

SERMON SERIES GUIDE • JUNE 7 - AUGUST 2, 2026



PHILIPPIANS

Learning to Rejoice in All Seasons of Life

NASHVILLE
FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH

10 Strategic Initiatives

- Hub of Prayer and Spiritual Renewal
- Cultivating Vibrant Creative Community
- Activating our Deacons for Connection and Support
- Deep Discipleship and Biblically Focused Growth
- Enhancing our Team to Carry the Vision for Nashville
- College and Young Adult Ministry
- Faith and Work Ministry
- City Engagement
- Global Missions
- Radical Generosity



These 10 Strategic Initiatives are intended to guide our ministry goals from 2025-2035.

These are broken up into several segments with "Revive" kicking off the plan from 2024-26.

OUR VISION:

We exist to help connect Jesus to people, people to community, and community to mission.

Two-Year (2024-2026) Strategic Initiatives for “Revive”

Our two-year strategic ministry plan is built around a vision for spiritual renewal, deep discipleship, and community transformation. A deeply revived city requires a deeply revived church, simply a collection of deeply revived people. It starts with each of us turning and returning our entire selves to God and asking him to make us whole.

In 2026, we are continuing to emphasize:

- **Developing a Culture of Prayer:** *Prayer is the foundation of spiritual awakening.*
- **Building a College and Young Adult Ministry:** *We are passionate about reaching the next generation.*
- **Engaging the City:** *Our vision is to see Nashville transformed by the gospel.*
- **Equipping Our Deacons for Future Development:** *To better serve our church and city.*
- **Staffing for the Future:** *We want to ensure our staff is equipped and aligned with the church’s vision and strategy.*



for the
CITY

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY GUIDE

What follows is a nine-week guide through Philippians, specifically designed for this congregation: for individuals who want to go deeper on their own, for families who want to bring the Word to the dinner table, and for small group Bible studies who want to do the good work of applying the Scriptures to their lives in practical ways.

Each week follows the same pattern: an opening reflection to bring you to the text, a brief orientation to what Paul is doing in the passage, a set of questions to move from understanding to application to the world beyond your front door, and a simple practice to carry into the week.

One suggestion: read each week's passage aloud before you do anything else. Philippians was written to be heard in the community. It rewards being read that way. And one request: do not rush. Nine weeks is generous for a four-chapter letter. We have designed this study to let the slow formation of the Word do what no program or platform can do.

The God who began a good work in you will bring it to completion. That is the first promise of the letter. It is also the promise under which this study begins.

CONTENTS

June 7 / Partners in the Gospel	10
June 14 / The Live Is Christ.....	14
VBS Information	16
Discover First Information	18
June 21/The Mind of Christ	20
June 28/Everything Without Grumbling.....	24
Music Arts Camp Information.....	28
July 5/The Gospel with Skin On.....	30
July 12/The Great Revaluation.....	34
July 19/Pressing On	38
July 26/The Peace That Defies Explanation	42
August 2/I Have Learned	46
Closing Word from Pastor	50

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

A Biblical and Theological Introduction to Philippians

Somewhere around AD 62, a man under house arrest in Rome picked up a pen and wrote the most joy-saturated document in the New Testament.

He was chained to a rotating series of Praetorian guards. His future was uncertain, the verdict could go either way. The church he had given his life to building up was scattered across the Roman world and facing pressures both external and internal. And the congregation he was writing to — the one that had sent their own member across the Mediterranean to care for him — was both anxious about his welfare and subtly fracturing along the fault lines that form in every community when outside pressure becomes internal stress. He began: “*I thank my God in all my remembrance of you.*”

The Letter of Paul to the PHILIPPIANS

PHILIPPIANS BEGINS IN ACTS

The letter of Philippians doesn't make sense without Acts 16. The Philippian church was born in a Roman prison. Paul and Silas, beaten and shackled at midnight, sang hymns while the other prisoners listened. The church was born through an earthquake, opened doors, a jailer fell trembling at their feet, and a household was baptized before sunrise. The first church on European soil gathered in the home of a woman named Lydia who had encountered Jesus at a riverside prayer meeting a few days before.

Philippi was a Roman colony — a garrison city, full of retired soldiers, fiercely proud of its Roman identity. It was exactly the kind of city that knew what power looked like and assumed it knew what weakness looked like too. Into that city, Paul announced that a crucified Jewish carpenter was the Lord of all creation. That the one who had emptied Himself of divine glory, taken the form of a servant, and died on a Roman cross had been raised and exalted above every authority in the cosmos. That His name was the one before which every knee — including every Roman knee — would bow.

This was not a safe message to preach in Philippi. Both Paul and the Philippians knew it. This letter carries that shared knowledge underneath every line.

HOW THE LETTER WORKS

Philippians is unlike most of Paul's letters in its structure. He is not correcting a heresy or resolving a crisis. Instead, the letter is arranged as a series of reflective movements — biographical, theological, exhortational, deeply personal — that all orbit around a single center of gravity.

The poetry written in Philippians chapter 2, verses 1 through 11 is almost certainly among the earliest Christian hymns we possess. The early church sang its theology before it systematized it. And what it sang was this: before His incarnation, the Messiah existed in the form of God — in the full weight of divine being and glory. But unlike Adam, who grasped at equality with God and plunged humanity into ruin, the Messiah did the opposite. He did not exploit His divine status for self-advantage. He released it. He emptied himself. He took the form of a servant. He became

obedient all the way to death, and death on a cross. *Therefore* God highly exalted Him. Every knee will bow. Every tongue will confess. Jesus Christ is Lord.

The hymn is the gospel in eleven verses. And every other section of the letter takes its cue from this poem. Paul's reflection on his imprisonment is a lived expression of it. The appeal to unity is grounded in it. Timothy and Epaphroditus are biographical portraits of it. The great revaluation of chapter 3 is Paul's autobiography written inside it. The peace and contentment of chapter 4 are its fruit.

The letter's invitation is simple and total: "have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus." See your own story as a lived expression of Jesus' story. Let the pattern of His descent and exaltation become the pattern of your life.

MAJOR THEMES ADDRESSED

Joy. The word appears sixteen times in four chapters. The verb to rejoice appears nine times more. No other letter from Paul comes close to this density. And Paul is writing from prison, that juxtaposition is the entire point. Joy in Philippians is not an emotion that arises when circumstances cooperate.

As John Piper helpfully explains, Christian joy is a good feeling in the soul, produced by the Holy Spirit, as he causes us to see the beauty of Christ in the Word and in the world. Joy is commanded (*rejoice in the Lord always – again I say, rejoice*) because it runs against our natural instincts. Joy is learned (*I have learned, in whatever situation I am, to be content*) because it must be pressed into a person through seasons of abundance and need before it becomes a realistic response to reality.

Koinonia. The letter's master relational word, appearing first in 1:5 as the ground of Paul's gratitude. Your Bible probably translates it partnership or fellowship, but it means more than that. *Co-participation*. Shared stakes in a mission that is larger than any one of us. The Philippians were not merely Paul's supporters. They were his co-participants in the gospel – from the first day until now, in his imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, in giving and receiving across the years. Their financial generosity referenced in chapter 4 is not separate from their koi-

nonia — it is one of its expressions. In Philippians, giving is not a transaction. It is the form that shared stakes takes when it becomes tangible.

The Great Revaluation. Paul's autobiography in chapter 3 is one of the most personally searching passages in the New Testament. Eight legitimate résumé credentials assembled carefully and then demolished. Not because they were false, but because they were on the wrong side of the ledger. The calculation Paul has done is radical and irreversible: against the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus his Lord, everything else registers as loss. The Greek word he uses — *skubala* — is considerably stronger than the polite translations suggest. Paul is not being subtle. The revaluation of his hard earned résumé is comprehensive

Heavenly Citizenship. The church at Philippi lived in a Roman colony that was oriented entirely around its Roman identity and allegiance. Paul offers a counter-identity. *Our citizenship* is in heaven. Not as an escape from earthly life but as a reorientation of it. The church is a colony of that country, planted here, living heaven's customs in a Roman city. In modern Nashville, this claim is no less demanding and no less necessary.

Contentment. The letter's final theological gift comes to us as testimony: "*I have learned, in whatever situation I am, to be content.*" The Greek word "autarkes" was the Stoic word for self-sufficiency. The philosopher found contentment by becoming independent of external things. Paul takes the word and transforms its source entirely. His contentment is not self-generated. It flows from the one who strengthens him. He can do all things — and indeed: learn to rejoice in every season — through Christ. The strength is for faithful endurance in any circumstances God brings.

WHY THIS LETTER, FOR THIS CHURCH, AT THIS MOMENT

By the grace of God, Nashville First Baptist Church will turn 206 years old during our study of this letter. We are in our second year of renewing our understanding of who God has always called us to be — a congregation rooted in the gospel, open to the city, formed by Scripture, and eager to reach our neighbors and the nations with the good news of Jesus Christ.

The Lord is ushering us into a season of favor. I do not say that casually. There is something alive in this congregation that I want to handle carefully: not exploit or manufacture, but steward well. And Philippians is, I

believe, exactly the right companion for our congregation at this moment.

Philippians was not written to a church in crisis. It was written to Paul's most beloved and flourishing congregation. A community that was genuinely alive, genuinely faithful, and facing the specific temptations that flourishing communities face. The temptation to trust the momentum rather than the Lord who gives it. The temptation to let internal tensions slowly undermine external witness. The temptation to hold the good gifts of a favored season with clenched fists rather than open hands.

Paul's answer to all of those temptations is the same: "the mind of Christ." The pattern of the one who held everything and released it. The fellowship of people who have shared stakes in something larger than their own comfort or reputation. The contentment of those who have an identity in Jesus Christ that cannot be taken or shaken, in any season.

Finally, there's a connection between the Roman colony of Philippi and the booming city of Nashville as well. Paul wrote to a Roman colony — a city that knew its identity, wore its allegiances visibly, and pressured everyone within it to conform to its values. Philippi was proud, connected, and prosperous. It had opinions about who mattered and who didn't. Nashville is not so different. And into that kind of city, Paul's letter plants a counter-community. The local church is a colony of heaven in a foreign land. A people who live by a different set of accounts, where giving increases rather than depletes, where descent is the path to exaltation, where joy is possible in chains, and where the one who holds all things together is not Caesar but the crucified and risen Jesus.

That is the community Nashville First is called to be. Not despite this city but for it. We want to be a church for the city. For every person in it who is anxious and successful and secretly unsatisfied. For every person who knows they are missing something and cannot name what it is. For every person whose citizenship in every other country has turned out to be less durable than they hoped.

WEEK ONE - June 7

Partners in the Gospel

PHILIPPIANS 1:1-11

BEFORE YOU READ

Nashville is one of the most connected cities in America.

Everyone knows someone. Everyone has a connection, a contact, or a friend of a friend. We are a city of networkers, collaborators, and creatives who are all looking for the next contact and connection. And yet, how many actual friends do we have? This isn't to say that the long haul members of the community don't have deep and impactful friendships. But many people experience the gap between people they know about and the real sort of partnerships where the stakes are actually shared. Paul knew the difference.

He opens this letter — the warmest he ever wrote — with a word that does not translate easily into English. The Greek is *koinonia*. Your Bible probably translates it “partnership” or “fellowship.” But it means something richer than that. It means co-participation. Shared stakes. Being genuinely in this together rather than merely associated with the same cause.

Every time Paul remembers the Philippians, he thanks God this specific way of relating to one another. Every memory produces joy. That is a remarkable thing to be able to say about a church. And it is the first reflection question this letter puts to us: are we becoming the kind of community that people remember that way?

THE TEXT — PHILIPPIANS 1:1-11

Read the passage slowly out loud.

Here is what Paul is doing in these eleven verses. He opens without his usual title. In almost every other letter, Paul identifies himself as an apostle. But here, his credential, his authority, his calling card are not deployed because they are not needed. With the Philippians, he is simply Paul, a servant. He doesn't need the résumé. He is writing to friends who already

know who he is and who have proven their partnership by the way they have stood with him. Paul is grateful for their *koinonia* — their genuine participation alongside him in the work of the gospel. They have not merely supported him from a distance. They have been in it with him from the first day until now.

Then he prays. And notice what he asks for. He does not ask for their comfort or their safety. Not even their growth in numbers. He prays that their love would keep growing — but growing specifically in knowledge and discernment. He wants them to love wisely. To be able to tell the difference between what is merely good and what is truly excellent. To give their lives to the things that actually matter.

One more thing before the questions. Verse 6: “He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.” Paul’s confidence in the Philippians is not based on how well they are performing. It is based on the faithfulness of the God who started something in them and does not abandon His work. That is the bedrock beneath everything else in this letter and beneath everything we are building together this summer.

QUESTIONS

1. Paul opens without his apostolic title demonstrating he is simply a servant writing to friends. What does it tell us about the Philippians that he doesn’t need his credentials with them? Is there a community in your life where you feel genuinely free to show up without performing?
2. *Koinonia* — co-participation, shared stakes — is more than friendship and more than church membership. By that definition, how would you honestly describe your relationship with Nashville First right now? What would going deeper actually require of you?
3. Paul prays that their love would grow in knowledge and discernment — so they can *approve what is excellent* (v.10). What is the difference between a church that loves generously and one that loves wisely? What does undiscerning love cost a congregation over time?
4. Verse 6, “*he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion.*” Paul’s joy is rooted not in the Philippians’ track record but in God’s faithfulness. How does that change how you hold your own spiritual life, especially in the seasons that feel like stagnation?

5. Paul remembers the Philippians with specific, genuine, grateful joy. What kind of community produces that kind of remembrance? What habits, choices, and ways of being together make a church something people carry with them?

6. Someone in your neighborhood, your workplace, your street is watching the community of Nashville First through the lens of your life. What are they seeing? And what would our koinonia need to look like for them to want to belong to what we belong to our faith family?

HEAR, TRUST, OBEY

Discipleship is learning to hear, trust, and obey what God says by His word and His Spirit. As disciples of Jesus Christ, we want to grow in our ability to hear, trust, and obey what God is saying to us on a weekly basis. Allow the words of Paul to inspire you this week.

Paul's joy in the Philippians is rooted in specific memories. Paul doesn't communicate general appreciation but particular things he thanks God for when he thinks of them. What does God say to you by His Word and His Spirit as you read this portion of Scripture and reflect on Paul's love for the church?

***“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

WEEK TWO - June 14

To Live Is Christ

PHILIPPIANS 1:12-30

BEFORE YOU READ

Nashville is a city that knows how to be ambitious.

People come here with dreams to make it in music, to build something, to leave a mark. And there is nothing wrong with that. But there is a question that ambition tends to avoid. The question is this: What are you actually living for? The true source of our ambition tends to reveal itself in the hard moments: when the deal falls through, when the diagnosis lands, when you realize you're going to come up short of the goal, and when the thing you've been building starts to fall apart. In those moments, what you are actually living for becomes visible; it becomes clear what is really holding you up.

Paul is writing from a Roman prison and awaiting a verdict. The outcome could be release or execution. His freedom is gone, his future is uncertain, and the people who love him most are anxious on his behalf. And from that place — that stripped-down, everything-on-the-line place — Paul writes one of the most extraordinary sentences in the New Testament.

“For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.” He is being precise; he has worked out what is actually at the center of his life. And he has found that it is something no circumstance can threaten. That is why he can write a joy-saturated letter from a prison cell. This week Paul invites us to sit with the same question he was forced to answer: what are you actually living for, and what happens to you when it gets threatened?

THE TEXT — PHILIPPIANS 1:12-30

Read the passage slowly.

There are three movements in this passage, and it helps to see them clearly before you work through the questions.

The first is a reframe (vv.12-18). Paul's imprisonment has not slowed the

gospel — it has spread it. The Praetorian Guard know why he is in chains. Other believers are preaching with more courage because of his example. Even those who preach from rivalry are still preaching Christ, and Paul finds a way to rejoice in that too. Paul has managed to see all he has gained from these difficulties and not simply focusing on his struggles. He is not pretending his circumstances are other than they are. He is seeing his life through a lens that most of us do not naturally use: what is God doing here that I cannot yet see? Later, Paul will write a more fully developed view of this thinking with even greater confidence (Romans 8:28-30).

The second movement is the great evaluation (vv.18b-26). Paul thinks out loud about what it would mean to live and what it would mean to die. Both, he concludes, are gain. To live means fruitful work. To die means being with Christ, which is far better. He settles on remaining, because they need him. What is remarkable is not his confidence about death but the freedom his settled convictions give him in life. A man who has already resolved the deepest question does not spend his days in fear of the answer.

The third is the exhortation (vv.27-30). Paul turns from himself to them. Live, he says, in a manner “worthy of the gospel.” And notice immediately how he defines that. Not as private holiness. Not as individual discipline. Living worthy of the gospel means communal solidarity, standing firm together, and striving side by side. The worthy life is something you live with other people, not just before God alone.

One last detail: verse 29. Paul tells them that it has been granted to them to suffer for Christ. The word he uses is the verb form of grace. Paul describes his suffering as a gift. That is either the strangest thing Paul ever wrote, or it is one of the most important.

QUESTIONS

1. Paul refuses to receive the Philippians' anxiety about his imprisonment. He reframes the whole situation — what looks like a setback is actually advanced. Is this denial? Is it faith? What is the difference, and how do you tell which one you are practicing in your own life?
2. Paul says the gospel has advanced because of his chains, not in spite of them. Can you think of a difficulty in your own life — past or present — that has served a purpose you could not have chosen for

it? What does that suggest about how God uses the things we would not have chosen?

3. Paul's life-vision is simple, "For me, to live is Christ." Christ Himself is the content of Paul's life. If someone watched your week — your decisions, your anxieties, your conversations — what would they conclude that you are actually living for? Be honest.

4. Paul defines "worthy of the gospel" as communal, meaning both 'standing firm together', and 'striving side by side', are not frightened by opponents. This is not a description of individual spiritual discipline but a description of the church. What does it look like for a congregation to be collectively "worthy of the gospel" in a city like Nashville?

5. Our neighbors might not be reading our statement of faith but they are watching what we believe by how we live our lives. They may not have yet read a Bible but they are reading your life. What do you want them to see?

HEAR, TRUST, OBEY

Paul declared "to live is Christ." Is that the same reason for living that you organize your life around? If not, what adjustments do you need to make in your life across the summer season? Ask the Father to speak to you through His Word and His Spirit this summer. Allow God to search your heart and show you what you're actually living for. Pray this prayer: Speak, Lord, your servant is listening.

"FOR TO ME TO LIVE IS CHRIST, AND TO DIE IS GAIN."

PHILIPPIANS 1:21

SHINING A LIGHT ON
WHO JESUS REALLY IS

ILLUMINATIONTM STATION

JOHN 8:12

JUNE 15-19 | 9 A.M. - 12:15 P.M.

Jesus spoke to them again:
“I am the light of the
world. Anyone who follows
me will never walk in the
darkness but will have the
light of life.”

JOHN 8:12

FIRSTkids

**AGES 5-12;
ENTERING K - COMPLETED 6TH GRADE**

VBS 2026 will be the brightest week of the year as we experience what it truly means for Jesus to be the Light of the World. Through Bible study, crafts, music, games, and snacks, preschoolers to preteens will explore all the ways light brightens, illuminates, reflects, and reveals. We will encounter Jesus – the promised, perfect, powerful, and proven Son of God. Invite your friends! VBS is always free, and registration never closes.

VBS PLUS

(extra charge)

Pack a lunch and stay all day with VBS Plus! We'll continue the fun with various afternoon adventures.

VBS Early Care

(extra charge) Come early to VBS and enjoy breakfast and board games with our summer staff.



SCAN TO SIGNUP!

Questions?

Contact our Minister to Children, Shannon Meadors at Shannon.Meadors@NashvilleFirst.org

Summer Sessions

DISCOVER FIRST



NEW ONE SESSION FORMAT DISCOVER FIRST LUNCHEONS ON JUNE 28 & AUGUST 2

Discover First will host special “Summer Sessions” featuring a free lunch and a 90-minute session for those who may be interested in learning more about who we are, and how you can join our mission. The course covers who we are and what our church is all about. It also looks at what exactly it means to belong to a church and how you can get involved and serve.

If you are interested in joining us for one of these groups, please scan the QR code with the corresponding date to register, or contact Juliana Wilson at Juliana.Wilson@NashvilleFirst.org.

Sign Up!

JUNE 28
DISCOVER FIRST



AUGUST 2
DISCOVER FIRST



Childcare will be provided free of charge during the Discover First Summer Sessions. If needed, please indicate the ages of your children when registering.

WEEK THREE - JUNE 21

The Mind of Christ

PHILIPPIANS 2:1-11

BEFORE YOU READ

Have you ever met someone who made you feel like you were the most important person in their world? They walk into a room and somehow make you feel more seen, known, and loved. They are genuinely interested in you. They don't seem concerned for what they can get from you but who you are and how you're doing. When they are with you, they are with you. They are not calculating for future potentials or distracted by what's going on with others through their phone. They are simply, freely, giving you their attention and their care.

That quality is rarer than we admit. And when you encounter it, you find yourself wanting to be near it. Paul discovered a way to become this kind of person. He calls it "the mind of Christ."

This week we arrive at the theological center of the entire letter. Eleven verses that the early church may well have sung before Paul ever wrote them down. The story of Jesus, told in poetry and song – from the heights of divine glory to the depth of a Roman cross, and then, therefore, to the highest name in all creation. It is the gospel in picture form. And Paul's claim – as audacious as anything he ever wrote – is that this movement, this pattern of descent and ascent, having and releasing, is the shape of the Christian life. This is the shape of a healthy church.

The trait that makes you feel incredibly seen and appreciated by others arises from humility. Christian humility isn't thinking more of yourself or less of yourself, it is thinking of yourself, less. Meditating on the life of Christ can produce a mindset called "the mind of Christ" in us that naturally humbles us.

Before you read, one question to carry into the text: is there something you are grasping right now – a position, a right, a record of being correct – that the mind of Christ would have you release?

THE TEXT – PHILIPPIANS 2:1-11

Read this passage aloud. Slowly. All the way through before you discuss anything. This passage was made to be heard.

Here is what Paul is doing in these eleven verses, and why they belong at the center of everything.

He opens with four if statements (vv.1-2). If there is any encouragement in Christ, if any comfort from love, if any participation in the Spirit, if any affection and sympathy... These are appeals. Paul is saying: you know these things are real because you have felt them. That shared experience – of grace, of love, of the Spirit's presence – is the ground of everything he is about to ask.

He asks for unity, but notice carefully that he is not asking for everyone to agree on everything. He is not asking for uniformity of opinion or personality. He is asking for a shared motivation and mentality. Observe it carefully in these phrases: Do nothing from selfish ambition. Consider others more significant than yourselves. Look not only to your own interests but to the interests of others. It is a way of moving through the world as other-directed, open-handed, and genuinely concerned.

Then comes the great Christ hymn (vv.5-11). Before He became human, Christ existed in the form of God: in the full weight and glory of divine being. Unlike Adam, who grasped at equality with God and brought ruin on us all, Christ did the opposite. He did not exploit His divine status for His own advantage. He released it. He emptied himself. He took the form of a servant. He was found in human likeness. He humbled Himself to the point of obedience, even when obedience meant death. Even when it meant death on a cross.

And therefore – because of that, not despite it – God has highly exalted him. He has given him the name above every name. Every knee will bow. Every tongue will confess. Jesus Christ is Lord.

The cross is not the contradiction of His glory but the fullest expression of it. And here is what Paul is asking of the Philippians and of us. Have this mind among yourselves. The command is plural. It is not a call to private, internal humility as a personal discipline. It is a call to a communal posture. A church that moves the way Christ moved. A people shaped by the pattern of descent and ascent. Jesus Christ was the most humble person who ever lived. Believing in Him and meditating on His life will produce His mindset in us.

QUESTIONS

1. Paul's appeal to unity is grounded in shared experience: if there is encouragement in Christ, if any comfort from love. He is not asking them to manufacture something from nothing. He is asking them to live consistently with what they have already received. What does that say about where genuine Christian unity comes from? Can it be produced without that shared foundation?
2. The Christ hymn echoes the story of Adam. Adam grasped at equality with God and fell. Christ had equality with God and released it. At the most fundamental level: what is sin? And what does Christ's response to it reveal about the character of God?
3. *"Did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped"* – the Greek word describes something seized and clutched tightly. What are you holding that way right now? A position in a relationship. A right you feel owed. A version of events you are not willing to let go of. A status you have worked hard to protect. The mind of Christ does not ask you to pretend these things do not matter, it asks what you do with them.
4. *"Have this mind among yourselves"* – the command is communal. Paul is not primarily describing an individual spiritual discipline. He is describing how it ought to go with the whole church. What does "the mind of Christ" look like not just in a single person but in a gathered congregation?
5. The Christ hymn moves from descent to exaltation, and the *"therefore"* in verse 9 carries the whole argument. God does not redeem Christ's suffering by making it worthwhile. He vindicates it by reversing it entirely. The cross leads to the crown. What does that pattern say about how God works, in the world, in a church, in a life?
6. *"Every knee shall bow, every tongue confess"* – Paul is quoting Isaiah 45, where this language refers to the God of Israel being recognized by all creation. He applies it to Jesus. Every person in your neighborhood is included in that every. Every colleague. Every stranger. Every person who has never heard the name. How does that change the way you see the people around you this week?

HEAR, TRUST, OBEY

Set apart time this week to sit in the presence of God and listen to what

WEEK FOUR - JUNE 28

Everything Without Grumbling

PHILIPPIANS 2:12-18

BEFORE YOU READ

Have you ever walked into a room where you could feel the tension?

Walk into a room — a workplace, a family home, a church — and within a few minutes you can sense what's going on. There is a culture, an atmosphere, to groups when they gather. An invisible thermostat is set by the collection of anxieties, hopes, fears, and expectations that a group carries. Some groups feel alive, some feel tired. Some feel like they are barely hanging on and others feel like something life-shattering is about to break through.

Nashville knows this instinctively. The best rooms in this city — the ones people talk about, the ones people return to — have an atmosphere you feel in your chest before you can name it. And the ones that have lost it? You feel that too. Something is missing, and everyone in the room knows it, and nobody is quite saying so. Paul is about to say something that sounds almost too simple to be theological: the atmosphere of a church is part of its witness.

The setting of that invisible thermostat sends a message. People feel what it's like to be among people before anyone has preached a sermon or sung a song. The sense of expectation, enduring hope, belief that God isn't finished with us yet. All of these contribute to the collective nervous system of our culture that people experience when they visit us. And the specific thing Paul wants to address, the specific culture-killer he names directly, is grumbling.

Last week we sat with one of the most exalted passages in the New Testament, the *kenosis* hymn: Christ emptying himself. The pattern of descent and ascent. This week Paul explains very practically what this would look like among us: *“Do everything without grumbling.”*

THE TEXT — PHILIPPIANS 2:12–18

Read the passage through once before you look at anything else.

There are three movements in this short passage, and they build on each other carefully.

The first is the *grammar of sanctification* (vv.12–13). Paul says: “work out your salvation with fear and trembling — for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.” These two sentences belong together. The first is a command. The second is its foundation. Paul is not telling the Philippians to earn their salvation. He is telling them to bring it to full expression: to live out the implications of something already given. The Greek word for “work out” means to bring to completion what is already present. And the reason this is possible — the only reason it is possible — is that God is already at work inside them. Both the desire and the capacity come from God. Human effort and divine initiative are not in competition. The divine initiative is what makes the human effort real. The fear and trembling in verse 12 is about holy awe, reverence for God.

The second movement is the *grumbling prohibition* (vv.14–16). And this is where Paul surprises us. He does not say: stop grumbling because it damages the community. He does not say: stop grumbling because it is unpleasant. He says: stop grumbling so *that you may shine as lights in a crooked and twisted generation*. The connection is direct. The interior atmosphere of the congregation is inseparable from its public witness. A church that complains constantly is a church whose witness isn’t working well.

The third is the *drink offering* (vv.17–18). Paul describes himself as a libation poured out on the sacrifice of their faith. It is a temple image — costly, complete, irreversible. And he says he rejoices in it. He invites them to rejoice with him. This is the man who wrote the kenosis hymn and is now illustrating what this means for us practically. We too, don’t simply observe the pattern of Christ from a distance and admire it, we inhabit it.

QUESTIONS

1. “*Work out your salvation... for it is God who works in you.*” Paul puts the human command and the divine initiative in the same breath. How do you hold those two together without collapsing into either

passivity (God will do it so I don't need to) or striving (it all depends on my effort)?

2. Paul says God works in us both “*to will and to work.*” Not just the capacity but the desire — the wanting — comes from God. Have you experienced this? A moment when you found yourself wanting something good that you did not manufacture in yourself? What does that feel like, and what does it suggest about how transformation actually happens?

3. Here is the question that does not let us off the hook: what does your default mode of speech communicate to the people around you about the gospel you say you believe? Not your best moments but your default disposition. What do the people closest to you hear most often from you — gratitude or complaint, trust or anxiety, generosity or grievance?

4. Paul connects grumbling directly to witness. A grumbling church cannot shine as lights because grumbling directly contradicts the gospel it proclaims. The gospel says: God is good and everything good we receive is a gift of His grace. Grumbling says: things are not as they should be and nobody is doing anything about it. Where do you see that contradiction most clearly — in yourself, in a community you are part of, in the broader church?

5. Paul describes himself as a drink offering “*poured out.*” He rejoices in his own sacrifice and asks the Philippians to rejoice with him. What does it mean that joy and sacrifice are not opposites in Paul's experience? Have you ever encountered that in your own life — a moment when giving something up produced something that felt more like joy than loss?

6. What would a community without grumbling communicate to your neighbors, your colleagues, the people who know where you go on Sundays, if the most obvious thing about this church was its gratitude? What would a watching world make of it?

HEAR, TRUST, OBEY

What does God say to you through his Word and his Spirit as you study this portion of Scripture? What does God reveal to you about your own heart? What do you contribute to the overall experience of our faith family through your mood and expectation? Ask the Lord to help you where you need help.



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WEEK FIVE - JULY 5

The Gospel with Skin On

PHILIPPIANS 2:19-30

BEFORE YOU READ

Most of us have experienced “performed concern.” You know what it looks like. Someone asks how you are and you can tell from the way they ask that they are not really asking. They are completing a social ritual. The words are right but nothing substantive seems to be behind them. The follow-up question never comes. And somehow, you just know.

And then there are others who are genuinely concerned for others. People who ask how you are and actually wait for the answer. Someone who remembers what you told them last time and brings it up again. A friend who will show up when it costs them something. Someone who is genuinely glad when things go well for you and genuinely sorry when they don't.

The difference between those two types of concern is common in human life. In the passage of Scripture we study this week, Paul introduces us to two people who lived entirely in the second experience of concern.

After four weeks of theology — the Christ hymn, the mind of Christ, the grumbling prohibition — Paul now lands it into something concrete. Two names. Two lives. Two portraits of what the gospel looks like when it takes hold of an ordinary person and produces something extraordinary in them. The Christ hymn described the shape of Christ's love. Timothy and Epaphroditus show us what it looks like when that shape gets lived out by people like us.

THE TEXT — PHILIPPIANS 2:19-30

Read the passage through once before you discuss anything.

Here is what Paul is doing in these twelve verses. He introduces two people. And on the surface it looks like travel news — who is coming, who is being sent back, when Paul hopes to visit. But underneath the logistics is something much more important. These two men are not illustrations

Paul has chosen to make a point. They are the point. They are the great Christ hymn (2:1-11) with biographical faces.

Timothy (vv.19–24). Paul says something that stops you in its tracks. “I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. And then immediately: For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.” The contrast is pointed. Most people — even in the church, even in ministry — are primarily oriented toward themselves. Their comfort, their advancement, their image, their interests. Timothy is different. He is genuinely concerned for the Philippians’ welfare. The word Paul uses for genuinely means naturally, authentically, not performed. This is not Timothy trying to be selfless. This is who Timothy is. He has been so shaped by the gospel that being directed towards others has become his natural posture.

Epaphroditus (vv.25–30). This is the man the Philippians sent with their financial gift to Paul in prison. He carried their love across a significant distance to a man in chains. And somewhere along the way, he nearly died. Paul writes that he was sick, close to death, and then adds a detail that is one of the most moving in the entire letter. Epaphroditus was distressed. Not because he was ill or that he was far from home. But because he received news that his congregation had heard he was sick and were now worried about him. He was grieving their anxiety, not his own suffering. That is the Christ hymn, embodied in specific people.

Paul uses a striking word to describe how Epaphroditus risked his life (v.30). The Greek is *paraboleusamenos* — from the same root as a gambler’s throw. He gambled with his life. He placed it on the table. Not recklessly but willingly. As an act of love for Paul, for the Philippians, for the work of Christ.

And then Paul does something important. He does not simply ask the Philippians to appreciate Epaphroditus. He commands them to honor him. Active, specific, public honor. The church that does not honor its sacrificial servants will eventually stop producing them.

QUESTIONS

1. Paul says Timothy is unlike most people because he genuinely cares for others’ welfare rather than his own interests. Is this a high bar or a basic description of Christian maturity? What is the difference between performing concern and genuinely having concern for people?

2. Epaphroditus was distressed not by his own suffering but by the fact that his congregation was worried about him. What does that kind of love require of a person? Have you ever encountered it — someone who was more concerned for your worry than for their own difficulty?
3. Who in your life has shown you genuine concern — not strategic, not performed, but real? Specific person, specific moment. What did it cost them? And how did it shape you?
4. Paul uses gambling language to describe how Epaphroditus risked his life. There is nothing cautious or calculated about it. He placed himself on the line. Is there a place in your own life — a relationship, a commitment, an act of service — where the Spirit is leading you to take risks for the gospel?
5. Paul commands the Philippians to honor Epaphroditus — not simply appreciate him. To receive him with joy and hold people like him in high regard. Who in this congregation is your Epaphroditus — the person who has served sacrificially, without seeking recognition?
6. Epaphroditus carried the Philippians' love and generosity to Paul in Rome — he was the vehicle of their *koinonia* beyond the walls of their own community. Who are we carrying our care to beyond our own walls? Who in this city is waiting for someone to bring them what we have?

HEAR, TRUST, OBEY

Timothy and Epaphroditus did not choose the easy road of friendly association. They chose the costly path of genuine fellowship. This week, focus on hearing, trusting, and obeying what God says to you through the lens of Timothy and Epaphroditus.

*“SO RECEIVE HIM IN THE LORD WITH ALL JOY, AND
HONOR SUCH MEN, FOR HE NEARLY DIED FOR THE WORK
OF CHRIST, RISKING HIS LIFE TO COMPLETE WHAT WAS LACKING
IN YOUR SERVICE TO ME.”*

PHILIPPIANS 2:29-30

WEEK SIX - JULY 12

The Great Revaluation

PHILIPPIANS 3:1-11

BEFORE YOU READ

Most of us carry a résumé we never show anyone.

Not the professional one with our accomplishments and credentials, but the moral one that lives in our minds and imaginations. The running list of things that secretly establish our sense of worth before God and before others. Our family background. Our faithfulness over the years. The theology we hold correctly. The sacrifices we have made. The ways we have served when serving was costly. The things we have built, survived, or stayed committed to when other people walked away.

We would never say we are trusting in these things. We know better than that. But when they get threatened: when someone questions our record, when a season of life goes badly, when we discover someone we respected doesn't think as highly of us as we thought, when the credentials don't open the doors we assumed they would...it's in these moments we find out how much weight we were placing on them all along.

Paul is about to do something in this passage that is uncomfortable in the best possible way. He is going to list his credentials. Every legitimate, real, hard-won item on his religious résumé. Eight of them. Carefully assembled. And then he is going to tell us what he makes of them now — using a word so blunt that his first readers would have caught their breath. And then he is going to tell us what he found instead. This is the most personally searching passage in the letter. Read it slowly. Let it search you.

THE TEXT — PHILIPPIANS 3:1-11

Read the passage through once before you look at anything else.

Here is what Paul is doing — and why the word choices in this passage matter so much.

He opens with a **warning** (vv.1-3). Beware, he says — and then he uses

language that would have startled his readers. Those who require circumcision as the basis of standing before God are not the faithful guardians of the covenant they think they are. The true circumcision is of the heart, by the Spirit. Paul is not being hostile for its own sake. He is protecting something essential: the sufficiency of Christ alone.

Then comes the *résumé* (vv.4–6). And this is where the passage becomes quietly devastating. Paul lists his credentials, not to boast but to establish that he has them. Circumcised on the eighth day. Of the people of Israel. Of the tribe of Benjamin. A Hebrew of Hebrews. A Pharisee. Zealous enough to persecute the church. As to the righteousness required by the law — blameless. Every item on this list is legitimate. None of it is exaggerated. If religious credentials could produce righteousness before God, Paul is first in line.

Then the *revaluation* (vv.7–9): “Whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.” Past tense — he has done this calculation before. But then Paul adds a second line that intensifies everything: “Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.” Present tense. Ongoing. The revaluation is not a one-time event in his past. It is his settled, daily accounting.

And then the word, “*Skubala*.” Your Bible probably says rubbish. The actual Greek is considerably more abrupt — the kind of word you use for waste, for refuse, for the scraps thrown out so the dogs can fight over them. Paul is not being accidentally coarse. He is telling us exactly how complete this revaluation is. There is no softened version. Against the surpassing worth of knowing Christ, everything else reports on the wrong side of the ledger.

The righteousness he wants now is not one he has produced — not measurable, achievable, something he can point to. It is a righteousness that comes through faith in Christ, given by God, received rather than earned.

And what He wants more than righteousness, more than any credential or achievement, is simply to “know him” (v.10). The Greek word is intimate and relational — the kind of knowing that comes from lived experience, not accumulated information. To know the power of His resurrection. To share in His sufferings. To be conformed to His death. The *kenosis* hymn, the hymn about Christ emptying Himself, three weeks ago, described Christ’s pattern. Paul is now telling us he wants to live inside it.

QUESTIONS

1. Paul's credentials are all legitimate — circumcision, tribal lineage, religious zeal, blameless law-keeping. What is the problem with legitimate credentials when they become the ground of our confidence before God? Why does that specific confusion matter so much?
2. Paul has done a calculation. He has weighed his credentials against the worth of knowing Christ — and Christ wins so completely that everything else registers as loss. Have you ever done that calculation honestly? As a lived reckoning? What did you find on each side of the ledger?
3. What are you trusting alongside Christ right now? Not instead of Him — you would not say that. *Alongside* Him. What credential, track record, or spiritual achievement provides your secret backup of confidence before God when faith feels thin? Name it specifically if you can.
4. Paul says he counts his credentials as *skubala*. He is not saying his past was worthless in every sense. He is saying that compared to Christ, the comparison is not even close. Is that the lived reality of your faith, or is it a thing you believe theologically without yet feeling the weight of? What would it take for that revaluation to move from your head to your heart?
5. “*That I may know Him*” — not know about Him. Paul has walked with Christ for decades and still describes knowing him as the thing he is pressing toward. What is the difference between knowing Christ and knowing about Christ? What does that difference feel like in practice — and which one more honestly describes where you are?
6. The righteousness Paul describes — given by God, received through faith, available to anyone who believes — is the most radically inclusive claim in the passage. It blows every credential-based door off its hinges. Who in your life, your neighborhood, your city do you tend to assume is beyond reach — too far gone, too different, too settled in another direction? What does this passage say to that assumption?

HEAR, TRUST, OBEY

The question of what you are trusting alongside Christ. Not instead of — alongside. Most of us have something. A track record we lean on privately

WEEK SEVEN - JULY 19

Pressing On

PHILIPPIANS 3:12-21

BEFORE YOU READ

There are two ways the past can hold a person in place.

The first is familiar. The thing you did, or that was done to you. The failure, the wound, the season that went badly. The version of yourself you are not entirely sure you have outrun. This kind of past is heavy in an obvious way: you feel its weight, you know it is there, and some part of you is not sure the future is safe enough to step into.

But there is a second way the past holds people, and it is less obvious and no less powerful. It is not failure or harm, but former glory or success. The season when things were alive, when the room was full, when the momentum was unmistakable. The year everything seemed to work. The version of a community that people still talk about with a particular light in their eyes.

Both of these — the wound and the golden era — can become anchors that keep us from making the forward progress that God intends for us. Both can keep a person, or a church, living in the wrong tense. Thankfully, the Bible shows us the middle way between these equal and opposite errors.

Paul is running. He has just told us everything he has released — his credentials, his achievements, his standing before God based on his own performance. And now he tells us the direction he is running. Not backward and not in place. Forward. Straining toward what lies ahead. Forgetting what lies behind. Not because the past did not happen. But because the prize is ahead — not behind. And a runner who keeps looking over his shoulder will lose the race.

THE TEXT — PHILIPPIANS 3:12-21

Read the passage through once. Notice the shift in focus from last week — Paul is no longer looking back. He is leaning forward.

Here is what Paul is doing in these ten verses — and why the sequence matters. He opens with something disarming (vv.12–14). After the heights of last week — everything counted loss, the surpassing worth of knowing Christ — Paul immediately says: *not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect*. He has not arrived. He is not done. He is still pressing toward. The great revaluation of chapter 3 does not produce a person who has it all worked out. It produces a person who is running with everything committed to the finish line, and no energy left over for looking backward.

The Greek word for *straining forward* (v.13) is a single compressed image — *epekteinomenos* — that pictures a runner whose whole body is reaching toward what lies ahead. It is not a casual jog. It is a total commitment of posture. Every muscle, every thought, every ounce of energy oriented in one direction. And the thing being pressed toward is not an achievement or a destination. It is a person — the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Then Paul names what must be released for that posture to be possible, *“Forgetting what lies behind.”* And here we need to be careful, because Paul does not mean only the obvious things — the failures, the sins, the seasons of disobedience. He has already left those behind. What he is also releasing is his résumé. His credentials. His former glory as the most zealous Pharisee of his generation. The discipline of forgetting covers both the wounds and the achievements. Both can anchor you. Both can keep you living in a tense that is no longer yours.

Then comes a moment that is easy to read past and should not be (vv.17–19). Paul warns about those who walk as enemies of the cross, and he does not do it with anger, *“I tell you even with tears.”* Paul weeps as he writes: their god is their appetite, their glory is their shame, their minds are fixed on earthly things. He feels grief over the lost. The pastoral heart that has learned to love the way Christ loves does not look at the wandering and feel contempt.

And then the horizon opens (vv.20–21), *“Our citizenship is in heaven.”* The context helps us appreciate the weight of this. Paul is writing to a Roman colony — a city of people who were proud of their Roman citizenship, who oriented their entire civic identity around their belonging to Rome. Paul offers them a counter-identity. A deeper, prior, more durable citizenship. Not one that negates their place in Philippi but one that reframes it entirely. They are a colony of heaven, living heaven’s customs in a Roman

city. And their Savior is coming from that country to transform not just their souls but their bodies — to bring every part of what they are into conformity with His glory.

QUESTIONS

1. Paul says he has not yet obtained what he is pressing toward — and this comes immediately after describing the surpassing worth of knowing Christ. How do those two statements belong together? What does genuine Christian maturity look like when it holds both deep confidence in Christ and honest humility about how far there still is to go?
2. The discipline of forgetting covers more than we usually assume. It is not just our failures and sins that can hold us down — it is also our former seasons of fruitfulness, our past identities, the versions of ourselves or our communities that felt most alive. Is there a former glory in your life or in this church that has become an anchor holding you back rather than a foundation that you're building upon? What is the difference between honoring your history and being restrained by it?
3. Paul weeps over the enemies of the cross. What produces that kind of grief in a person? Do you feel grief over the lostness of people around you, or something closer to indifference, irritation, or exhaustion? What does Paul's weeping tell us about the heart that has been genuinely shaped by the love of Christ?
4. *"Our citizenship is in heaven"* — present tense. Paul is not describing a future hope only. He is describing a present identity. We already belong to that country. We are already living as its citizens here. What is the difference between a community that is oriented around its earthly address and one that is oriented around its heavenly citizenship? What does each one look like from the outside?
5. Philippi was a Roman colony — a little piece of Rome planted in Macedonia, living Roman customs, owing Roman allegiance. Paul says the church is a colony of heaven in the same way. What would a colony of heaven look like planted in Nashville in 2026? What customs, what way of life, what visible distinctiveness would mark it out to the people around it?

WEEK EIGHT - JULY 26

The Peace That Defies Explanation

PHILIPPIANS 4:1-9

BEFORE YOU READ

Most of us have experienced the feeling of relief. We know what it feels like when the hard thing is finally over. When the test results come back clear. When the difficult conversation happens and goes better than expected. When the financial pressure lifts. When the relationship that felt like it was breaking finds its footing again. That exhale — that feeling of the weight coming off — is real and good. But it is not what Paul is describing in this passage.

What Paul describes is something that exists before the resolution. Before the results come back, before the conversation happens, and before anything changes. A peace that is present in the middle of the difficulty — not on the other side of it. A peace that Paul says: surpasses understanding. Meaning it does not make sense to the part of your brain that is calculating, assuming the worst, and trying to manage its way to safety.

Most of us have not experienced that very often. And many of us have spent a significant amount of energy trying to create the conditions for it: resolving enough, controlling enough, fixing enough things that peace would eventually arrive as the reward. Paul is about to tell us we have been going to the wrong source.

This week we arrive at one of the most beloved passages in the letter, and one of the most misread. Because the peace Paul describes is not the peace of a person who has their circumstances under control. It is the peace of a person who has brought their circumstances to God. That is a very different thing, and the difference is worth sitting with before we rush to the comfort of the promise.

THE TEXT — PHILIPPIANS 4:1-9

Read the passage slowly. This one rewards being read aloud.

There are four movements in this passage, and they build toward a Hear,

Trust, Obey that is more surprising than it first appears.

The first is the therefore (v.1). Because our citizenship is in heaven — because we are awaiting a Savior who will transform all things — therefore stand firm. Paul is not asking the Philippians to stand firm on the basis of their own resolve. He is asking them to stand firm on the basis of what is already true about them. Their identity is settled. Their future is secured. That is the ground under their feet. “Stand on it” they are told.

The second movement is *specific* (vv.2–3). Paul names two women — Euodia and Syntyche — who have labored alongside him in the gospel, whose names are written in the book of life, and who are currently in conflict with each other. He does not manage the conflict. He does not address it vaguely and hopes they know he means them. He names them. In a letter read aloud to the whole congregation. And he asks a third person — a true companion, someone in the community — to help them find their way back to one another.

This is one of the most pastorally courageous moments in the letter. Culture-killers are lurking and they must be addressed. The community is not asked to pretend the tension does not exist. It is asked to help resolve it together, specifically, with both women held in honor as people whose names are written in the book of life.

The third movement is the command (vv.4–7). *Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say — rejoice.* The doubling is deliberate. Paul says it twice because the first time it does not feel possible. It runs against instinct when there is conflict in the community, when circumstances are uncertain, when anxiety is the more natural response. The reason he can command it is the phrase that follows: the Lord is at hand. Either his nearness in presence — the God who is always close — or his nearness in return — the King who is coming. Either way, joy has a ground that is not dependent on cooperating circumstances.

And then the prescription for anxiety. Not a platitude — a practice. *In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.* Three elements, not one. Prayer. Supplication — which is specific asking, not vague hoping. And thanksgiving — which is the acknowledgment of what God has already done, woven into the asking. Thanksgiving is not a formula. It is the posture that changes everything. You cannot simultaneously grip your anxiety with both hands and open your hands in gratitude. Thanksgiving loosens the grip. And the

peace that follows is not the peace of resolved circumstances. It is the peace of the God who is present — guarding, Paul says, like a sentinel standing watch over your heart and mind.

The fourth movement is *formation* (vv.8–9). Whatever is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable — think about these things. This is not positive thinking. This is the recognition that we become what we repeatedly attend to. The mind shaped by anxiety produces anxiety. The mind shaped by gratitude and truth and beauty produces something different. Paul is not asking the Philippians to ignore what is hard. He is asking them to discipline what they give their sustained attention to. And the promise at the end is the most quietly significant in the passage: the God of peace will be with you. Not just peace as a feeling — the God of peace as a presence. The peace is personal. It comes with Someone.

QUESTIONS

1. Paul names Euodia and Syntyche publicly in a letter read before the whole congregation. What is the pastoral logic of naming rather than managing around conflict? What does it say about how seriously Paul takes both the unity of the church and the dignity of the two women that he names them alongside the reminder that their names are in the book of life?
2. “*Rejoice in the Lord always — again I say, rejoice.*” The doubling command to “*rejoice*” tells us this is a command, not an invitation. If joy were just a feeling, commanding it would make no sense. But Paul commands it — which means it is something you can be told to do, which means it is something other than a feeling. What is it? How do you choose joy when circumstances do not produce it naturally?
3. The antidote-for-anxiety-prescription has three parts: prayer, supplication, and thanksgiving. Most of us are reasonably comfortable with the first two. Why is thanksgiving specifically included? What does bringing gratitude into the asking change about the posture of the person asking?
4. What anxiety are you carrying right now that you have not yet brought to God with thanksgiving? There is a difference between telling God about your anxiety and actually bringing it to him with open hands. Which are you doing? What would it take to genuinely give your anxiety to God?
5. The meditative list in verse 8 “*true, honorable, just, pure, lovely,*

commendable” is what we are supposed to give our attention to. We become what we repeatedly attend to. Not occasionally, not in our best moments but *repeatedly*. What are you regularly giving your sustained attention to right now? What is it forming in you?

6. “*The Lord is at hand.*” Paul says this to a church experiencing real conflict, real anxiety, real difficulty. How does that nearness change how you see the people around you — and how you show up for them?

HEAR, TRUST, OBEY

What is God saying to you by his Word and his Spirit as you study this portion of Scripture? Is there a specific truth or promise you need to hear? Is there something you need to believe in God for by faith? Is there a next step of obedience you need to take? What does living with dignified Christian maturity in your relationships look like, based on this text of Scripture?

*“AND THE PEACE OF GOD, WHICH SURPASSES
ALL UNDERSTANDING, WILL GUARD YOUR HEARTS AND YOUR
MINDS IN CHRIST JESUS.”*

PHILIPPIANS 4:7

WEEK NINE - AUGUST 2

I Have Learned

PHILIPPIANS 4:10-23

BEFORE YOU READ

Contentment might be confusing to understand. There are different realities that might appear as “contentment” when they’re actually not.

One “fake” of contentment is resignation.

Resignation is what happens when you stop wanting what you cannot have. When the dream does not come through and you quietly tell yourself you never really wanted it anyway. When a season keeps disappointing and you lower your expectations enough that disappointment is no longer possible. It presents itself as maturity. It feels like peace. But it is actually a quiet form of despair — hope that has given up on itself and called the surrender wisdom.

Contentment is something entirely different.

Paul is not a man who has killed his desires. He has not talked himself out of wanting. He is a man who has found something that holds — genuinely, durably, unshakably holds — regardless of whether the circumstances cooperate. And the word he uses to describe how he got there gives us everything.

“I have learned” is how Paul testifies to the journey. Not *“I was given”* or *“I achieved it”* and not even: *“it arrived in a single moment of spiritual breakthrough.”* Learned. Past tense. Accumulated. Pressed into him across seasons of abundance and need — across chains and freedom, plenty and hunger — until it settled somewhere that circumstances could no longer reach.

This is the final week of our summer in Philippians. Nine weeks. Four chapters. One of the great love letters of the ancient world. And it ends exactly where it has been pointing all along. Not with a doctrine or a program or a resolution. With a person who has found the secret — and who presses it into your hands as the last gift of the letter.

“I have learned, in whatever situation I am, to be content.”

So have we. Let us find out what that means.

THE TEXT – PHILIPPIANS 4:10–23

Read the passage through once. And then, before the questions, read verse 11 again slowly by itself. Let it sit.

Here is what Paul is doing in these final fourteen verses, and why the closing of this letter is as carefully constructed as the opening.

He begins with the *contentment declaration* (vv.10–13). Paul thanks the Philippians for their gift – but carefully, because he does not want gratitude to become the kind of thing that implies he needed them to survive. What he wants them to understand is something more important: he has learned to hold both abundance and need without being mastered by either. The Greek word for contentment here – *autarkes* – was a Stoic word for self-sufficiency. The Stoic philosopher found contentment by becoming independent of external things. Paul takes the word and transforms it entirely. His contentment is not self-sourced. It comes from the One who strengthens him.

Which brings us to the most quoted – and most misread – verse in the passage, *“I can do all things through him who strengthens me.”* In context, *“all things”* does not mean *“achieve any ambition.”* It means to endure *“any condition.”* Paul has just said he knows how to be brought low and how to abound – in any and every circumstance. The strength of Christ enables him to hold both without being undone by either. It is strength for endurance, not conquest. For contentment in all conditions, not success in all endeavors. Read in context, this verse is even more extraordinary than it is when lifted out of it.

Then the *koinonia of giving* (vv.14–17). Paul names what the Philippians have done – and notice the care with which Paul does it. He is not simply thanking them for the money. He is naming the theological meaning of what they did. They entered into partnership – the same *koinonia* word from the very first chapter – in the work of the gospel. No other church did this for him. And then the phrase that reframes everything about generosity: *not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your account.* Their giving is not a depletion. It is a kingdom investment. The ledger of God runs differently from every other ledger – giving increases rather than diminishes, and the increase is credited to the giver.

Then the supply promise (vv.18–20). Their gift is described in temple language — a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. And then Paul makes a promise that is among the most significant in the letter: my God will supply every need of yours according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus. Not according to your need — according to His riches. The measure of the supply is not the size of the problem. It is the scope of God's wealth. That is a very different calculation.

And finally — the grace note that closes everything (vv.21–23). Greetings from the saints. And then, quietly, especially those of Caesar's household. The Praetorian Guard. The imperial servants. The people inside the very machine that put Paul in chains. The gospel has gotten there too. Into the empire's own household. And the letter that opened with grace — grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ — closes with grace: the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Grace was the first word. Grace is the last word.

QUESTIONS

1. Paul says he "*learned*" contentment, not that he received it, earned it, or was born with it. What does it mean that something this important is learned rather than given in a single moment? What has the learning cost him? And what does that say about the seasons of difficulty you have been through — or are in now?
2. "*I can do all things through him who strengthens me.*" In context, this means: I can endure any condition — abundance or need, freedom or chains — through Christ who strengthens me. Does the correct context change how you have used or heard this verse? And more personally: is there a condition in your life right now that you have not yet brought to Christ as something He can strengthen you to endure?
3. Paul says he does not seek the gift but the "*fruit that increases to their account.*" The kingdom ledger runs in reverse. Generosity is not depletion but investment, and the increase is credited to the giver. Has that ever been your lived experience of giving? What would it change about your relationship to generosity if you genuinely believed it, not as a principle but as a reality?
4. "*My God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.*" The supply is measured by God's wealth — not the size of your need. What would you be willing to give, risk, or release

if you genuinely believed that? Not what you think you should say — what would actually change about how you live and how you give?

5. The letter ends with greetings from those of Caesar’s household — imperial servants, Praetorian guards, people inside the empire’s own machine. The gospel has gotten somewhere Paul could not have predicted or engineered. Where in your world — your workplace, your neighborhood, your family — is the gospel present in places you have not yet noticed or named? Who is in your Caesar’s household?

HEAR, TRUST, OBEY

We’ve consistently defined a “disciple” as: someone who is constantly growing in his or her ability to hear, trust, and obey what God is saying by His Word and His Spirit. How have you grown as a disciple this summer? What have you heard from God after nine weeks of studying Philippians that you didn’t hear before we began? What are you believing in God for now that you weren’t when we started? What are the specific points of obedience in your life now that you didn’t have when June began?

*“AND MY GOD WILL SUPPLY EVERY NEED OF YOURS ACCORDING
TO HIS RICHES IN GLORY IN CHRIST JESUS.”*

PHILIPPIANS 4:19

A CLOSING WORD FROM PASTOR THOMAS

Nine weeks ago we opened a letter.

It was written from a prison cell, to the church Paul loved most, about a joy that chains could not touch. We have read it slowly. We have asked it hard questions. We have let it ask us harder ones.

We have talked about what it means to be genuine partners in the gospel – not just attendees of the same gathering, but people with shared stakes in something that matters. We have sat with the most exalted Christological poetry in the New Testament and tried to let its shape become our shape. We have named the difference between a grateful community and a grumbling one. We have met Timothy and Epaphroditus and seen the theology with biographical faces. We have torn up our interior résumés and found something worth more than every credential we have built. We have pressed forward and released the past and received a peace that defies explanation. We conclude by joining Paul in his three word testimony: “I have learned....”

The local church is a learning community where we are learning to follow Jesus together. This has been a season of learning to rejoice in every season of life. As we continue to increase in this discipline of learning, an unfolding contentment will be our individual experience and a defining mark of our culture.

Contentment is not passive and it is not resignation. It is the hard-won, grace-given settledness of a person who has chosen, again and again, to build their life on the sure foundation of Jesus Christ. That is what we have been learning this summer and now we carry it with us.

The God who began a good work in us will bring it to completion. He said so in the very first chapter. He has been proving it across all nine.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

³ I THANK MY GOD IN ALL MY REMEMBRANCE OF YOU, ⁴ ALWAYS IN EVERY PRAYER OF MINE FOR YOU ALL MAKING MY PRAYER WITH JOY, ⁵ BECAUSE OF YOUR PARTNERSHIP IN THE GOSPEL FROM THE FIRST DAY UNTIL NOW.

⁶ 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.

⁷ 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.

⁸ FOR GOD IS MY WITNESS, HOW I YEARN FOR YOU ALL WITH THE AFFECTION OF CHRIST JESUS.

⁹ AND IT IS MY PRAYER THAT YOUR LOVE MAY ABOUND MORE AND MORE, WITH KNOWLEDGE AND ALL DISCERNMENT, ¹⁰ SO THAT YOU MAY APPROVE WHAT IS EXCELLENT, AND SO BE PURE AND BLAMELESS FOR THE DAY OF CHRIST,

¹¹ FILLED WITH THE FRUIT OF RIGHTEOUSNESS THAT COMES THROUGH JESUS CHRIST, TO THE GLORY AND PRAISE OF GOD.

PHILIPPIANS 1:3-11



NASHVILLE
FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH

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