

## Life-Sharing Lesson 1 Philippians 4:10-20

### Commentary

**4:10** I rejoice in the Lord greatly that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned for me, but had no opportunity to show it.<sup>NRSV</sup> Next, Paul turned his attention to one of the main reasons for writing this letter—to thank the Philippian church for their gift to him. Epaphroditus had been sent to Rome from Philippi with a generous financial gift for Paul, and it had come during a time of need. Paul's words *at last you have revived* sound harsh, but that harshness is absent in Greek. The second phrase explains that the church had constantly been concerned for Paul, but had *had no opportunity to show it*. Whatever the reason for that lack of opportunity, Paul rejoiced not only at the gift and God's wondrous provision for his needs but also for the church who cared so much about him, had not forgotten him, and had at last been able to show their concern for him with the arrival of Epaphroditus.

---

### LIFE APPLICATION

#### REVIVING CONCERN

Paul was glad that the Philippians had revived their interest in supporting him. If your interest in a missionary has waned and you'd like to revive it, here are some suggestions:

- I Ask her about her work. Don't wait for the quarterly letter to arrive. Take the initiative.
- I Send a birthday card. Everyone in the family should sign it, and before it gets mailed, pray together for your missionary.
- I Send a gift. It doesn't need to be big. Tell him it's just a little extra from a friend.

---

Though Paul never asked for money for himself, he accepted the Philippians' gift because they gave it willingly and because he was in need. In [1 Corinthians 9:11-18](#), Paul wrote that he didn't accept gifts from the Corinthian church because he didn't want to be accused of preaching only to get money. But Paul maintained that it was a church's responsibility to support God's ministers ([1 Corinthians 9:14](#)).

**4:11** Not that I am referring to being in need; for I have learned to be content with whatever I have.<sup>NRSV</sup> At this point, Paul took pains to make sure that his words were not misunderstood. The fact that the Philippians had not sent help sooner did not mean that Paul had been disappointed in them or that he had been put in desperate

straits at that time. Instead, he had learned an important secret to the Christian life—that he could be content with whatever he had, despite his outward circumstances.

Wealth is a good servant, a very bad mistress.

*Francis Bacon*

Paul had to *learn* this because contentment is not a natural human response. The word *content* in Greek means "self-sufficient" and independent of others. Paul used this term to indicate his independence, if need be, of everything *but* Christ, since Christ was the sole source of Paul's life ([1:21](#); [4:13](#)). This contrasted with the Stoic philosophy that used the word "content" to describe a person who impassively accepted whatever came. A Stoic view fostered self-sufficiency to the point that all the resources for coping with life came from within humans themselves. Paul explained that his sufficiency was in Christ alone, who provides strength to cope with all circumstances.

---

## LIFE APPLICATION

### HIS POINT OF VIEW

Paul was content because he could see life from God's point of view. He focused on what he was supposed to *do*, not what he felt he should *have*. Paul had his priorities straight, and he was grateful for everything God had given him. Paul had detached himself from the nonessentials so that he could concentrate on the eternal. Often the desire for more or better possessions is really a longing to fill an empty place in one's life. To what are you drawn when you feel empty inside? How can you find true contentment? The answer lies in your perspective, your priorities, and your source of power.

---

How do we get to that lofty goal of contentment? It is important for believers to realize that biblical "contentment" is not fatalism or acquiescence to one's lot in life. Such thinking would smother God's ongoing guidance. Rather, contentment involves one's perspective on life. Believers know that "we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal" ([2 Corinthians 4:18](#) NIV).

To have real contentment:

- Remember that everything belongs to God. What we have is a gift from him.
- Be thankful for what we have, not coveting what others have.
- Ask for wisdom to use wisely what we do have.
- Pray for grace to let go of the desire for what we don't have.
- Trust in God to meet our needs.

For more on contentment, see [1 Timothy 6:6-10](#).

### *LIFE APPLICATION*

#### CONTENTMENT

Poverty is a tragedy, but everyone needs to be penniless at some point during young adulthood. People who have nothing begin to see wonders in simple pleasure, to savor simple food, and to enjoy simple diversions. Poverty brings the "rat race" to a halt and teaches the value of relationships. Prayer becomes more important and voice mail less so.

Francis of Assisi, the great thirteenth-century monk, taught his followers never to own anything in order to be content in Christ alone. We are less severe today about our possessions. But contentment means that we *need* none of them and that we regard them all as God's gift, never God's substitute.

**[4:12](#) I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty.**<sup>NRSV</sup> The following verses give a bit of Paul's personal testimony. Paul knew what it was like to have very little—to "be abased" (NKJV). The Greek word is the same root word used to describe Jesus humbling himself in [2:8](#). The picture is of Paul voluntarily accepting a low status, even a life of poverty, for his Master's sake (see also [1 Corinthians 4:11-13](#); [2 Corinthians 6:4-10](#)). Although he taught that the churches should support their leaders, Paul himself did not demand salaries from the churches that he had planted. This kept him above criticism (see [2 Corinthians 11:7](#)). Thus with travel and food costs, Paul probably had very little to live on.

In the Greek, the opposite of having little is having *plenty*. Literally, the meaning of the Greek word *perisseuein* is "to overflow." This might refer to Paul's pre-Christian days as a fairly wealthy and influential Pharisee.

Whether Paul had plenty or little, he could keep life on an even keel because of contentment. What an important lesson for all believers to learn! No wonder Paul called it a "secret" (below).

**In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need.**<sup>NRSV</sup> The Greek words for *learned the secret* are used only here in the New Testament. It was an expression used in the pagan mystery cults to describe initiations of new members. Initiations were rarely easy, and Paul used the word to describe his initiation by his experiences into living a victorious Christian life. Paul's initiation was filled with joys as well as difficulties, *being well-fed and . . . going hungry*—having plenty sometimes and being needy at other times (see discussion on [1:1](#)). (For a more complete testimony of Paul's life as an apostle of Jesus Christ, read [2 Corinthians 11:21-33](#).)

---

### LIFE APPLICATION

#### ALWAYS WANTING MORE

Are you content in any circumstances you face? Paul knew how to be content whether he had plenty or whether he was in need. The secret meant drawing on Christ's power for strength. Do you have great needs? Are you discontented because you don't have what you want? Learn to rely on God's promises and Christ's power to help you be content. If you always want more, ask God to remove that desire and teach you contentment in every circumstance. He will supply all your needs, but in a way that he knows is best for you.

---

**[4:13](#) I can do all things through him who strengthens me.**<sup>NRSV</sup> Paul's contentment was not gained through stoic self-discipline. Instead, it was through Christ alone, literally "the one empowering me" (see [1 Timothy 1:12](#)). In the most reliable manuscripts, Christ's name is not in this verse, but he was surely who Paul had in mind. Paul had already given up all his accomplishments and credentials as he followed Christ ([3:7-8](#)); he also realized that he could not live the Christian life on his own. Paul, like every believer, had to depend on Jesus Christ. In context, the *all things* refers to the list in [4:11-12](#). In every possible circumstance, Paul could truly be content because he did not let outward circumstances determine his attitude. Christ was giving him the strength to continue with his ministry and the work of spreading the gospel whether he had plenty or was in need. Paul had complete confidence that, no matter what the circumstance, Christ would give him the strength to meet it. Thanks to his enabler, Paul had a "can do" attitude.

This verse can be divided into two halves. The first half is, "I can do all things" ("everything"). To stop there and pull the words out of context would imply the idea of self-reliance, cocky self-assuredness. That's the kind of message we often hear from motivational speakers: "You can do anything you want if you put your mind to it." But that's not what the verse says. The last half reveals the source of our strength: Christ. God wants us to accomplish much for him in this world, but only through Christ. Instead of trusting our own strength and abilities, we must rely on Christ and his power.

Paul's confident words can be spoken by every Christian. The power we receive in union with Christ is sufficient to do his will and to face the challenges that arise from our commitment to doing it. God does not grant us superhuman ability nor every resource to accomplish anything we can imagine without regard to his interests. As we contend for the faith, we will face troubles, pressures, and trials. But we do not need to worry about being given more than we can handle; Christ will supply resources sufficient to complete what he asks us to do.

---

### *LIFE APPLICATION*

#### WHAT DOES HE WANT?

Does this verse promise that Christians can do anything they want? No. What God promises is that we can do everything he wants us to do. At times we may wonder if God is expecting too much. How can we possibly heal that relationship, break that sinful habit, tell that neighbor about Christ, or give our tithes to the church? But God promises to give us the strength to do what he asks. What does God want you to do? Step out in faith and do it, trusting him for the strength.

---

**4:14 Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles.**<sup>NIV</sup> The Philippians shared in Paul's financial support while he was in prison, thus communicating their sympathy with him. The sense of this phrase, lost in the English translation, is a closeness between the apostle and the Philippian believers. That they had shared in his troubles refers to having fellowship in them, identifying with the apostle on behalf of his work for the gospel.

---

### *LIFE APPLICATION*

#### IN AND THROUGH

The world expects strong people to win athletic contests, intellectually brilliant people to win scholastic competitions, and powerful people to win tests of will. We don't expect much from the weak and humble. But God's ways are not the ways of the world—his values turn the world's values upside down. God loves to use the small, weak, and insignificant people to accomplish his purposes. Paul wrote the Corinthians that he delighted in his weaknesses because God would be glorified through them—when Paul was weak, then he would be strong ([2 Corinthians 12:10](#)). Whenever you feel small and insignificant, remember that God wants to reveal his strength in and through you.

---

**4:15** You Philippians indeed know that in the early days of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you alone.<sup>NRSV</sup> The *early days* refers to Paul's initial visit to Philippi when the Christian church began (recorded in [Acts 16](#); see also [Philippians 1:5](#)). The "sharing" the Philippians had done with Paul refers to their partnership with him, revealed in the practical expression of financial support (see [4:10](#)). Only the Philippian church had been ready to give to Paul's ministry—to send financial gifts from their church to Paul while he was ministering in other churches. Although Paul ministered in other cities and planted other churches, only the Philippians had shared in *giving and receiving* with Paul. From Paul the church received spiritual blessings; from the church, Paul received material blessings. (The same usage of "giving and receiving" is found in [Romans 15:27](#) and [1 Corinthians 9:11](#).)

The phrase *when I left Macedonia* could be read, "when I set out from Macedonia." This could mean that at the time of Paul's departure from Macedonia, after his first visit to Philippi, no other churches shared financial gifts with him. It seems that other churches did support Paul's ministry later (see [2 Corinthians 11:8](#)), but that the Philippians had been especially attentive and generous, sending gifts not only while Paul was in Thessalonica ([4:16](#)), but later when he was in Corinth ([2 Corinthians 11:9](#)). However, Paul refused to accept gifts from the Corinthian church because he felt that asking for support in Corinth might be misunderstood. There were many false teachers who were hoping to make a good profit from preaching ([2 Corinthians 2:17](#)), and Paul wanted to separate himself completely from them. The Philippians might have "known" this because no one arrived to bring Paul any financial support during his visit with them.

---

## LIFE APPLICATION

### SHARING

What makes money so magnetic and giving it away so stressful? Money measures our energy; it represents our day-to-day security. Giving money away puts our work and our future at risk.

Not every charity deserves your attention, and you're wise to scrutinize missionary appeals as well. But once you've determined that a project honors the Lord, don't hold back—give generously and joyfully. Like the Philippians, you'll be establishing an eternal partnership.

---

**4:16 For even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me help for my needs more than once.**<sup>NRSV</sup> During his second missionary journey, after Paul left Philippi, his next stop was Thessalonica (see [Acts 17:1](#)). The word *even* highlights Paul's gratitude for the Philippians' show of support so soon after he had left them. While Paul was *in Thessalonica*, the Philippians had sent help for his financial needs. The phrase *more than once* means simply that—with no exact number of times. There is also the possibility that this sentence could mean that when Paul was at Thessalonica, and more than once while he was in other places (such as Corinth, see [4:15](#)), the Philippians had sent help. Paul's stay in Thessalonica (recorded in [Acts 17:1-9](#)) seems to have been quite short so that more than one visit from Philippi would have been unlikely.

**4:17 Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account.**<sup>NIV</sup> Paul made it clear that his thankfulness for the Philippians' generosity was not a veiled request for more. In fact, he considered that they had made "full payment" as it were ([4:18](#)) and need not send anything else.

Instead, Paul focused on what their good works on his behalf were benefiting them in heaven. The NKJV translates this phrase, "the fruit that abounds to your account" and the NRSV says "the profit that accumulates to your account." The financial language showed the Philippians that their gifts to Paul were investments that paid dividends or accumulated interest (or "profit") that would be *credited* to their heavenly *account*. When we give to those in need, we benefit as well as the receiver, as we grow in the grace of giving ([2 Corinthians 8:1](#), [6-7](#); [9:14](#)). Paul appreciated the Philippians' spirit of love and devotion more than their gifts. God would remember their gifts to Paul. The writer to the Hebrews explained, "God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them" ([Hebrews 6:10](#) NIV). God would reward the Philippian believers for their kind and generous support of his apostle.

**4:18 I have received full payment and even more; I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent.**<sup>NIV</sup> Paul thanked the Philippians for their generous gift by describing it as *full payment and even more*. In the Greek, the word "received" was used for drawing up a receipt in a business

transaction. This was Paul's acknowledgement that he had received the Philippians' most recent gift and that Epaphroditus had faithfully fulfilled his mission (see [2:25](#)). Paul told the Philippians that this was payment in full. No more money would be required; their generous gift was more than enough. Surely the Philippian church rejoiced that they had been able to meet Paul's needs.

---

### LIFE APPLICATION

#### TRUE GIVING

Giving gifts involves a strange reciprocity. In giving, we create bonds of friendship that return a strong benefit to us. In giving to God's work, we generate value in heaven. Some churches have exploited the latter point where giving is pictured almost as a down payment on heavenly real estate. In such a system, the "gift" becomes no gift at all. Paul did not want giving to be so tainted with self-interest that the giver had personal benefit as a primary goal.

True giving diminishes the lure and power of money in our lives. We need not clutch at wealth, but rightly share it with people we love and strangers we are coming to love. Regular giving tells God that he is first and that nothing we possess is more important than him.

---

**They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God.**<sup>NIV</sup> Paul described the Philippians' gift as a *fragrant offering*. Paul was referring to the burnt offering, a voluntary offering given for payment of sins and showing a person's devotion to God ([Genesis 8:20-21](#); [Exodus 29:18](#); [Leviticus 1:9, 13](#); [Ezekiel 20:41](#)). Although the Greek and Roman Christians were not Jews and had not offered sacrifices according to the Old Testament laws, they were well acquainted with the pagan sacrificial rituals (see [2 Corinthians 2:14-16](#)). Paul referred to Christ as a fragrant offering to God ([Ephesians 5:2](#)).

*Acceptable sacrifice* meant that their very gifts were acts of worship, and God was the true recipient. The Philippians' gift had not only helped Paul and added to their heavenly "account" ([4:17](#)), it was, perhaps most importantly, an act of worship, *pleasing to God*. They had given in faith, not so much to Paul as to God. That should be the ultimate goal of every act of love, care, concern, and charity—to help, but also to please God (see [2 Corinthians 5:9](#); [Hebrews 13:16](#)).

**4:19 And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.**<sup>NKJV</sup> As the Philippians had met Paul's needs, so God would meet theirs. The Philippian church was not wealthy. In fact, when Paul spoke of the Philippians'



generosity [referred to as "the Macedonian churches"] in giving to the impoverished church in Jerusalem, he said:

- *We want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints.* ([2 Corinthians 8:1-4](#) NIV)

There is no human need that God is unable to meet—in fact, he meets the needs far better than anything on this earth. Paul was assured by Christ that Christ's grace was sufficient for every need ([2 Corinthians 12:9](#)). Yet he often sends "vertical" help through people helping one another on the "horizontal" level. God had met Paul's need through the generosity of the Philippian church. God would more than repay that generosity by supplying the need of the Philippian church. Not only would God supply all their needs, but he would do it *according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus* (or "his glorious riches"). Believers cannot begin to comprehend God's riches in glory—his riches are limitless, infinite. If it is from that storehouse that believers' needs are met, then the

Philippian believers could rest assured that God would indeed meet every need, no matter how large, desperate, or hopeless it seemed.

Cast all your cares on God; that anchor holds.

*Alfred, Lord Tennyson*

This could happen *by Christ Jesus*. That is, because of believers' relationship with Christ, they have access to God and can "come boldly to the throne of grace [and] obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" ([Hebrews 4:16](#) NKJV).

---

### LIFE APPLICATION

#### GOD WILL SUPPLY

We can trust that God will always meet our needs. Whatever we need on earth, God will always supply, even if it is the courage to face death. We must remember, however, the difference between wants and needs. Most people want to feel good and avoid discomfort or pain. We may not get all that we want, but God will provide what we need. By trusting in Christ, our attitudes and appetites can change from wanting everything to accepting his provision

---

and power to live for him.

---

**4:20 Now to our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.**<sup>NKJV</sup> God the Father was both Paul's God and the Philippians' God—and he is also our God. God who supplied Paul's needs and met the Philippians' needs is the same yesterday, today, and forever, and he promises to meet our needs. To *our God* belongs all *glory forever*. Paul broke into a doxology of praise as he remembered God's great love and provision. God alone deserves all glory from his creation. *Amen*, so be it.

Life Application Bible Commentary - Life Application Bible Commentary – Philippians, Colossians, & Philemon.

## Life-Sharing Lesson 1 Philippians 4:10-20

1. When do you usually feel the best about yourself?

*When I have helped someone in a jam and they were truly appreciative of what I did. There is a joy in knowing you made a difference in another person's life, at least there is for me.*

2. What have you been truly thankful for in the past month?

*I have been thankful for the people I have observed who are truly willing to make changes and compromises to make New Life At Calvary one church family. I can sense when they are giving up personal preferences for the sake of unity in the church. I thank God for the extra steps they take because it has encouraged my heart.*

3. What do you think causes some people to be more thankful than others?

*I think that people who look for the best in others are usually more thankful. Their positive outlook helps them to find things to be thankful for in life. We often find what we go looking for in the lives of people as well as in the life of a church. I also think that people who are genuinely appreciated by others develop a thankful spirit.*

### **Philippians 4:10-20 (NIV)**

<sup>10</sup> I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you have been concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. <sup>11</sup> I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. <sup>12</sup> 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.

<sup>13</sup> I can do everything through him who gives me strength. <sup>14</sup> Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles.

<sup>15</sup> 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; <sup>16</sup> for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid again and again when I was in need.

<sup>17</sup> Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account. <sup>18</sup> 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. <sup>19</sup> And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus. <sup>20</sup> To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

4. What are some reasons God puts people on our hearts, and we just start thinking about them?

*Sometimes God wants to use us to make a difference in the life of other people. Sometimes we are called to pray for others. Sometimes we are called to go visit others. Sometimes we are called to give or do something for someone out of the blue. I can remember a time when someone gave me a store gift card, but God said it was not for me. I carried the gift card around for almost 4 months before God told me to give it to this other person. The person needed the card for that particular store, because her granddaughter had been praying for a coat from that store that was the amount of the gift card. Sometimes God puts a person on our heart, because God wants to mend a relationship, or provide us with an opportunity for closure from an earlier situation. There are no random happenings in the plan of God.*

**Proverbs 20:24 (NIV)** <sup>24</sup> *A person's steps are directed by the LORD. How then can anyone understand his own way?*

5. What takes place on the inside of us when people go out of their way to do something for us, that we know they did not have to do, and certainly did not owe us anything in the first place?

*When it happens to me, I feel greatly humbled and usually stand in awe of the person and of the mercy of God.*

6. How do you think Paul felt being in prison and all of a sudden receiving a gift from the Philippian church?

*I can imagine that Paul felt like crying at the sight of the gift. In a Roman prison, it was usually family and friends that had to provide for you. The gift from the Philippians felt as though family had come to sit with him and to share his sufferings. I can imagine he had tears in his eyes when Epaphroditus told him what he was bringing. I'm sure there was a "thank you Lord" in a very humble kind of way.*

7. Why is contentment a necessary part of thanksgiving?

*Contentment allows us to rejoice in what we have instead of thinking of what we don't have. When we focus on what we have in our favor, we become thankful for it. Contentment allows us to make adjustments to the situations around us, instead of insisting that the circumstances change. We become thankful that the circumstances are not nearly as bad as they could have been. As I get older and lose some of the things I took for granted for years, (not needing glasses, running without pain, sleeping through the night) I'm also learning that God is with us even as we lose our physical and mental abilities. I don't have to have God restore all these losses in order to be happy and content in life.*

8. What does contentment look like, when you're in prison having done nothing wrong?

*I think it looks like saying to God, "God you know I didn't deserve to get here, and that I certainly don't want to be here, but I also know that you can use me anywhere for your purpose. Help me to discover what you want me to do while I am here for as long as you plan to keep me here. Use me for your honor and your glory and give me the strength to make it happen."*

9. Are you willing to know what it's like to be hungry and content for the cause of Christ? How can you tell?

*I still have not crossed that threshold of being hungry for Christ. I do not take too many opportunities for fasting. I resist on the inside the thought of going to poverty areas in the world to minister to Christ. At times I think my brand of Christianity is far too Americanized. I still put a lot of emphasis on my personal comfort.*

10. How does a lack of contentment contribute to us backsliding in our walk with Christ?

*The idea that I am missing out on something causes us to be discontent. Adam and Eve were fine in the garden until the serpent told them, they were missing out on something good. I think we lose a lot of young people to the world, because they think they are missing out on having a good time. They are not content with how they spend their free time. They see the choice as either stay at home or go to the club. They don't see the option of, if I go to the club, how do I seek to win someone to Christ. The tendency seems to be to use the club to hide from the presence of Christ. Lack of contentment with what we have, put us under tremendous financial pressure and then we backslide in our giving. We have other priorities. There was a time when very few people could afford a cell phone. Now almost everyone feels a cell phone is a need to which they are entitled.*

11. When is contentment not a good thing?

*Contentment is not a good thing when we become content with not taking on new challenges for the cause of Christ. We have to keep stretching ourselves and our faith to discover what new thing the Lord may be doing and wants us to be a part of it. We should not be content with the Christian we are today. God wants us to grow.*

12. When most people are saying "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me", do you really think they are saying God if I have to be poor, then I can be happy poor for the cause of Christ, but if I have to be rich, then I can be happy rich for the cause of Christ".

*No I think most people quote this verse out of context. It becomes a motivational speech of our ability to do all things. There is no idea of suffering or defeat when people are claiming this verse. They are usually thinking of being an overcomer and a victorious one as well. Paul clearly is teaching that he can be just as strong a believer in Christ if he gets his car towed away by the repo man or if he gets a new car given to him as a gift. It is the same God who walks with him in both situations.*

13. What kind of circumstances do you find it the most difficult to be in for an extended period of time?

*I have a hard time being thankful in situations in which I am trying to help a person get on his or her feet, but the person turns out to be just plain lazy or the person insists on making one bad decision after another. I want the person to move on to someone else.*

14. What might God be trying to teach us during those moments in which we let our attitudes get bent out of shape, instead of seeking something for which to be thankful in the situation?

*I think at times God is showing us how we exhibit the same attitude toward God but in a different spiritual area. It is so easy to see the speck in the eye of another, and miss the beam that is in our own eye. None of us are quite as spiritual as we may like to think. It only appears that way when we compare ourselves to each other. When we compare ourselves to Christ, it becomes a completely different story.*

15. Why was Paul excited about the Philippians?

*Paul was excited that they were growing in their faith and that God was going to reward them for it. They had not given to Paul to get something back. They had given out of love, and God was going to reward them for it. There is a verse in proverbs that says **Proverbs 19:17 (NIV)** <sup>17</sup> He who is kind to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will reward him for what he has done.*

16. Why do you think God requires a step of faith of giving on our part, before releasing a blessing in our own lives?

*I think God wants us to learn the principle of sowing and reaping. You have to plant before you receive a harvest. God is looking to see if we really are going to trust God. Most of the time we say “no God, I’m going to do this my way.”*

17. If God meets all of our needs, then why are some of us still poor and broke?

*There is not a need to be rich and pockets full of money. The need is to learn to trust God whether we have nothing, little, some or a whole lot. Paul's point is that at different times in our lives, we are going to suffer some hard situations. Be faithful to God in the midst of the hard situations.*

18. Why not plan to bless someone anonymously this month, and see what it does to you as well as to the other person?



Life-Sharing Lesson 2 How Thankful Are You For The 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming  
1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 Revelations 13:15-18

*BE PREPARED: NO ONE KNOWS WHEN THE LORD WILL RETURN / [5:1-11](#)*

Certain questions have perplexed Christians across the ages. All are concerned when loved ones die, and they wonder when they will see them again. All are also concerned about the Day of Judgment and what that will mean for them. The end of [chapter 4](#) addresses the bereavement issue, stating that believers who have died will not be left out of the Second Coming. The first part of [chapter 5](#) addresses the issue of the Day of Judgment and how believers can prepare for it.

This section ([5:1-11](#)) and the previous section ([4:13-18](#)) have been the subject of ongoing debate. Some have interpreted them as describing two separate events: (1) [4:13-18](#) refers to the Second Coming, with emphasis on the Rapture of the saints ([4:17](#)); and (2) [5:1-11](#) refers to the period of Tribulation (the Day of the Lord, [5:2](#)). Others view these two sections as topically distinct but not necessarily indicating two events. They say that Paul emphasized the Resurrection in [4:13-18](#) and the Judgment in [5:1-11](#). The purpose of the first section is to reassure believers who have lost loved ones; the purpose of the second section is to warn believers to be spiritually alert and morally prepared.

**[5:1-2](#) I really don't need to write to you about how and when all this will happen, dear brothers and sisters. For you know quite well that the day of the Lord will come unexpectedly, like a thief in the night.**<sup>NLT</sup> The phrase "day of the Lord" refers to a future time when God will intervene directly and dramatically in world affairs. Predicted and discussed often in the Old Testament (see [Isaiah 13:6-13](#); [Joel 2:28-32](#); [Amos 5:18-20](#); [Zephaniah 1:14-18](#)), the "day of the Lord" will include both punishment and blessing. Christ will judge sin and set up his eternal kingdom. Paul had already taught at length about the *day of the Lord* and had just answered a question that the Thessalonian believers had concerning fellow believers who had died ([4:13-18](#)). They knew that the timing of this event was unknown, for Paul had already explained to them *that the day of the Lord will come unexpectedly, like a thief in the night* (see also [2 Peter 3:10](#); [Revelation 3:3](#); [16:15](#)). Paul was the first to associate the "day of the Lord" with the coming of Jesus Christ (see [1 Corinthians 1:8](#); [5:5](#); [2 Corinthians 1:14](#)).

Jesus had discussed his second coming and at one point had compared it to the coming of a thief:

- *No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. . . . But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. So you also must be*

ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him. ([Matthew 24:36](#), [43-44](#) NIV)

Some have attempted to pinpoint dates or prove how certain present events fulfill prophecy. Jesus made it clear and Paul reiterated, however, that no one knows when Christ will return. It will be unexpected and on God's timetable. Jesus predicted that before his return many believers would be misled by false teachers claiming to have revelations from God ([Mark 13:5-6](#)). According to Scripture, the one clear sign of Christ's return will be his unmistakable appearance in the clouds. This will be seen by all people ([Mark 13:26](#); [Revelation 1:7](#)). In other words, believers do not have to wonder whether a certain person is the Messiah or whether the times in which they live are the end times. When Jesus returns, everyone will know beyond a doubt because it will be evident. Beware of groups that claim special knowledge of the last days because no one knows when that time will be.

---

### LIFE APPLICATION

#### WELCOME MAT

Paul said Christ will come unexpectedly. Efforts to determine the date of the Second Coming are foolish. Don't be misled by anyone who claims to know. The Bible says that no one knows and that even believers will be surprised. The Lord will return suddenly and unexpectedly, so believers should be ready! Christ's second coming will be swift and sudden. There will be no opportunity for last-minute repentance or bargaining. The choice you have already made will determine your eternal destiny. Suppose he were to return today. How would he find you living? Are you ready to meet him? Live each day prepared to welcome Christ.

---

#### See Also:

[Chart: The Second Coming](#)

**[5:3](#) While people are saying, "Peace and safety," destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.**<sup>NIV</sup> The comparison of Christ's coming to a thief ([5:1-2](#)) reveals that it will be sudden and unexpected; the comparison of it to *labor pains on a pregnant woman* indicates that it will be unavoidable (see also [Mark 13:8](#)). Some who will not be waiting for Christ will think that everything is safe—they will be lulled into a false sense of *peace and safety*

(see also [Jeremiah 6:14](#); [8:11](#); [Ezekiel 13:10](#)). However, they will find themselves facing sudden *destruction*. This word "destruction" (*olethpos*) is also used in [2 Thessalonians 1:9](#) and refers to separation from God: "They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power" (NIV). When Christ returns, that *will* be the end—there will be no reprieves, no second chances, no *escape*.

In order to be ready for the Second Coming, the Thessalonian believers may have thought it would only make sense to know when that coming would be. So Paul further explained that the Second Coming is certain and will be sudden and unavoidable. So how are believers to be ready? The following verses explain.

---

### LIFE APPLICATION

#### WE HAVE WORK TO DO

It is good that we don't know exactly when Christ will return. If we knew the precise date, we might be tempted to be lazy in our work for Christ. Worse yet, we might plan to keep sinning and then turn to God right at the end. Heaven is not our only goal; we have work to do here. Christians must keep on doing God's work until death or until we see the unmistakable return of our Savior.

---

**[5:4-5](#) But you, beloved, are not in darkness, for that day to surprise you like a thief; for you are all children of light and children of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness.**<sup>NRSV</sup> The *beloved* believers in Thessalonica were *not in darkness*; that is, they were not ignorant of what was to occur. God has chosen not to tell his people everything about Christ's return, but believers know all that they need to know. God has not left his people "in darkness" so that they will be totally surprised when Christ comes back. From the moment Christ ascended into heaven, the promise remained that someday, just as he went, he would return ([Acts 1:11](#)). For believers, that promise is not scary; instead, it is a promise of hope. Because believers *are all children of light and children of the day*, that return will be a time of great joy.

The contrasts of "light" and "darkness" and "day" and "night" are often used in the Bible to describe the difference between good and evil, between God's people and the people of the world. [First John 1:5](#) says that "God is light and there is no darkness in him at all" (NLT). Light represents what is good, pure, true, holy, and reliable. Darkness represents what is sinful and evil. God is perfectly holy and true, and he alone can guide people out of the darkness of sin. Light is also related to truth in that light exposes whatever exists, whether it is good or bad. In the dark, good and evil look

alike; in the light, they can be clearly distinguished. Just as darkness cannot exist in the presence of light, sin cannot exist in the presence of a holy God.

"Children of light," God's children, have nothing to fear regarding the Second Coming—although they are responsible to be ready.

---

### LIFE APPLICATION

#### GET READY

Paul warned Christians not to be surprised by Christ's return. The only way for believers not to be surprised is to be morally ready and spiritually vigilant at all times (see [5:6-8](#)). Knowing that Christ's return will be sudden and unexpected should motivate us to always be prepared. We are not to live irresponsibly—sitting and waiting, doing nothing, seeking self-serving pleasure, or using the time until he returns as an excuse not to do God's work of building his kingdom. No one should develop a false sense of security based on precise calculations of events or let their curiosity about the end times divert them from doing God's work. Are you working, serving, and waiting?

---

**[5:6-7](#) So be on your guard, not asleep like the others. Stay alert and be sober. Night is the time for sleep and the time when people get drunk.**<sup>NLT</sup> Usually thieves break into homes at night when everyone is sleeping. Jesus' second coming *will* happen, and it will happen with surprise like a thief breaking in, but God's people should *be on . . . guard, not asleep*. The way to be ready for Jesus' return is not in knowing when he will return, for he won't give that information. Instead, readiness lies in being *alert* and *sober*. The children of the light will be awake and ready when the Lord returns. Paul describes those who constantly expect the Lord to return at any moment. They are not dallying in sin or falling into temptation or being waylaid by their own doubts. We also must walk close to God in daily fellowship with him so that at the Second Coming we will be ready.

This contrasts with the rest of the world, the *others* of the "darkness" and of the "night" who are *asleep* at the Lord's return. The word translated "asleep" (*katheudo*) is used for moral indifference (see [Mark 13:36](#); [Ephesians 5:14](#)). These people aren't waiting for the Lord, aren't caring that he could return, and are even getting *drunk* (the opposite of *sober*), a metaphor for their moral indifference toward the holy God. "Sober" also means "self-controlled" (NIV) and further implies being ready rather than muddled in one's thinking.

Because unbelievers  
are people of the

Christ designed that
----------------------

"darkness" and of the "night," their lives are focused on their own pleasures and obsessions and not on alertness and moral readiness for the coming of Christ.

the day of his coming should be hid from us, that being in suspense, we might be as it were upon the watch.

*Martin Luther*

**5:8 But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet.**<sup>NIV</sup> People who *belong to the day*, the believers who are living in the "light" of God, have a whole different reason to be alive. Life is not all about personal pleasure but about loving and serving God and getting to know him better. The reward for being God's children is that when he returns, he will take his people to eternal blessing. This means that in this sinful world, the world of "darkness" and "night," believers have to be different. First of all, they must *be self-controlled*, for self-control can keep people from many sins—especially the sexual sins described in [4:3-8](#). Self-control helps a person be ready for Christ's return as it helps him or her stay away from sin.

In addition, however, believers need to realize that they are in a battle. Spiritual warfare is very real, and Satan does not easily accept people's leaving his kingdom for God's kingdom. So believers must be armed and ready, like soldiers, *putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet*. To the Ephesians, Paul had written about the armor believers need for their spiritual battle:

- *Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. ([Ephesians 6:11-13](#) NIV)*

Believers face a powerful army whose goal is to defeat Christ's church. Those who believe in Christ are assured of victory. They must engage in the struggle until Christ returns, however, because Satan is constantly battling against all who are on the Lord's side. Christians need supernatural power to defeat Satan, and God has provided this by giving his Holy Spirit and his armor for protection. In Ephesians, "righteousness" is the breastplate, while here Paul used "faith and love" as the breastplate. Probably the analogy cannot be pressed too far other than to say that

believers have supernatural armor for the battle, but they must put it on. Believers have faith and love to protect their hearts and hope to keep their minds focused on the goal—God's eternal kingdom.

**5:9-10 For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him.**<sup>NIV</sup> In order to wear "hope" as a helmet ([5:8](#)), believers must know in what (or in whom) they are hoping. Christians' hope lies secure because *God* is in charge. He has made the decision and *did not appoint [his people] to suffer wrath*. Because God has ordained it this way, it is certain. God's wrath is very real. Sin will be punished, and those who have refused his offer of forgiveness will indeed suffer God's wrath ([Revelation 20:11-15](#)).

Those who argue for the Rapture ([4:17](#)) to occur before the Tribulation starts on earth interpret these verses to refer to the beginning of the outpouring of God's wrath in the seven-year period of Tribulation. But "wrath" as used here (the Greek word is *orge*) refers to the Day of the Lord, the final judgment.

God's people will not face the condemnation that their sins deserve, however. Instead, they will *receive salvation* because they have put their faith in Jesus' sacrifice on the cross for forgiveness of their sins. This salvation was offered *through our Lord Jesus Christ*. He said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me" ([John 14:6](#) NLT). How did Jesus accomplish this? Through his death. Jesus, the sinless Son of God, *died for us*, died in the place of sinful humanity, to spare us from punishment. Those who accept Jesus' sacrifice *receive salvation*.

Why did Jesus have to die? Jesus' death on the cross sealed a new covenant between God and people. The old covenant involved forgiveness of sins through the blood of an animal sacrifice (see [Exodus 24:6-8](#)). Instead of a spotless lamb on the altar, Jesus offered himself, the spotless Lamb of God, as a sacrifice that would forgive sin once and for all. Jesus was the final sacrifice for sins, and his blood sealed the new agreement between God and people. Now all are welcomed to come to God *through our Lord Jesus Christ*. Through his death, the promise was sealed.

Christ's sacrifice for sins was not an afterthought, not something God decided to do after the world had spun out of control. All-knowing, eternal God set this plan in motion long before the world was created. [First Peter 1:18-21](#) says:

- *You know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. Through him you believe in God, who raised*

*him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.*  
(NIV)

The hope rests secure *whether* believers are awake or asleep at Christ's return. Salvation is a certainty because the Christ who is coming is the same Christ who died for sinners. All believers—those who have died and those who are still alive—will *live together with* God in heaven. God has appointed this to come to pass, and no power can change his plan (read [Revelation 21–22](#)).

---

### LIFE APPLICATION

#### ENCOURAGING WORDS

As you near the end of a long race, your legs ache, your throat burns, and your whole body cries out for you to stop. This is when friends and fans are most valuable. Their encouragement helps you push through the pain to the finish line. In the same way, Christians are to encourage one another. A word of encouragement offered at the right moment can mean the difference between finishing well and collapsing along the way. Look around you. Be sensitive to others' need for encouragement, and offer supportive words or actions.

---

**5:11** Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing.<sup>NRSV</sup> The words "encourage one another" repeat Paul's words in [4:18](#). Despite persecution and their sorrow over fellow believers who had died, the Christians needed to *encourage one another* about the certainty of their future reunion with all believers who had gone on before ([4:13-18](#)) and the promise of eternal life through Jesus Christ ([5:9-10](#)). They ought also to *build up each other* in the faith as they dealt with the difficult issues and to seek to be ready for Christ's return ([5:1-8](#)). Apparently the Thessalonians were already doing this, so Paul took note of that fact; yet he wanted them to continue to do so. Believers will never stop needing encouragement or building up. Just as one believer receives encouragement, he or she at another time will be in a position to offer it. The mutual giving and receiving in the body of Christ keep the church strong against the forces that attack it. God's people always need to stand together with one another as they anticipate their Savior's return.

Life Application Bible Commentary - Life Application Bible Commentary – 1 & 2 Thessalonians.

Life-Sharing Lesson 2 How Thankful Are You For The 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming  
1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 Revelations 13:15-18

1. Was there ever a situation in which you were thankful in advance that you knew when someone was going to surprise you with something?

***Yes. I was always glad to be informed of a pop quiz that was going to take place in one of my classes by a friend who had had the teacher earlier that day in class.***

2. What's an important factor of a thief being successful?

***The element of surprise. A thief has to be able to act at a time when nobody knows the theft is currently taking place. A good thief is stealing at a time when no one is aware of the thief's actions.***

**1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 (NIV)**

<sup>1</sup> Now, brothers and , about times and dates we do not need to write to you,

<sup>2</sup> for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.

<sup>3</sup> While people are saying, "Peace and safety," destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.

<sup>4</sup> But you, brothers and sisters, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief.

<sup>5</sup> You are all sons and daughters of the light and sons and daughters of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness.

<sup>6</sup> So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled.

<sup>7</sup> For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night.

<sup>8</sup> But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet.

<sup>9</sup> For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.

<sup>10</sup> He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. <sup>11</sup> Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

3. If Jesus said that no one knows the day nor the hour of his return, why do people spending so much time trying to figure it out?



**Probably pride. We like knowing something that others do not know. People are attracted to secret knowledge, be it gossip or some kind of prophecy.**

4. Why do you think Jesus wanted us to think of him coming as a thief?

**Jesus was motivating us to be on the lookout for him in the same way we would as a thief. If we were expecting a thief, we'd make sure there were locks on the doors and windows. In the same way we would prepare for a thief by taking positive steps, we should prepare for the coming of Christ by taking positive steps with our lives.**

5. What's the difference between being a child of the day and a child of the night?

**A child of the day has been touched by God and made the decision to live his/her life in accordance with the word and commandments of God. A child of the night has not made the decision to surrender his or her life over to Christ, and hence is still in the darkness.**

6. How do we sleep as believers as opposed to staying awake?

**We sleep by forgetting what our primary calling in life is which is to serve and obey God. Sin becomes something we can accept and participate in more readily. The things of God slowly lose their impact and priorities in our lives. When we are awake, we see sin for what it truly is which is 1) disobedience toward God and 2) a participation in our own self-destruction.**

7. Why is it important to exercise self-control? When are we most likely to lose control?

**Self-Control has a lot to do with whether we are growing in Christ or not. Anyone can look like a believer when there is no pressure on him/her. It's what we do under pressure that reveals who we truly are. Self-control allows others to see God at work in our lives. When we are most likely to lose self control will vary with each person, but it all comes back to selfishness on our part. The selfishness shows up in the form "I don't care right now what God thinks, I am going to do this right now." We lose self control, when we make the decision to give in to our desires and allow the desires to control us, instead of being the master of the desires holding them in check.**

8. We hear a lot about the love of God, but not much about the wrath of God? How do you explain to people the reality of God's judgment and punishment?

***Part of the reason Jesus tells us to be ready is for us to avoid the punishment that is coming upon the world. Punishment is not something God desires to do. The moral law is that the punishment for sin is death. God loved us enough to do all that He could in the form of Jesus Christ to keep us from undergoing punishment. We get to decide whether to accept or to reject God's love. We can stand before God based on the righteousness of Christ or on our own righteousness. Any judgment that we receive will be fair and honest. We have been told in advance, no one will be justified in God's eyes.***

9. If God is trying to save us from wrath, why do you think so many people reject what God has to offer to them?

***Most people see God as trying to keep them from having a good time, rather than as one trying to give them life. Maybe we have presented God in the wrong way to some people. They think God is trying to get something from them that they do not want to give, rather than trying to give them something that they truly need.***

10. Why do you think the Bible refers to believers who have died as being asleep as opposed to being dead?

***Because all believers are simply waiting to hear the trumpet call of God to be raised back to life. Jesus told the disciples that Lazarus was sleeping, because he knew the moment Lazarus heard him call, he was going to rise to life. Believers rise to life. Unbelievers however who have died, are raised only to experience a second death. Revelation 20:11-15 (NIV)***

***<sup>11</sup> Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. <sup>12</sup> And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. <sup>13</sup> The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done.***

<sup>14</sup> *Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death.* <sup>15</sup> *If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.*

11. Do you think we will have to give an account to God for our sins that we have confessed and asked to be forgiven of before we died? Why or why not?

*We as Christians give an account of our sins as we go through life. They are not waiting for us in the future as something we will have to deal with. Many of our sins have had their own consequences already in our lives. We do not go before God in fear that somehow at the judgment we will lose our salvation. We may miss out on rewards God intended for us to have because of our lack of action. We will be shown for who we truly are at the judgment. Our works will be tested to see what our motives were, but we are not going to be cast into hell.*

**1 Corinthians 3:10-15 (NIV)**

<sup>10</sup> *By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds.* <sup>11</sup> *For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.* <sup>12</sup> *If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw,* <sup>13</sup> *his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work.* <sup>14</sup> *If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward.* <sup>15</sup> *If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.*

**Revelation 13:15-18 (NIV)**

<sup>15</sup> He was given power to give breath to the image of the first beast, so that it could speak and cause all who refused to worship the image to be killed. <sup>16</sup> He also forced everyone, small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on his right hand or on his forehead, <sup>17</sup> so that no one could buy or sell unless he had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of his name.

<sup>18</sup> This calls for wisdom. If anyone has insight, let him calculate the number of the beast, for it is man's number. His number is 666.

12. If God did not expect us to know when Jesus would return, why does the Bible tell us what will happen in the future with the Anti-Christ and the mark of the beast?

***God wanted us to be prepared for the future. God also wants to let us know that God is still in charge of the future no matter how bleak it may seem at any given moment. God still wanted to provide a means for us to know how to escape the wrath and judgment that will eventually come upon the world.***

13. What in our world today could be interpreted as moving toward fulfillment of this prophecy in Revelations?

***The prophecy that a single individual could control the economic possibilities for everybody in the world is taking place before us. We are moving to a cashless society. At the push of computer keys, your access to your checking account, credit card, and insurance can be put on hold. It does not matter if you are rich or poor, we are moving toward a world in which we cannot buy or sell without the approval of the government.***

14. If you knew Jesus was definitely coming tomorrow, what would you do today? Who would you try harder to reach for Christ before Jesus arrived?

***I would probably ask for a greater boldness to win as many people as possible to the Lord. I'd like to think that I would try calling my cousins again to tell them to get right with the Lord.***

15. Do you think it would be more stressful or less stressful knowing a week in advance the date that Jesus would return?

***I think it would be a lot more stressful. I think our intensity level would rise so high that many people would think we have lost our minds.***

16. What do you want to be doing when Jesus comes back?

***I want to be doing whatever Jesus will is for me on that day with a joyful heart giving thanks.***

## Life-Sharing Lesson 3—Being Thankful For What God Is Doing Philippians 1:3-11

### GREETINGS / [1:1-2](#)

As Paul wrote this letter, he was under house arrest in Rome. When the Philippian church had heard about Paul's imprisonment, they had sent Epaphroditus (who may have been one their elders) to Rome to visit and encourage him. Epaphroditus had arrived with words of affection from the church, as well as a financial contribution that would help make Paul's confinement more comfortable. Paul wanted to thank the believers for helping him during his time of need. He also wanted to tell them why he could be full of joy despite his imprisonment and upcoming trial. He wanted them to remain strong in the faith, realizing that although he was in chains for the gospel, God was still in control and the truth of the gospel remained unchanged. In this uplifting letter, Paul counseled the Philippians about humility and unity and warned them about potential problems they would face.

**[1:1](#) Paul.** The undisputed author of this letter is the apostle Paul, missionary to the Gentiles, imprisoned in Rome for preaching the gospel. Paul had founded the church in Philippi, so the recipients of the letter were his dear friends and children in the faith. Paul filled his letter with joy and love as he sought to dispel the Philippians' fears regarding his imprisonment, to thank them for their financial support, and to encourage them in their faith.

"Paul" is the Greek version of the Hebrew name Saul ([Acts 13:9](#)). From the tribe of Benjamin ([3:5](#)), Paul was born in Tarsus, was raised as a strict Pharisee, and was educated in Jerusalem under Gamaliel ([Acts 22:3](#)). Though born to Jewish parents, Paul was also a Roman citizen ([Acts 22:27-28](#)).

Out of this diverse background, God formed and called a valuable servant. God used every aspect of Paul's upbringing to further the spreading of the gospel. God called him: "This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel" ([Acts 9:15](#) NIV). Paul fulfilled his calling. So far, he had taken three missionary journeys, covering thousands of miles as he carried the gospel from Jerusalem, across Asia, and into Europe. His ultimate goal had always been to take the gospel to Rome itself—capital of the vast Roman Empire that had spread over most of Europe, North Africa, and the Near East. The fact that all roads led to Rome made Rome a perfect center for the gospel message to spread across the known world.

Paul wrote this letter from Rome. He had arrived there through a series of unusual circumstances. He had been arrested in Jerusalem by the Romans for seemingly inciting a riot. A plot to kill Paul caused the Romans to take Paul to Caesarea (on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea). There Paul gave the gospel message to Governor Felix and his wife Drusilla ([Acts 23:24](#); [24:1-26](#)). Felix didn't make a decision in the

case, leaving Paul in prison for two years until Festus became the new governor. Then Paul was able to present the gospel to Festus, and then to King Agrippa and Bernice ([Acts 25:1–26:32](#)). Paul did indeed carry God's name to Israel, and to the Gentiles and to their kings, just as God had said ([Acts 9:15](#)).

Every Roman citizen had the right to appeal to Caesar. This didn't mean that Caesar himself would hear the case, but that the citizen's case would be tried by the highest courts in the empire. As a prisoner being unjustly tried, Paul used the opportunity to get to Rome by appealing his case to Caesar ([Acts 25:12](#)). Paul had wanted to preach the gospel in Rome, and he eventually got there—in chains, through shipwreck, and after many trials ([Acts 27–28](#)).

In Rome, Paul was under house arrest. This meant that he could receive visitors and write and receive letters. Paul had to finance his imprisonment. [Acts 28:30](#) states that Paul had to pay for his own rented apartment in Rome; plus he had to pay for the guards as required by Rome. Although Paul's normal policy was not to accept support from the churches so that he could not be accused of having a "profit motive," he did accept a gift from the Philippians for his support in prison (see [4:10-18](#)).

Paul wrote several letters during this imprisonment. These are called the Prison Letters, or Prison Epistles, and Philippians is one of those (the others being Ephesians and Colossians). Paul also wrote personal letters, such as the one to Philemon. Luke was with Paul in Rome ([2 Timothy 4:11](#)). Timothy was a frequent visitor, as were Tychichus ([Ephesians 6:21](#)), Epaphroditus ([4:18](#)), and Mark ([Colossians 4:10](#)). Paul witnessed to the imperial guard (that is, the Roman soldiers, [1:13](#)) and was involved with the Roman believers.

Paul had arrived in Rome around A.D. 59 and had spent two years under house arrest. The letter to the Philippians was probably written toward the end of Paul's imprisonment there, in A.D. 61. The reasons for a late dating of this letter include the following:

- Paul expressed expectation of an impending decision on his case ([2:23](#)).
- Enough time had gone by for the Philippians to have heard of Paul's imprisonment, send Epaphroditus, hear back of Epaphroditus's sickness, and then send back words of concern. (Some scholars contend that travel back and forth between Rome and Philippi could not have occurred during this short time period, and so they say that Paul was writing from either Caesarea or Ephesus, not Rome. See the introduction to Philippians for a full discussion.)
- Philippians must have been written after Colossians, Ephesians, and Philemon because Paul says in Philippians that Luke was no longer with him ([2:20](#)), and Luke had been there when Paul wrote Colossians ([Colossians 4:14](#)) and Philemon ([Philemon 24](#)).

**And Timothy.** Timothy was a frequent visitor during Paul's imprisonment in Rome ([Colossians 1:1](#); [Philemon 1](#)) and was with Paul in Rome when he wrote this letter. Then Timothy went as Paul's emissary to the church in Philippi ([2:19](#)). Timothy had a special interest in the Philippians ([2:20](#)), for he had traveled with Paul on his second missionary journey when the church at Philippi had begun ([Acts 16:1-3](#), [10-12](#)). Although he is mentioned in the salutation, Timothy is not considered a coauthor. Paul wrote in the first person throughout this letter.

Timothy grew up in Lystra, a city in the province of Galatia. Paul and Barnabas had visited Lystra on Paul's first missionary journey ([Acts 14:8-21](#)). Most likely, Paul had met the young Timothy and his mother, Eunice, and grandmother Lois ([2 Timothy 1:5](#)) on this journey, perhaps even staying in their home.

On Paul's second missionary journey, he and Silas returned to several cities that Paul had already visited, including Lystra. There Paul invited Timothy to accompany them. Timothy would travel the empire with Paul, preaching and teaching the Good News, traveling with Paul as his assistant and sometimes for him, as his emissary.

Paul and Timothy had developed a special bond, like father and son ([2:22](#)). Paul had led Timothy to Christ during his first missionary journey. Timothy would become an important leader in the early church and, like Paul, eventually would be imprisoned for his faith. The writer of Hebrews mentioned Timothy at the end of that letter: "I want you to know that our brother Timothy has been released. If he arrives soon, I will come with him to see you" ([Hebrews 13:23](#) NIV).

**Servants of Christ Jesus.**<sup>NRSV</sup> While Paul usually used the designation "apostle" in the beginning of his letters, here he referred only to his and Timothy's role as *servants of Christ Jesus*. The Philippians had been an encouragement to Paul, readily accepting his position and message. Apparently, Paul did not feel the need to mention his apostleship or to present his credentials as in some of his other letters.

The word *doulos*, translated "servant," means "slave," one who is subject to the will and wholly at the disposal of his master. Paul expressed his and Timothy's absolute devotion and subjection to Christ Jesus. In Greek culture, the custom of manumission enabled a slave to be set free but remain devoted to a master for life as a bondservant. Paul may have had that in mind as he wrote to this audience. More likely, he was using the Old Testament concept of "servant of Yahweh," as used of Moses ([Exodus 14:31](#)) and other prophets ([Jeremiah 25:4](#); [Daniel 9:6-10](#); [Amos 3:7](#)). This concept conveyed their dignity as authoritative messengers of the Lord.

The pattern of ancient letters was for the writer to first identify himself or herself (as opposed to letters today that are signed at the end). Paul always declared his Christian faith from the very start. Paul and Timothy were not mere servants, they were servants of the divine Lord, Christ Jesus himself.

---

## LIFE APPLICATION

### SERVING

The work that servants perform benefits both their masters and those whom their masters wish to help. When we serve others, as Paul did, we can call ourselves servants of Christ Jesus. We serve Christ by serving them. Jesus made our servant job description very clear during his last evening with his disciples. After washing their feet, he said, "Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet" ([John 13:14](#) NIV). What can you do to serve others this week?

---

**To all the saints in Christ Jesus.**<sup>NKJV</sup> The word "saints" was a common term designating believers. It did not mean those who were without sin. The Greek word is *hagioi*, meaning "those set apart." Like Paul and Timothy, these believers were also *in Christ Jesus* because of their faith; they had accepted Jesus as their Savior and had joined God's family. Only through faith in Christ and our union with him in his death and resurrection can we be set apart from evil and for service to God.

The first "saint" or convert in Philippi was a woman named Lydia. Because few Jews lived in the city, there was no synagogue for Paul to visit. Thus in Philippi, Paul did not face the problem of false teaching from the Judaizers as he had faced in so many other areas with significant Jewish populations. The Romans tolerated religious practices other than their state religion, but often relegated them to territory outside the city. Thus, these people were outside the city gates beside the river ([Acts 16:11-15](#)). From those humble beginnings began the faithful Philippian church.

The church at Philippi was about twelve years old when Paul wrote this letter. It had been a significant source of financial support for Paul ([4:15-16](#); [2 Corinthians 11:9](#)). Paul had often commended the church, holding it up as an example of generosity ([2 Corinthians 8:1-2](#)).

**Who are in Philippi.**<sup>NKJV</sup> The city of *Philippi* had a rich history. The site of the city was northern Greece (called Macedonia). The city of Philippi, with mountains on every side, and its port city of Neapolis on the Aegean Sea, had originally been strategic sites in the Greek empire. Gold was discovered at Mount Pangaeum to the west, tempting settlers from the Aegean island of Thasos to seize the area. They founded a city near the site of Philippi, naming it Krenides (meaning "spring" for the spring-fed marshlands in the valley).

When Philip II of Macedon (the father of Alexander the Great) ascended the throne of the Greek empire, he captured the city in about 357 B.C., enlarged and strengthened it, and gave it his name. Philip used the yield of the gold mines to outfit his army.



In 168 B.C., the Romans conquered Macedonia. The mountain's gold was exhausted, and the city declined. But in 42 B.C., the city became a Roman colony (see [Acts 16:12](#)). On the plains surrounding the city, Augustus had defeated Brutus and Cassius (assassins of Caesar). He then gave the city the status of a "colony" to celebrate his victory. A colony was considered a part of Rome itself. Its people were Roman citizens (a standing that carried high privilege), had the right to vote, were governed by their own senate, and had Roman law and Latin language. Later the city was given the right to the Law of Italy, giving it many privileges and immunities—most significantly immunity from taxation. Philippi was also a "garrison city" with a Roman garrison stationed there to keep it secure. The Philippians were proud of their Roman heritage and standing ([Acts 16:20-21](#)).

At the time of Paul's visit, Philippi was a thriving commercial center at the crossroads between Europe and Asia. During Paul's second missionary journey, he tried to continue his ministry northward into Bithynia and Mysia, only to be stopped by the Spirit. In Troas, "Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, 'Come over to Macedonia and help us'" ([Acts 16:9](#) NIV). Thus in about A.D. 50, Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke crossed the Aegean Sea from Troas and landed at Neapolis, the port of Philippi ([Acts 16:11-40](#)).

At Troas, Paul received the Macedonian call, so he, Silas, Timothy, and Luke boarded a ship. They sailed to the island of Samothrace, then on to Neapolis, the port for the city of Philippi.

Paul certainly had a memorable experience in Philippi. While he didn't face Judaizers, he did find opposition of another kind. Paul cast a demon out of a young slave girl who had been earning a great deal of money for her owners through fortune-telling. When the demon was released, the girl's fortune-telling powers disappeared, so the girl's owners were furious. Paul and Silas were arrested, stripped, beaten, flogged (the Roman punishment that Jesus also received—a punishment so severe it sometimes killed the receiver), and thrown into prison, where they were put in an inner cell with their feet fastened in stocks ([Acts 16:16-24](#)). Paul later wrote to the Thessalonians, "We had previously suffered and been insulted in Philippi, as you know" ([1 Thessalonians 2:2](#) NIV).

But Paul and Silas praised God and sang hymns in their prison cell. "Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everybody's chains came loose" ([Acts 16:26](#) NIV). As a result, the jailer and his family believed, and Paul and Silas were released to continue their journey.

It seems that Luke remained in Philippi, because the "we" account in Acts ends in [chapter 16](#) and picks up again in [20:5](#) when Paul again leaves Philippi on his return to Jerusalem. Luke's presence could account for the growth and strengthening of the church in Philippi. Luke would have been a logical choice to remain there, for Philippi

may have been Luke's home. The city had a famous school of medicine, where Luke, a medical doctor, may have studied.

**Together with the overseers and deacons.**<sup>NIV</sup> While Paul greeted all the "saints," meaning the entire church, he singled out the church's leadership for greetings as well. *Overseers* (also called elders) were in charge of the church, "overseeing" it—watching over, nourishing, and protecting the spiritual life of the believers. The church in Philippi had several overseers drawn from the church membership. Paul had appointed overseers in various churches during his journeys: "Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust" ([Acts 14:23](#) NIV). In [Acts 20:28](#), Paul spoke to the "elders" in the Ephesian church: "Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers" (NIV). The sheer number of churches meant that neither Paul himself, his companions, nor all the apostles could administer the day-to-day workings of each church. So Paul wisely set up groups of leaders, allowing church members to govern themselves with guidance from the apostles. The new churches needed strong spiritual leadership. The men and women chosen were to lead the churches by teaching sound doctrine, helping believers mature spiritually, and equipping them to live for Jesus Christ despite opposition. The qualifications and duties of the overseers are explained in detail in [1 Timothy 3:1-7](#) and [Titus 1:5-9](#). (See [Philippians 1:1-5](#) for Paul's view of partnership.)

---

### LIFE APPLICATION

#### TEAM SPIRIT

Paul knew that God had given him unusual spiritual gifts and a special mission, but he also knew that he was not a one-man band.

Right away, before his teaching and doctrine and pastoral words, Paul displayed his team spirit, referring to Timothy, the deacons, the elders, and all the Christian brothers and sisters near and far.

We who are "in Christ Jesus" need each other. A one-person team will not stay in the game for long. Neither will your team if you drop out. Christians need to work together, side by side, to see God's kingdom grow.

---

*Deacons* were selected to handle the church's external concerns. In the secular culture, the diakonoi handled certain welfare-type duties such as distributing food or other gifts. Some scholars think that the office of deacon first arose in response to a need in the Jerusalem church. Distributing food and caring for widows was drawing the

apostles away from preaching and teaching, so seven men were carefully chosen to care for the physical needs of the congregation ([Acts 6:1-6](#)). These men, though they were not called "deacons," functioned as deacons because they were responsible for specific administrative details of the church. The qualifications and duties of deacons are spelled out in [1 Timothy 3:8-13](#).

## **[1:2](#) Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.**<sup>NKJV</sup>

Paul used *grace* and *peace* as a standard greeting in all his letters. *Grace* and *peace* were the typical Greek and Hebrew greetings (respectively) utilized by Paul to express God's desire for the believers' well-being. "Grace" is God's undeserved favor—his loving-kindness shown to sinners whereby he saves them and gives them strength to live for him; "peace" refers to the peace that Christ made between sinners and God through his death on the cross. "Peace" also refers to that inner assurance and tranquility that God places in the heart, producing confidence and contentment in Christ. Only God can grant such wonderful gifts. Paul wanted his readers to experience God's grace and peace in their daily living.

The world offers a temporary and counterfeit version of grace and peace. Grace might be considered luck; peace might be seen as the absence of conflict. But for believers in Philippi and today, God's blessings are not the result of luck, but because of God's grace; peace is not a fragile calm, but an inner security. Grace and peace are abundant and available even in troubles, conflicts, and turmoil. Paul was in prison and the Philippians were experiencing persecution ([1:28-30](#)), yet Paul greeted them with the assurance of grace and peace.

---

### *LIFE APPLICATION*

#### UNOPENED GIFTS

We get upset at children who fail to appreciate small gifts, yet we undervalue God's immeasurable gifts of grace and peace. Instead, we seek the possessions and shallow experiences the world offers. "Grace" and "peace" easily become common religious words rather than names for very real benefits that God offers to us. Compared to the big and bright "packages" of our culture, grace and peace appear insignificant. But when we unwrap them, we discover God's wonderful personal dealings with us. Not a single heartbeat or breath occurs outside of God's grace. We live because of his divine favor. His favor cannot be earned by effort or bought with money. Jesus calmly spoke of "peace" as a personal possession that he gladly left to those who would follow him ([John 14:27](#)). Inside the tiny package marked "Grace and Peace," we find an inexhaustible treasure of

---

God's daily presence in our lives. Using these two words in his greeting to the churches, Paul wasn't offering something new. He was reminding his readers of what they already possessed in Christ. Thank God for his grace, and live in his peace.

---

The phrase *God our Father* focuses on the family relationship among all believers as God's children. By using the phrase *Lord Jesus Christ*, Paul was pointing to Jesus as a full person of the Godhead and he was recognizing Jesus' full deity. God the Father and Christ the Lord are coequal in providing the resources of grace and peace.

### *PAUL'S PRAYER FOR THE PHILIPPIAN BELIEVERS / [1:3-11](#)*

Following the convention of first-century letter writing, Paul extended his greeting by expressing thanksgiving and saying a prayer for the believers. Paul's words in this section are tender and sincere; he was genuinely thankful for the Philippians' gifts and partnership in the gospel, and he was confident that they would continue in the faith. Paul truly loved these believers, as expressed in these gentle words; and they truly loved Paul, as expressed by their concern and support. Paul's prayer for this church gives us an example for a prayer we can pray for our church and for believers around the world.

**[1:3](#) I thank my God upon every remembrance of you.**<sup>NKJV</sup> In these words, Paul expressed his love for the Philippian believers. Every time he thought about the Philippians, he thanked God for them. Paul's love for these believers had not diminished; nor had theirs for him, evidenced by their generous support ([4:10-20](#)). The Philippian church had brought Paul much joy and little pain. Some of the churches had developed severe problems, and Paul's letters had focused on dealing with the problems. For example, the churches in Rome and Galatia were threatened by Judaizers, who wanted the believers to return to obeying the Jewish law; the church in Corinth was plagued by internal strife; the church in Ephesus was being plagued by false teachers; the church in Colosse was turning away to a heresy all its own; the church in Thessalonica was dealing with false rumors about Paul, disrespect toward leaders, laziness among the members, and false teaching about the resurrection. Paul's letter to the Philippians, while mentioning some concerns and giving some advice, could be considered a beautiful thank-you note for their unwavering support.

Paul probably visited Philippi on three separate occasions: (1) on the second missionary journey, when the gospel was planted ([Acts 16:12](#)); (2) on his journey from Ephesus through Macedonia on his way to Greece, where he stayed for three months; and (3) on his way back to Jerusalem ([Acts 20:6](#)). While the length of time of each stay is uncertain, his time with the Philippians had cemented a strong relationship.

Some Bible versions expand *you* to read "you all," and correctly so. At the start of his letter, Paul focused on the unity of the fellowship, thanking God for all the believers.

---

### LIFE APPLICATION

#### CLASS REUNION

Assemble a group of old classmates, or army buddies, or teammates, and memories become so vivid you can almost reach out and touch them. Paul hinted that such memories can put new energy into prayer. Try this:

- Today when a bank clerk reminds you of a friend from long ago, pause for a moment to pray.
- When a kid on a bike reminds you of a grandchild, take a minute to pray.
- When a song reminds you of an old boyfriend or girlfriend, pray for that person you once couldn't get out of your mind.
- When a different dialect jogs your memory of a foreign friend, pray for Christians in his or her country (and for your friend too).

Let your memories spark the engine of prayer. And let people know that you thank God when you think of them.

---

**1:4-5** In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.<sup>NIV</sup> Here again, Paul focused on unity in the fellowship. He prayed for *all of you*, referring to all the believers in the church. The words *I always pray* are in the present tense, meaning that Paul was praying for them continually. Paul planted churches and then kept those churches in prayer as he continued in his ministry.

We today might take the lesson to heart that the sign of our professed love for the gospel is the measure of sacrifice we are prepared to make in order to help its progress.

*Ralph P. Martin*

When Paul prayed for the Philippians, he thanked God for them, and he prayed *with joy*. This is the first of many times that Paul used the word "joy" in this letter. The focus on joy sets this letter apart from all of Paul's other letters; the word "joy" (in its various forms: joy, rejoice) is found fourteen times in this short epistle (see the chart: [I Say It Again, Rejoice](#)). Coming from an itinerant preacher imprisoned for his faith, joy would be the last attitude one would expect. Paul had joy despite his imprisonment and the uncertain decision on his case. Paul's life was on the line, yet he could rejoice and encourage others.

A standard dictionary equates joy with happiness, but in Scripture the two words are quite distinct. For example, when life is going well, we may feel happy; but when hard times come, we lose that feeling and become unhappy or sad. True joy, however, rises above the rolling waves of circumstance; true joy keeps us on an even keel no matter how happy or sad we might feel because of our situation. Happiness reflects a horizontal perspective, focusing on circumstances on one's plane of experience. We are happy when events are going our way. Joy reflects a vertical perspective centering on God. We can feel joy in trials because we know that God is still in control (as stated in [Romans 8:26-28](#)). True joy is found only in relationship with Jesus Christ. Joy is the gladdening of the heart that comes from knowing Christ as Lord, the feeling of relief because we are released from sin; it is the inner peace and tranquility we have because we know the final outcome of our lives; and it is the assurance that God is in us and in every circumstance. In his final words to his disciples, Jesus promised, "These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full" ([John 15:11](#) NKJV). Jesus said these words as he faced crucifixion. Clearly, for Jesus and for Paul, joy was separate from their circumstances.

---

### LIFE APPLICATION

#### REMEMBERED WITH JOY

The Philippians were willing to be used by God for whatever he wanted them to do. When others think about you, what comes to their minds? Are you remembered with joy by them? Do your acts of kindness lift up others?

---

One reason for Paul's joy was the Philippians' *partnership* (in Greek, *koinonia*) *in the gospel*. The Philippians were partners through their generous and valuable contribution to Paul's ministry of spreading God's message. They contributed through their practical help when Paul was in Philippi and through their financial support over the years, even when he was in prison. By helping Paul, they were helping Christ's cause to bring the gospel to all nations ([Matthew 28:19-20](#)). This partnership had never wavered; Paul mentioned that their support had been constant from the very first time they heard the gospel right through to the day that he was writing this letter (a span of about twelve years). These people did not just sit back and applaud Paul's efforts; instead, they got actively involved in his ministry through their fellowship with him and their financial support. As we help our ministers, missionaries, and evangelists through prayer, hospitality, and financial donations, we become partners with them.

Not only did the Philippians help Paul, but they also got involved in other ministry needs. During his third missionary journey, Paul collected money for the impoverished believers in Jerusalem. The churches in Macedonia—including Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea—were not wealthy, yet they gave joyfully and generously. Paul held these churches up as examples of generosity:

- *We want you to know, brothers and sisters, about the grace of God that has been granted to the churches of Macedonia; for during a severe ordeal of affliction, their abundant joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For, as I can testify, they voluntarily gave according to their means, and even beyond their means, begging us earnestly for the privilege of sharing in this ministry to the saints* ([2 Corinthians 8:1-4](#) NRSV).

**See Also:**

[Chart: Prayer in Paul's Life and Letters](#)

**1:6 Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.**<sup>NIV</sup> The verb tense indicates that Paul had been confident (that is, he had full assurance) from the first, and he was still confident to that very day, of God's continued work to transform the lives of the Philippian believers. *He* refers to God; the *good work* refers to God's salvation and continued perfecting of the believers. God's goal for believers is that they be "conformed to the likeness of his Son, that [Jesus] might be the firstborn among many brothers" ([Romans 8:29](#) NIV).

---

### LIFE APPLICATION

#### NO "INCOMPLETES"

Do you sometimes feel as though you aren't making progress in your spiritual life? When God starts a project, he completes it! As with the Philippians, God will help you grow in grace until he has completed his work in your life. When you are discouraged, remember that God won't give up on you. He promises to finish the work he has begun. When you feel incomplete, unfinished, or distressed by your shortcomings, remember and be confident in God's promise and provision. Don't let your present condition rob you of the joy of knowing Christ or keep you from growing closer to him.

God who began a good work of redemption in us *will carry it on to completion* throughout our lifetime and then finish it when we meet him face-to-face. God's work *for* us began when Christ died on the cross in our place. His work *in* us began when we first believed. Now the Holy Spirit lives in us, enabling us to be more like Christ every day. God not only initiates our salvation, he guarantees its fulfillment ([Ephesians 1:13-14](#)). Paul was describing the process of Christian growth and maturity that began when we accepted Jesus and continues until *the day of Christ Jesus* (see also [1:10](#)), that is, when Christ returns. Nothing in this life or after death can stop God's good work in us ([Romans 8:28-39](#)). Despite any persecution the church in Philippi might face, Paul was confident that God would continue his good work in them. Paul didn't know when the "day of Christ Jesus" would arrive, but he lived as though it could come at any moment.

Variations of the phrase "day of Christ Jesus" occur only six times in the New Testament; three of those times are in Philippians (see [1 Corinthians 1:8](#); [5:5](#); [2 Corinthians 1:14](#); [Philippians 1:6, 10](#); [2:16](#)). The phrase emphasizes the future day when Christ will return for his church, complete believers' salvation, and give believers their rewards. The phrase "day of the Lord" ([Amos 5:18-20](#); [1 Thessalonians 5:2](#)) has more of an emphasis on judgment.

---

### LIFE APPLICATION

#### WHO'S IN CHARGE?

If your God is second fiddle to some higher power, then your God is too small. The God of the Bible is "sovereign," an old word used to describe a king—and nobody has more power than a king.

God's sovereign action is the Christian's belief that all of life, the good and the ugly, happens under the eyes and loving will of the universal ruler. Nothing happens that God does not know about. And while God does not approve of the evil people do, God controls even that and will judge it one day, as befits a righteous king.

Be confident today that your life is fully in the hands of the sovereign God, who doesn't miss anything and who loves you with the same boundlessness with which he rules all of creation.

---

**1:7** It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart.<sup>NIV</sup> Paul knew that his feeling of confidence in the Philippians was *right* and appropriate because of his personal relationship with them and knowledge of their sincere faith in Christ. The Greek word translated *to feel* (*phronein*) is used by Paul twenty-three times in this letter. This word means more than simply affection or an



emotional reaction; it goes deeper, showing special concern based on others' best interests. These Philippian believers held a special place in Paul's heart (see also [1:8](#); [4:1](#)).

The Greek structure of the sentence makes it possible to translate the last part "because you hold me in your heart" (as in NRSV) and could refer back to Paul's thankfulness for their support. In either translation, Paul and the Philippians had mutual affection: Paul in his constant prayers for them and concern for their faith; and the Philippians in their constant and generous support of Paul's ministry.

**For all of you share in God's grace with me, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel.**<sup>NRSV</sup> Notice again Paul's emphasis on *all of you*. If there were any divisions in the church, Paul made it clear that all the believers shared *in God's grace* (see [1:2](#)). As Paul sat imprisoned in Rome, he knew that the Philippians suffered as well because of their deep concern and love for him. Paul knew that the church was constantly praying on his behalf. As Paul received God's grace in his struggles, so the Philippians would share in that grace as they faced persecution for their faith. The Philippians also shared *in the defense and confirmation of the gospel* through their support of Paul's ministry across the world and during his imprisonment. The words "defense" and "confirmation" could refer to Paul's preaching ministry, as he continued to defend (maintain and uphold the truth of) and confirm (establish the truth and validity of) the gospel message. Or the words could be looking forward to Paul's upcoming trial, where he would defend and confirm his faith in the gospel before the Roman court. In either case, the believers in Philippi shared with Paul through their prayers and support. Wherever Paul was, even in prison, he faithfully preached the Good News. Remember Paul's inspiring example when hindrances, small or large, slow down your work for God.

---

### LIFE APPLICATION

#### IN THE HEART

You've heard sermons on the duty to serve others selflessly. Now go one step further: put those people in your heart.

Doctors take an oath, a symbol of their duty to heal. Judges promise to render decisions "without fear or favor," a duty to fairness. Christians are to share the gospel and minister to people's needs, but in this case, duty alone isn't enough.

Do you have anyone in your heart? With that person, you don't calculate costs or punch a time clock. The energy you exert is borne on wings of love; the times you give are the happiest moments of your day.

Open your heart to another person today. Turn duty into love, a job into joy.

---

**1:8 For God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ.**<sup>NKJV</sup> Paul, separated by his imprisonment from his dear friends in Philippi and uncertain of whether he would see them again during his life on earth, experienced intense longing for fellowship with them. He called God as his witness to the truth of his statement; Paul's *affection* for the Philippians was so strong that it was deeper than human emotion; it was the selfless affection of *Jesus Christ* himself.

The word "affection" is literally "inward parts" or "viscera," such as the inward parts of an animal sacrifice (heart, liver, kidneys). It conveys very strong internal feelings. How could Paul say that he loved the Philippians with the affection of Jesus Christ? Just as Jesus loved them, so Paul loved them. Although Christ is the originator of this love, it was expressed through Paul.

**1:9 And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment.**<sup>NKJV</sup> While Paul's travels were hindered by his imprisonment, his prayers were not. And Paul prayed with joy for the Philippians ([1:4](#)). Here he explained what he prayed for them. He asked that their *love* for God and for

---

### LIFE APPLICATION

#### LONGING TO SEE

Have you ever longed to see a friend with whom you share fond memories? Paul had such a longing to see the Christians at Philippi. His love and affection for them was based not merely on past experiences, but also on the unity that comes when believers draw upon Christ's love. All Christians are part of God's family and thus share equally in the transforming power of his love. Do you feel a deep love for fellow Christians, friends and strangers alike? Let Christ's love motivate you to love other Christians and to express that love in your actions toward them.

---

one another *may abound* (that is, overflow). But Paul wasn't talking about gushing sentimental or emotional affection. He was praying that their love would overflow, first in the *knowledge* of God and his ways. As each believer learned more and more about God and his ways, the entire congregation would experience a stronger fellowship and love for one another.

Paul also prayed that the Philippians' love would overflow in *discernment* (also translated "depth of insight" or "perception"). The church in Philippi was experiencing

several problems in its fellowship, such as pride and faultfinding (see [2:1-18](#) and [3:10-4:1](#)). Before giving any admonition, Paul tactfully revealed that he was praying that the believers would have discernment in their words and actions. Certainly this would affect their relationships. Relationships must not be based on changeable emotions; spontaneity must be tempered by self-restraint and tactfulness. If there were a problem, it should be prayed about and then dealt with in loving discernment.

Often the best way to influence others is to pray for them. Paul's prayer for the Philippians was that they would be unified in love (see also [Colossians 3:14](#)). Their love was based, not on feelings, but on what Christ had done for them. As you grow in Christ's love, your heart and mind must grow together. Is your love and insight growing?

**[1:10](#) So that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ.**<sup>NIV</sup> The Philippians should have both knowledge and discernment so that, in their Christian lives and in their dealings with one another, they would be able to *discern what is best*. They should have the ability to differentiate between right and wrong, good and bad, healthy and dangerous, vital and trivial; but they should also have the discernment to decide between acceptable and right, good and best, and important and urgent—in other words, to know what really matters. We ought to pray for moral discernment so we can maintain our Christian morals and values (see [Hebrews 5:14](#)). A lot of Christians get involved in peripheral pursuits and neglect the most important priority: to know Christ and live for him ([3:8](#)).

Their ability to discern (that is, to test and approve) should cause them to focus on what really matters as a body of believers. Paul prayed that the Philippians would be *pure*. The Greek word is *eilikrineis*, used only here and in [2 Peter 3:1](#). The word derives from the Greek words for "sunlight" and "judgment." The Philippians' transformation should be so thorough that the resulting purity could pass the toughest scrutiny—the light of God's judgment (see [2 Corinthians 5:10](#)).

Paul also prayed that they would be *blameless*. The Greek word is *aproskopoi*, which also means "not causing others to stumble." Believers ought to be blameless with God (keeping their relationship with him up-to-date and personal) and with people (that their behavior would not lead others into sin).

The *day of Christ* refers to the time when God will judge the world through Jesus Christ. We should live each day as though he could return at any moment—expectant, ready, and eager to be in his presence.

**[1:11](#) Filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.**<sup>NIV</sup> Finally, Paul prayed that the believers would be *filled with the fruit of righteousness*, that "fruit" being all of the character traits flowing from a right relationship with God. "Righteousness" means a right relationship with God as a result of justification from sin. Paul expounds on this in [3:9](#), wherein he says that he does not want to have a righteousness of his own that comes from the law, but "that

which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith." Being made right with God through Christ enables us to live rightly before him. There is a parallel between what Paul prayed for the Philippians and what he himself pursued (as clarified in [3:7-15](#)).

The phrase, "fruit (or harvest) of righteousness" is found in [Isaiah 32:17](#) in the Old Testament, and in [Hebrews 12:11](#) and [James 3:18](#) in the New. It refers to the righteousness of God implanted in us, causing acts of practical righteousness to flow out of us. There is no other way for believers to gain this fruit than through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Only his life through us can help us live in ways that often go against our human nature. See [Galatians 5:22-23](#) for a listing of this fruit of righteousness or "fruit of the Spirit."

Such infilling and the results revealed as "fruit" in people's lives are always *to the glory and praise of God*. Believers' lives ought to glorify and praise God, for it is by his grace alone that sinful human beings can obtain righteousness. See [Ephesians 1:12-14](#) for more on how our lives bring praise to God.

Life Application Bible Commentary - Life Application Bible Commentary – Philippians, Colossians, & Philemon.

## Life-Sharing Lesson 3—Being Thankful For What God Is Doing Philippians 1:3-11

1. What's one thing God has done for you lately that you are thankful for now?

***Since coming to New Life At Calvary, God has raised up a number of people who have actively sought ways to replace me in jobs in the church, so that I can do other things that require my skills. I appreciate each of these persons and I am very thankful for them.***

### **Philippians 1:3-11 (NIV)**

<sup>3</sup> I thank my God every time I remember you. <sup>4</sup> In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy <sup>5</sup> because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, <sup>6</sup> being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

<sup>7</sup> It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart; for whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me.

<sup>8</sup> God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus. <sup>9</sup> And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, <sup>10</sup> so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, <sup>11</sup> filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ--to the glory and praise of God.

2. Who's a person who made a difference in your life and each time you think about the person, you are thankful for what the person did? Did the person know he/she was having such a tremendous influence in your life?

***A high school teacher by the name of Mr. Quinlan motivated me to really pursue academic learning. I appreciate his use of humor in making learning fun. I don't think he fully knows the impact he's had on my life over the years, but I did say thank you to him.***

3. Who is a person for whom you are thankful here at New Life At Calvary and why are you thankful for that person?

***I am thankful for many people at New Life At Calvary because it has a lot of great saints in it, but one that stands out at the moment is Margaret Mallory. She keeps reminding me of my failure to delegate some things out to others, so that I'll last longer in the long run of things. She does it with a genuine sense of concern and wisdom in her voice.***

4. What is a ministry for which you are thankful here at New Life At Calvary and why is it a blessing to you?

***I am thankful for the praise team ministry and the media ministry. Listening to the group sing in my devotions really lifts my spirit in my car. Without the media ministry, the praise team wouldn't be on my phone. I can think of many other ministries that I appreciate and I'm thankful for, but the question only ask for one choice.***

5. What is the connection between praying for someone or a ministry and being thankful for it?

***I think the more we pray for someone or a ministry, the more invested we become in that person or ministry. We begin to be more thankful for it because we see more of what God is doing in and through the person.***

6. How are we in partnership with each other in ministry at New Life At Calvary?

***All of our ministries are interdependent upon each other. We are only as strong as the weakest ministry because it can cause people to turn away from our church. Our parking lot ministry sets the tone for what people can expect from the rest of us. Our greeters either confirm or confuse the message coming the parking lot team. Our ushers build on what the greeters have done. Our music ministry either opens the door for people to become engaged with God and each other or it closes the door. The music and media ministry is a support to the music ministry in the feel it helps to created. The partnership extends to the congregation when its time to greet each other. The preaching takes place in a context that has been created by all of the other ministries that have taken place before the sermon. The partnership continues not just through the end of service, but to all the activities which take place during the week. All of us have an important role to play in loving each other and loving the people who come through our doors.***

7. Why should you be most thankful for verse 1:6 in the passage above?

***It lets us know that we did not start our journey with God simply based on a whim or some thing that happened in our lives. It was actually God at work in us***

**from the very beginning. That means God made us worthy to be in His family, even before we realized that we needed a change.**

8. Why is God committed to completing the work that God began in us?

**God loves us. He called us to prepare us for the day of Christ Jesus. Jesus himself promised that He would be with us always. No one can take us from the hands of God. We have to make the choice to walk away. Even then God seeks to call us back to repentance so that we can be restored.**

9. Why is it important for us to know that God began the work in our walk with the Lord rather than us simply choosing to follow God?

**We have the confidence that our sin didn't keep God from calling us in the first place. So if we stumble and fall after giving our lives to Christ, that does not mean that God has given up on us. We can get up and begin to work once again with the plan and purposes of God for our lives. We serve God, because God first loved us.**

10. Paul is in prison. Why does he seem to be so joyful and confident in this passage of Scripture?

**Paul never lost sight of the reality that God was in charge of his life. In our first lesson in this series, Paul spoke of knowing what it was like to be content in his life regardless of the circumstances. There are often challenges in our lives that we would not have chosen for ourselves, but God has allowed them. Those circumstances can push us closer to God or further away, but God has a way of providing us His peace in the situation if we are willing to receive it.**

11. What do you think it means for us to have a love which is focused by knowledge and insight?

**There are so many good things we could do for others, but not all the good we want to do is going to lead the results that we had hoped for. God wants us to have our love focused by what is really going on in a given situation. Otherwise**

***we may be making great sacrifices that are having zero impact in the kingdom of God. It's not enough to simply support a cause out of love, we should make sure that cause is worthy of our time and energy.***

12. Have you ever had a situation in which you tried to demonstrate the love of Christ, and somehow it did not work out in the way that you planned it would?

***Yes. I can remember one time opening our home to help someone and the person ended up resenting us for trying to help the person out. The person began saying negative things about us.***

13. If we have the Holy Spirit of truth, why do we still fail to discern what is best for us in given situations?

***All of us are still capable of being deceived by Satan and we are all capable of self deception. We think our motives are truly pure in a situation, but God can show us things we have not thought of. As brothers and sisters in Christ, we have a wealth of experience in our lives, and sometimes its good to learn from the mistakes of others. We can want some things too badly and fail to see how we could be setting ourselves up for a disaster.***

14. What is it for a believer to be pure and blameless until the day of Christ? Can we actually be without sin in our lives?

***To be pure and blameless is to have our lives rooted in Christ and seeking to live the life Christ has called us to live by saying yes to the will of God in our everyday life. We are not arriving at a moment of perfection. We are recognizing what God has imparted to us. There will always be some form of sin in our lives. The question is what do we do with it once we recognize that it is there.***

15. Which goal is better, "to walk away from sin" or "to walk closer to Jesus?" Which goal do we try to practice more often? Which goal leads us to verse 11 of being filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes from Christ?



The better goal is to walk closer to Jesus. Even unbelievers seek to walk away from sin. Unfortunately, too many of us are content with trying to walk away from sin, instead of trying to walk closer to Jesus. The focus should not be on what I don't do anymore, but rather on what I'm becoming in walking closer to Jesus.

