

PART 1

CONNECT GUIDE



*Letter From
a Jail Cell*

**WALLACE MEMORIAL
BAPTIST CHURCH**

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AS WE BEGIN A READING PLAN

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WEEK ONE

DAY 1: PHILIPPIANS 1

UUPG Prayer Focus: Khorasani Turks in Iran / Makhwa-Shirima in Mozambique

Welcome to our 8 week study through the book of Philippians. Philippians is not a very long book, but there is so much depth packed into the four chapters that we could take a lifetime finding every application. Philippians is one of the most quoted books of the New Testament and if you're a sports fan you'll know that Philippians 4:13 has been taken out of context by almost every athlete who has ever heard it.

Because there is so much in this book that's often taken out of context, we'll be spending the first four weeks of our study focused on our Bible reading methodology. This way we can better understand how the authors of Scripture chose to use particular strategies to communicate their message to the original audience, in a way that was unique to their culture. Jewish authors of the first century would not have written in the style that you and I are used to in our time. As 21st century westerners we read in a very linear way. We expect to read point 1, point 2, point 3 and a conclusion. This is because you and I read directly from paper.

A first century writer would actually expect that 95% of their audience would never even be able to read and therefore

wrote these letters to be heard aloud and memorized. This is why they wrote in a way that circles back and repeats the same theme from a different angle over and over. If you expect your audience to read, you write with minimal repetition, but when your audience can't read (The worldwide literacy rate was only about 5% to 7% until recent history) you use thematic repetition so they can memorize it.

OK... so how do we find out what themes are repeated in Philippians? I'm glad you asked. We will do this by carefully reading the text and seeing if we can identify any repeated words, phrases, or ideas. So, in your notebook you'll go through each of our passages and try to find the pattern of repetition, then write it down to see which ones are the most prominent. This may seem difficult at first, but by the end of the week you'll be an expert. So go ahead and take a few minutes. Look through the book and see what repeated words and phrases you can find. We'll begin focusing on specific themes in specific chapters tomorrow.

DAY 2: PHILIPPIANS 2

UUPG Prayer Focus: Shirazi in Tanzania / Mwera in Tanzania

To begin our study today, go ahead and search chapters 1 and 2 for every time Paul uses the words "joy" or "rejoice."

As you've already figured out, the first theme we will be tracking through Philippians is that of joy. Paul mentions his joy in relation to the Philippian church 9 separate times in these two chapters. This joy actually sets the tone for most of the letter. One of the first things Paul says is that he is thankful and joyful every time he prays for the Philippian Church. He also rejoices because he is thankful that he gets to work alongside the Philippian Church in Spreading the Gospel. So now that we've done the work to see that Paul is talking to the Philippian Church about joy in spreading the Gospel, we can say we understand this message "in context." This is just a concise way to say we understand what the original author meant to the original audience, at the time the letter was written.

We can now confidently say that Paul wants us to be joyful about the opportunity to spread the Gospel with our fellow church members. The final and most difficult part is asking ourselves if we exhibit these same characteristics... and being honest with ourselves about the answer. For most of us there are days we're joyful about what we get to do at church, and there are other days where we feel like it's a burden or an obligation. Which means we would also need to ask, what it is that's preventing our joy on those bad days.

For most people in our culture right now, the source of those bad days where we don't feel joy is overcommitment and information overload. We don't have room for joy because

we've heard everyone's opinions about world events, the weather, and every sports league available. It's hard to be joyful when this is the tenth night in a row you've been out and you're not sure when you'll ever catch up on sleep. But Scripture is telling us that joy is an essential part of the Christian life. So something has to go. Let's turn off our apps, maybe slow down our schedule and create some room for joy in our lives.

DAY 3: PHILIPPIANS 3

UUPG Prayer Focus: Fumbira in Uganda / Serbs in Bosnia and Herzegovina

To begin our study today, go ahead and search chapter 3 for every time Paul uses the words "joy" or "rejoice."

Ok, yeah, that one was a bit of a trick question. We found "joy" or "rejoice" so many times in chapters 1 and 2 that it seemed like it would be easy for chapter 3... but there was only one use of the word rejoice in the entire chapter? Did we make a mistake? Is Joy not the theme of this book? No, we're still on the right track, but it's important to see that we aren't reducing the writings of Scripture to a single word. Yes, first century writers (especially Jewish writers) used thematic loops, but it will always be a combination of multiple themes throughout the book. Rejoicing is still mentioned, but the other primary themes of Philippians will be highlighted more directly

in chapter 3. (Don't worry, we'll do the same thing next week and cover those themes as well.

It's very important not to take thematic writing too far in either direction. If we try to oversimplify a book into a one-word theme, then we'll miss the complexity and depth that makes it applicable in real life. On the other hand, if we try to ascribe too many themes to a particular writing then our understanding becomes too vague and we miss the unique insight that each book of the Bible has to offer. Most study Bibles are extremely unhelpful in this pursuit. They tend to list too many themes and lose track. They list themes like "salvation," "sin," "the Trinity." Yes, those are in the book, but they're also in every book. We want to know what unique perspective Philippians is telling us about sin, salvation, and the character of God. So don't get upset or give up because every theme is the main idea of every chapter. Keep working and you'll see the patterns.

Paul only uses rejoice once in chapter 3, but when he does it's a pretty big deal. He's telling us that our joy should be in the Lord and not in our own achievements. Paul makes sure that his readers understand: If there was anyone who could brag about their pedigree or their accomplishments, it would be Paul himself. Yet he tells us to reject our own contributions and find our joy in what God has done for us. Joy because even the best human has sinned, and is therefore under judgment, but Jesus wasn't a normal human so we can have joy in Him because He sets us free.

It's human nature to want to build our resume and boast about what we've accomplished. It's human nature to want to compare ourselves to others instead of finding joy in what God has given us. Human nature though, is just another word for sin. So today, as we reflect on Paul's singular use of the word joy in chapter 3, let's take a minute and evaluate ourselves. Look at your life, the things you value, the pursuits that give our days meaning, and ask: Is my joy coming from the Lord, or in my own achievement? Be honest with yourself, and ask the Spirit to give you insight.

DAY 4: PHILIPPIANS 4

UUPG Prayer Focus: Zigua in Tanzania / Ha Li in China

To begin our study today, go ahead and search chapter 4 for every time Paul uses the words "joy" or "rejoice."

With this chapter we learn that it's not only how often the thematic words are used, but also where they are used in the text that makes them important. If you look at the structure of chapter 4, you'll see that Paul actually uses joy or rejoice at the beginning of each section in this chapter. That's because he is framing each of these sections as an explanation of how to live out that joy. He begins the chapter by reminding the Philippian church that they are a big part of his joy. In the next section he explains that an attitude of joy and rejoicing is the

best type of evangelism and example for the world around us, as well as the best attitude to keep us focused on the work God is doing inside of us. Finally, he encourages the Philippian church by reminding them that their friendship brings him joy and helps him along the way as he shares Jesus throughout the world.

As you practice this methodology, you'll get much better at seeing how thematic words are positioned in the structure of the text. This helped an audience that was hearing this letter aloud remember the main themes so they could meditate on them throughout their day. If you didn't automatically notice it this time, don't worry. You'll have plenty of time to practice in the coming weeks.

Let's remember though, this isn't just technical work we're doing. We also need to apply these themes to our own lives after we've studied them in the text. Are you also framing every aspect of your life with the joy of salvation like Paul is framing his letter? Too often the church becomes known for what we are protesting or struggling against, instead of being known as a people who find joy in our redemption. Yes, we have to struggle against the sin that enclaves this world, but we must do so with a focus on joy and gratitude. If we are only known as people of contention and agenda, then we are sending the wrong message to the world about who our God is and what He has done for us. So today, as you go through your regular schedule, meditate on Paul's theme. Remember

what Jesus has done for you. Let your joy frame everything you do and be visible to the world around you.

DAY 5: PHILIPPIANS 17:22

UUPG Prayer Focus: Makua in Tanzania / Poles in Germany

As we end each week in this study, we will stop to reflect on the idea we've been focusing on throughout the week. Instead of working, searching, and reading, we'll end each week with a shorter devotion and a time of reflection and prayer. As you reflect on each verse, I'd like to encourage you to memorize it as best you can so you can make it part of your daily thought process.

Today's proverb focuses on the same theme we studied in Philippians. It reminds us that our attitude of joy can cause us to reframe the events in our lives and be a healing force mentally and spiritually. This of course isn't just a "good attitude" or some vapid positivity. This only works if it's joy that comes from knowing God and what He has done for us.

1. How can your joy in God's work change your outlook on life?
2. How can that same joy impact others and draw them closer to God?

In the same way, if we claim to be saved from an eternity of hell, but can't find any joy, then our actions say that our testimony is a lie. We live in a difficult world with information overload where depression and anxiety seem to spread and drag everyone down. Whether we like it or not, we're telling

the world something about our God every minute of every day. We need to make sure we're letting the Holy Spirit renew us instead of letting this world drag us down.

1. What distractions can you remove from your life to enhance your joy?
2. When someone else's attitude is dragging everyone down, how can you encourage them?

DISCUSSION GUIDE: JANUARY 25, 2026

WEEK ONE: PHILIPPIANS 1:1-20

This week we learned that the book of Philippians contains the theme of joy throughout all four chapters. We focused on learning how to track repeated words and phrases to discover this theme within the text. As we analyzed Paul's usage of each of these words, we made several applications of how to live joyfully in our own Christian walk. Today Pastor John will introduce this sermon series to our congregation and give you a better understanding of how this particular section tells us how to advance to Gospel. He'll also outline what that means for us as a church and how we can do the same.

ACTION STEP

How will I live out the action step this week?

SERMON NOTES

CONNECT DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: WEEK 1

- Paul's tone in this passage seems happy and friendly even though he is talking about his own imprisonment. Have you ever been joyful even though you were in a difficult situation? What was that like? What helped you find that joy?
- Paul's primary goal in this passage is to advance the Gospel at whatever cost is necessary. What type of cost might we face for spreading the Gospel?
- In verses 15-18 Paul says that some people preach the Gospel with the wrong motivation, but it doesn't matter as long as Jesus is being glorified. Does this mean we should let false teachers off the hook? What about prosperity guys like Joel Osteen or Creflo Dollar? What's the difference between bad motivation and false doctrine?
- What are you planning to do personally this week to advance the Gospel? What can you collectively do as a class to share the Gospel together?

WEEK TWO

DAY 1: PHILIPPIANS 1

UUPG Prayer Focus: Gwere in Uganda / Deaf Iranians in Iran

To begin our study today, go ahead and search chapter 1 for every time Paul speaks about suffering, difficulty, or hardship.

Christianity, and therefore the Scripture is not so simple that it can be boiled down to just one word. It is after all the revelation of God that defines everything He created and how it interacts with Him. It's because of this that we also don't want to oversimplify a book of the Bible and say that it only covers one theme. We want to make sure we're understanding how the Holy Spirit is inspiring the Biblical writers to use multiple themes to tell us about all the different aspects of the Christian life. At the same time, we don't want to be so broad or vague that we lose the unique perspective of each book. If we just say the themes are "Jesus, God, and salvation," then that doesn't help us because that describes every page of the Bible.

You may have found today's theme quite surprising. After studying joy for a week, we attuned our minds to search for an overall tone of rejoicing in every word of this letter. Suffering and hardship, however, are also just as present in the book of Philippians.

Yes, Paul tells the Philippians of his great joy, but he also

speaks of his imprisonment multiple times in this chapter. For most people, joy and prison hard belong in the same book together, much less the same chapter. He also tells them of rivalries, opponents, and conflicts inside and outside of the church. While some people find joy in conflict, those things aren't normally associated together. So why does Paul talk about two themes that seem so opposed to each other?

It's because Christianity is about real life. There's no version of the fallen world we live in that doesn't contain suffering. "But shouldn't we ignore the bad and just focus on the good?" No, that's not reality, and if the Bible doesn't do that, we shouldn't either. In fact, when we dishonestly ignore problems and refuse to address hardship, we call that "toxic positivity." It's actually a selfish philosophy that rejects reality. Let's never forget, Jesus Himself came into the world with difficulty and hardship. Jesus suffered so He could identify with our reality. Jesus wept. Jesus sent us to go and love a world in the midst of hardship. So, this week, as we analyze the theme of suffering, hardship, and difficulty let's remember: If Jesus didn't ignore it, then neither should we.

DAY 2: PHILIPPIANS 2

UUPG Prayer Focus: Doms in Iran / Western Baloch in Iran

To begin our study today, go ahead and search chapter 2 for every time Paul speaks about suffering, difficulty, or hardship.

Once again today, we see that the theme of suffering is just as prevalent as the theme of joy in Philippians chapter 2. Verse 18 of chapter 2 is perhaps one of the most important statements that can ever be made about suffering in this world. Jesus Himself willingly took on every ounce of suffering that could ever be conceived. Crucifixion was one of the most brutal and horrific deaths ever created by human ingenuity, but even that pales in comparison to the wrath of God that was poured out on Jesus as He died. In that moment He paid an eternity's worth of punishment for everyone who would ever believe in Him. Jesus didn't just suffer along the way, He came to endure the punishment we deserved.

As humans, so much of what we do is based on trying to avoid suffering. We often think that with enough planning, enough technology, and a little luck we can live a life without any difficulty. Yet, because of our sinful nature our drive for comfort quickly turns into a lust for luxury and excess. This desire is bottomless and can never be fulfilled so the method eventually becomes denying and oppressing others so that we can have more. In our quest for a life of comfort we only end up creating suffering for others. This is what Paul is talking about when he tells the church to distinguish themselves from a "crooked and corrupt generation."

As Christians we know there will be hardship along the way, but it can coexist with the joy that comes from Jesus. I'm not suggesting we try to seek out suffering, no, there's enough

of that to go around as it is, but the attitude with which we face difficulty will be the thing that shows the world we belong to Jesus. We can't avoid pain, but we can try to make sure it happens for the right reasons. If we make sacrifices for our own comfort, our wealth, our own lust then we have suffered in vain. If we cause the suffering of others with our attitude, our politics, or our greed then we are just like the corrupt generations of the world. Instead, we should follow the example of Epaphroditus, Paul's messenger who braved near death illness and still took up the mission just to comfort those who worried about him. If we suffer for the name of Jesus, we can weep in the moment but still have lasting joy because we know it's worth it.

DAY 3: PHILIPPIANS 3

UUPG Prayer Focus: Badhai in India / Namasudra in India

To begin our study today, go ahead and search chapter 3 for every time Paul speaks about suffering, difficulty, or hardship.

This chapter actually teaches us something very important about thematic reading. Sometimes the idea is presented even if the word itself isn't used. Last week we saw that Paul begins this chapter by asking the reader to rejoice, but this week we see that he also mentions suffering and opposition three separate times in the chapter. This chapter however is all about hardship, oppression, loss and opposition, so even

though Paul only uses the word "suffering" a few times, the entire chapter is about the force of this world that causes us to suffer hardship and difficulty.

Then why does he frame the beginning of the chapter with a call to rejoice? Just like yesterday, Paul is telling us that the causes of our suffering can be a great encouragement. When false teachers were invading the church and teaching salvation by the law, Paul faced a lot of aggression and conflict, but he was able to rejoice because he knew the struggle was worth it. He knew that every truth he taught about Jesus was eternally valuable regardless of how much difficulty he encountered. In verse 8 of chapter 3 we even see that Paul says he'd happily suffer the loss of everything as long as it means knowing Jesus better.

This teaches us that loss and pain are directly related to our priorities. Most people love candy, cookies, and chips, but every year many people give those up because they realize that, as good as those taste, it's way better to have long term health. The priority dictates whether or not we can rejoice in the pain of the sacrifice. If we want comfort, wealth, social status, or recognition more than anything then we'll be devastated if we have to give those up. If we want to know Jesus more than anything, then we'll happily give up our Earthly comforts to know Him.

It's never easy to give something up, but as followers of Christ we'll be called to make sacrifices and face opposition.

So today, as we ponder this theme of sacrifice and hardship let's take a few minutes to think about our priorities. Most of us would like to say that Jesus is our priority, but if we look at our lives, the things we cling to will reveal what our priorities actually look like. So, ask the Holy Spirit to guide you as you pray. Ask Him to show you what you value most, and how to make Jesus your top priority.

DAY 4: PHILIPPIANS 4

UUPG Prayer Focus: Deaf Germans in Germany / Syrian Arabs in Saudi Arabia

To begin our study today, go ahead and search chapter 4 for every time Paul speaks about suffering, difficulty, or hardship.

It's ok that you didn't find much in the way of suffering or hardship within this chapter. With such a large focus on those ideas in the previous chapter this naturally shifts back to other themes. This is how thematic writing works. Paul tells us about a multitude of things that cause the church to struggle in chapter 3, but then in chapter 4 he tells us what to do in the face of that struggle so we can still experience joy.

When he tells us to stand firm in chapter 4, he's saying that in reference to the problems he outlines in chapter 3. When he

urges Euodia and Syntyche to get along, he's explaining how we combat the division he mentioned in all 3 previous chapters. When he tell us to guard our mind and think on "whatever is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, and morally excellent," he's telling us how to make Jesus our focus and priority so we can have joy while suffering the loss of Earthly comfort.

The only difficulty he mentions directly in chapter 4 is that times are hard financially. Historically speaking the people of the early church would have been mostly conquered subjects of Rome in the outer provinces, and therefore would have only had enough money to feed themselves for a couple of days at most. Even those church members who were among the merchant classes would not have been wealthy or free by the standards we have today. Paul, however, is commending the Philippian church because they are letting the Gospel rearrange their priorities and being generous even in the face of their own poverty.

As 21st century believers we can learn a lot from the Philippian church here. Materialism and consumerism are two of the biggest struggles we face in our culture. Our every waking minute is bombarded with advertising, and we are often brainwashed into believing that wealth and economics are supposed to be our number one priority. Sacrificial generosity, however, is a defining trait of those who follow Jesus. He gave everything for us, so we're willing to give up whatever it takes

to be like Him. We see people who claim to be Christians take to social media every day and berate others over economic matters, all the while claiming to be "contending for truth." Instead, we should follow the example of the Philippian church and begin to contend with the sin in our own hearts through generosity. We can fight our own internal battle against our wealth obsession by being sacrificially generous to missions and ministry.

So today, as you pray, ask the Holy Spirit to show you where you can begin the battle against your own sin, and let the resulting life change be the testimony that shows someone else what Jesus can do.

DAY 5: ROMANS 8:18

UUPG Prayer Rufaa in Sudan / Yinuo Nosu in China

This week we followed Paul's theme of having joy in the midst of suffering throughout the book of Philippians. We ultimately learned that our approach to hardship and how we react to it depends on our priority structure. No verse better sums up this thought than Romans 8:18. Paul acknowledges that there will be pain, suffering, and difficulty in this life, but he also shows us that there is something so much better to look forward to that we can quickly change our perspective. Today, I'd like us to spend some time meditating on this verse and asking the

Holy Spirit to show us our priorities and help us rearrange our perspective.

- What are the difficulties and struggles you face on a regular basis?
- How can you join and comfort others by recognizing their pain and their struggles?
- How can you guard your mind against becoming too focused on Earthly suffering?
- How can you tell someone about Jesus in a way that give them hope and endurance?

DISCUSSION GUIDE: FEBRUARY 1, 2026

WEEK TWO: PHILIPPIANS 1:21-30

This week we focused on the theme of suffering and hardship throughout the book of Philippians. We once again practiced our skills of tracking repeated words and phrases so we could see where these themes arise. We learned that difficulty takes many forms in the Christian life, including opposition to the Gospel from both inside and outside the church. Today, our pastor will walk us through the second half of chapter and tell us what it means to live for Christ instead of just making Him one piece of our lives. Take note of the specific applications Pastor John offers so that you can make a plan for how to live these out with your Connect group..

ACTION STEP

How will I live out the action step this week?

CONNECT DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: WEEK 2

- What did you do the most this past week? Did work, family, or maybe your hobbies define your life? If you looked at your schedule, what would it imply you are living for?
- Read verse 27. What does it mean to "Live a life worthy of the Gospel of Christ?" Are there specific actions you have to undertake every day? Can you do anything as long as it's with the right attitude?
- In verse 28, Paul says the church should not be frightened by its opponents. Who were the first-century opponents of the church Paul is referring to? Who are the opponents of the church in our time? What should our attitude be to those who oppose the Gospel?
- Paul says that encountering difficulty and opposition is actually a gift from Jesus. How can we stay focused when we encounter these difficulties?
- Last week our final question was "What are you planning to do personally this week to advance the Gospel?" How did you follow through on your plan for this?

WEEK THREE

DAY 1: PHILIPPIANS 1

UUPG Prayer Focus: Mbanja in Democratic Republic of Congo
/ Mishaba laluo in China

To begin our study today, go ahead and search chapter 1 for every time Paul speaks about partnership or working together.

Today we begin analyzing the last of our three major themes in Philippians. This theme is a lot more tricky to find... in English. The New Testament was written with a blend of Koine Greek, and an eastern dialect known as Aramaic. When translators are deciding what word to use for our versions they often have to make decisions of which word is best when the translating language doesn't have a word that means the exact same things.

Finding the theme of partnerships or working together is easy in Greek because most of these words begin with the prefix "syn," which is just a Greek add-on meaning together. (It's where we get our word "synthesis" which means putting multiple things together.) In English we won't see this repetition of the same prefix so we have to focus on looking for the idea that is repeated. We'll see lots of different words that mean the same things. Phrases like partner, side by side, full accord, fellow workers, just to name a few.

This partnership is actually what Paul says brings him so much joy as he thinks of the Philippian church. There is always much to be said about how the company can change an activity. You might enjoy a movie, a meal, or a road trip much more (or much less) depending on who you share it with. For Paul, sharing the labor of ministry made it so much more rewarding. It's not just his example we look to though. Notice how he even references Jesus and God the Father in the greeting of the letter. He sends his letter from Paul AND Timothy, his partner in ministry. He addresses the letter to the members, AND the overseers, AND the Deacons. He does this in the name of Jesus AND God the Father. Our unity, our labor, our partnership isn't just practical, it's how we reflect a small part of the Trinity as a testimony to this world!

So today, as we wrap up, take a few minutes and consider how you are part of reflecting unity with the other members of your church. Thank God for the chance to have partnerships in spreading His kingdom, and ask the Holy Spirit to show you where you can forge even greater unity with your fellow church members.

DAY 2: PHILIPPIANS 2

UUPG Prayer Focus: Xiaoliangshan Nosu in China / Padhola in Uganda

To begin our study today, go ahead and search chapter 2 for every time Paul speaks about partnership or working together.

This chapter is FULL of references to and explanations of partnership. In the very first verse Paul actually refers to our partnership in the Gospel as "fellowship with the Spirit." The importance of this cannot be overstated. There is only one Holy Spirit and if we have put our faith in Jesus then His Spirit lives in all of us. That means that if we are saved then we have to have some type of unity with every other believer. Any rejection of that unity is a rejection of the Holy Spirit Himself. Yes, we all experience the guidance and the conviction of the Holy Spirit differently, but we are doing this together.

That's why Paul calls us to such great humility. We are all equals in the church because we are all participating in the same fellowship with the Holy Spirit. We do need to clarify however what humility and unity DO NOT mean. This doesn't mean we overlook sin, false teaching, or misconduct in the name of unity. Permitting sin to get along isn't unity, that passivity, fear, and apathy. Too often in our culture we are told to treat clearly sinful behavior as "a matter of opinion." If you like strawberry ice cream and someone else likes chocolate, that's an opinion. If I like Christian hip hop and rap, but you like hymns, that's an opinion we can set aside for Gospel unity. If one person thinks the Earth is 6,000 years old and another thinks it's 10 billion, then you can debate that as friends. God's design for marriage as one man and one woman

is a clear biblical directive and therefore, we can't treat this as an opinion because it's a command from God!

Specifically in our culture we have been told all too often that racism is a matter of opinion. There is no version of personal, systemic, or institutional racism that can be tolerated or supported as Christian doctrine. Genesis 9 tells us that ALL humans bear the image of God. Revelation tells us that every "Tribe, Tongue, and Nation" will be gathered around Jesus on Judgment Day so any version of saying "our culture is superior" isn't an opinion, it's sin.

Paul tells us that we need to humbly put every other church member's needs above our own. This is why we have to hold each other accountable in a gentle and loving way. Why? Because this was the exact example Jesus set for us. Jesus actually is better than all of us. He's perfect in every way, and yet He came to walk the Earth and live as one of us. He abandoned every privilege that He rightly deserved just to have a relationship with us. So, let's follow the example of Jesus, let's set aside our preference and submit to the will of God. Let's embrace humble accountability and let our attitude of service and growth be the testimony the world so desperately needs to see.

DAY 3: PHILIPPIANS 3

UUPG Prayer Focus: Aiyarakulu in India / Moors in Mali

To begin our study today, go ahead and search chapter 3 for every time Paul speaks about partnership or working together.

Today's passage speaks of a partnership that we may not be as eager to embrace. Verse 10 says that to know Jesus we must also share in His suffering. This idea really tests whether or not we're embracing biblical Christianity or just the toxic positivity of the prosperity gospel. It can be easy to sell someone on the idea of eternal life, but Christianity isn't Ponce De Leon's quest for the Fountain of Youth. It's a call to give up many of our comforts and desires so that we can become more like Jesus. This is why we don't practice the emotional tactics of the tent revivals and crusades. Jesus definitely says to follow him for healing, love, eternity and the removal of shame, but He also tells anyone who would follow him to "count the cost. (Luke 14:28)"

This is the same chapter where Paul says he takes joy in the loss of everything as long as it brings him closer to Jesus, then in verse 17 tells us to engage in this partnership imitating him. The Philippians church was not wealthy, yet they still gave up what they had to know Jesus more. Paul Gave up his pedigree as a Pharisee to be a nomad and receive regular beatings just so he could spread the Gospel. Jesus created everything and

rightly has dominion over all of it, but He embraced poverty, struggle, and even death at the very hands of those He came to save, just so He could redeem us.

Now, I'm definitely not saying you need to be a monk, cause your own suffering, or even take pride in your pain. That's just another version of trying to earn God's love through our works. Jesus, however, tells us that if we want to follow Him, we will have to take up our cross (as in carrying the instrument of our own execution) every day if we want to walk the path He has for us. It's in that spirit that I'd like you to ask yourself a difficult question: Have you had to give up anything to follow Jesus? Jesus saves us the moment we put our faith in His perfect life, death, and resurrection, no mistake or lack of understanding could ever take that away, but what a tragedy it would be if we lived this life in a way where we chose our own comfort over knowing Him better. If you've never had to give up anything to follow Jesus, then it's time to take a serious self inventory. We may need to ask ourselves if we're following Jesus or just mimicking culture propriety. We may need to ask ourselves if we're following Jesus or if we've been deceived by a false teaching like Christian Nationalism, or some vague hippie universalism. We need to search the Scripture and ask ourselves if we're following Jesus, or just some version of Jesus we invented.

These are difficult questions to ask, and even more difficult answers to live out, but being honest with yourself and with

God could change the direction of eternity for you and for all the others you will reach.

DAY 4: PHILIPPIANS 4

UUPG Prayer Focus: Sanusi Bedouins in Libya / Egyptian Arabs in Saudi Arabia

To begin our study today, go ahead and search chapter 4 for every time Paul speaks about partnership or working together.

Today, as we consider the theme of partnership in chapter 4, I'd like us to focus on verses 1-9. Paul tells the Philippian church, and us by extension, that we need to stand firm in our relationship with God. How do we do this? Well, the first step is to get along with other church members. By "get along" he doesn't mean politely ignoring each other. He definitely doesn't mean trash talking someone behind their back and then smiling to their face.

In the specific context of this letter, we see that Paul is urging two women of the Philippian church to put aside their personal differences and focus on unity. He's not asking them to do this because it makes him sad or causes the church discomfort. He's asking them to get along so that they can focus on the mission and be more effective as they spread the Gospel. It's hard to love the world and contend for the faith when you

have a fellow church member that you're constantly in tension with. This may be an uncomfortable application for you, but I'm going to ask anyway. If you have an ongoing feud, beef, rivalry, or argument with someone else in the church then put down this book and go settle it right now. It takes a few seconds to send a text messenger or a few minutes to make a phone call. So do it... no not on Sunday, you'll lose your nerve by then. Go ahead and do it right now.

"Whew, good thing he's not talking to me, I'm not in a squabble with anyone right now." Not so fast... none of us are off the hook with this one. Notice that Paul also addresses the recipient of the letter as "true partner" and specifically asks them to help these two women get along. All too often we find entertainment in sitting passively aside and watching other people's drama play out like it's some terrible reality TV show. Some of us even like to make the situation worse or get great pleasure from recounting the details to others. This type of provocation and gossip makes us just as guilty as the people in the argument. We let our minds dwell on the conflict and use it as a source of entertainment and pride. That's not our job. That's sin. Scripture is telling us that it's our job as fellow believers to help others get along instead of throwing fuel on the fire. Now, that doesn't mean "getting in the middle of it," and it certainly doesn't mean that you have to be best friends with everyone in your church, but it does mean to stop spreading gossip and to encourage accountability for those you're close to in Connect groups D groups.

It also means we don't need to dwell on conflict. This is why Paul tells us to guard our minds by thinking about what's holy, pure, and good. So, let's do the hard work this week of settling our arguments and putting the conflicts to bed. After all, our sin put us in conflict with God and Jesus gave everything to resolve that conflict. The least we can do is follow His example and be peacemakers ourselves.

DAY 5: ECCLESIASTES 4:9-12

UUPG Prayer Focus: Rundi in Tanzania / Manggari in Indonesia

This week we learned all about the idea of Gospel partnership from the book of Philippians. This is a topic that we could spend years on and not say everything that needs to be said. Jesus never called anyone to follow Him outside of the church. As Christians we are all inherently partnered in the Kingdom of God through our fellowship with the Holy Spirit. The relationships within the church can be a source of great joy, but they are also difficult and require a lot of work. Each person in our congregation is a sinner that desperately needs Jesus and each day we have to wrestle with that sin. Yeah, the pastors too, and sometimes it's even harder for us to admit it. That sin means we have to work every day at repenting and reconciling with one another. Here's some things to consider as you ponder this idea:

- Have you had conflict with anyone in the church?

- Have you tried to reconcile with that person?
- What causes most of the conflict between members of the church?
- Have you ever gossiped about or provoked conflict between others?
- How can we hold each other accountable for being peace makers?

The good news is, there are so many advantages to having church relationships! Our reading in Ecclesiastes today gives us categories in which to think regarding our ministry partnerships and Gospel collaboration. Take a few minutes to meditate on all the perks of having church members you can trust and work with before you answer these questions.

- Do you have friendships at church that bring you joy?
- Do you have specific groups of people you look forward to working with on ministry projects?
- How can we make sure that every member of our church is included in relationship and partnership?
- How is Jesus the ultimate example of Gospel partnership and true friendship?

DISCUSSION GUIDE: FEBRUARY 8, 2026

WEEK THREE: PHILIPPIANS 2:1-11

This week we explored the theme of partnership and working together for the Gospel. We continued our skills practice and learned that sometimes we need to focus on how the concepts are presented instead of expecting the exact same word to be repeated. We made several applications that will require individual follow up and interaction with our church family. Today our pastor will tell us how we can discipline our minds to more closely reflect Jesus. Make sure to take note of any specific strategies or disciplines he offers so you can discuss them with your Connect group later.

ACTION STEP

How will I live out the action step this week?

CONNECT DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: WEEK 3

- Have you ever been part of a team, a workplace, or any group that was focused on one goal? How did a shared goal make the work easier? Why is it so important to Paul that the Philippian church be united in this way?
- This chapter has a big focus on Christian unity within the church. What types of preferences do we need to let go of for unity? What do we need to stand firm on without compromising? What verses from the Bible did you use to decide this?
- Read verses 5-11. How can we follow Jesus' example in adopting humility? What privileges can you give up or leverage for the sake of others? How can you put others' needs before your own in the church?
- What are you going to do this week to support or encourage another church member?

WEEK FOUR

DAY 1: PHILIPPIANS 1

UUPG Prayer Focus: Deaf Italians in Italy / Yazeed in Sudan

The final step in learning to read thematically is to put it all together. Yes, we've already established the three themes of joy, suffering, and partnership, but we don't get the depth or the unique insight until we articulate and understand how these themes work together to tell us about the Christian life. To do this we need to take all 3 themes and put them together in a sentence that explains how they work together. You should do this in your own words, and don't try to sound overly poetic, or use words that people outside the church wouldn't understand.

The best way to go about this is to imagine you are sitting in a coffee shop studying Philippians. Someone who has never stepped foot in a church asks you what you're studying. You can't just say "the book of Philippians" because they won't know what that is. You can't just say "joy, suffering, and partnership" because that's just three unconnected words. You definitely don't want to say "We shall receiveth joy from oh high, yet there be holy suffering that causes sanctification, and we undertake it righteously while fellowshiping in the partnership of the brethren" because then you'll sound

pretentious and annoying while that person just rolls their eyes and walks away.

We need to be able to share the lesson we've learned quickly and clearly with anyone regardless of their church background. Something like "Oh, I'm studying a book of the Bible that tells me I can have joy even when I'm struggling, because I have a relationship with Jesus and partners in my church." With a sentence like that, you've just described the unique insight in Philippians in a way that anyone can understand. We don't just learn how to read the Bible better to help ourselves, we learn to read, understand AND communicate it so that we can share the message of Jesus with the world. Take a few minutes and practice creating your own sentence that describes how these themes work together in the book of Philippians.

DAY 2: PHILIPPIANS 2

UUPG Prayer Focus: Tai Lu in China / Shina in Pakistan

TAs you are reading through the book for a fourth time, now armed with the knowledge of thematic reading you've gained from your studies, I hope you're seen brand new insights and lessons jump off the page at you. Knowing that joy can be present even in the midst of suffering because of Gospel partnership brings new light to how we read Philippians and how we apply it to our lives. Yeah, this life is hard. Sin causes a

lot of pain and struggle, but I can still be joyful because I have Jesus and all my fellow believers at my side.

Jesus was broke, like He was poorer than most of us have ever been, and so were most people in the first century, but we see Him spending time with His friends traveling the countryside and sharing about the Kingdom. Paul shows us in chapter 2 that Jesus is the ultimate realization of all things that are good and we should try to follow His example in whatever small ways we're able to.

This is what Paul is talking about in verses 12-18 when he tells the Philippians church to shine like stars in the world. Yes, their culture was very different from ours, but sinful human nature remains pretty much the same. Wealthy rulers oppress people, and most of those people are angry, unsettled, and they take out their frustration on each other. People look to exploit each other and complain if they have to do something difficult. We can shine as believers because even when things get difficult, we have lasting joy knowing that everything we do is for Jesus, because He already secured our eternal destination and wellbeing. Our joy doesn't come from our circumstances, it comes from the bond we have with Jesus and with our fellow believers.

You can give the most perfect theological articulation ever heard...and it won't convince anyone, but live with joy in the

midst of hard times and people will wonder what's different about you. You can argue til you're blue in the face, and you'll just be another angry profile picture in a comment section, but show the world you care more about others than yourself, and you've got a powerful testimony that can change someone's life forever.

DAY 3: PHILIPPIANS 3

UUPG Prayer Focus: Jita in Tanzania / Sudanese Arabs in Yemen

When we understand that all three of the themes are consistently intertwined it gives the chapter that focuses on suffering and difficulty a new layer of meaning. The other chapters serve primarily as encouragement to those who are participating in Gospel partnership already. Chapters 1 and 2 reiterate commitment, explain how we follow Jesus, and extoll the virtues of the joy partnership brings, even in suffering.

Chapter 3, however, is much more of a warning. Paul is explaining that the opposition to Christianity is well unified in their efforts to obscure the truth. He uses words like "they" and "those" in reference to false teachers, which is in opposition to words like "we" when he is referring to the church. He is making sure that the church understands we're not just a group of individuals who can go about living the Christian life however we please. We have to be a group of people who

are completely centered around Jesus because He is the only thing strong enough to hold together such a vibrant and diverse group of people.

If anyone has the strength, intelligence, or pedigree to do it on their own, then it would be Paul himself. He lists these attributes very clearly in chapter 3. You and I don't have half the skills or knowledge the Apostle Paul had at his disposal, and he's the one saying, "we can't do this on our own." So not only do we find our joy in Gospel partnership despite suffering, we NEED it just to withstand the opposition and hardship this world will bombard the church with.

We also need to clarify, however, what this does not mean. Yes, we need our fellow church members for spiritual growth, encouragement, and accountability, but that doesn't mean people who are "outgoing" or "extroverted" automatically have a higher level of spiritual maturity. A highly social personality type is often confused with spiritual maturity, but this ignores many aspects of Christian discipline and delves dangerously close to the toxic positivity we talked about earlier in this study. Many believers and church members have limited social bandwidth and prefer to process emotions and "recharge" alone. This doesn't make them isolated or "in sin" after all, Jesus Himself went to pray alone for hours a day and spent up to 40 days in the wilderness by Himself.

We need each other in the church, and we all need silent times of solitude for personal reflection. Some people are naturally more inclined to one or the other and that's good! We can learn from each other. Diversity isn't just good for the church, it's necessary! We talk often about how cultural, racial, and ethnic diversity are part of God's design for the church, but personality diversity is just as important.

So, let's all heed Paul's warning. Embrace the church. Ask for accountability. Bear one another's burdens. Celebrate our differences. Most of all let's stand firm on being united by Jesus in His mission so we can overcome the opposition of this world.

DAY 4: PHILIPPIANS 4

UUPG Prayer Focus: Kurmanji Kurds in Iran / Luwu in Indonesia

We've reached the final chapter in putting our themes together. With each brick of understanding, we've been able to add great depth to our knowledge concerning the unique perspective of Philippians. We could analyze themes and each combination daily and still find practical life applications for the lessons we've learned. Our focus today though is on one critical aspect of chapter 4. We find joy, even in suffering, because of our partnership with Jesus and His church, but it's something we have to guard dearly and work at every single day.

Let's be clear, we're not talking about salvation. The moment you put your faith in Jesus you are saved. God sees Jesus' perfection instead of our sin the very instant we put our trust in His sacrifice and resurrection, but then the Holy Spirit invites us to join in the work of slowly changing our hearts and our lives to actually look more like Jesus. We'd be completely powerless to do this on our own, but because Jesus desires our relational participation with Him, we're called to embrace discipline and repentance a little bit at a time for the rest of our lives. Yeah, it's hard work, but there's also no greater joy than to be a part of the life changing work of Jesus.

In Philippians 4, Paul tells us that spiritual disciplines aren't just for individuals. They are for the whole church together as well. We don't just magically get along with everyone because we're saved. We have to learn to put aside our preferences and our egos for unity in the church. Like Euodia and Syntyche we have to put in the effort required to get along and put the mission first. This might mean you have to make some apologies or let people know they've been offensive. It might mean taking the time to guide, and gently correct fellow church members instead of reacting aggressively.

Paul also charges us with the daily work of guarding our minds. The command to think on what is good, lovely, pure, and moral isn't just a guided meditation exercise to be done in one's free time. It's a daily struggle against our own thoughts and our supernatural enemies of oppression. We have to have the

courage to face sin, the pain, and the brokenness of this world head on, but we also can't let ourselves become swallowed by it or even worse, become part of it ourselves. This is why it's so important to guard our minds...together. When we try to do this alone without Gospel partnership, we are prone to being caught in our own irrational fears and ultimately spiraling into depression. When we can't see the hope we need our fellow church members to help us put it front and center. Not to dismiss the pain or the struggle, but to remind each other that it is temporary and Jesus is so much better.

So, as you read this today, thank God for what He's done for you through Jesus and commit to the work guarding your mind, and encouraging other church members.

DAY 5: PHILIPPIANS 4:13

UUPG Prayer Focus: Rufiji in Tanzania / Rizeigat in Sudan

We've chosen this verse as our final meditation for this study because it's been so badly abused and taken out of context by our culture. Corporate CEOs, Athletes, and for some reason greeting card writers love to use this verse. They use it in a way that seems to suggest we "harness the power" of Jesus to achieve our personal goals. That's not at all what this verse is talking about. It has nothing to do with hitting sales numbers or how far you can throw a football. Because we

know themes, we know this verse is about finding joy while enduring suffering, because of our partnership with Jesus and His church. So today, let's ask ourselves some questions as we meditate on this verse as part of the larger contextual theme in Philippians.

- What types of struggles and opposition do you face in your Christian walk?
- How can your fellow church members help you find joy in the midst of these struggles?
- Have you ever told anyone how to best help or encourage you?
- Have you ever asked someone how you can encourage them?
- What preferences (Music, clothing, style, tradition) can you give up for unity in the church?
- What are you doing each day to guard your mind?
- How can you have joy in all things when life gets really hard?
- What are you doing to guard the minds and hearts of your fellow church members?

DISCUSSION GUIDE: FEBRUARY 15, 2026

WEEK FOUR: PHILIPPIANS 2:12-18

This week we focused on combining all three of the themes we found in Philippians. We learned that the overall combined theme is that we can have joy even in suffering because of our partnership with Jesus and His church. Understanding this helped us see the unique perspective that Philippians has to offer on living the Christian life. Today, Pastor John will focus on Philippians 2:12-18. He will break down what it means to "be a light in the world" and let your attitude, and conduct be the beginning of your testimony. Pay close attention to how our attitudes can alter someone else's perspective on Christianity.

ACTION STEP

How will I live out the action step this week?

CONNECT DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: WEEK 4

- Have you ever disliked a sports team, a style of music, a movie, or anything else because of who it was associated with? How can the actions of certain people push us away from something just by association?
- What does Paul mean when he says, “work out your salvation with fear and trembling?” Should we be afraid of losing our salvation or not doing enough good works?
- In this passage, Paul says to do everything without grumbling or complaining. What parts of Christian living would make you grumble and complain? Why are some aspects of Christian conduct more difficult than others?
- The number one reason most people give for rejecting Christianity is hypocrisy in the church. Where has the American church in particular struggled with hypocrisy? What can you and I do to make sure our actions match what we say we believe?
- In the first week of this study, we asked what you were doing to advance the Gospel. How have you followed through on this plan? What could the other members of your Connect group do to support you in sharing the Gospel?

ANSWER KEY

JOY

- 1:4 Joy because of your participation
- 1:18 Joy at Christ proclaimed
- 1:18 I will rejoice, confident in my delivery
- 1:25 Joy in the faith
- 2:2 complete my joy by being unified
- 2:17 Rejoice with you all
- 2:18 Likewise rejoice with me
- 2:28 Rejoice at seeing Epaphroditus
- 2:29 Receive him with joy
- 3:1 Rejoice in the Lord
- 4:1 my joy
- 4:4 rejoice and again I say rejoice
- 4:10 rejoiced over your help

SUFFERING

- 1:7 Paul's imprisonment
- 1:12-14 Imprisonment is for good
- 1:15-17 Rivalry within the body
- 1:28 Opponents
- 1:30 Conflict
- 2:3 Rivalry and conceit
- 2:8 Death on the Cross
- 2:15 crooked and twisted generation
- 2:17 Poured out as an offering
- 2:25-30 short-term missionary almost died
- 3:2 Violent opposition
from outside the faith
- 3:8 Suffered the loss of all things
- 3:18 enemies of Christ
- 4:10 church is broke

PARTNERSHIP

1:5 partnership

1:7 partakers

1:24-25 stay on earth for you!

1:27 striving side-by side

2:1 participation in the Spirit

2:2 full accord

2:19 cheered by news of you

2:20 concerned for your welfare

2:22 served with me in the gospel

2:25 fellow worker

3:10 share in his suffering

3:17 join in imitating me

4:2 Agree!!

4:3 labored side by side, together

4:14 share my trouble

4:15 partnership

