Take a moment to consider this passage of scripture and choose to welcome the Holy Spirit into your reflections.

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Generosity will look different for each of us, but we don't need to remain detached from the needs that we see. Consider how you can share in the troubles of others in a practical way? What might an acceptable sacrifice be for you right now?

Whether financial or otherwise, allow God to stir your heart to the opportunities to help and allow your own spirit to respond to His prompting.

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Pray for others who you know are in need right now, those who are lonely, isolated, sick or suffering.

Ask the Lord to meet their needs, to support and provide for them. Ask Him also to help you see where you can be a part of the answer.

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Prayer

Lord, I recognise that You delight to give good gifts and love generosity. I also see that all I have is Yours. Help me to join with You in supporting those in need and to recognise the ways that I am able to do so. Lord, let Your Kingdom come, let Your will be done. Amen.

Philippians 4:21–23

Written by: Jacob Parton

Thought:

Paul concludes his letter to the church in Philippi in a similar manner to how he opened it: sending greetings and proclaiming the grace of Jesus over them all. But, even here Paul reinforces the argument of his letter.

The Greek word translated in this passage as “God’s people” is literally translated as “the holy ones.” This is an important identity that Paul wants the church to embrace, for it means that the Christians are set apart or distinct, specifically, from the pagan culture around them. This echoes Paul’s language of citizenship found elsewhere in the letter: “our citizenship is in heaven” (3:20), he says, and, as many Bible scholars translate 1:27: “live as citizens worthy of the gospel of Christ.” For the Philippians who have Roman citizenship, and those with Paul who “belong to Caesar’s household,” Paul would remind them that their allegiance is ultimately to King Jesus, not to Rome and not to Caesar - the current king of the Roman Empire. For a world where there weren’t clear divisions between religious, political and socio-economic life, this would have been deeply challenging.

As Christians, our allegiance is higher than any human ruler, institution, or culture. We follow and worship the King of kings and the Lord of lords. This has not only “religious” implications, but economic and social ones. It means sacrificing social status for the sake of the marginalised and those of low social status, as Jesus did. It means supporting others financially or with provisions when they’re in need, like the Philippians supported Paul. It means embracing the culture of heaven to bring God’s grace and peace into a violent and troubled world. Christians are to be radically counter-cultural, making love of God and love of neighbour our highest priorities. And, as we began our reflections on this letter, it means praying for those around us with affection, fervency, and even joy when we may be in the depths of despair ourselves.

So, may we join with our Christian brothers and sisters in living as citizens worthy of the gospel and devoting our whole lives to Jesus our Lord.

Meditation:

Welcome the presence of the Holy Spirit right now. Jesus' grace is near and His presence is with you.

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Reflect for a few moments on your allegiance to Jesus as our King, our Lord, our friend, or as Paul says in 2:9-11:

⁹ Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,
¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
¹¹ and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.”

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Ask the Spirit to reveal to you how you could live counter-culturally today and as a citizen worthy of the gospel. Commit to loving God and your neighbour afresh.

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Prayer

Lord Jesus, we thank You that Your grace is always with us and that You have brought us into Your family. God is our Father, Christians are our brothers and sisters, and You want us to represent You to the world together. Help us in this, through Your Spirit's power. Amen.



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