

The Pursuit Of Joy

A Study In Philippians

Richard P. Nifong

The Pursuit of Joy:
A Study In Philippians
by
Richard P. Nifong

© 2010 Richard P. Nifong
Revised April 2015

Published by Amazon.com

All rights reserved. No portion of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means – electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, scanning or other – except for brief quotations in critical reviews or articles, without the prior written permission of the publisher

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 Biblica. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved.

Noted Scripture quotations are taken from *The Message*. Copyright ♦ 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002. Used by permission of NavPress Publishing Group.

For my girls: Cheryl, Trinity and Zoey

I'm not much without you

There has never been the slightest doubt in my mind that the God who started this great work in you would keep at it and bring it to a flourishing finish on the very day Christ Jesus appears.

(The Message)

Table of Contents

[Title Page](#)

[Copyright](#)

[Dedication](#)

[Table of Contents](#)

[Introduction](#)

[Background](#)

[Features](#)

[Daily Readings](#)

[Small Group Ideas](#)

Introduction

Paul's letter to the Philippians has been a source of inspiration and encouragement to Christian readers throughout the ages. It is a personal letter from Paul to the people in the church that he started in the European city of Philippi. These people were his spiritual children, and the love they had for each other was evident.

Philippians is a book of joy – the word “joy” appears in one form or another at least 16 times in this short letter – and it was written by a man being held captive, awaiting a trial that could end in his death. What was there to be joyful about in such a trying circumstance? Paul was joyful to have had such good friends as the Philippians. He was joyful to have received the gift that he mentions was sent by them. He was joyful that his suffering was causing others to preach Christ even more boldly than before. But most of all, Paul rejoiced that the day for him to see Jesus face to face was drawing closer.

By his example, Paul taught, and continues to teach, his readers that true joy is not so much a feeling as it is a state of mind characterized by the confidence all Christians should have in Christ. Joy is God's gift to His people, enabling them to accept what life brings, both good and bad, and it fills His children with the confidence that God is in control. All Christians can learn from Paul's example of peace and joy and faith in the Lord – even in the face of death.

Background

This letter from Paul was addressed to the Christians living in the city of Philippi. At the time Paul wrote to the Philippians, around 63 AD, their city was already ancient and historic. Originally a mining city named Crenides, it was captured around 358 BC by Philip II of Macedon, the father of Alexander the Great. The city was located only eight miles from the Aegean Sea, and was rich in gold and other resources.

The city passed from Macedonian to Roman rule in 168 BC, and a little over a hundred years later it was the site of one of the most famous battles of all time – the Battle of Philippi, which was between the forces of Octavian and Marc Antony against Brutus and Cassius, the assassins who killed Octavian's adopted father, Julius Caesar. Octavian and Antony emerged victorious, but within ten years they went to war with each other. Antony died in this war either in battle or by suicide, and Octavian became the uncontested ruler of Rome and was given the title Augustus Caesar.

When Paul arrived in Philippi around 51 AD, it was inhabited mostly by Romans who viewed their city as a smaller version of Rome. Philippi was awash with pagan religions, perversions, worldly philosophies and all manner of evil. It was among these conditions that Paul and his friends started the first Christian church Europe had ever known.

Features of This Bible Study Journal

Each daily devotional reading will also include questions to be considered concerning the passage of scripture being studied. These questions can be used in a group setting as well, either alone or in combination with the group activities suggested at the end of the book.

There are 5 small group sessions and 20 daily readings included. We suggest 5 readings per week with 2 days off, or those 2 days can be used for further study or application.

If being studied as a group, the group should be given the opportunity to do a service project before the study has ended. A few ideas are: helping at a homeless shelter, spending time at a retirement home reading or talking to the residents, yard clean up for elderly church members, putting together packets of crayons and coloring books to give to a children's hospital. Begin talking about this project during the first session and try to have it scheduled by the third at the latest.

Our prayer is that as you study the book of Philippians, you will find the same source of strength and joy the Apostle Paul had in his life, which comes only from a growing relationship with Jesus Christ.

"I thank my God every time I remember you"

Day 1 - Read Philippians 1:1-6

Paul expressed his gratitude to the believers in Philippi for their willingness to share the work of spreading the Gospel with him. The word "partnership" in verse 5 can also be translated "fellowship." Here it is taken to mean that Paul is rejoicing that there are those who have the same goals as he does.

The Philippians share a common bond – faith in Christ – and they are pursuing a common goal – the spread of the Good News of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

In verse 6, Paul is reminding the Philippians of the one thing that followers of Christ should never forget – God always finishes what He starts. Paul tells them this to encourage them as they stand firm against worldly thinking and actions in Philippi.

Do you have anybody with whom you share a special bond? Do you have friends who have the same goals or plans in life as you? List those people below and pray for them by name this week.

Day 1 Study Questions –

What do you think is the main verse in this passage? Write it out in your own words.

Why does Paul give thanks for the believers in the Philippian church?

What is the work that God will complete in all followers of His Son Jesus Christ?

What is the Day of Jesus Christ?

"This is my prayer: that your love may abound"

Day 2 - Read Philippians 1:7-11

The love that followers of Christ have for each other should overflow from their lives. Picture a flooded river or stream – everything around the stream gets wet when the banks overflow.

As we grow in knowledge and understanding of the Word of God, we will see what really matters in life is devotion to Jesus Christ and love for each other in all circumstances; even when others hate you, love them in return.

If the love of God rules your life, then it should overflow and effect everybody and everything around you.

Who do you need to show love to today? Can you think of a person who has been nothing but trouble to you? Love them, and in so doing you might just change their life!

Write down the names of a few people that you need to show love to, and make a point to pray for them and love them God's way this week.

Day 2 Study Questions –

Write in your own words the main thought of these verses -

What is Paul's prayer for the Philippians?

How do you think love and understanding work together to bring about growth in our lives?

Read Galatians 5:22-26. What fruit should we see in our lives as children of God? How can dependence on Jesus cause us to produce this fruit?

"I am in chains for Christ"

Day 3 - Read Philippians 1:12-19

Can you imagine being joyful while being imprisoned for something you didn't do? Can you imagine suffering for something you did that was the right thing?

Most of us would give up at that point and try something else. Not Paul. It seems that the more bad things happened to Paul, the more he rejoiced! Strange, right? Even worse, while Paul was in prison, some people took the opportunity to preach for the wrong reason, most likely to boost their own reputation or for monetary gain.

Paul was just glad the Gospel was being preached. It didn't matter what the motives were of the people preaching, because lives were being changed. That is the power of the Word of God!

Can you rejoice like Paul when everything around you falls apart? When you are persecuted unjustly? When you suffer hardship for nothing more than doing the right thing?

Read Psalm 1. God is mighty and just! He sees the ways of the righteous, and the ways of the wicked will perish! Have hope – God is on your side!

Day 3 Study Questions –

What was the effect of Paul's imprisonment on other Christians?

How did Paul feel about those who preached Christ for selfish motives? How do you feel about those that seem to profit from the preaching of God's Word?

What do you think was behind Paul's attitude of joy while under arrest?

What will it take for you to experience that same joy during hard times in your life?

"For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain"

Day 4 - Read Philippians 1:20-26

During his imprisonment, Paul didn't know whether or not he would be released. The trial he was awaiting could have meant his death. His prayer was that through all of his earthly trials, Christ would be glorified in all he said and did.

If Christ was glorified by Paul's death, he would finally see his Savior face to face. If Paul was allowed to live, Christ would be glorified by his continuing work with people such as the Philippians. Either option was exciting to Paul. Either way God's purpose for his life would be fulfilled.

Can you imagine the faith it would take to think the way Paul did? That type of thinking only comes from a growing relationship with the Lord, and from a lifetime of service to a God who gives not only purpose in life, but also the strength to carry out that purpose.

Paul was serving God's purpose as he sat under arrest awaiting a trial that could end in his death. Because he was following Christ, Paul was joyful. When we discover our life's purpose, we have peace and joy like Paul's.

What is God's purpose for you? Find it, and pursue it with all your heart, knowing that this will bring peace and joy that only God can give.

Day 4 Study Questions –

Why was Paul so divided about the outcome of his trial?

How would God be glorified in Paul's death? How would God be glorified if Paul was allowed to live?

What did Paul mean when he said that death is gain?

How would the Philippian's confidence in Christ grow because of Paul?

“Conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ”

Day 5 - Read Philippians 1:27-30

Think about this phrase – “United we stand, divided we fall.” This familiar phrase was reportedly uttered by one of the founding fathers of the United States of America as they battled for their independence from England. The point was this – if we don’t take a stand together, then we will certainly be defeated.

We are all in this life together. A popular pastor has said, “Life is not a do it yourself project.” This is the idea Paul was trying to convey to the Philippians. By facing opposition and hardship together it is never as hard as it would be facing it alone, and by sharing victories and joy, everyone is blessed. That’s what being a Christian is all about!

We are called to suffer for Christ, but we are not supposed to do it alone. Paul had friends like the Philippian believers to share the good times and the bad.

Who do you have in your life that is special to you? Is there a certain person that is always there for you no matter what? Let them know how important they are to you. Who knows, you might just be a blessing to them, too!

Day 5 Study Questions –

Why should we not be afraid of those who stand against us?

What will happen to those who oppose us?

How will God bless those who stand together in His Spirit?

What two privileges does verse 29 say all believers share? How have you experienced both of these?

"In humility consider others better than yourselves"

Day 6 - Read Philippians 2:1-4

In this passage, Paul called upon the Philippians to be unified in all things. The statements Paul makes in verse 1 are almost rhetorical – of course there is encouragement in Christ! Of course there is comfort in His love! Do we enjoy fellowship with each other? Yes! What about compassion and affection? We have plenty!

We answer each with a resounding “yes!” each time a pastor or church leader asks, but we tend to live the exact opposite of what we say during the week. We put on our “halo” for church and then after Sunday supper we put it back on the shelf until its needed again.

Re-read verses 3 and 4. Paul mentions rivalry and conceit. There is no direct evidence that the Philippian church was exhibiting this behavior, but Paul feels it is necessary to warn them about it because this is worldly conduct that believers should have no part of. Paul encourages them to think of others as more important, and to look to the concerns of others.

Paul is talking about sacrificial living. The question is, are you humble or conceited? Are you a giver or a taker? If we are going to do what Christ has called us to do, we must be united and we must leave worldly actions behind.

Day 6 Study Questions –

**What encouragement have you drawn from belonging to Christ?
How has this enabled you to be humble?**

How has the love of Christ comforted you?

**How has being involved in a group with other believers (fellowship)
been helpful to you?**

How do you show others affection and compassion?

What can you do to remain or become humble and put others first?

"Your attitude should be that of Christ Jesus"

Day 7 - Read Philippians 2:5-11

These verses contain the words of one of the earliest hymns of the Christian church. It is a song about Christ – his preexistence with God before creation, his equality with God, his identification with humanity, and how costly that identification truly was.

Here are some more highlights of these verses – God became a man, and not just a man, but a servant of humanity. He humbled Himself even more by dying as a common criminal on the cross.

In the first half of the hymn, Christ is seen emptying Himself of his identity as God to be reviled, tortured and killed by His own creation. In the last half of the hymn, we see just the opposite. Because Christ was obedient to God, now Jesus has the name above all names!

Don't forget how the passage begins though – we should have the same attitude that Jesus had. God has called us to be servants, which implies humility and sacrifice.

Sometimes we forget who we are in Christ, and the price that was paid for us. Begin each day by thinking, "who can I serve today" and your attitude will become like that of Christ Jesus.

Day 7 Study Questions –

What is the attitude that Jesus had?

**Read John 1:1-18. What do these verses reveal about who Jesus is?
State verse 14 in your own words.**

What does it mean that Jesus emptied Himself?

What did Jesus do that made Him worthy of being exalted by God?

Why is the name “Jesus” so special?

"Work out your salvation with fear and trembling"

Day 8 - Read Philippians 2:12-18

Think for a minute about all the energy you have used in your lifetime. How much of it was wasted on arguing? What did you win in these arguments? What did you lose?

If you're honest, you will probably look back and see that you lost far more than you gained. How much progress could have been made for Christ had the same energy been used to glorify God rather than yourself?

An argumentative spirit will kill a relationship, and it can kill a church, because when the people on the outside look in, they see nothing that would indicate that the church is any different from the world.

Again, Paul is encouraging the Philippians to be aware of what is going on around them, and to not be drawn in to such behavior. If that were to happen, they, and we, would cease being the light of the world.

Paul reminds us of the uselessness of complaining and arguing – these things are self-indulgent and do not bring glory to God. Instead, we are to be innocent, blameless before men and God.

How bright does your light shine? Has your innocence been corrupted by arguing or complaining? Give these attitudes to God and allow Him to restore you to purity of heart.

Day 8 Study Questions –

**What do you think is the real danger in arguing and complaining?
What can you do to avoid being drawn into arguing and complaining?**

Read verses 14 and 15 again – how are we blameless if we avoid arguing and complaining?

What are some of the characteristics of those who live blameless and pure lives?

What are some of the characteristics of the world we live in? What should our attitude toward the world be?

"I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon"

Day 9 – Read Philippians 2:19-24

Do you remember the old commercial where the little boy wants to have a Big Mac because his dad ordered one? Dad knows that the Big Mac is too much sandwich for the little boy, so he says, "Hey son, how about a Happy Meal instead?" But the boy wants to be just like his dad and insists on the Big Mac.

There's a shaving cream ad that comes to mind as well – a man is shaving and standing right beside him is a little man with a foamy face, wanting to be like his father.

Timothy was Paul's son in the faith. Timothy knew the heart and mind of Paul, perhaps better than anyone else. Paul states that he and Timothy are like minded, especially concerning the welfare of the church in Philippi, and in fact, all others are seeking after their own interests and not those of Christ.

Paul had been a mentor to Timothy, and in return Timothy made Paul proud like a father is with his children. Is there someone in your life who looks up to you? You have great influence on this person, either for good or for bad, just by the way you act around them, or by the way you include them in what you are doing. Be a good role model for those around you, and leave behind a legacy of being a great leader!

Day 9 Study Questions –

**What does Paul say about Timothy's feelings for the Philippians?
Why is this important?**

**What do you think are some positive qualities of Timothy's
character? What are some of your positive qualities?**

**Look at 1 Timothy 1:2 and 2 Timothy 1:2 – how did Paul describe
Timothy in these verses?**

**Who do you know that you can be a role model for, a mother or
father in the faith? What can you do to encourage them or build a
relationship with them?**

“Welcome him in the Lord with great joy”

Day 10 – Read Philippians 2:25-30

Another person that Paul thought highly of was Epaphroditus. Paul lists the Christian qualities that Epaphroditus has shown in his life (verse 25). Paul says he is a brother, a worker, a soldier, a messenger and a minister.

In using these words, Paul identifies Epaphroditus as one who is a fellow believer, a follower of Christ who has given his life to a similar calling as Paul and who was willing to risk everything, even his life, for that calling.

We need to remember though that Epaphroditus was from Philippi. The people in the church at Philippi knew him well. He was their representative and messenger sent to Paul to begin with. Why did Paul feel the need to share so much information about someone the Philippians already knew so much about?

Sometimes when we have known someone for a long time, we can overlook important changes God has made in their lives. We tend to remember the mistakes of the past over the victories of the present, and the hope of the future. Our memories can cloud the truth about a person.

What has God done in your life? How has he changed you? God is at work in others just like His at work in you. Forget the past of others and yourself and see the future God is shaping right now!

Day 10 Study Questions –

List the words Paul uses to describe Epaphroditus. Can you think of anyone that has been like Epaphroditus for you?

What was Epaphroditus willing sacrifice for God? What are you willing to sacrifice? How far would you go to please God?

What characteristics of Epaphroditus would you like to have in your life?

What kind of future do you think God is trying to shape for you?

"Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord!"

Day 11 – Read Philippians 3:1-6

Paul probably had more reason to boast in his accomplishments than any other person. It was his efforts and his willingness to follow God's plan for him that took the Gospel to the ends of the earth. Even before that, though, Paul had every reason to be proud of who he was. He was the model Jew, and the model Roman citizen. He was of the tribe of Benjamin, which was the tribe of the first king of Israel, with whom he also shared the name "Saul."

The thing Paul could have been the most proud of, though, was that he was a Pharisee. The Pharisees prided themselves on the way they obeyed the Law of God. Nobody was as close to God as the Pharisees, or so they thought.

This is the life Paul had chosen for himself, and this is the life we often choose for ourselves. We get so wrapped up in our accomplishments and our own holiness that we forget who called us. We forget that God is the source. We rely on our own power, and we fail again and again and don't understand why.

We should be like Paul! We should lay our desires aside and put no faith in our own accomplishments. Instead, we should boast in Christ and what he has done for us!

Day 11 Study Questions –

Why do you think Paul says in verse 3 that we can have no confidence in our own efforts?

What reasons does Paul give for being able to have confidence in himself? Are these valid reasons? What is the reason for your confidence?

Rewrite verse 5 as if you were talking about yourself. What good has come to you because of these things?

What motivates Paul to boast in Christ? What has Christ done for you that is worth boasting about?

"I consider everything a loss"

Day 12 – Read Philippians 3:7-11

Recall from yesterday the list Paul provided of all his accomplishments. To us, these things would be like championship trophies or 1st place ribbons. They are part of what defined who Paul was.

Now, imagine listing all of the good things you have done in your life along the side of a page, as if you were going to add them together; except when you draw the line underneath and start your calculations, no matter how you add it, the answer is always a negative number. That is what Paul was saying was the sum of his life before Christ.

Everything Paul considered to be worthwhile was actually what held him back the most in his new life and devotion to Christ.

Some people say we are products of our environment. This way of thinking is contrary to the Bible. If anyone is in Christ, he is a NEW creation!

As a Christian the newness that comes from having a relationship with Christ has replaced the old things that held you back. Those old things are counted as loss. As far as God is concerned they can no longer affect you. Have the same attitude as Paul in regard to your past – cut your losses and rejoice in the future you have with Jesus Christ!

Day 12 Study Questions –

What things in your life do you consider to be important? List a few below.

What do you think Paul meant when he said I count all things as loss? Does being a Christian add to or take away from your life?

Name some things from your past that at one time you were proud of, but that may be holding you back in your Christian life.

What do you think life would be like for you if you had the same attitude as Paul?

"Let us live up to whatever we have already attained"

Day 13 – Read Philippians 3:12-16

Have you ever been walking or even driving a car and been distracted by something? It happens to us all. You're headed in one direction, and for some reason, you turned your head one way or another while your body continued to go the other direction. Sometimes you get away with it, sometimes a neighbor loses a mailbox. Or worse.

When we spend too much time and effort looking at what is behind instead of focusing on what is ahead sometimes we run into things we would have otherwise seen coming. It pays to keep your eyes on the road when you drive.

Now imagine a person running a race. They are only focused on one thing – the finish. They want to stretch out their chest and burst through the tape at the finish line. They want to win! We all have things in our past that are hurtful, that could bog us down and prevent us from completing the race we run as children of God in style.

The key is focus. Just like the runner, as believers we should look ahead in our walk with Christ. The past is gone, but what a great future we have ahead of us! Live your life focused on Christ in the here and now, and expect a forever future with God. That's the goal set before us – now run to win!

Day 13 Study Questions –

Paul says he has not yet taken the prize. What do you think he was talking about in verse 12?

Why do you think it is so important to not dwell on the past? In what ways have you been focused on the wrong things before? What have you done or what can you do to refocus on Christ?

How is running a race like living the Christian life?

Write verse 16 below in your own words. What is the truth that Paul is speaking of in this verse?

"Their mind is on earthly things; but our citizenship is in heaven"

Day 14 – Read Philippians 3:17-21

Once there was a man who was looking for a job, and he found an opening at the zoo. It seems the gorilla died, and they needed someone to wear a gorilla suit and sit in the cage until the new one arrived. The man took the job, and after a few hours of just sitting, he decided to have some fun. He started jumping around and yelling and swinging on a vine that was in the cage.

The people loved it, so he jumped harder, yelled louder and swung higher. This time though, the vine broke mid swing and he land flat on his back in the next cage, which belonged to the lion. The man panicked! The lion was just inches away and looking very hungry. He started to scream for help, but the lion knocked him flat and jumped on his chest. The man thought this was the end, but just then the lion whispered, "Cork it or we'll both get fired!"

He looked like an ape, acted like an ape, yelled like an ape, but when it came right down to it he wasn't an ape. His actions eventually gave him away. Just like our actions sometimes give us away. When the mask is stripped away, what lies behind it? A true relationship with Jesus, or just actions with no substance? Don't get caught in the wrong cage – if you're a child of God, act like it, because in the end, you won't be fooling anybody.

Day 14 Study Questions –

**How can the way a person acts tell you about what they believe?
How can the way you act tell others about your relationship with
God?**

**Give some examples of the type of things a worldly person thinks
about. What are some examples of what a godly person thinks
about?**

**Verse 19 is speaking about those without Christ, while verse 21 gives
some ideas of what it will be like for us in heaven. What do you think
will be the difference between earthly bodies and heavenly bodies?
What does it mean for us right now to be citizens of heaven?**

"Rejoice in the Lord always!"

Day 15 – Read Philippians 4:1-5

Imagine you have a very important job and a lot of people depend on your performance at work. You do your job very well, and you are rewarded for it by your boss, your co-workers and your family.

Then one day while you are sitting at your desk doing your job, the police come and arrest you. The charges? Doing what you do best. Doing the one thing in life that brings you joy and peace. Fulfilling your calling in life. The charges are doing your job and doing it well. The sentence is death.

Ridiculous? It happened to Paul, and still his word to us is rejoice in all things. In fact, it is such an important thing to do as a Christian that Paul tells us twice in the same breath to rejoice.

When things don't go your way, rejoice! When living gets hard, rejoice! When the world gets you down, rejoice! Lift up your voice and sing of your love for God and give thanks for His blessings which you do not deserve! Shout from the rooftops that Jesus is Lord and that His love for you brought Him suffering and death, but that He rose again so that you could live!

If you can praise God in all of life's circumstances, then those circumstances become blessings. Just give it a try – rejoice!

Day 15 Study Questions –

Is it possible to rejoice in the Lord *always*? If yes, do you? If you don't why not? If it's not possible, what do you think Paul means?

List some of the things you do that are evidence of a joyful spirit.

What impact does being joyful have on us emotionally, spiritually and physically?

How do you think being joyful impacts our relationship with others and with God?

"Do not be anxious about anything"

Day 16 – Read Philippians 4:6-9

The key to less worry is more prayer. The more you pray the less you worry about the things this life throws at you. We all have moments of worry, but when we dwell in worry-land it becomes an issue that will cause pain and suffering instead of joy and peace. Prayer is the key to changing your point of view.

Consider two brothers who were hired to thin out the wolf population in a national park. The pay was \$150 for every wolf captured alive. After several exhausting, fruitless days of labor, the men fall asleep under the stars. A few hours later, the first brother awoke to find that they were surrounded by wolves! Eyes flaming, teeth bared, and a deep throaty growl was all it took to let him know they were in trouble. He shook his brother awake in a panic. The brother took a look around, smiled and stated, "We're going to be rich!"

It would have been easy for the brother to panic, but it would not have been profitable. As Christians it is always profitable to pray. Prayer may not cure the disease, pay the bills or find us a job, but it will ease a troubled heart and shift the focus from us to God, and the more we focus on God, the better off we will be. Don't worry – pray instead and expect God to move in your life. He hears you, but not if you don't call out to Him.

Day 16 Study Questions –

List a few things below that can be accomplished by worrying. How often do you worry?

What do you think worrying does to us emotionally, spiritually and physically?

List a few things below that can be accomplished by praying. How often do you pray? How often are your prayers answered?

Read verse 8 again. List some ways you dwell on these things. What is the end result of dwelling on godly things?

"I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances"

Day 17 – Read Philippians 4:10-14

Self-sufficiency. That's what Paul is writing about in these verses. Think about a baby taking his first steps, or a teenager getting her driver's license, or a young person graduating from college. These are all landmark events in a person's life. They are all graduations of a sort – events that a person must pass through in order to get to the next stage of life.

These events represent self-sufficiency. They are all things that have to be done without the help of others – all on our own. There is a vast difference, though, between this type of self-sufficiency and what Paul was describing in these verses.

The self-sufficient independence Paul felt came to him as a result of complete dependence upon Jesus Christ in all things. As a follower of Christ, he was in need of nothing – everything he needed was provided for him.

Paul's contentment was a matter of faith through his relationship with the Lord rather than a matter of pride based on his accomplishments in life. We all accomplish much in life but only a relationship with Jesus can make life's accomplishments worthwhile. Contentment comes not through what you do, but through who you know.

Day 17 Study Questions –

What does Paul mean when he says that he has *learned* to be content in all circumstances?

List some things you have accomplished solely because of your relationship with Jesus. How has your faith enabled you to do these things? Why do you think you would not have been able to do them on your own?

Do you know anybody who is content outside of a relationship with Jesus? What is the secret to contentment in trying times?

What do you think Paul meant when he said I can do all things?

"A fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God"

Day 18 – Read Philippians 4:15-23

In the Old Testament, when a sacrifice was made, the people understood that the fragrance of the offering would reach all the way up to the heavens and that the smell would actually be pleasing to God.

For us, this means that how we serve and give to God must be the best we have to offer. Just like an old or diseased animal would not be an acceptable sacrifice to God, anything from us that is less than our best is equally unacceptable.

Paul rejoices that this attitude is present in the Philippian church. They may not have had much, but what they did have they shared freely. Paul recognized the sacrifice they made for him and he equated their giving spirit with the humble attitude of one making an offering before God.

The message for people today is that God will bless those people who can give sacrificially, and those who can rely on Him humbly. The prideful or greedy need not apply.

This idea sums up Paul's letter to the Philippians – the testimony of what God can do for us and through us is we will humbly rely on Him for all things.

Day 18 Study Questions –

How do you think the Philippians' gift to Paul is like an offering to God? What have you been willing to sacrifice because of your relationship with God?

What makes an offering acceptable or unacceptable to God?

In verse 17, what does Paul mean when he said he is seeking the fruit being added to their account?

What did Paul mean in verse 18 when he said he had received everything in full?

Day 19 – review chapters 1 and 2 of Philippians. Use the space below to write out anything you may have questions about or anything God may be showing you that you need to do, or any changes you need to make in your life.

Day 20 – review chapters 3 and 4 of Philippians. Use the space below to write out anything you may have questions about or anything God may be showing you that you need to do or any changes you need to make in your life.

Small group session 1

Begin the time with prayer asking if there are any special concerns that the group should be aware of.

Go over the introduction, background and features of the book and give the group a few minutes to look through the material.

Ask group members to imagine what it would be like to live in the early days of the church. It was an exciting time, and a dangerous time to be a Christian. The Jews didn't like Christians and the Romans weren't big fans either. Between the two, over the first 300 years of the Christian church, there was a lot of persecution.

Ask the group if any of them have ever suffered persecution. Allow time for everyone to share. Be aware that there may be new believers or people who have not begun a relationship with Christ in the group.

Briefly share your struggles and victories as a follower of Christ. Reiterate that the focus of the study is learning to be joyful no matter what the circumstance.

Remind the group that the study is for 4 weeks. Lead in a time of commitment, asking if there are any that need to renew their commitment to Christ, or take the first steps toward making a commitment to follow Him.

Small group session 2

Begin the session with a time of prayer. If you like, have each individual pray, or allow a time of silent prayer then close.

Review some of the themes in the weeks reading – thankfulness, love, struggles, sacrifice, devotion. Ask the group how they have experienced any of these in their lives.

Take some time to allow each person to share what they learned from the readings.

Pick several of the questions from the daily readings and allow the group to comment on how they answered. Be sensitive to what you are hearing and be aware you will have to lead the discussion by keeping the group on topic. Be mindful of the feelings of those who speak – it's not easy for most people to talk in a group setting.

Keep in mind that the focus is on the joy found in Christ. Be prepared to answer some hard questions.

Close the session by asking the group to bow their heads and consider their own actions and reactions. How do they respond to the hard times in life? What can they do rely on Christ when life doesn't turn out the way they thought it would?

Pray, thanking God for your time together and for each group member.

Small group session 3

Begin the time with prayer. Give each individual an opportunity to pray. Be sensitive to those who do not wish to pray.

Hand out slips of paper or 3x5 cards and a pen to each person. Give them a few minutes to write down the one thing that stood out for each of them from the week's reading.

Collect the papers, fold them up and have people draw them from a hat. If they get their own, allow them to draw again. Let each person read the paper they drew and then discuss what was written as a group.

Be aware that some of the people may still be new to the group, or to ideas about Christianity. You will have to lead the discussion and help the group to keep on target.

Pick several questions from each reading to go over as a group. Allow time for each person to respond.

Ask, "What did Paul teach about humility and being like Christ? How can we learn to be more humble and Christlike – how can we learn to be servants?"

Be aware of opportunities to serve in the community by this time. Have a specific date, place and time by the day of this session. Close in prayer, thanking God for His love and compassion toward us.

Small group session 4

Begin by asking each person to state in one phrase what they got out of the readings last week.

Pray thanking God for showing these things to you all, and asking for guidance for the rest of the time together.

Play a modified version of pin the tail on the donkey. Blindfold one person, and chose another to be the donkey. The thing is, the donkey should move as quietly as possible each time the person gets close.

Say something like this – sometimes life is difficult, and even more so if things are out of focus for you, or if you don't know where you're headed. The point this last week was our focus should be on Christ. When it is, everything is clear – where we are headed, where He is leading us, what we are supposed to do. What can you do to remain focused on Christ?"

Give each person a chance to respond, then go through some of the discussion questions from the readings. Pay attention to those who are beginning to stand out as leaders in the discussion. You may want to plan to spend time with these individuals one on one as a mentor.

Ask if there is anything so far that is difficult to understand, and be aware you may have to spend time teaching new believers some basics. Close by praying for each member by name, thanking God for their presence and his design for them.

Small group session 5

This is the last session, so plan a small party and have each person volunteer to bring something for the group.

Begin the session in prayer, then ask each person to list a few things they tend to worry about. If you're able, write each item down on a whiteboard. Take a few minutes to discuss why these things are such a struggle for people.

Say something like, "What Paul is saying in these verses is, we all tend to worry about the same things, but God is in control of it all. If we give Him the control in these areas, in return His gift to us is contentment."

Give each person an opportunity to describe what contentment would be like for them. Remind them that as followers of Christ, His gift to us is contentment, but we first have to give up control to Him.

Take some time to go through a few of the discussion questions and ask if anyone has anything they are having trouble understanding, or if they learned something through the study or have made a new commitment they want to share with the group.

If you have not done your group project yet, remind them of the date/time.

Close in prayer – thanking God for giving us His word, His peace, His contentment, and for drawing us closer to Him.