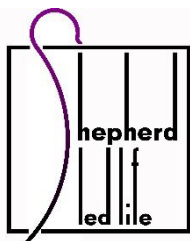
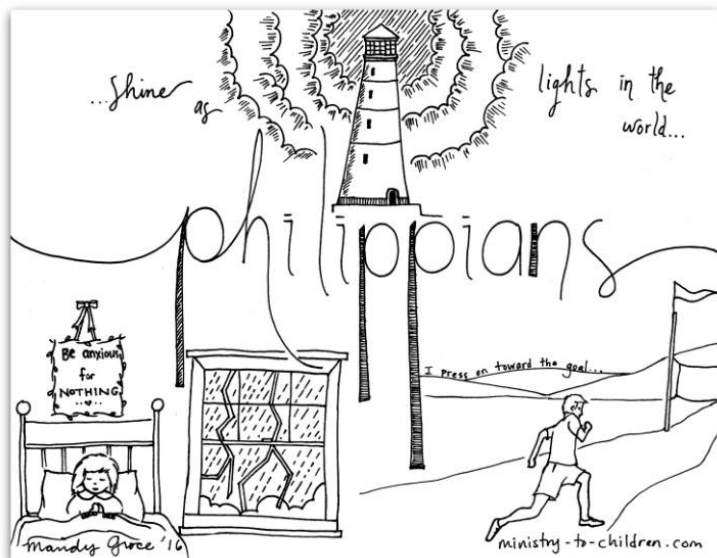


## Devotional Reflections on Paul's letter to the Philippians



*A Shepherd Led Life Resource*

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*Day One: Greetings Saints!*

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***Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus,  
To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the  
overseers and deacons: Grace to you and peace from God  
our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Philippians 1:1-2***

Only Paul could take a simple standard letter format of his day and pack it with theology!

Notice how he sees himself: as a servant (it can also be translated as slave but must be understood as being a willing slave!). He and Timothy were glad servants/slaves of Christ Jesus, because they understood what Christ Jesus had done for them.

Notice how he sees his brothers and sisters: as saints. You probably have a hard time seeing Christians as saints, but that is the miracle of grace - because of what Christ has done, we are saints made by grace.

Grace and peace: here he combines two expressions (Hebrew and Greek) common to his day (which was politically Roman - think Pax Romana but culturally Greek) and again a distinctively Christian meaning is given. We are enabled to know inner peace and God's undeserved kindness to us simply because of what God has made possible through Jesus.

Sometimes, or should I say often, we forget who we actually are in our day to day living. How would it change your

behaviour if you understood that you are seen as a saint by God, when you have responded to His call, and that you subsequently bear His image within you? How would it affect you in terms of how you treat your fellow saints who have also been rescued by God?

And are you a glad servant of Christ Jesus? Is He the One you seek to honour and live for in all your 'daily rounds and common tasks?'

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*Day Two: Spread The Word – No matter  
what!*

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***I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now - Philippians 1:3-5***

To get an idea of the memories Paul would have had of this church, go to Acts 16. I can imagine Paul remembering along the lines of "Ah yes - I remember Lydia who was my first convert in Philippi - her devotion to God and her open heart to receiving the gospel was so precious to see - and her hospitality - I've never tasted such nice raisin cakes! And I remember that demon possessed girl that kept following me around until I got irritated and cast the demon out - and then her owners seized Silas and myself along with a mob and falsely accused us - we got beaten with rods without a proper trial! And then we were thrown into that dark dungeon - and while we were singing hymns at midnight with the other prisoners listening to us there was an earthquake - the poor jailer was about to kill himself because he thought we had escaped - instead we assured him we were there and led him to the Lord! He nursed us and we baptized him and his family. If being beaten with rods meant getting the gospel to him then it was worth it..."

And so the church at Philippi was founded with the help of demon possession, false accusation, a flogging with rods and jail time - not exactly my first choice of method to plant a church.

But it was a body close to the heart of Paul because of their partnership in the spreading of the gospel - partnership being translated from a word which is rich in meaning with respect to a two-sided relationship of fellowship - there is indeed a sharing in the life of God Himself and heartfelt brotherly relationship.

They were a genuine faith community made possible by the grace of God. Think about it - there was Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth (which only got worn by royalty) and at the other end of the social spectrum a jailer. They were however united by a genuine love for Jesus and a desire to see His gospel spread.

What is your first love and desire?

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*Day 3: No half-measures*

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***And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ -  
Philippians 1:6***

There are few things more irritating than a job that is left undone - just ask my wife:-)

This verse is a source of tremendous encouragement, because it shows that God is not a God of temporary jobs or half-measures: what God has begun in us, He will bring to completion. God initiates salvation, and He preserves us and works in us.

But let us not forget the context this verse is written in - yesterday's verse was about being in the fellowship of the gospel. As we participate in the life of the gospel community, God is 'enabled' (so to speak) to work in us and through us. Salvation is not Arminianism vs Calvinism (that refers to two main streams of Protestant theology) - as if mere mortals can grasp the entire counsel of God. It is free will and divine sovereignty working mysteriously (at least to my simple brain) together - human perseverance and divine preservation to use the language of theology.

As we trust God daily, living in gospel community, God does His work, and one day Jesus shall indeed return - and we shall undoubtedly marvel at how God's hand was at work in our lives, preserving us in ways we were not even aware of! We shall discover indeed that nothing was able to separate us from His love.

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*Day 4: A Burden Shared*

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***It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affections of Christ Jesus.***

***Philippians 1:7&8***

This is the heart of a man who loves deeply. He is separated from those he loves, but through no voluntary decision - he was forced to. Their hearts were bound together by the love of Christ.

They were in this together. Paul's imprisonment was not something they went 'ag shame' over - they identified with him and sought to assist him. They both understood the reality of the ministry of the gospel: defending and confirming. There could well be a double meaning here too, in that Paul was in due course going to have to defend himself and his Gospel before the emperor.

But he is truly loving of his brothers and sisters, to the extent that he even calls upon God as his witness to verify how he loves them and longs to see them. The love of the Philippians for Christ and himself makes it a moral obligation for Paul to feel love for them (notice how he says 'It is right for me...')

Relationships meant something in this body. It must have been very special to be a part of this!

How different from today's consumer approach to church.

Let's give thanks for the privilege of having brothers and sisters whom God has brought into our lives and with whom we can journey together in this road of faith.



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*Day 5: No 'frot' fruit please!*

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***And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment so that you may approve what is excellent and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God -  
Philippians 1:9-11***

Paul really had a knack for cramming big theology into small spaces! It's like he can take a gigabyte of meaning and express it in a byte, or a big box of content crammed into a matchbox!

If Paul were to write to you and your local church family, I am pretty sure he would include this prayer (and naturally deal with all the other issues in your life!). It would take a full length sermon at the very least to try and unpack the richness of these words.

To abound more and more in love is to grow in obedience to the Spirit, since love is a fruit of the Spirit that also provides the foundation for the proper expression of all other virtues. In his famous love passage (1 Cor 13) Paul points out for example that to be very clever and have amazing insight and discernment and have no love is pretty much useless.

Love also needs to be governed by what God loves - so this moves way beyond sentimentality! How important then that we are grounded in God's Word so that we can indeed be discerning (Paul comes back to this at the end of this letter in

4:8). Godly love becomes wisdom for living (Proverbs will give you a lot of insight into this!).

God, through Paul, reminds us that we will one day stand before Him and give account of our lives - and how good it will be if we can truthfully say we led lives of love, revealed through the fruit displayed, and the glory then returns to God because Christ redeemed us and transformed us through the Holy Spirit.

Our desire should be the same as God's: to be trophies of His grace (a phrase taken from Jim Cymbala).

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*Day 6: Circumstances worse? That's  
Wonderful!*

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***I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear. Philippians 1:12-14***

"Guys - don't see this development as bad news - see it as God's plan - God is creating gospel opportunities for me here!"

A brother was sharing on this passage a few weeks ago, and he remarked how Paul clearly had a different attitude to life. How many of us, if thrown into prison for our faith, would actually be positive about it?

The verses imply some change in Paul's circumstance, which obviously gave cause for concern for the Philippians. One possibility is that he is no longer under house arrest, which gave far more freedom, but he is now in prison under the watchful eye of the elite of the elite - the ancient equivalent of the Marines or President's bodyguards.

Paul doesn't get angry and frustrated and let out any Aramaic expletives (I think we can be confident he didn't:-), but instead reassures the believers that this is all part of God's plan - after all, now these elite soldiers are hearing the

gospel! They probably would have all taken turns to guard him, and whilst Paul might have been a prisoner, he loved nothing more than a captive audience!

Not only were the soldiers hearing the gospel, but the cause of Christ was indeed being advanced, as even others were now given courage to share.

I think of modern day examples of how some Christians in prison have been the subject of international attention, making known the reality of this situation for countless others.

Sometimes we may not be where we want to be, but have you considered the possibility that maybe you are where God wants you to be? The key consideration is whether the name of Christ is being honoured through your life. Paul didn't choose his own path, but allowed God to lead him.

The Shepherd led life aint always an easy one!

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*Day 7: Jesus and your ego*

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***Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. The former proclaim Christ out of rivalry, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice. Phil 1:15-18***

It's embarrassing really - people are painfully pathetic sometimes, and I'm talking about Christians here!

Paul recognises that there are some that were jealous of him, and their preaching of Christ was not heartfelt, but rather (by implication) to boost their own egos and garner a following for themselves and try and make trouble for Paul.

Others recognised that hand of God in Paul's life - after all, within thirty years of its planting, the message of the Gospel had moved from the backwater of Judea and was now going to be presented in the epicenter of Roman power: in Rome before the Emperor. They understood, that although it was not an easy journey for Paul, God's hand was upon Him and he had been put there in prison by God Himself.

Nowadays there are still rivalries in the church, and unfortunately many do preach with wrong motives. People love to hear a gospel that promises health and wealth and how to make it in this world, as opposed to how to be in this world but not of it and prepare for the life to come. And

goodness knows the number of ministers (including myself) who have been caught in the numbers trap!

But the scary thing is that Paul wasn't dealing with oppositional doctrine here - he indicates that the content of what was being preached was correct, but the heart of the preacher wasn't. And the amazing thing was that Paul was clearly not caught in the numbers trap. What was Paul's response to ministers who preached with a wrong heart? How wonderful that Christ is being proclaimed!

Paul didn't have rose tinted glasses, simply a trust in and focus on the person of Jesus.

May we be the same.

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*Day 8: For me to live is coffee*

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

***Philippians 1:18b-21***

From a rule keeping Pharisee to a lover of Jesus - in my books that's a greater transformation than from a person who gets converted from the so-called 'wild sinful' background scenario!

Paul is able to maintain joy and hope in his circumstances because of his utter love for Jesus. Deliverance could well be earthly (being released after his trial), but even if the deliverance is death, Paul is able to live with that, and indeed even desires that (as we shall see tomorrow).

Paul is displaying utter trust and dependency on Jesus Christ. What will the verdict of the trial be - Jesus knows and Jesus can be trusted. Paul needs courage so as to not be ashamed and to be able to face this literal trial with dignity so as to honour Christ - how? Jesus will supply the needed courage.

What will the avenue be of receiving what is needed?

Prayer. Those of his brothers and sisters, his own, and indeed the interceding ministry of the Holy Spirit!

And who can deny his assertion? It is backed up by his life. Paul can unequivocally state that "For me to live is Christ."

As I look at my heart, I have to pause and think about what I would really put in that space: For me to live is \_\_\_\_\_

What would you put there? Success? Fame? Recognition? Coffee (be honest!)?

May our hearts align with Christ! May God give us hearts that want what He wants it to want.



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*Day 9: Decisions decisions*

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***If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me. Phil 1:22-26***

It's interesting that Paul speaks in terms of "What shall I choose?", because in reality he didn't have a choice!

But we see clearly what drives Paul: his love for Christ and his desire to make Christ known. Staying in the body would mean continuing in the ministry that God called him to, and it was his desire to see believers grow into maturity and joy in Christ. Leaving the body would obviously mean being with Christ. It's like Paul is trying to weigh up the greater of the two goods!

It is also clear as we read this letter that the Philippian church loved Paul. Clearly his presence with them fed them and encouraged them.

Have you ever wondered what effect you have on people around you? Do they leave your presence encouraged and blessed or with a sigh of relief? It's like a sign I once came

across (I think for a church as well!) that said "All our visitors  
bless us - some by staying and some by going" :-)

May the presence of Christ permeate our lives!

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*Day 10: Where do you live?*

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***Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. Phil 1:27&28a***

The Philippians were proud of their Roman citizenship, and for good reason! In the appeal above, Paul is literally urging his readers to live as citizens of the gospel (in 3:20 he says citizens of heaven).

They were not to depend on him for their discipleship, but were to continue to live out the gospel whether Paul got out of jail or not.

There's an important lesson here: we each need to take ownership of our discipleship. We need to live the life we are called to live, we need to commune with our Father and feed ourselves upon His Word. We are each responsible for our own journey of obedience.

And we need to live our lives as gospel citizens in a gospel community - which means a lot more than serving tea when it's your turn!

We cannot live this life alone. Part of our faith is about being invested in gospel relationship, so that we can encourage

each other, confess to one another and build each other up,  
and together advance God's Kingdom cause.

That's a lot deeper than a Sunday vibe!

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*Day 11: Suffering for Christ? What a privilege!*

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***..and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God. For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have. Phil 1:28-30***

It's easy to lose heart in the face of opposition, and Paul was clearly a man who understood and experienced opposition. He encourages the fellowship to not be afraid, because in their failure to be intimidated, it served as a sign for the proof of the believers salvation to the world and of their own (the enemies) destruction.

And then Paul throws in a whopper - not a herring but a whole whale! Read it carefully: For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake...

What is Paul saying? Is this perhaps by some remote chance an uninspired phrase of Scripture?

We are being taught by God that to suffer for His sake is in fact a gracious gift of God and a privilege. Let's be clear here: suffering is not something we are to go looking for, and in and of itself I don't think is particularly virtuous. But to suffer as a result of being a child of God and serving Him, that is an entirely different matter. It certainly has gracious results:

- it brings you nearer to Christ who suffered on our behalf
- we are promised reward in heaven one day for enduring and persisting through it
- goodness knows how many testimonies can be shared through church history of how non-believers came to the Lord because of the example of believers in suffering
- and of course it frustrates Satan and his plans when we stubbornly insist on following and loving Jesus through the suffering

I've yet to meet a person of character and who is used of God who has had it easy.

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*Day12: It doesn't just happen*

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***So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Phil 2:1-4***

Paul sure knows how to get his point across! In essence, he is saying that if you love Jesus, don't let your heart issues get in the way! For the sake of Christ, we are to be of one mind as a community of faith.

And unity can only happen in a certain context: firstly, there needs to be a mutual love. Then there needs to be a focus on being unified. We also need to avoid selfish ambition and get rid of the delusion that we are better than others. And we must not look out only for ourselves, but also for others.

As we shall see, the church at Phillipi also had its issues, and churches ever since have had them! It has something to do with the fact that it comprises of the likes of you and me.

But there is a powerful lesson here, one which James Emery White explains so well in his Church & Culture blog. He challenges the notion of 'finding Mr Right' which pervades all aspects of relational society - from finding the right person to

the right job to the right church. I shall quote him directly below:

*Community is not something you find, it is something you build. What you long for isn't about finding the right mate, the right job, the right neighborhood, the right church – it's about making your marriage, making your workplace, making your neighborhood and making your church the community God intended. Community is not something discovered, it is something forged. I don't mean to suggest any and all relationships are designed for, say, marriage. Or that there aren't dysfunctional communities you should flee from. My point is that all relationships of worth are products of labor . (Emphasis his)*

Is there an example we can follow in achieving and being like this? Of course there is - we shall discover that tomorrow. In the meantime, let us give thanks for the relationships we have!

Be the blessing.



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*Day 13: Don't be so upper class*

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***Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:  
Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality  
with God something to be grasped. (NIV)***

***Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ  
Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count  
equality with God a thing to be grasped (ESV)***

***Phil 2:5&6***

I don't know if you have ever been in a meeting or environment where you felt a bit out of place because of the people you were with. You found it difficult to associate or relate because the others around you were in a different class...

A lower class.

I'm just glad Jesus didn't have the same attitude about being around me. A look at the gospels shows us that it was the 'lower class' of people that were enabled to be comfortable around Jesus, but the likes of you and me (the 'middle' and 'upper' class who are the 'nice citizens') had a bit of difficulty.

Jesus was, and is, better than everyone else. You cannot really beat being the perfect God!

And in comparison to the 'class' of God, there is simply no comparison for us, because God is simply in a totally different

league - totally 'Other' or Transcendent to use the language of Theology. In fact, from that perspective, we really should not presume to see ourselves as even as high and illustrious as lower class. I'm thinking more along the lines of worm...even maggot (to use the language of Bildad in Job 25:6!).

And that is what makes Jesus so amazing. I am a man who is in desperate need of unmerited acceptance by God, and in reaching out to me, Jesus did not allow his Godness or my sinfulness to stop Him reaching out to me. In fact it is because He is God that He did.

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound!

Now if we can just spread a little around and not let our egos get in the way! Because then we might just be able to receive some too.

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*Day 14: You're hopeless...*

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***but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death - even death on a cross! Phil 2:7&8***

I probably wouldn't make any money as a motivational speaker:-)

Just imagine the scenario:

"Compared to God you're nothing! You need to make yourself nothing! You can't do it! You have to humble yourself! You must not obey your inner instinct! You must die to yourselves! You can't do it!"

Yip - certainly not going to have a deluge of speaking engagements!

And yet our Lord who is above all, whom through all things are made, who has all power and authority and literally can do anything, nonetheless chooses the path of limiting Himself, of humbling Himself, so that we can know limitless love.

We can know the enabling grace apart from which we cannot serve, we cannot deal with sin, we cannot grow and certainly cannot know salvation!

It's quite something when a person lays down a life for the sake of others.

It's hard not to be grateful when that happens!

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*Day 15: He is exalted!*

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***Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Phil 2:9-11***

I love a good epic - a story that is huge through which the themes of life are clearly (and subtly!) portrayed.

And there is no greater epic than the story of God's dealing with humanity. And the story is not yet over, although we are currently living in the most exciting part of it (barring of course living in glory one day!).

As I write, there are friends represented from different nations gathering together under the lordship of Christ in a foreign country. They're experiencing a taste of heaven, because whilst they're all so different, they are united by a common passion: Jesus.

And one day we will be part of the countless throng that bows and confesses the Lordship of Christ. Everyone will bow down, from the angels and saved humanity in heaven through to the demonic hosts and lost humanity of hell. The former will do so with joy, the latter with resentment. From which camp will you be acknowledging?

The good news is that we don't have to wait until then to exalt our Lord - we can do so now through our lives and the praise of our lips.

To God be the glory - great things He has done  
So loved He the world that He gave us His Son  
Who rendered His life an atonement for sin  
And opened the life gates that all may go in

Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!  
Let the earth hear His voice  
Praise the Lord - praise the Lord!

Let the people rejoice!  
O come to the Father through Jesus the Son  
And give Him the glory - Great things He has done!

Soli Deo Gloria!

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*Day 16: Baa Baa Blessed Sheep – have you gone astray?*

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Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. Phil 2:12&13

I can imagine with Paul around obedience to God was a good motivator! But when the cat's away...

And clearly Paul had insight into human nature - we sheep are indeed funny creatures. And so he encourages the church at Philippi to continue obeying Jesus, even though Paul is not around.

After all, Paul is not Jesus.

We are all to 'work out' our salvation with 'fear and trembling.' Paul doesn't say 'work for,' but 'work out.' The distinction is crucial. We cannot work for our salvation, but we can express it in our daily lives. Daniel expressed his salvation by refusing to eat the King's food and preferred to stick to his Jewish dietary requirements.

We express our salvation when we choose to live in a manner that honours Christ, and fear and trembling comes in when we contemplate the prospect of sinning in the light of

the character of our Holy God - even though our sins have been covered.

And we are told that God works in His children not just to 'will' good deeds (remember, the road to hell is paved with good intentions), but to actually carry them out. What God births, He enables.

And walking in this way brings pleasure to God - and who wouldn't want to do that?



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*Day 17: What you're complaining about  
now?*

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***Do all things without grumbling or questioning, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world,...  
Phil 2:14&15***

Do all things without grumbling or questioning...ouch.

Back on my knees I go.

You may want to as well.

The Israelites did not exactly have a history of a grumble-free existence (check out Deut 32:5 which Paul seems to be alluding to here), and certainly they grumbled against Moses. It's possible that Paul is also touching on the issue of grumbling against church leaders (he has already touched on disunity in verse two and comes again to it in chapter 4).

Church leaders also have weaknesses, but grumbling about them is not the solution. I remember a leader in Egypt sharing on the story of Noah's drunkenness (Genesis 9:20-27), and how Ham took the wrong approach (mocking gossip), but Shem and Japheth walked in backwards to cover their father, and he used that picture to illustrate how we need to cover the weaknesses of our leaders in prayer.

But there is more to this grumbling scenario isn't there?  
Ultimately our grumbings are against God. Like I said, back to my knees I go. To my shame I have to openly admit how I have grumbled and complained about many things, ranging from people to circumstances.

Not exactly what God had in mind for me. We're called to be different from the world, not the same as it.

The heart of the issue is always the issue of the heart.

May God give us hearts that want what He wants it to want!

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*Day 18: Are Words Matter?*

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***...holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ  
I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain.  
Phil 2:16***

Where do words go? We speak them so glibly most of the time. God's creative words became matter: all of creation came into being (with the exception of you and me) because of God's spoken word. Scripture teaches us that His Word will never pass away (Matt 24:35) and in a very real sense the creative words of 'Let there be light' still echo through the centuries, now becoming our credo by which to live in a dark world.

The words of God are powerful, and God's Word to us is His gift to us, showing us how to live. Living by this word means we need not be ashamed when Christ returns. Indeed, it was Paul's desire that the Philippians would continue to live by the teachings he taught them, so that on Judgement Day it would be shown he didn't waste his time! In Paul's case, he is still reaping the benefits of his labor as millions throughout Church history have come to know Christ because of God's word through him.

Let us resolve to hold onto God's Word. Let us be willing to be shaped by it, after all (never mind the Lutheran 95 Theses nailed to a door) - there was the Living Word who was nailed to Calvary so that we could live.

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*Day 19: Yay! I'm getting my head chopped off!*

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***Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me. Phil 2:17&18***

What an attitude! He is essentially saying "Even if I do get my head chopped off because of our faith, I am glad...and so should you be"

Paul saw his life as a sacrifice in the service of the spiritual advancement of others. Can you think of people who God called to give their lives in service so that you could grow in the knowledge of Him? Have you given thanks lately?

Think about it - where would we be without the apostle Paul? Then I think of my own life growing up - there are many names that I can share with you of people who served the Lord wholeheartedly and as a result I am a child of God.

What if you took the attitude that your job is actually not about you having a job? What if you saw it as God putting you in a place where you can sacrifice for the kingdom of God, making sure that those around you have opportunity to encounter Christ?

Wouldn't it be great if people gave thanks to God because of you?

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*Day 20: In Christ Alone*

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***I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. I have no one else like him, who takes a genuine interest in your welfare. For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel. I hope, therefore, to send him as soon as I see how things go with me. And I am confident in the Lord that I myself will come soon. Phil 2:19-24***

It truly is a joy to have friends who look after your welfare, and Timothy was such a friend to both Paul and the Philippians. It would not be an overstatement to say that the reason we have a Paul is because he had a Timothy.

But do you notice something else about the above verses? Something as simple as a hope to send a friend, to visit, or a hope to be released, is all done in the Lord. The reality of the Lordship of Christ is what influences the thinking of Paul.

All children of God are in Christ, and it is this reality that is to govern our lives: from our thought life through to the decisions we make and the way we conduct our lives. The phrase in Christ is pretty much a useful way to sum up Paul's theology of the Christian life!

We don't give this reality proper consideration in our daily living. Does it sober you to realise that you will one day give an account of the past 24 hrs?

It sure sobers me up (not that I was drunk!).

I pray that the profound privileged reality of being in Christ will saturate our hearts and mind, and that through His Holy Spirit we shall be enabled to restfully live accordingly.

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*Day 21: Loved by Jesus – Living for Him*

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***I have thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, and your messenger and minister to my need, for he has been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill. Indeed he was ill, near to death. But God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. I am the more eager to send him, therefore, that you may rejoice at seeing him again, and that I may be less anxious. So receive him in the Lord with all joy, and honour such men, for he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me. Phil 2:25-30***

This is the only time in the entire NT that we meet Epaphroditus - and what an impression he makes!

He is a true servant of the Lord, and is described in glowing terms by Paul. Paul also needed ministry, and Epaphroditus was a person appointed by the Philippian church to minister to Paul on their behalf.

And it seems that he took his task so seriously that his health suffered, but fortunately God had mercy and restored him (note that there was no quick healing claimed for him - he was allowed to get sick and recover slowly like everyone else!).

He worked hard, and had a heart for God's people, to the extent that he didn't want the church to worry about him!

It's no wonder that Paul wanted to ensure this man was received and treated with honour.

What is most clear is that Epaphroditus loved Jesus, and was following His example.

May God enable us to do the same.



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*Day 22: Beware of the Dogs*

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***Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. For we are the real circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh - Phil 3:2-3***

When it came to defending the beauty of the Gospel, Paul did not mince his words! He is making reference to a group of Jews known as Judaizers, who taught that in addition to giving your life to Christ, you had to obey the law to make salvation proper. They insisted on converts becoming circumcised.

So he calls such people dogs (incidentally what Jews sometimes called Gentiles), which were not of the domesticated variety we have today- these were the wild vicious homeless animals that would attack. He then also describes them as evildoers, and to top it off he calls them mutilators of the flesh (in Galatians 5:12 he takes it even further!).

But a bit of flesh removed cannot save. Neither can a bit of water sprinkled (or a lot dipped into for that matter). John MacArthur is right when he says that there are millions of baptised non-believers walking this earth, and millions of non-baptized believers walking around too. Why is this the case? Simply because salvation is an issue of the heart - and Paul spells it out: it is circumcision of the heart, worshiping through the Spirit of God and living for Jesus, and not putting any confidence whatsoever in human effort.

In Christ alone our hope is found!

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*Day 23: Your Spiritual CV*

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**...though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness, under the law blameless. But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Phil 3:4-7**

I'm wondering what a modern day person might want to say if they were trying to impress people with their 'spiritual' credentials...

' christened as a child, of \_\_\_\_\_ denomination (put in your own: Lutheran, Baptist, Presbyterian, Confused), a deacon/elder in the church, also baptised as an adult, served in the church, attended Bible Studies, as to theology: Reformed, and strong defender of Truth'

Whoopee...now compare your credentials to the person of Christ...

It is a naive person who would deny that they have tried to impress God (and others) with their credentials in the hope of gaining something. But as Paul points out, there simply is no gain in our pedigree when compared to Jesus.

We cannot impress God, but we can bless Him through our loving service. The only credential we need is this: follower of Jesus.

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*Day 24: Who knows you?*

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***Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith - Phil 3:8&9***

No matter how hard you try to be good, no matter what precautions you think you can take - and Paul was certainly in the league of the elite when it came to human credentials - the reality is this: you will not match the required righteousness of God. You simply cannot change your heart.

To know and be known by Christ is the heart of the gospel. Jesus Himself defined eternal life not in terms of religious activity, but in terms of knowledge of God and Himself (John 17:3).

Tragically, the church does have many that are still enslaved to religion, because it's inherent in our nature to want to earn favour with God. Let's be clear (I'm quoting Dallas Willard here) - Grace is not opposed to effort, but it is opposed to earning. We cannot earn favour with God, but certainly we can grow in grace through effort (and by that we refer to loving obedience or walking in the Spirit).

It is an issue of the heart: do you love Jesus? Do you understand that only He can make you acceptable to

God? When it comes to salvation, the expression is true: it's not what you know, but Who you know!

Have you discovered that compared to knowing Christ, everything else really is rubbish?

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*Day 25: Who do you want to know?*

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***I want to know Christ - Phil 3:10***

I: that's you with all your complexities, your identity, your very being...

Want: that speaks of motivation and desire - where does yours lie?

To know: in the context of relationships, we're speaking of wanting to experience the reality of another person, and in marriage this term is used to describe the intimacy of knowing: there is nothing hidden.

Christ: Jesus has a name and many titles used in Scripture - please don't use any other name - we need to make sure we are referring to the same person, and respect and reverence demand we use the names and titles by which we have been introduced!

So, who do you want to meet and know? I know there are many people I would love to meet and get to know, but I am sure we all agree that ultimately there is no greater person than Jesus to know.

I want to know Christ: there simply is no nobler desire is there? Buddhism encourages you to know four noble

truths: we are invited to know, in intimate relationship, truth personified: Jesus Christ.

And it makes sense to grow in this desire and make it our goal, after all, we shall, if we have handed ourselves over to Him, be spending eternity with Jesus!

Why spend our lives trying to make the departure lounge nice for us if we don't know anything about who we will be with?

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*Day 26: A life worth living for a death  
worth dying*

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***I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. Phil 3:10&11***

At the risk of sounding like some Scripture is more inspired than others (an impression which red-letter editions are prone to create), this is nonetheless one of those verses that really run deep in terms of getting to the heart of discipleship.

Paul was indeed an 'abnormally born' apostle, in that the other disciples encountered Christ through His suffering first, and saw that as the gateway to experiencing the resurrection: after all, there can be no resurrection without a death.

But Paul's encounter with Christ was firstly in His risen state (as it is with all of us!), and through his service to Christ encountered the reality of suffering.

And the only way we can endure suffering as a result of being a lover of Jesus in a world hostile to Him, is through the resurrection power of Christ within us. And let us not forget that identification with Jesus means death to our former life, and absolute submission to the will of God - even when we do not understand.



It's only in the context of a life lived for Christ that we can expect to be resurrected from the dead into glory one day - either through dying and then being raised, or being raised if we are on earth when Christ comes.

It's always good to ask ourselves: who and what are we living for?

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*Day 27: Grippled to Grow*

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***Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Phil 3:12***

Paul was quite aware of his limitations. He did not hold to the view that he was already perfect in his life (although he obviously knew he was in status - his righteousness came from Christ!), and he recognised that he had a long way to go in terms of wanting to know Christ to the extent that he wanted to.

But he knew the direction of his life: his motivation was to know Christ. He wanted to grow in Christ, and that responsibility laid squarely on him - as Dallas Willard likes to say: Grace is not opposed to effort, it is opposed to earning.

And if our greatest enemy - death - has been conquered, then surely the lesser issues in our life and hearts can also be conquered?

If the grace of God through Christ has gripped me, then in Him I can grow in grace.

Not bitterness, not resentment, not anger - but grace.

Hmmmm...I don't know about you, but back to my knees I go!

How wonderful that in Christ, it's not about where we have come from with our failures, its about where we are going with His successes.

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*Day 28: Which Way?*

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***Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. Phil 3:13-14***

Your past does not define you: your direction does.

Where are you headed?

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*Day 29: Becoming Mature*

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***All of us who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. Only let us live up to what we have already attained. Phil 3:15-16***

It did not take long for the gospel to get distorted. The gospel has always had two enemies: those who proclaim that works must be added to maintain and keep salvation, and those who go to the other extreme and say works makes no difference because we have already arrived.

Paul has been pointing out that whilst grace is indeed free and cannot be earned, we nonetheless have the responsibility to grow in our walk towards maturity.

If our attitude is right - that of being willing to be corrected and learn, then God through His Spirit can indeed lead us into truth. But our starting point to maturity is to simply begin with living up to what we already know. What is your next step? To simply do what you know is right.

And why would we not want to grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord?

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*Day 30: Make an example of yourself!*

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***Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you. Philippians 3:17***

As a pastor, this is one of those verses that scare me (along with 1 Cor 11:1), simply because as much as I would love to be able to say to folk "just look at my life and follow suit" I simply cannot.

But boy am I grateful to God for godly people whose example I have been able to look at and aspire to. I myself always find it easier to learn a skill if it is practically shown to me.

And so let us give thanks to God for those who have set or who are setting an example to follow, and let us aspire to be an example to follow!

Of course, you tend to become like the company you hang out with...so ask yourself who you are spending time with!

Is it our Lord?

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*Day 31: The Mind-Body Connection*

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***For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things.***  
***Phil 3:18&19***

I don't know if there is anything more tragic than a professing Christian who isn't one. It was certainly cause for tears for the apostle Paul (and obviously for our Father whose written Word we read).

We've already touched on how the gospel has two enemies, and in the verses above, Paul seems to be referring to those who professed to be disciples of Jesus, but lived however they liked. They lived lives of unrestrained sensuality (Paul speaks of their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame). It was clear that no new birth or regeneration had taken place in their lives. The grace of God was treated as their licence to sin rather than their motivation to love.

The result of their lives was going to be eternal loss, not salvation. And is there not a warning here for us? How did these professing Christians get to be so far off track? By their focus: their mind is on earthly things.

We live in this world, and we are not called to escape it, but to live differently in it. We are called to have a different focus - but more on that tomorrow.

In the meantime: how much of your thinking and living is taken up by earthly stuff?



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*Day 32: Focus*

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***But our citizenship is in heaven. Phil 3:20a***

There's an old saying that said "don't be so heavenly minded that you're of no earthly use." You can understand the sentiment behind it in some cases, but the converse is also true: don't be so earthly minded that you're of no heavenly use.

As Randy Alcorn likes to sum it up: we were created for a person and a place - Jesus is the person and Heaven is the place.

Only as we set our focus on these realities, will life on earth develop proper perspective. Through such a proper focus, our perception changes: Death is the gateway to life; suffering is the furnace of glory; the ordinary becomes worship; our workplace and sphere of influence the place to reveal Jesus.

May God through His Holy Spirit enable us to remain focused!

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*Day 33: What you waiting for?*

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***But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ - Phil 3:20b***

As children of God, we all carry dual citizenship: that of our own country, and that of heaven.

And our king, our emperor, is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. He is no mere earthly ruler, but Lord over all (check out Colossians 1:15-20). How privileged we are to have a King that would rescue us with His very own life!

And keeping our eyes fixed on Him, eagerly awaiting His return, will help protect us here on earth from falling into error and going astray.

Life on this earth is temporary, but life with Christ is eternal.

Are you eagerly awaiting Christ's return? Think about it: no more pain, no more incompetence, no more sadness, no more security systems, no more junk, no more corruption, no more...(insert your preference)

Perhaps that itself is the wrong way to look at it...

We will be with Jesus.

What else do we need?

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*Day 34: Just Camping*

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***...who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body - Phil 3:21***

For most of us, it is good news to know that the body we have is not our permanent one! The body we currently have needs to be viewed as a tent - prone to wear and tear, and so must be looked after as best we can.

But we must remember that we are not bodies with a spirit - it's the other way round: we are each a spirit with a body. This is why the search for bodily satisfaction never satisfies - only the issues of the heart can do that!

And one day we will move from our tent to our new home: a transformed body (just like Jesus our brother has!)

That should take our worship to a whole new level one day!

In the meantime, let's make the most of the camping tent we have, and use it to worship Christ our Lord through our lives. Let us indeed worship in spirit and in truth.

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*Day 35: Reconciliation*

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***I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord. Yes, and I ask you, loyal yokefellow (or loyal Syzygus), help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life. Phil 4:2-3***

Every church needs a Syzygus - and since that seems quite a mouthful to pronounce, let's rather pray for loyal peacemakers!

There had clearly been a clash of personalities in the church (it is reasonable to assume that they had taken offence over something), enough for it to warrant Paul's attention to mention them by name. Division is not to be part of the body of Christ. These two ladies had to work it out (leaving wasn't exactly an option cause that meant leaving town - and besides they would just be taking their wrong heart with them), and it did not matter who was in the right and who was in the wrong - what mattered was bringing their hearts into harmony with Christ.

I write this entering Christmas, and it is appropriate that we recognise that His whole purpose was to bring reconciliation between us and God, and certainly as far as it is possible, we need to be reconciled to one another too.

Because a united body is far more effective in advancing the gospel, because then the attention is not on personal issues, but on Jesus and His mission.

It makes sense doesn't it? We were the beneficiaries of Jesus' mission, so let us keep our focus on Him and His mission!

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*Day 36: Rejoice*

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***Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!***  
***Phil 4:4***

I've looked everywhere for a loophole on this one - there isn't one.

In Paul's case, he was living in the context of jail, attacks on the gospel from heretics, personality clashes, persecution from the world, and the very distinct possibility of death.

Joy is not happiness. Happiness is circumstantial, joy is spiritual. Even in circumstantial depression there can be the experience of spiritual joy. Being joyful does not mean being immune to the pains of life, but it does mean one can know inner peace in the midst of heartache because of whom we place our focus upon.

Focussing on the person of Christ and our Father's will in all circumstances will be the pathway to experiencing true joy and peace through the Holy Spirit.

Don't get distracted by the joy-suckers (whether they be people or circumstances), but focus on the person of Christ and give thanks to Him that He alone is Lord.

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*Day 37: Gently Does it*

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***Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.  
Phil 4:5***

If your memory is superb (like my forgettery is), you will recall that the previous verse was an instruction to rejoice in the Lord always. If one is rejoicing in the Lord, then there should be an overflow to those around you through the demonstration of what has above been translated as gentleness - which, according to Hendricksen can also be translated with any of the following:

big-heartedness, forbearance, yieldedness, geniality, kindness, sweet reasonableness, considerateness, charitableness, mildness, magnanimity (I like that one:-) ) or generosity. You kind of need to take all of those words together to get to the meaning of what is being called for.

And this gentleness or big-heartedness is not only to be displayed to fellow believers (and we don't exactly always get that right), but to all people. Does it not reflect what Jesus commanded which has come to be described as the golden rule: Do to others as you would have them do to you (Luke 6:31)?

As a friend of mine shared when he faced a congregation of people who were divided over whether they should retaliate or not against Muslim extremists who had repeatedly treated them badly, the only answer he could give to that question was what God laid on his heart: to retaliate with love.

And we are only able to be motivated to live like this because we have an understanding that Christ is near - both in the sense of His presence with us (the unseen host at every conversation), but also in that He is coming again, and naturally we would want to do Him proud.

What is more, we have been the recipients of His gentleness, His big-heartedness, His kindness, His mercy, His grace.

As we have received, so let us give.



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*Day 38: Defeating Anxiety*

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***Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. Phil 4:6***

Anxiety...worry...stress - seems to be the malady of our time. We're not talking about genuine concern in the welfare of others here, but rather giving unnecessary worry over the circumstances of life.

As a child of God, we rest in the hand of God. We have the tremendous privilege of knowing that God really is in charge. With that knowledge, whatever we allow to worry us, can be converted to prayer. In everything, through prayer and petition: which means we come with reverence and acknowledging our need upon God, along with thanksgiving (because we know that in all things God is able to work towards the good of conforming us to the likeness of His Son - Romans 8:28&29), we can present our specific requests to God.

The starting point over any anxiety producing situation is thankful prayer. It is not meant to be the last resort.

So whatever it is that is causing anxiety: hand it over in reverential thankful prayer!

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*Day 39: Your thoughts please*

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***Finally, brothers, 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. Phil 4:8***

This is truly a call to think and focus differently. In an age where we are bombarded with the negativity of the world, with self-styled opinions masquerading as truth, with feeling-based morality which does not think of consequence, we are called to truly be light.

Having the correct focus is pivotal for our spiritual sanity.

Each phrase above warrants meditation: whatever is true...

whatever is noble...

whatever is right...

whatever is pure...

whatever is lovely...

whatever is admirable...

We can think differently from everyone else, and indeed this forms part of our hope and witness. Because the reality is that for whatever evil and hurt may be running rampant, there is a lot more of God and His grace at work.

Replace the word 'whatever' with 'whoever,' and we have a person worthy of our worship!

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*Day 40: Just do what I do*

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***Whatever 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. Phil 4:9***

Wow - those are words that I was never able to share with the congregation. I wish I could have said "just follow my example" but I was not able to.

The lesson we need to recognise is that meditation upon God and His attributes and truths (previous verses) must lead to action. We think with the purpose of influencing our behaviour - and the person who walks in the right way will know the peace of God.

But being an example is not just the calling of apostles, evangelists, pastors or teachers - it is the calling placed upon all disciples - because the best way to teach a disciple how to be a disciple is to be one.

Will you answer the call?

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*Day 41: Lovin' that blessed feeling*

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***I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. Phil 4:10***

Paul also needed help and people who were concerned for his welfare. Just like we all do.

For whatever reason, the Philippians were not able to provide the kind of assistance that they wanted to (remember - this is waaaaaaaaaaaaaay before the days of internet, email and eft's!). When the opportunity did present itself, they grabbed it wholeheartedly and practically helped Paul by sending a gift to him.

What a blessing to receive a blessing. And what a blessing to be a blessing!

And when we receive, and when we give, we can rejoice in Christ because all good gifts come from Him (see James 1:17), and it is a tremendous privilege to be an instrument for our Lord to express His goodness to others through us.

So, what opportunity will you seize today to be a practical blessing to someone else?

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*Day 42: Psst...I have a secret to share*

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***I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. 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. Phil 4:11&12***

Paul understood human nature - and so he wanted to make sure that his letter was not some kind of subtle fund-raising request. If Paul wanted something, he asked, and did not resort to manipulative techniques to do so (unlike many mission organization's appeal letters!). Hence his comment "I am not saying this because I am in need."

Instead he reveals an important spiritual lesson of life that he has learned, and we would all do well to learn! He speaks of having learned contentment whatever the circumstances.

He knows what it is to be in need. Paul knew first hand the reality of hunger and thirst and difficult circumstances (see 2 Cor 11:16-33). But he was able to be satisfied and content in those type of circumstances. Truth be told, most of us have a far easier time with being content when life is good - but that is to love the gift more than the giver.

In short, the circumstances did not define Paul's contentment and joy Rather the circumstances of life, through the Holy Spirit, brought him to the point where he could be content no matter what.

And the secret of being content is a secret we can all learn, if we are willing (but more about that tomorrow!).

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*Day 43: Bob the Builder...not quite*

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***I can do everything through Him who gives me strength -  
Phil 4:13***

This is probably one of the most mis-quoted verses in Scripture. It usually gets quoted as a more sanctified version of Bob the Builder's "can we fix this - yes we can!"

What we do find in this verse is the secret that Paul spoke of in the previous verses: of how he is able to remain content no matter what the circumstances. If he goes hungry and is without, he is content. If he experiences prosperity, he is content.

In other words, the circumstances do not define Paul's feelings. His contentment lies in Christ alone, and because of Christ, Paul is able to go through any season - whether it be valley or mountain, poverty or prosperity. Whatever the Lord deems fit for Paul to go through in the course of this life, Paul can go through it because of the indwelling Christ who strengthens him.

And the same is true for us. No matter what season the Lord sees fit to take us through, we can indeed go through it only because the grace of God is more than able to carry us, sustain us and indeed strengthen us. As Jesus Himself said to Paul: My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.

Let's no get in the way of Christ's power through an "I can do it" attitude - let's make way for Him to work through us through a "please work through me" attitude.



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*Day 44: Be oily*

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***Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles. Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid again and again when I was in need. Phil 4:14-16***

Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles...there's something about going through difficult times that has a way of separating the wheat from the chaff when it comes to friends - and Paul is here expressing his gratitude to the church at Philippi for their continued assistance to him, especially in his time of need, and contrasts them to those who did not assist.

When we stand by people in times of need, it is ministering the very soul of Christ like an anointing oil. Indeed, the image behind Paul's gratitude is the same of Jesus commending Mary of Bethany in Mark 14:6, where Mary broke a jar of expensive perfume and poured it onto Jesus. Mary got criticized for her actions, but Jesus responded as follows:

"Leave her alone," said Jesus. "Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me..."

May the Lord help us to be anointing oil to those in need.

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*Day 45: Count your blessings...Be a blessing*

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***Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account. I have received full payment and even more; I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus. To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen. Phil 4:17-20***

Paul is again at pains to point out that he is not after another gift - it seems he had enemies that would question his motives: if he accepts the gift, he is greedy - if he doesn't, he is displaying false humility!

But Paul's concern is not the gift - it is the giver of the gift. The way he describes the gift reveals to us that to give is really an investment through which we receive God's blessing. Let us not be limited in our thinking with what blessing is and turn it into a financial issue - because our needs are far more than financial and can only be met in Christ.

But for many of us, giving of our finances is an issue. It sounds odd to say this but it is true: money is a spiritual issue. It doesn't take long to develop a sense of entitlement to the money we earn and it can soon entrap us into ownership thinking instead of stewardship thinking.

Paul is commending the Philippians for their generosity, and uses a beautiful image: a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice - pleasing to our God.

Can there be any greater affirmation? May God help us to worship with our finances as well. I like the way Randy Alcorn puts it: you can't take it with you - but you can send it on ahead of you! And how's this for a real challenge that I read somewhere - why is it when we give the waiter 10% it's called a tip, but when we give 10% to God it's called a tithe/generous giving?

We have a wonderful promise from God: He is more than able to meet all our needs - after all, did He not prove that at Calvary?

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*Day 46: This little light of mine...*

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***Greet all the saints in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me send greetings. All the saints send you greetings, especially those who belong to Caesar's household. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.***

Simple question: how come there were saints in Caesar's household? That has got to be the absolute unholy of unholies in the context of Roman society. Caesar himself was regarded as a god and expected to be treated and worshiped as one.

Nonetheless, the gospel had penetrated the hearts of men and women, and some were servants in the palace. When God wants the gospel spread, He gets it spread! And no matter where we are, we are privileged to count brothers and sisters in other parts of the world as family.

And so the question remains: will your light shine so that there can be fellow saints in unexpected places? Where has God called you to be His witness? What is your workplace? Your social circle? These are your God-given opportunities to be His witness.

And as you do so, may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.