



Blazing Stars

A KID'S COMPANION TO PHILIPPIANS

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To Pastor Doug,

*My pastor, teacher, encourager, heresy-checker, brother, and friend. I
am ever thankful that the Lord crossed our paths.*

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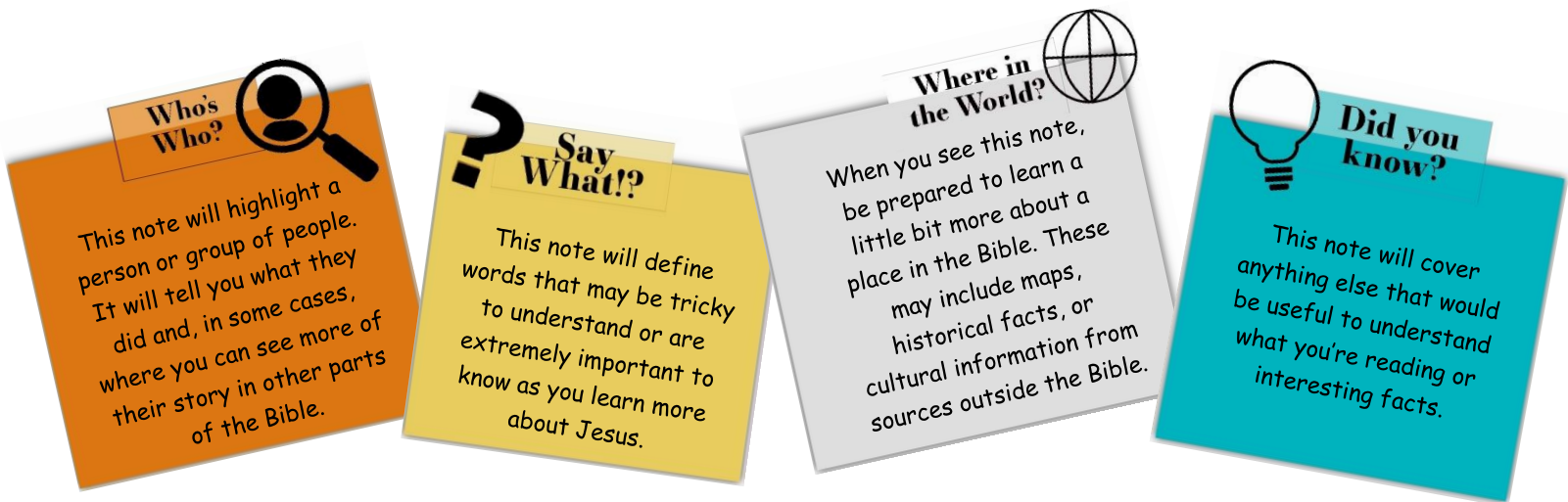
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Welcome to *Blazing Stars: A Kid's Companion to Philippians*! I'm so very excited we're going to begin this adventure together. Though this journey may feel hard at times, digging into God's Word is a habit that will change your life. Allow me to explain how this will work. My hope is to shed some light on what you're reading. Sometimes the Bible can talk about people, places, and culture you may not understand. Using this book alongside your Bible reading, I hope to provide a bridge of understanding to some of the things that are most confusing or hard to follow when you start diving into God's Word. Please know that if you read anything, read the Bible. I will do my best to try to present a helpful tool, but if you only have time to read this book or the Bible, choose the Bible every time—it is the living, active Word of God.

That being said, my hope is to help you on your journey. Providing summary and explanation, this book will take you section by section and chapter by chapter through Philippians. Also included will be little pop-ups in the form of sticky notes titled "Who's Who?", "Say What?", "Where in the World?", and "Did You Know?" When you see these, know they offer information that will help you tie historical and cultural facts to what you are reading. They will explain words or give background on who is being talked about and why they're important to the story. If you come across something underlined in the main body text, look for the corresponding sticky note.



Finally, throughout this book, you will see sections with the heading "Illuminate." In Philippians we are encouraged to "shine like stars," but that can be hard to do (Philippians 2:15). "Illuminate" sections give extra thoughts, discussion questions, or practical ways for you to apply what you're learning, helping you to light up the darkness by holding firm to God's Word.

I can't write about everything, and you may have questions I don't address. Ask your questions anyway! Ask a parent, and if you don't get an answer there, find a pastor or mature Christian who can point you in the right direction. The beauty of God's Word is that you will always have questions. I've been following Jesus for a while, and I still have lots of questions. Never let questions or confusion discourage you because God is always in the process of revealing himself to those who seek him. We need only to ask for his wisdom. Let's ask, dear readers, and ready our hearts to explore the book of Philippians.

A Note to Parents

I read the Bible as a kid, so I know how it can feel too hard and overwhelming. As a mom, I've also read the Bible to my kids, which is hard in its own way. My prayer is that this book will be a bridge to help you and your family study the Bible.

One tip that I have used with my own children is to read the Bible in **small sections**. Our family does this by using the subheadings within each chapter of the Bible. Some days we'll read one section, and my kids will be ready to move on to another activity. Other days they'll want to keep reading. I let them dictate the pace. Because I've found this to be so helpful in my own family, I have divided this book into subheadings as well. Each of these subheadings relates directly to the latest version of the NIV Bible. Choosing a Bible translation can be difficult, as they each have pros and cons. This translation was chosen based on reading levels and because it is already widely used for children and beginner Bibles.

Becoming Stars (Acts 16:6-40)

For any star to form you need clumps of gas and dust. As those pieces of matter come together, they eventually collapse into themselves, heat up, and form a baby star.¹ The book of Philippians that you're about to read says that followers of Jesus are called to shine like stars, holding true to the word of life. I don't know about you but, sometimes, when I read God's Word, it feels a little like floating dust and gas. A lot of words and ideas, without much shape in my life. What we need to do is begin to pull those pieces together in our hearts and minds to help us become blazing stars. To do this, we first ask for help from the Lord, and second, look for context in the Bible.

Think of it this way, have you ever read anyone's mail? Maybe you snuck a peek at a note you found

in the hallway, or your eyes glanced over a letter you found lying on the table. Now, don't get me wrong, you should ask before you read someone's mail, but allow me to make a point. If you ever did read a letter that you had no business reading, did you know what was going on? While pouring over a letter that wasn't yours, did you feel left in the dark? Certainly, there may have been clues like who the letter was to and some small understanding of a situation, but reading probably only made you want to know more about the letter or why it was written. You wanted the context. When we read the Bible, it is just as important to have the context of the story. We do this by reading it in larger portions at a time, not just a single verse here and there. That is what we are going to do through this book as we read it alongside Philippians. And believe it or not, like much of the New Testament, this *is* someone else's mail, and it was written by a man named Paul.

You see, Paul traveled throughout much of the Roman Empire, planting (or starting) churches and bringing the good news of Jesus to those who hadn't heard it

before. After he planted these churches, he sometimes stayed for a while, but would eventually move on to plant more churches. Paul, however, out of his love and affection for his church plants, kept in contact with them through letters and visits over his lifetime.

Philippians, which you're about to study, is one of those letters, written to a church Paul planted at Philippi. Though written long ago to different people, it is also meant for us today, so you don't have to worry—you aren't being nosy when you read this mail. But because it had an original audience and purpose aside from us it can feel confusing. That is why it's so important to check out the history of the church and Paul's relationship with them before we begin. Thankfully, we can learn a whole lot about the church at Philippi from the book of Acts. I encourage you to take a minute to read the story which is found in Acts 16:6-40 right now.

Who's Who?

Paul

Originally introduced as Saul in Book of Acts in the Bible, Paul was known for persecuting Christians. On his way to Damascus with orders to arrest Christians, he was spoken to by the resurrected Jesus and blinded for three days (Acts 9). Upon receiving his sight back, Paul became a follower of Jesus and began to preach the message of Jesus to various cities throughout Europe and Asia.

Where in the World?

Philippi

Philippi was a Roman province of Macedonia where many Roman soldiers retired. The Via Egnatia (a trade route that connected Italy to Asia) ran through the middle of the city, making Philippi an important and busy city. Philippi is Kavalla in modern Greece.²

Where in
the World?



Macedonia

Macedonia is modern-day
Greece and the Balkans.
It was the homeland of
Alexander the Great.³

From this passage, we see that Paul and his friends travel to Macedonia because Paul receives a vision of a man begging them to help him. Did you notice how quick they are to obey? Upon landing, the travelers go to Philippi and stay for a few days. There they meet with women who are praying by the river and preach the good news of Jesus to them. One of the women, Lydia, believes and is baptized along with members of her household. It seems like smooth sailing until the story takes a turn.

Soon, Paul and Silas are met by a woman possessed by an evil spirit who follows them around and claims that they know the way to be saved. After a few days (I've always wondered why he waited a few days, and I hope you know it's okay to wonder when you read the Bible) Paul, fed up, casts out the demon in the powerful name of Jesus and then trouble begins.

The men of the city don't like that Paul has just freed this woman from the possession of a demon because it means they will lose out on the money they were making off her fortune-telling. Crowds form, rage bubbles, and Paul and Silas are beaten, flogged, and jailed. At midnight, however, Paul and Silas are singing hymns to God (they're actually singing and praising God through all this!) and a violent earthquake breaks open the prison doors. The jailer fears that he will be killed for allowing prisoners to go free, but Paul and Silas tell him not to fear because they haven't escaped. The jailer soon comes to know Christ and Paul and Silas are released. This, young learners, is the exciting beginning of the church in Philippi.

Who's
Who?

Silas



Chosen by Paul to accompany him on one of his journeys, Silas helped plant the churches of Philippi, Thessalonica, and Corinth.⁴ He is first mentioned in Acts 15 as a leader among the brothers in Jerusalem (Acts 15:22).

Illuminate

I want you to take a second and think about the beginning to the church at Philippi. It all started with a dream and an act of obedience; a man pleading to Paul for help and Paul and his friends responding. Our world is still full of people who need help. Lost in darkness, people are searching for the light of truth that we carry and find in the gospel of Jesus. You may not receive a dream—I hope you do because how cool would that be? —but we all have a call. And that call is to make disciples. As we learn about Jesus, we have the amazing privilege of telling others about him and what he has done. This week, who can you begin praying for? Who do you know that needs to know Jesus? And what can you do to be obedient like Paul?

Say
What!?

Gospel

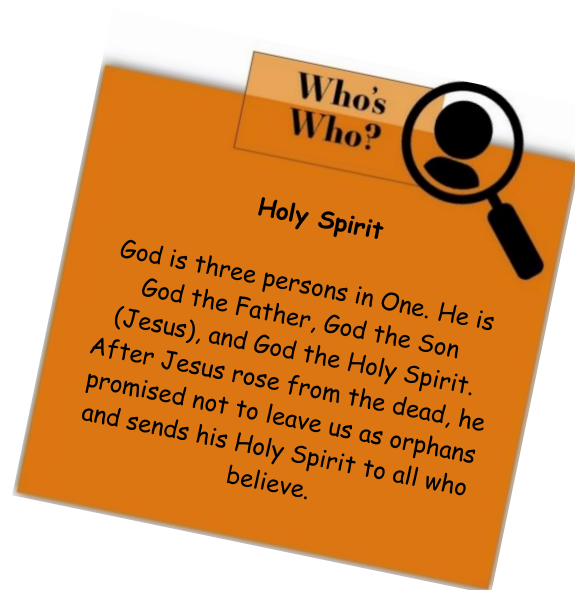
Gospel simply means "Good News."⁵ When someone "preaches the gospel" they are telling of the saving work of the death and resurrection of Jesus, which is good news! To stand firm in the gospel is to stand firm in your faith in the salvation of Jesus.

As far as we know, the church in Philippi begins with Lydia and her household and a jailer and his household. Could it be possible that the woman freed from the demon-possession also joined the church and decided to follow Jesus? If that is the case, the church at Philippi starts with Lydia, a jailer, their families, and a once-demon-possessed girl. This group of people likely wouldn't ever be considered to plant a church in our day and age, but Paul and Silas have no problem with it. They

are now believers in Christ and had every ability to stand firm in the gospel through the power of the Holy Spirit. As an added help, it is also assumed that Paul left companions Luke, and possibly Timothy, behind in Philippi to further disciple the young believers.⁶

What you read in Acts about the founding of the Philippian church occurred during Paul's second missionary journey between A.D. 49-52.⁷ After this incredible start, the church was still going strong, and Paul wrote them the letter we're about to read (between A.D. 53 and A.D. 62⁸). By the time of Paul's letter, their church had grown, and they had a special place in Paul's heart due to their support for him. He wrote to encourage them and thank them. He wrote to teach and correct. He wrote to them, but it's also for us!

Are the bits of gas and dust starting to come together? Now that we have some context about the beginning of the church at Philippi, let's explore their letter and learn how to shine brighter than ever before.



Who's Who?



Timothy

Timothy is mentioned in five of Paul's letters to churches. The Bible also contains two letters that Paul wrote to Timothy himself (1 and 2 Timothy). He is the son of Eunice and the grandson of Lois (2 Timothy 1:5), and was perhaps Paul's most trusted coworker in spreading the gospel because Paul says he "has no one else like him" later on in this letter to the Philippians (2:20).²

A Prayerful Life (Philippians 1:1-11)

The very start of Philippians makes it easy to remember that this is, in fact, someone's mail. Paul begins the letter in the same way that most letters during his time are written. We might start our letters with "Dear Johnny," but in Paul's time, letters often started a bit fancier. The letters during Paul's day often began with the name of the sender, followed by who the letter was to and a common "Greetings!"¹

Thanksgiving and Prayer (1:1-11)

Paul follows this style in a way, saying the letter is from both him and Timothy, while giving them the title "servants of Christ". But after noting that his letter is to all God's holy people, the overseers, and deacons of Philippi, he greets them more deeply than the common greeting.

Instead, Paul wishes them grace and peace, likely trying to

remind them of the peace of God that we have because of the grace we receive through Jesus.⁷

Say What?

"Servants of Christ"

The word "servant" would be better translated as slave. Paul and Timothy were humbly and fully committed to the Lordship of Christ.³

God's Holy People

Sometimes translated "saints," this phrase doesn't mean important, Christian leaders, but all people who follow Christ and are adopted through that belief into the family of God.⁴

Overseers

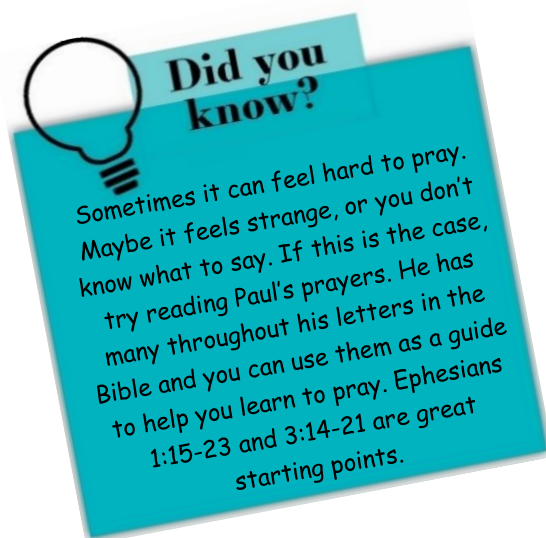
Roman culture had people that "oversaw" the town. In this context, Paul has placed the overseers to help care for and tend the church. These would have been leaders in the church.⁵

Deacons

These people often served meals within the church and maintained administrative tasks. They worked together to serve and meet many of the physical needs of the church.⁶

Often, after the greeting, letters in Paul's time were followed by a person giving thanks to the gods they believed in and a promise of their prayers. Paul uses this method but does not give thanks to the Roman gods of the day. He instead gives thanks to the One True God and tells of his prayers for the Philippians.⁷ Using these prayers, we almost get an outline for what his letter will be about.⁸

Maybe you're writing your own papers in school. If you're of that age, think of Paul's prayer as his "thesis statement." He's cluing his listeners into what parts of the letter he considers most important. His prayer and outline of his letter give us several themes to look and listen for: the Philippians' partnership with Paul in the gospel (even in the midst of suffering), their growth in the Lord, the unity and humility of the Philippian church, and their joy and growth in Christ. While reading, you'll also be able to see how thankfulness is woven throughout this letter meant to encourage the church at Philippi.⁹ Our focus will follow Paul's, especially highlighting humility and joy, so we can live lives that shine in our culture that feeds on the conceited and the concerned.



Illuminate

Just because his prayer serves as his summary for the themes of the letter, please don't forget it is also a prayer. Paul loves this church at Philippi who, as we see in verse 5, has partnered with him (both by supplying money to meet his needs and in spreading the gospel) from the very beginning.¹⁰ In this section, Paul gives us many ideas to model and build our prayer life upon.

First, he prays for this church about the things he plans to speak of *before* he speaks. He models a "pray first, speak second" approach that we would all be better for following. How many times have you spoken and regretted it? How many times have you approached someone about a problem

before praying through it? I know I have far too often to count. I've learned, however, that if I pray before correcting or teaching or even encouraging others, the conversation typically ends on a better note.

Second, Paul does not quit praying for people just because they already know Jesus. In Paul's love for this church, he continues to pray for them and thank God for them. He prays that they might "abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight" (1:9). We all need this prayer. From the oldest, wisest pastor, to the youngest, newest Christian, we all need to grow in our knowledge of Christ. We all need to grow in righteousness. This means our actions and our lives should shine brighter and look more and more like Jesus the longer we walk with him. Please know, salvation comes through the sacrifice of Jesus alone. We cannot earn our way to heaven. And we cannot be good enough on our own. Our only way to heaven is through believing in Jesus Christ as Lord and declaring this truth with our mouths (Romans 10:9).

That being made clear, as Paul prays for the Philippians, we should also be praying this for ourselves and other believers: that we will grow more and more in our understanding of Jesus. We aren't meant to hear the good news and never grow in our faith after that. If you went to school every day for years but never learned to read, wouldn't you be concerned? If you planted a seed and it never grew, wouldn't you wonder what was wrong? We should also then be concerned if we call ourselves a Christian but never grow in our knowledge, understanding, and faith of Jesus. How can you commit to growing in Jesus this year? What person or situation can you pray for this week?

Chain Reaction (Philippians 1:12-30)

Paul's Chains Advance the Gospel (1:12-26)

In this next section of the letter, Paul talks about his chains. It turns out that, even though he is imprisoned for preaching about Jesus, the good news is still advancing, which was probably a great surprise to the Philippians.² Not only is the gospel advancing, but it is advancing in part *because* Paul is in chains. His chains have caused a chain reaction!

This movement of the gospel is happening in a few different ways. You see, Paul is still preaching.³ Even though he has been placed in prison for his words, he is still using those same words to proclaim to the entire palace guard the reason for his chains. Oh, that we would be so bold for Christ!

Also, Christ followers outside of the prison are becoming bolder themselves to teach the Word of God⁴—this is a big piece of the chain reaction! Perhaps the people felt the need to step up because they knew that Paul wasn't going to be traveling and preaching to as many people. Has that ever happened to you? Maybe your mom or dad was sick, and you had to help more around the house for the day? Maybe there was a player hurt on your soccer team who usually scores all the goals and without that person, new people had to step up to replace them? That could be what is happening here. Paul is stuck in one place but people long for the gospel to keep spreading so they start stepping out in boldness and the power of God to see that happen.

Finally, there are some people preaching with wrong motives, trying to stir up more trouble for Paul while he is in prison. Please know that Paul regularly writes to churches about false teachers and warns them not to follow anyone who is teaching a different gospel than the one they first heard (2 Corinthians 11:4). His warnings are strong, and he scolds false teachers harshly. Here, Paul doesn't warn against these people. Because of that, we can assume their message is true, but their motives are not.⁵ Perhaps they wanted Paul's followers to follow them, giving them a larger crowd.⁶ Maybe the teachers were ashamed that Paul was in prison. Imprisonment in their culture and in many today, carries a great deal of shame and the teachers may have felt like it was an embarrassment to the gospel.⁷ Either way, Paul rejoices.

You may be wondering how Paul could rejoice when people are taking his place or possibly stealing his followers or ashamed of his imprisonment. How could he rejoice while he sits in chains, wondering if his imprisonment will end in death? The answer is simple: Paul cares more about spreading the news of Jesus than he does about himself. Paul knows that the gospel is not his own⁸ and Paul can rejoice because he knows that the Kingdom of God is bigger than him. Don't get me wrong, Paul played an extraordinary part in making the gospel known, his role, however, is only a piece in the eternal Kingdom of God.⁹



Did you know?

Paul was likely chained to a guard throughout his imprisonment. Regular shift changes would mean many guards were chained to Paul at some point. Each soldier chained to him would hear him dictate letters like this, pray, and preach the gospel. No wonder they knew the reason for his chains.¹



Did you know?

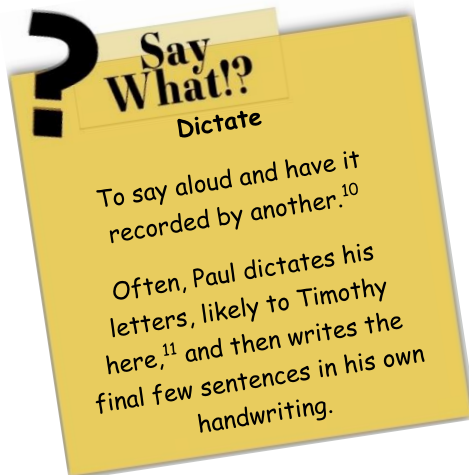
Paul has some hard things to say about people who preach what doesn't align with the Word of God. You can see a few of his choice words in Galatians 1:6-7, 2 Corinthians 11:13-15, and 1 Timothy 6:3-5.

Illuminate

Can you sense the humility of Paul? For all of history, he has been one of the biggest names in Christianity, yet he rejoices when anyone spreads the gospel. His message isn't about him and how many likes or followers he can get. His message is about how many people can come to the saving love and knowledge of Jesus, and he doesn't care who gets the credit! I pray you and I can be more like Paul. I pray that we can rejoice even when someone is noticed over us. I pray that we can work to advance the gospel, even if we never get recognized for it. In a world full of people seeking followers and likes, I pray that we can be followers of Jesus, liking and rejoicing in the spread of the gospel, not the spread of our popularity. Because, friends, all that will fade, but the gospel endures forever.

1:20-26

In these next verses, Paul turns to reflect on what the outcome of his imprisonment will be. He knows there is a possibility that he will be killed for proclaiming the gospel. There also remains the possibility that he will be released. Regardless of the outcome, Paul's mission remains. For him "to live is Christ and to die is gain" (verse 21).



Paul then begins an aside where it seems he is almost thinking aloud. Remember that this is a letter, and he is talking to his friends. As he writes or dictates, he probably starts to think about which would be better and trails off in verses 22-26.

Though it seems like Paul's thoughts are running away with his words, important truth can be found in these verses. First, know that Paul doesn't have a death wish. Paul isn't so miserable in prison that he wants to die. Instead, he is so looking forward to what his death would mean.¹² You see, as followers of Jesus, we have no reason to fear death because death results in us being united with Christ and made whole. Death results in us coming into the presence of our glorious Lord who we have spent our time serving. The joy of being in the presence of God and his perfect love can melt away even the deepest fears.

As he thinks on this, however, Paul recognizes that it would be helpful to the Philippians for him to be released. If he is released, he can visit them and continue with them in sharing the gospel and teaching others what it means to follow Jesus. Do you see how entwined Paul's life is with the gospel? Do you see how his focus is Jesus and the Kingdom of God alone?

In the end, Paul decides that it would be more valuable for the Philippians for him to remain alive. Even in this, Paul is showing humility. He longs to be with Jesus, but he puts the needs of the Philippian church before his own desires.¹³ He is modeling one of the themes of his letter: to humbly serve one another.

Illuminate

Just like Paul had a role in the Kingdom of God, you do too! The Bible tells us that we are “God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do (Ephesians 2:10).” You have a role and a purpose in bringing God’s Kingdom to earth. You aren’t too small or insignificant. Isn’t that amazing? God has plans to use you! How can you humbly serve God this week?

Life Worthy of the Gospel (1:27-30)

As we saw in the last section and will see throughout this letter, you’ll notice just how often Paul speaks of the gospel. Everything Paul does is centered around Christ and his mission to tell the

world about the saving grace of Jesus. You can see it in Paul’s prayers, you can see it in his actions, and you can see it in his willingness to suffer and be imprisoned to see the gospel advance. Because Paul’s joy is so rooted and established in knowing Christ and the spreading of the gospel, he can be joyful no matter his circumstance since his focus is entirely off himself.¹⁴

This example that Paul is setting is exactly the way he longs for the people of Philippi to live. He wants them to conduct themselves in a manner worthy of the gospel, standing firm in one Spirit, and working together (verse 27). The wording Paul uses here is likely wording about citizenship.¹⁵ The colony at Philippi was mostly made up of retired Roman soldiers

and these soldiers had great loyalty and love for Rome.¹⁶ They considered themselves as citizens of that great city and took a lot of pride in representing it.¹⁷ Paul, here, is calling the Philippians to a higher citizenship: a citizenship of heaven.

Illuminate

As Paul makes a connection to the pride of citizenship for the Roman soldiers, I want you to think for a moment of service members that you know who serve or have served in your country’s military. Even today, when a member of the military puts on their uniform, they are told to act according to a very high standard because they represent their nation. They have rules to follow and duties to fulfill. These men and women may not do this perfectly, but there is a standard that they strive to live up to because they take pride in their country and its ideals, and they are honored to serve. Paul’s goal for the Philippian church is similar. His goal is to represent Christ to the highest level: in unity, humility, and joy, even when circumstances make that hard. This desire Paul has for the church to live to a high standard isn’t so they can *earn* a heavenly citizenship, but because they *already have one* and their desire should be for the rest of the world to see and know what that looks like.

Just as soldiers wear uniforms to show the country they represent on the battlefield; I want you to imagine you have a Jesus uniform. Every day in prayer, ask God to remind you that you are a soldier for a different country, a heavenly country. When you go to school, you’re a soldier of the King.



Did you know?

Throughout this letter, you’ll see that Paul sets an example of what it means to follow Christ. He mentions others that do, too. It’s so important for us to find good examples of what it means to live for Jesus, and then become good examples ourselves.



Say What!?

Heaven

Followers of Jesus (Christians) believe in an afterlife. We believe that after anybody dies, they will either go to heaven or hell. Heaven is for those who have confessed their sins and accepted Jesus’ sacrifice on their behalf. When we do this, we live forever with him in heaven.

When you play a sport or perform in a play, you're a soldier of the King. Wherever you go, wear his uniform and walk in the honor and esteem of that uniform, knowing you represent the High King and Savior of the world.

1:29-30

In the final verses of the chapter, Paul makes what sounds like a very strange statement. He says in verses 29-30: "For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him, since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had and now hear I still have."

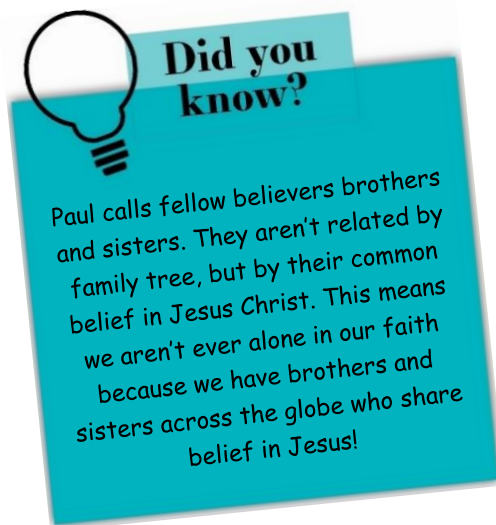
You heard that right, Paul says that suffering has been granted to the Philippian church in the same way that believing has been granted to them. He is saying they have received a gift of suffering. That sounds wrong to us, doesn't it? Suffering isn't a good thing, is it? It's often something we try to avoid at all costs, but Paul calls it a gift. The reason for Paul saying this isn't because we should seek after suffering to feel like we're doing something important for Jesus, but that, in the same way Christ suffered, we also will face suffering when we follow Jesus, and God can use it to further the spread of the gospel.¹⁸

Illuminate

In the book of John, Jesus said, "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first" (John 15:18). Make no mistake, it is unusual to live for Jesus. The way of the Bible often goes against the way our culture and even the way we ourselves would like to go. But the Bible calls us to live like we belong to a different place, it calls us to a heavenly citizenship. Often, the more we look like Jesus, the less we look like the culture around us and that opens us up to ridicule. Even worse, in some countries, people are still imprisoned for their belief in Jesus.

So when we are faced with suffering, ridicule, and hatred, Paul calls us to stand firm. He reminds us that our true citizenship isn't here, but in heaven. He reminds us to stand together with our brothers and sisters in Christ, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel. He reminds us not to be frightened when we are persecuted, mocked, or trampled on for our beliefs because, just as Christ suffered and Paul suffered, we will too. This isn't easy. Our joy, however, can remain deep in our souls and peace can rule over us even in suffering and adversity because we have eternal life in Jesus to look forward to.

When you are ridiculed or made fun of for shining Jesus, how can you remember that your true home is in heaven?



Shine Like Jesus (Philippians 2:1-11)

Chapter two of Philippians starts off with the word “therefore.” Something important to remember while you’re reading the Bible is that it wasn’t originally divided into chapters and verses. We do that now so we can quickly find what we’re looking for, but when this was written, it was written to be read in one sitting. Think of how differently you read a chapter book and a letter. Sometimes we get caught up in what we’re reading and forget this was a letter to real people, not a chapter book written to an unknown audience. Try to keep that in mind as you go through Philippians.

Imitating Christ’s Humility (2:1-11)

The “therefore” in the first sentence of chapter two is relating what Paul is about to say to what he just said in the section before. Before, he was reminding the church that they needed to live a life worthy of the gospel of Jesus, and not to be afraid when suffering comes.¹ Paul then gives the Philippians a list in verses 1 and 2 saying:

“If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind.”

I don’t know if you’ve noticed, but Paul often wrote in long, wordy sentences. These can be intimidating to understand while you’re reading, or easy to glaze over, causing you to never really look at what the sentences are saying. But these words are so important, both to the Philippian church and to us today.

What Paul is saying in this long sentence is that they have a common bond that holds them together. Just like they share in the suffering of Christ that Paul spoke about in the first chapter, he is saying they also share in the beauty of what it means to be a Christ-follower.³ Because they share the same belief in Jesus as the risen Lord, they are united in Christ. They have comfort when they are afraid. They have the Holy Spirit and tenderness and compassion. With all this in common, Paul longs for them to recognize the bond they all share and calls them to be like-minded and have the same mind as one another.

Illuminate

Sometimes when we hear about being like-minded, we start to feel frustrated. Our culture places a high value on individuality. We want to make a statement, be different, and be an individual. When we read words about being like-minded, we are almost troubled. Our hackles start to rise. What I want you to think of, though, when you read the words “like-minded” is not a bunch of robots walking around doing the same thing. Instead, think of an orchestra. A clarinet can’t sound like a violin and a French horn doesn’t make the sound of a flute. If all the instruments sounded alike, the

orchestra would be dull and without depth. Joining together, however, each instrument playing its part, the result is better than any one instrument could be on its own.

The church is meant to work the same way. Paul writes in a different letter to another church that they are all members of one body. We can't all be a hand, or we wouldn't have a sense of smell. We can't all be eyes, or we wouldn't be able to hear (1 Corinthians 12). Being like-minded isn't about being the same as everyone else but using the gifts that God has given you to work together toward a common goal, just like a good orchestra. Think about your gifts. How are you using them? Are you using them to build up and help fellow Jesus followers? What can you do this week to add to the music?

Did you know?

The church was never meant to be the title of a building. Instead, the church is a group of people walking and working together in unity with Jesus as their Lord. We don't go to church; we are the church!

(2:3-11)

As a part of the same orchestra, striving for the same goal of spreading the good news of Jesus—Paul calls the Philippians and us to do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Instead, we should live in humility toward others. With humility as his point, Paul gives us the message of the gospel in two sentences, where he emphasizes the perfect example of humility found in Jesus.

Some students of Paul have argued that verses 5-11 are an old hymn from the time of Paul because it has such a poetic style.⁸ Whether or not it was a song is unimportant in our understanding of the text. What is of highest importance, however, is that these few verses hold some of the

deepest truths of faith in Jesus.

Beginning, Paul says that Jesus was “in very nature God” (verse 6) and was “found in appearance as a man” (verse 8). Maybe you're thinking because it says “appearance as a man,” that Jesus was God and he just looked like a person. What Paul is really pointing

out here is that Jesus was human, but still maintained his divine (or Godly) qualities. He was human but was without sin.⁹ He was both fully God and fully man.

Though Jesus was fully God, he didn't take advantage with his authority and power, rather he humbled himself and became a servant of all.¹⁰ As a servant, Jesus was obedient to the Father and died on a cross. Do you see the humility Paul longs for us to imitate? Jesus, who is God, sacrificed himself out of humility and obedience.

Did you know?

There are many adults and even brilliant teachers who struggle to understand how Jesus can be fully God and fully man. God is so much bigger than us and sometimes we're confused. But it's okay to trust him because his ways are not our ways and his thoughts are not our thoughts; they're so much bigger! (Isaiah 55: 8-9).

Because death by crucifixion (on a cross) was such a horrible punishment reserved mostly for slaves, lower classes, or conquered people, the word cross was not even spoken in polite conversation.¹¹

Because of that obedience, the Father has now exalted Jesus and given him the name above every other name: Lord.¹² One day, Paul says, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess the Lordship of Jesus (verse 10).

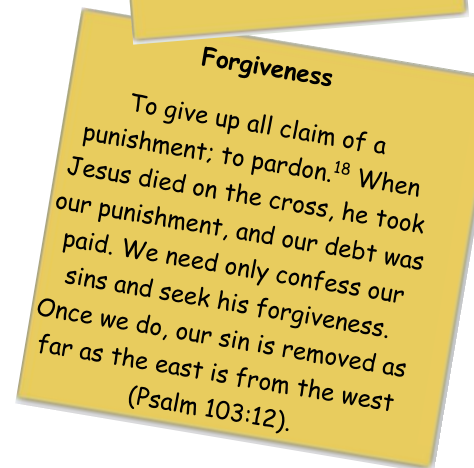
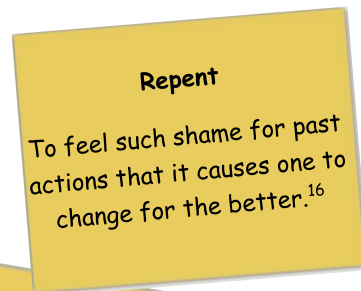
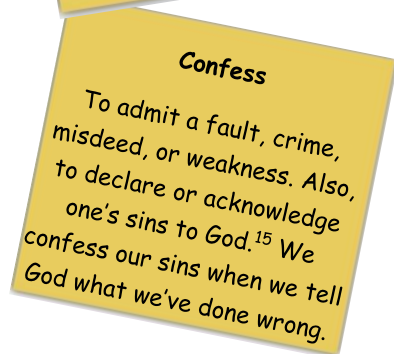
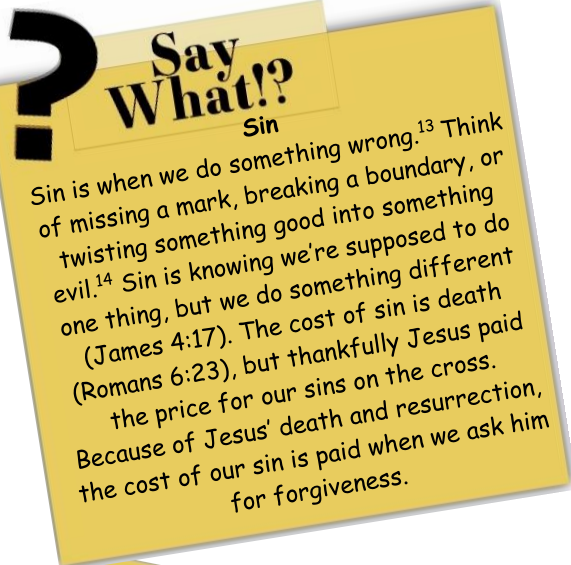
Illuminate

What you just read is the story of Christianity in a nutshell. Jesus, fully God and fully man, came to earth and died on a cross, even though he never sinned. He was raised from the dead and is exalted to the highest place. One day all will bow before him. Some bow willingly now and are rewarded with eternal life, while some refuse, facing eternal death. Either way, at the end of life, all will come face to face with Jesus and recognize that he truly is Lord of all. That is the gospel—the good news of Jesus—plain and simple. The choice is ours. No matter what, all knees will someday bow, and all tongues will someday confess that Jesus is Lord. We, however, can do this in our lifetime.

When we recognize our sin against God and we want to submit to Jesus as the Lord of our life, we can confess our sins and acknowledge that Jesus is the only one that can

remove them. See, our sin should result in death—that should be our punishment. But, because of his great love for us, Jesus, who never sinner, bore our sins on the cross so that we can be made clean. Then, with God's help, we repent and submit ourselves to Jesus and living how he wants us to live. In the same way Jesus humbled himself out of obedience, we must humble ourselves and ask Jesus to help us to live our lives in obedience to his Word.¹⁷ We will fail and stumble, but with him as the

Lord of our lives, we keep running back to him for forgiveness and the heartfelt desire to try again to live a life worthy of all he has done on our behalf. With Jesus as Lord of our lives, he will transform us daily to shine more and more like him.





Did you know?

This may sound like we can earn our way into heaven. We can't. Paul isn't calling us to work to earn our salvation, Jesus already did the work on the cross. Paul is calling us to conduct ourselves in a way that aligns with God's Word. This takes hard work!¹

Shine Like Them (Philippians 2:12-30)

Do Everything Without Grumbling (2:12-18)

Because of what Jesus has done, Paul encourages the Philippians to keep working out their salvation with fear and trembling. These are strong words, but their intention is to remind the Philippians and us that living for God is tough work that we are meant to take seriously. Paul is encouraging the church to thoughtfully live out the gospel.

Thankfully, though this is tough work, it is God himself who works within us to do this. God does not leave us alone. In fact, we can't even begin to live our lives for the Kingdom of God without him working within us.² If

you don't feel good enough or feel like you're always messing up, hold on to those words. God is always at work within his obedient children.

It is then that Paul tells the Philippians to do everything without grumbling or arguing so that they might be a bright, shiny example to the world around them, lighting up the night like stars. By their effort, Paul will know his work in spreading the gospel wasn't all for nothing, because they and those around them would see what it truly means to live for Jesus. In fact, Paul says that if his life is being poured out like a drink offering, he still rejoices and here calls the Philippians to rejoice as well.⁴



Who's Who?

Epaphroditus

He was a man sent by the Philippian church to bring Paul aid. Paul sends him back as the courier of his letter and gives him the titles of co-worker and soldier (Philippians 2:25).

Timothy and Epaphroditus (2:19-30)

Chapter two ends with a section that seems almost like the end of the letter. Typically, letters in this time ended with greetings or a discussion of plans that the sender had. Paul, however, includes that portion of the letter right here in the middle. It is possible that Paul does this to mention his friends Timothy and Epaphroditus as models for the Philippians to follow.⁵

Notice first the words that Paul uses to describe Timothy. Timothy, Paul says, takes a genuine interest in their well-being, he is concerned about the interests of Jesus, and he has served and worked to advance the gospel. All of these attributes are traits that Paul is longing to fan into flame in the Philippians. So

far Paul has set an example in his own life of what it means to put others first. He has also shown how Jesus humbled himself to death on a cross. With Timothy, he provides yet another example of a person living this out. His message is that these characteristics shouldn't be uncommon in the life of a Christian.⁶ Paul is reminding the Philippians and us that we are called to look like Christ. It is possible, just look at all these examples!



Say What!?

Drink Offering

In the Old Testament, the Israelites sacrificed offerings to God for forgiveness, thankfulness, and other things. In Numbers 15:1-10, we see that drink offerings can be poured on other sacrifices. Paul is likely saying that his current suffering and labor is a living sacrifice on top of their service and sacrifice in the gospel. They are in this together.³

Epaphroditus is Paul's second example. From the letter, we learn that the Philippian church sent Epaphroditus to Paul with a gift of money to supply for his needs. Now Paul sends Epaphroditus back for a couple reasons. First, he likely delivers the very letter you're reading.⁷ Second, the Philippian church somehow heard that Epaphroditus had become ill on his journey. Though Epaphroditus would have been a great help to Paul, Paul wants to spare the Philippian church the stress of wondering if their friend is okay. Remember that this was before the days of cell phones and social media updates. In this time, when you heard someone far away was sick, updates were hard to come by. By sending Epaphroditus back to

them to ease their worries, Paul again sets an example of putting others' needs before his own.⁸

Illuminate

Do you see it yet? Do you see the example Timothy and Epaphroditus are setting? Do you see how Epaphroditus risked his life to bring help to Paul? Do you see how Timothy lives in service to others? Do you see how these men put others before themselves time and time again? Do you see how they were able to rejoice in the Lord, even during suffering?

Sometimes when we read the Bible, we forget that the people in it were people just like us. There was nothing super-human or especially heroic about these people. Rather, they were ordinary people who submitted their lives to God, and, because of their obedience and God's power at work within them, God was able to

use them in extraordinary ways.

If you ever wonder what it looks like to serve and follow Jesus, find examples like these men to look up to. Make it your goal this week to look for people who are putting others' needs above their own. Search for people who are happy to serve others. As you watch and learn from them, try to follow their example. Christ is the ultimate example, but it's also good to look to others that are following him closely. Soon, if you follow the examples of people who are wholeheartedly devoted to Jesus, people will start to look to you as an example too.

Did you know?

Acts 28:16 states that, in Rome, Paul was chained to a guard and allowed to live in his own rented house. If *Philippians* was written while Paul was in Rome, it is possible the Philippian church sent money to help pay his rent.

Did you know?

We crave control and comfort. Often, though, God calls us to give up comforts to teach us to trust that he is in control. He alone meets our needs and is our comfort, not anything else we try to rely on in this world. Epaphroditus, Timothy, and Paul are all examples of people who gave up their comfort and control for the sake of the gospel.

The Right Kind of Confidence (Philippians 3)

After Paul gives the Philippians the example of Timothy and Epaphroditus, we start to wonder where he will take the letter from here. It felt a little bit like the end, but we are only halfway through! Paul does have more to say, and he is going to pick back up with the theme of rejoicing that weaves this letter together.

No Confidence in the Flesh (3:1-14)

Paul, in verse 1, commands the Philippians to rejoice in the Lord. Remember that these people are undergoing some sort of persecution similar to Paul's. Remember that this church is divided and struggling in some way, yet Paul calls them to rejoice in the Lord. Then Paul takes a sharp turn. With intense language, Paul warns his brothers and sisters in Christ to watch out for some evildoers.¹

To understand who Paul is talking about, we need to take a step away from the letter to the Philippians and learn a bit about Paul's ministry. Paul, as you remember, traveled from place-to-place teaching people about the death and resurrection of Jesus and starting churches. As Paul did this, he made a lot of enemies. Some of his enemies were people who followed other gods and didn't like the idea that Paul was causing people to turn from worshipping those gods to the True God (one example is in Acts 19:23-41). Other enemies of Paul were from his own people—the Jews—who didn't believe that Jesus was the Messiah. Still others were Jews that did in fact recognize Jesus as the Messiah but had some different beliefs about who could follow Jesus and how they had to do it. These people were known as the Judaizers and that is who Paul is likely talking about here. These Judaizers often showed up in the churches Paul planted and taught a foundation of different beliefs than those Paul taught.⁴

The beliefs of the Judaizers were tied very strongly to Old Testament law. They believed that if gentiles decided to follow Jesus, they must take part in their law and traditions. Jewish history and law are spelled out in the first five books of the Bible, and those books act as a handbook for the Jewish people to serve and maintain a right relationship with God. These laws required the sacrifices of animals for the forgiveness of sins on behalf of the people. When Jesus came, however, and died for the sins of the world and rose again, the old order of sacrifices was done away with because Jesus fulfilled the law perfectly. Jesus offered the perfect sacrifice. Now, to live in a right relationship with God, we look to the sacrifice of Jesus for our forgiveness, believing in him and walking in obedience to the Word of God.

Who's Who?

Messiah

This simply means "the one anointed by God."² Today, Jews still await the Messiah. Christians believe that Jesus was, in fact, the promised Messiah.

Judaizers (JOO-day-igh-zurhs)

The Judaizers believed that Gentile Christians should also have to follow and obey Jewish laws.³ The leaders of the early church disagreed with this and gave the requirements for Gentile believers in Acts 15 at the Council of Jerusalem.

? Say What!?
Gentile

A Gentile is any person that is not Jewish.⁵ Paul was God's chosen instrument to bring the gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15).

Say What!?

Covenant

A covenant is a promise. This wasn't a casual pinky promise but was sworn on their life. If one side failed to honor the covenant, they could be punished with death.⁶

Circumcision

This was a "physical, visible mark that identified those who bore it as members of Israel, God's chosen people."⁷

This is the message that Paul preached and, as you can imagine, it turned things upside down for Judaizers and the Jewish people. Their lives were based on the sacrificial system and their mark as God's people by the covenant of circumcision, which God gave to Abraham when he promised to bless him for generations.

The Judaizers were placing confidence in themselves and the work that they could do to earn salvation from God, and this concerned Paul greatly. They believed that Jesus saved them, but that they also needed to do more. Paul's argument against these people is that Jesus completed the work fully. Jesus plus circumcision isn't needed. Paul wants the Philippians to refuse to put confidence in anything that they can do themselves, and place confidence only in the sacrifice of Jesus.

Next, Paul explains how he has every reason to place confidence in the things he has done. Here it looks a bit like Paul is bragging, but we'll soon see that he's not. Paul says that he has more reason than anyone else to put confidence in his works. He talks about how he was circumcised like the law required, and he was from the tribe of Benjamin. He calls himself a Hebrew of Hebrews and a Pharisee. He shares that he was so zealous for God that he

persecuted the church before he came to realize that Jesus truly is Lord. Finally, Paul says he was faultless when it came to righteousness. By faultless he doesn't mean that he didn't sin but that, when he did, he fulfilled the requirements of the law with sacrifices and paid special attention to obeying God's laws.¹²

You can see from this list of qualifications that Paul has a lot of reasons to put confidence in himself. Not only was he born into a great family with impressive qualifications, but he also faithfully served God through the Old Testament law before following Jesus. He had qualifications he was born with and ones he worked hard for.¹³ All of this, though, Paul says is considered a loss—it is of no use—to Paul for the sake of

knowing Jesus.¹⁴ Paul is saying, "If you want to talk about confidence, I have every reason to have confidence in what I have done. But none of what I have done matters. None of what I have done will make me righteous before God. The only thing that I can claim at the end of it all—the only thing I desire—is to know Christ Jesus my Lord."

Who's Who?

Abraham

Considered the Father of the Jewish people, Abraham left his home in Ur because God promised him land and a family line that would rival the stars in number (Genesis 12 and 15). Abraham faithfully followed God and it was credited to him as righteousness (Galatians 3:6).

Did you know?

There are 12 tribes in Israel. The first King of Israel—Saul—came from the tribe of Benjamin. This tribe was held in high honor for that.⁸

Who's Who?

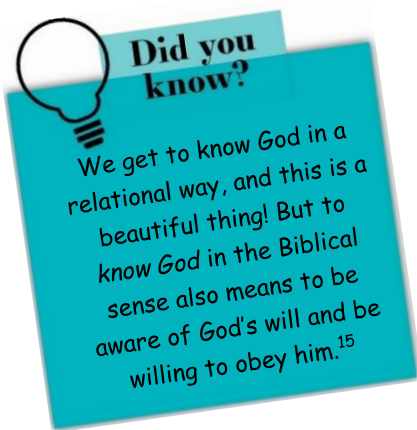
Hebrew

These are descendants of Israel, also known as Israelites or Jews.⁹ With this statement, Paul is saying both his parents were Jews, he was a model Jew, or he was educated as a Jew.¹⁰

Say What!?

Pharisee

A member of a religious sect (or group) that taught strict following of the Jewish law and had a great concern for purity. They interpreted and adapted the law to fit the condition of their time and help people to stay true to the Law.¹¹



You see, Paul knows his righteousness doesn't come from following the rules, but from God on the basis of his faith in Jesus. Paul's righteousness comes from God alone. And this is the beauty of the gospel: that because of Jesus, we can know God. Knowing Christ is Paul's goal and that means knowing suffering the way Jesus did. That means knowing submission and laying down his life for the gospel in the same way Jesus laid his life down for Paul—for us. This is Paul's call to the Philippians and his call to us: to know Christ in his suffering. We haven't arrived in heaven yet, so we get to press on until we receive the prize of knowing Christ fully. We get to press on joyfully through

adversity and difficulty in this world to know Christ now and in fullness at the resurrection and that, young learners, makes any suffering we face well worth it.

Illuminate

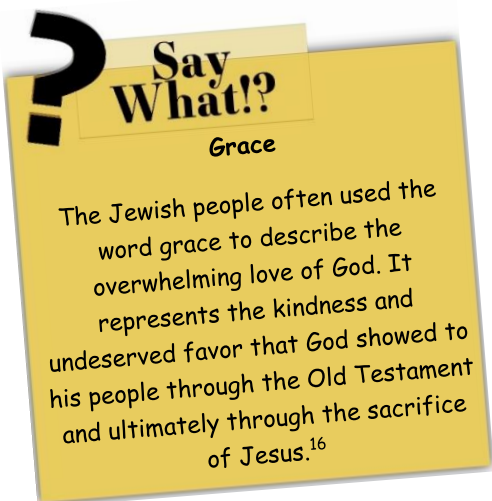
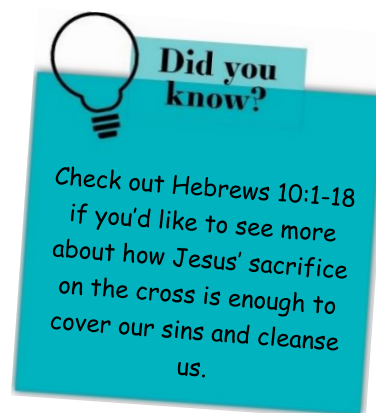
Sometimes in life we get this mindset that we have to earn our place with God. We think, "If I can just do this, this, and this, then God will love me and let me into heaven." Those thoughts, however, are greatly mistaken. When we add our own works to the death of Jesus, we're basically saying that his death on the cross was alright, but it wasn't enough to save us. No way! When we turn to Jesus, confess, and repent, our sins are forgiven, and we are children of God. From that, we get to begin the

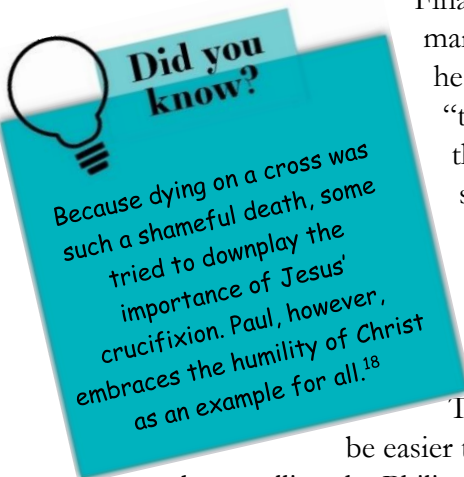
journey of knowing Christ. We *get* to walk with him, to learn from him, to follow him. We *get* to learn what it means to live for Jesus. Our salvation isn't Jesus plus a report card of all we've done. It is Jesus and Jesus alone.

If you feel like you aren't good enough for God, don't worry, no one is. That is why we cling to his grace. Once we receive that, out of our own thankfulness and by his power, we can pray, "God, now help me to live a life that shines. Help me to live a life that finds joy in suffering. Help me to live a life that looks like Jesus, humbly serving you and others because of the amazing work you have done in my life. Not to earn my place in heaven, but to show others just how beautiful you are."

Following Paul's Example (3:15-21)

As Paul finished the last section with words about how he presses on, he begins this section encouraging all to take this view. Notice in verse 15 how Paul allows the Philippians time for God to work to make things clear to them. As a friend to the Philippians, Paul trusts that they will model after him, and that God will continue to reveal himself.¹⁷ They may not agree on everything, but they (and we) are all called to the standard set forth in the Bible. As the Philippians grew in Christ and as we grow in Christ, Paul trusts that God will continue to reveal more and more of himself to the Philippians and us as we seek him. You're not a finished product yet, God is still working on you!





Finally, Paul makes one last warning in chapter three of Philippians. He warns of many that live as enemies of the cross. Then he says something a little confusing: that “their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things” (verse 19). Let’s take a moment to break this down.

Paul is describing the life of a person whose mind is set on earthly things.

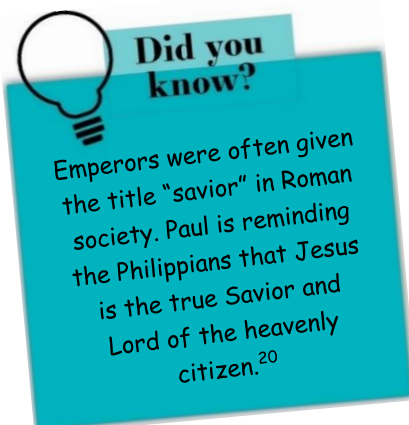
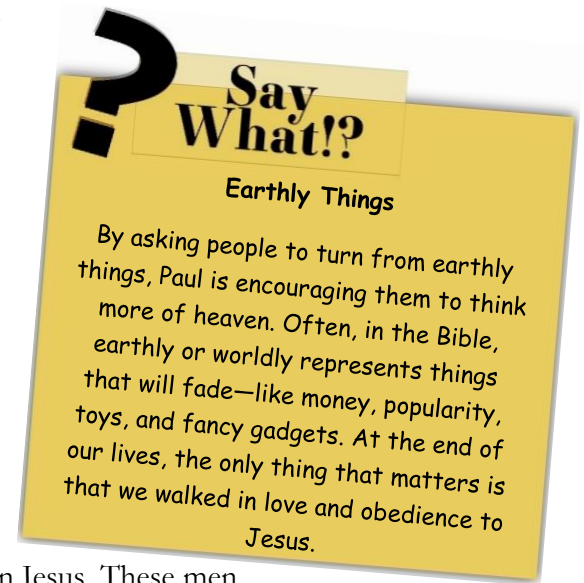
To understand what this means, it might

be easier to look at the opposite. So far, Paul has been calling the Philippians to look to Christ and those who follow him closely as their example. These men, as we’ve seen, have lived lives of service and humility. Each of their lives in turn points to the ultimate service, sacrifice, and humility found in Jesus. These men are living with eternity in mind. It makes sense, then, that people who live with their minds set on earthly things are the opposite: they are selfish, proud, consider themselves more important than others, and live to please themselves. Paul weeps over these people because he knows that their end is destruction. This is the opposite of an eternity with Jesus, it is an eternity separated from him in hell.¹⁹

When Paul says that their god is their stomach, he means that we all have “appetites.” Think of it this way: you’re hungry. It’s past snack time and you didn’t have a big lunch. You want to eat. You wander into the kitchen, and you see on the counter a plate full of cookies next to a bowl of bananas, oranges, and apples. You know that the bowl of fruit would fill you up longer and be better for you. But you also know that cookies taste way better than fruit. When you follow your stomach, you’ll likely go for what tastes best, even though it won’t be helpful in the long run.

Don’t get me wrong, delicious cookies are in no way a sin, but bear with my analogy because sin works in a similar way. When we are faced with a choice to sin or not to sin, we are tempted to sin because sin typically satisfies for a moment. It feels good and it is hard to say no to. But Paul is saying here that choosing sin doesn’t last, it ends in destruction. Proverbs 14:12 uses different words to say the same thing: “There is a way that appears to be right, but in the end it leads to death.” See, sin may feel good for a moment but in the end, chasing after sin and selfishness only leads to shame, destruction, and devastating consequences.

As he often does, Paul redirects the Philippians to their heavenly citizenship. He reminds them and us that we await the Savior from there. He reminds us that this battle against sin has been won. Though we struggle, we struggle with the power of the living God inside of us as believers. We struggle on, fighting off these earthly desires because our home is not here on this earth. Our true home, our forever home, is in heaven.



Pretty Please (Philippians 4:1-9)

After his reminder in the last chapter that their citizenship is in heaven, Paul calls the Philippians again to stand firm in the Lord. Do you notice yet how everything Paul does is “in the Lord?” It’s the point he keeps coming back to again and again. Paul knows that he is only capable of anything “in the Lord” and that his whole purpose of existence comes from that truth. Paul is a man that lives every day in the Lord, and because of that zeal and passion, we can dive deep into his letters and follow his example.

You’re so close to finishing a book of the Bible. Great work, young learners! That is no small task. Keep digging, keep learning, and keep growing.

Closing Appeal to Steadfastness and Unity (4:1-3)

Who’s
Who?



Euodia and Syntyche

We know very little about these two women, other than they are co-workers with Paul and their names mean “success” and “lucky.”²

True Companion

We have no way of knowing who this true companion is, though some have wondered if it was Luke, author of the gospel of Luke.⁴

While calling the Philippians to stand firm, Paul does something he rarely does outside of greetings—he names people specifically. He names two women—Euodia and Syntyche—asking them to be of the same mind. He knows these women have worked alongside him in spreading the gospel, and he now longs for them to put their dispute behind them.¹ What this quarrel was, we don’t know, but we do know that Paul was distressed that their disagreement might cause division in the church.³ And so Paul calls them to the same unity he has called for throughout his letter. He calls for his true companion to help them in their dispute along with others whose names are written in the book of life.



Say
What!?

Book of Life

A record kept by God of those that are his people.⁵
Exodus 32:32-33, Psalm 69:28, and Isaiah 4:3 refer to this record.

Final Exhortations (4:4-9)

After settling the matter of the dispute, Paul, as he does in many of his letters, goes on to offer his final exhortations, or commands.⁶ He gives these commands in quick succession in two parts: verses 4-7 and 8-9. Think of when you’re walking out the door to go to a practice and your mom or dad yells out a list of all the things they don’t want you to forget. “Make sure you have your cleats, your water, your bag! And don’t forget a snack or you’ll be hungry!” This is what Paul is doing. He is listing the final thoughts he has for the Philippians that he really doesn’t want them to forget. Because there is so much information in these two sets of commands, we’re going to break it down with charts to make it a bit easier to understand.

The first section is verses 4-7:

“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! ⁵ Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. ⁶ Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

Rejoice	Paul never gets tired of telling the people to rejoice in this letter. As Christians, no matter our circumstances, we can always rejoice in our hope in the Lord.
Gentleness	This word is used to mean a kind response when retaliation would be expected. ⁷
Do not be anxious	Though this can mean any situation, it is often used when talking about persecution. ⁸ Paul remembers the struggles they are facing but reminds them not to cling to fearful, anxious thoughts. Rather, he calls them to pray with thanksgiving.
Guard	In this sense, “guard” is like a garrison of soldiers. ⁹ When we present our requests to God, trusting that he hears and sees us, his peace guards us like a team of soldiers, surrounding us in times of trouble, hardship, or fear.

Illuminate

These are some difficult commands to obey. I don’t know about you, but I have a hard time rejoicing on bad days and in hard situations. I have a hard time responding in kindness when someone is mean to me. In our world, anxiety seems commonplace, and peace seems hard to find. These words, written to the Philippians almost 2,000 years ago, are still so important to us today. We are still called to rejoice and to respond in kindness when everyone would expect us to be mean. When our thoughts become anxious, we are still called to pray. And thankfully, oh so thankfully, our God still guards our hearts and minds with his peace.

All of this is in Christ Jesus. Without him, these commands are impossible. They don’t even make sense! Who would rejoice in struggles and be kind to people when they deserve our retaliation? Jesus would. Jesus did. When he walked this earth, when people nailed him to a cross, he said “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34). Look back on chapter two of Philippians. Jesus, though fully God, made himself nothing, that he might save us. In these commands, Paul is asking the Philippians once more to follow in the footsteps of the Lord Jesus. He is calling the Philippians and us to live differently, so we might shine like stars in a crooked and perverse generation (Philippians 2:15).

Which of these do you struggle with most? Which of these can you ask God for help in? We can rejoice, be gentle, and have peace because of Jesus. Look to him and learn from him. Lean on him and see how he guards your heart and mind with his perfect peace.

(4:8-9)

The second section of commands that Paul gives in quick lists is found in verses 8-9. In verse 8, Paul tells the Philippians how to think, in verse 9 he tells them how to act. Check it out:

⁸Finally, 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. ⁹Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

True	Truth finds its measure in God and the gospel. God's truth is not relative—it's not true for some and not others. It's absolutely true. Christians should also be known for honesty and reliability—we should be known for truth. ¹⁰
Noble	In this verse, <i>noble</i> probably refers to “honor” or “worthy of respect.” ¹¹
Right	Though this was a highly held virtue in Greek and Roman society, Paul defines it by God and his character, not mere human understanding. ¹²
Pure	The opposite of pure would be “tainted in some way by evil.” In Philippians 1:17, Paul spoke of teachers with impure motives. ¹³ To be pure, then, would be without blemish.
Lovely	This is anything lovely, not just something that is lovely because good morals make it right. It could mean a pretty sunset or rescuing an abandoned puppy. Both are lovely, the second contains a good moral cause. ¹⁴
Admirable	This is conduct that is well spoken of by the general people ¹⁵
Excellent or Praiseworthy	Both of these were common Greek virtues. Paul didn't mind using the Greek worldview of having good human morals. He used these ideas but took them a step further by infusing them with Jesus and aligning them correctly to the Word of God. ¹⁶

After offering these ideas for the Philippians to think on, Paul reminds them how to act. He once more calls on the Philippians to follow his example. He has taught them with words and shown them with actions what it means to live for Christ. To the Philippians and us, he encourages that same lifestyle.

Illuminate

Did you catch that Paul doesn't say to refuse to be a part of the world? He doesn't ask the Philippians to close themselves off and ignore everyone who doesn't know Jesus. Rather, he tells the people to think on things of the world that fit these qualities.¹⁷ We can do this because we know that “every good and perfect gift is from above (James 1:17).”

Now, please note that this requires wisdom. Remember how Paul called the Philippians away from setting their minds on earthly things and instead focus on eternal things? This sounds like the opposite, right? Allow me to explain. You see, Paul knows that there is value in what is happening in the world. Paul was an expert at explaining Christianity to people who had no other knowledge of it, so he entered their thought processes and ways of understanding life. There were even times that Paul spoke to people about their own gods and idols to bring the True God into conversation (check out Acts 17:22-23). He was a master, but I think he was such a master because he always brought all the beautiful and lovely things of the world into alignment with the character and Word of God. We must do the same.¹⁸

Talk about the beauty of a sunset with your friends but use it as a way to start a conversation about God and his majesty as Creator. Find things that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, and praiseworthy and use those things to point to the one who made them all.

A Weird Thank You Note (Philippians 4:10-23)

Thanks for Their Gifts (4:10-20)

Paul prepares to close the letter with a final word of thanks to the Philippians. He has encouraged them and commanded them. He has reminded them of their common bond and begged for them to restore bonds within their own community. Now, Paul will end with an oozing thank you, but it is one that seems a bit strange to us.

In his thank you, twice Paul tells the Philippians that he didn't need or desire their gift. This seems a little bit confusing. Can you imagine receiving a thank you note that said, "Thanks for the present, but I didn't want or need it?" That wouldn't be the best thank you letter ever written. Paul, however, was writing from a different time and culture, and has good reasons for writing this.

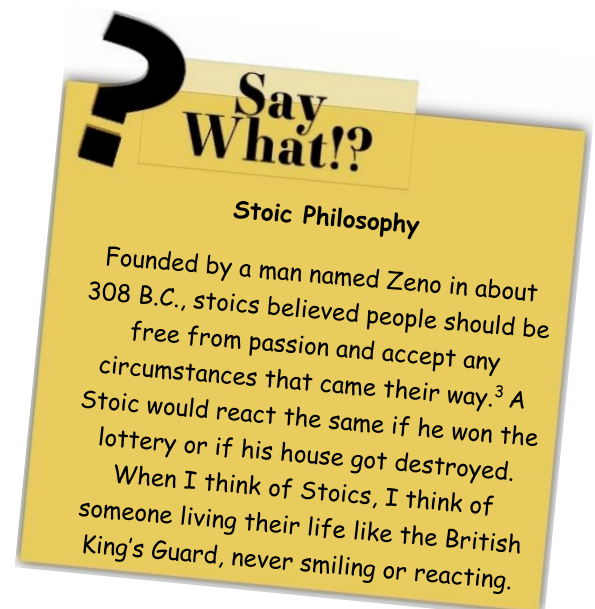
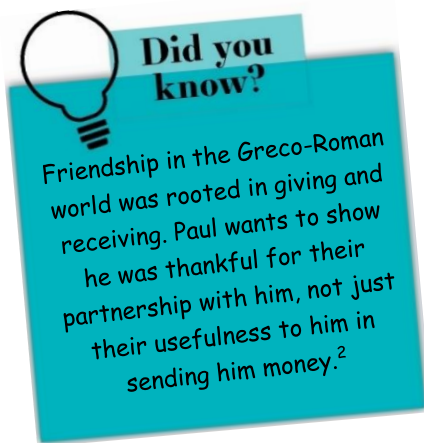
First, Paul wants to make sure the Philippians know that he isn't motivated by money.¹ Paul doesn't preach the gospel to get rich or even to make a living. He preaches the gospel because the knowledge and love of God compels him to tell others about the joy he has found. Second, Paul wants to make sure the Philippians know that his joy is rooted in their friendship, not in him receiving gifts from them.

Sandwiched between the two places where Paul states he doesn't need or desire their gifts comes a verse that is often misquoted or taken out of context. Paul says, "I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength" (verses 12-13). Some

have misused verse 13 as a blanket statement to win a sports contest or succeed in school.

There is a very important rule to remember when reading the Bible, and that is that we must read the Bible in context, with an understanding of the original meaning. This means we can't just see a verse on social media and apply it however we want to our lives. We must dig and learn the bigger picture of where the verse came from and why it was being said. Have you ever quoted a movie in response to something someone said, but no one else had seen the movie? They all look at you cluelessly, and so you end up explaining the movie and the scene. We need to do the same with Bible verses.

With that disclosure, let's look at why Paul can do all things through Christ who gives him strength. First, know that in verse 12, Paul is playing on a popular Stoic philosophy of the time. The idea of the Stoics was that contentment meant accepting whatever came their way. They longed for self-sufficiency and worked to find contentment in the fact that



they could meet their own needs. Paul, on the other hand, turns this philosophy from self-sufficiency to Christ-sufficiency.⁴

Paul is saying, “Whether I have a lot or a little, it doesn’t matter. Whether I’m hungry or well-fed, it doesn’t matter.” Nothing matters because he has Jesus. His circumstances, his needs, his successes or failures don’t change that. The very chains binding him as he dictates this letter don’t change that. He can live through any circumstance and any trial because his sufficiency comes from Christ alone. He finishes this section reminding the Philippians that Christ is sufficient for them as well. He shares that God will sufficiently meet all their needs according to the riches in Christ Jesus.

Illuminate

Dear friends, Christ meets all your needs as well. This doesn’t mean you’ll get every wish you ever had; God isn’t a genie granting wishes. But he will care for you. Your life will not be without trials. You will have times when you are in plenty and times when you are in want. You may have times when you’re hungry and times when you’re well-fed. You may have times when you are lonely and without friends, and times when you have amazing friendships. In all these times, remember that Christ meets all your needs. He alone sustains you and encourages you. He is with you. Cling to him, seek him, and live your life for him. Like Paul, learn to say, “For me to live is Christ, to die is gain (Philippians 1:21).”

Final Greetings (4:21-23)

Paul finishes his letter in a beautiful way. He has just poured out his thankfulness, and now he asks that each saint be greeted. This doesn’t mean the entire group, but each individually.⁵ In his closing, he longs for them to know his affection. Finishing, Paul reminds them that his imprisonment is not in vain, because the members of Caesar’s household that are believers greet them, too. Paul’s chains truly caused a chain reaction, advancing the gospel as the soldiers listened and learned from him.

The Philippians’ struggles, and ours too, can also advance the gospel if we stay in an attitude of humble service and rejoicing like Paul models. We can advance the gospel as we live in unity with one another and keep our eyes focused on our heavenly citizenship and eternal reward of knowing Christ Jesus fully.

Paul and these great men of the faith mentioned throughout this book are beautiful examples, but they aren’t an example that is too lofty to attain ourselves. In Christ, we can also live lives that glorify God, shining brightly in the darkest nights. In Christ, we can walk and live in obedience to the Word of God. In Christ, we can endure struggles and sufferings because we know that this is not our home. In Christ, we are citizens of heaven, and we live our lives as blazing stars awaiting our Savior’s return.

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