

Joying Like Jesus

PHILIPPIANS

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The Doctrinal Basis of Strong Curriculum

A more detailed statement with references is available upon request.

- The verbal, plenary inspiration of the Scriptures
- Only one true God
- The Trinity of the Godhead
- The Holy Spirit and His ministry
- The personality of Satan
- The Genesis account of creation
- Original sin and the fall of man
- The virgin birth of Christ
- Salvation through faith in the shed blood of Christ
- The bodily resurrection and priesthood of Christ
- Grace and the new birth
- Justification by faith
- Sanctification of the believer
- The security of the believer
- The church
- The ordinances of the local church: baptism by immersion and the Lord's Supper
- Biblical separation—ecclesiastical and personal
- Obedience to civil government
- The place of Israel
- The pretribulation rapture of the church
- The premillennial return of Christ
- The millennial reign of Christ
- Eternal glory in Heaven for the righteous
- Eternal torment in Hell for the wicked

Alex Bauman, editor

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introduction

This study addresses Paul's letter to the Philippians. The course recognizes Paul's emphasis on thinking and acting like Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit. You will be challenged to adopt the mind of Christ so you might know His joy and contentment.

This study is part of the Strong Adults curriculum. Strong Curriculum builds stronger churches by teaching all Scripture to produce spiritually mature believers who measure up to the stature of Christ. The curriculum addresses 7 BuildUP aims modeled after Jesus' teaching. Each session in this course identifies one of the following aims.

-  BELIEVE THE GOSPEL. Jesus taught His students to trust in Him alone for salvation and to share the gospel.
-  UNDERSTAND BIBLICAL ETHICS. Jesus instructed His students to live according to moral values.
-  INTERNALIZE GODLINESS. Jesus taught His followers to have godly hearts rather than merely acting godly.
-  LEARN DOCTRINE. Jesus taught the truth and identified doctrine as essential for spiritual growth.
-  DEVELOP LIFE SKILLS. Jesus taught His followers to meet life's challenges in ways that honored and glorified God.
-  UPLIFT OTHERS. Jesus taught His followers to serve God by humbly and sacrificially serving others.
-  PREPARE TO SERVE. Jesus prepared His followers to serve in the context of local churches.

joyful connections

SCRIPTURE FOCUS

Acts 16:6–40; Philippians 1:1–8

BUILDUP THEME



UPLIFT OTHERS

God directs believers to make personal connections that give their lives purpose and joy.

MEMORY VERSE

Philippians 1:8

Seeing the luxuries the very wealthy or insanely talented get to enjoy can make us envious and perhaps even forlorn about our own lives. We might conclude we could never be truly happy in our present circumstances. The apostle Paul didn't sail on mega yachts or stay in five-star hotels while on his mission trips. Yet he had a joying-like-Jesus kind of life. He was happy and content. This study presents his relationships with others and with Christ, the keys to his joyous life.

1. What do you think "joying like Jesus" means?
2. Suppose someone said they joyed like you. What might that look like?

BIBLE STUDY

Paul wrote Philippians to the church in Philippi, which was located in the region of Macedonia. Paul first visited the Roman colony about ten years earlier when he traveled there on his second missionary journey.

Following God to Places

Before traveling to Philippi, Paul and Silas visited the churches Paul had started during his first missionary journey. Along the way, a young man named Timothy joined them (Acts 16:1–3). All was going as planned before the Holy Spirit forbade Paul and his companions to preach the gospel in Asia and Bithynia. God used a vision to direct them to Macedonia (16:6–8).

Paul and Silas traveled with God's purpose in mind because they were on a missionary journey. That God overtly led them to go over to Macedonia to enter Europe with the gospel for the first time makes sense. That God leads your church's missionaries to travel overseas and enter towns and villages makes sense too. But should you think God doesn't care so much about where *you* end up?

3. Read Acts 16:9. Does God lead believers to places (cities, houses, workplaces, groups) today? Explain.

4. Why are you where you are? Does God top your list of reasons?

No matter your location or vocation, gospel work is your primary work. God commissioned all believers to spread the gospel. Instead of saying, "I'll serve God wherever I go," you should say, "I'll serve God wherever He leads me."

5. What is the difference between serving God where you go and serving God where He leads?

6. How can you be sure you are following God when you make decisions to move to a new neighborhood, city, state, or country?

Following God to Religious People

Once Paul knew where to go, he turned his focus to individuals in Philippi. Luke recorded three specific examples of people to whom Paul went. One encounter was the result of Paul's God-given common sense while the other two were clearly the result of God's leading through unexpected circumstances.

Philippi apparently had no synagogue, meaning the number of people practicing Judaism in the city must have been few. But Paul knew any Jewish activity would happen at the nearest river on the evening of the Sabbath. So that's where he took his team (Acts 16:11–13).

The religious women Paul and Silas encountered must have understood the futility of pagan religion. They sought something else and must have been introduced to the God of Judaism. In their group was a woman named Lydia, a seller of purple cloth. She settled in Philippi after coming from Thyatira in Asia, one of the regions into which God had forbid the missionaries to enter just days earlier.

Of all the women who talked with Paul and Silas, it appears only Lydia responded to the gospel. She believed and then was instrumental in leading her household to the Lord (Acts 16:14, 15). Lydia's former religion and recognition of God were commendable, but the religious are just as lost as the pagans.

7. Why might believers be tempted to ignore the spiritual needs of those who are religious but lost?

God won't accept well-meaning religious unbelievers into His presence in eternity. Consider the religious but lost in your life. Ask God for the grace to help them see their need for salvation.

Following God to Desperate People

Paul and Silas went throughout Philippi preaching the gospel. When a possessed girl started following them and proclaiming them as God's servants and the declarers of salvation, they became annoyed. The girl had a reputation of being controlled by a divining spirit. But Paul knew her predictions were empowered by an evil spirit. The demon didn't use her verbal testimony to encourage people to believe in the gospel but to cause them to question its validity. The evil spirit sullied Paul's preaching by endorsing him and his message.

The girl following Paul and Silas was a toxic endorsement. Her presence hurt Paul's message and damaged his credibility because it connected him with the demonic power controlling the girl. No doubt Paul and Silas had to repeatedly tell their audience, "She's not with us." When the annoyance reached a tipping point, Paul turned to the girl and dealt with the problem (Acts 16:18).

What happened to the slave girl after being delivered from her demon possession? Did she trust in Christ as her Savior? We don't know. Luke never mentions her again and the missionaries don't seem to engage her. Instead, Luke turns to a series of events that steer the reader to consider God's reason for her deliverance.

The slave girl's owners were furious. They had made a lot of money from the girl's fortune-telling. So they appealed to the thoroughly pagan population by accusing the missionaries of putting the crowd in danger. The Philippians feared their pagan gods as well as Rome. The local magistrates, appointed by Rome to keep the city loyal, tore their robes at the thought of trouble. They had the missionaries beaten and then held them in stocks in the grimmest and darkest part of the prison. By their actions, they communicated their intolerance of all potential threats to Rome's dominance in Philippi (Acts 16:19–24).

God had His own reason for working through a demon-possessed girl, slave-owning opportunists, and Roman-appointed magistrates to incarcerate Paul and Silas. In that prison were other people considered threats to Rome. Paul and Silas brought them light and hope in a place of darkness and despair. The prisoners listened to the missionaries' prayers and hymns with rapt attention (Acts 16:25). They heard a message of true deliverance from guilt and shame—a deliverance that for Paul and Silas brought true joy despite their circumstances. God directed Paul and Silas to deliver their message of hope to their "captive" audience.

8. Read Acts 16:25. How would you expect someone to respond to being unjustly beaten and incarcerated?

The Romans didn't normally sentence people to spend time in prison. Those in prison were either condemned and awaiting their punishment or soon to be condemned. Furthermore, they were likely not Roman citizens and were therefore at the mercy of the magistrates. For good reason, then, the prisoners listened intently to the missionaries' message of forgiveness and freedom.

9. In what sense is every unbeliever condemned? (See John 3:17, 18.)

God directed Paul and Silas to the incarcerated and condemned—the most desperate to hear the gospel.

10. How has God directed you to encounter desperate people? How did you respond to the circumstances?

Paul and Silas understood that to whom God had led them was far more important than how God had led them. They resisted the urge to whine about the journey into the prison and carried out God's will instead. Their ministry had a tremendous impact. The prisoners stayed with Paul and Silas when they had a chance to flee (Acts 16:28).

Following God to Troubled People

The prisoners' chance to flee came when God caused an earthquake and supernaturally loosed all their chains. When the jailer awoke, he panicked. Thinking the prisoners had fled, he drew his sword to kill himself. Paul called out to him to stop, for the prisoners were all still there (Acts 16:26–28).

The missionaries realized that God hadn't loosed their chains and opened the doors so they could escape the prison. They sat and wait-

ed for the “aftershock.” For the God Who shook the jail also shook the jailer. The jailer grabbed a light and entered the deepest part of the prison to bring out Paul and Silas. Trembling, he brought them out and asked the missionaries how to be freed from his captivity to sin.

11. Read Acts 16:30. What could the jailer learn from the missionaries’ refusal to flee?

Paul and Silas told the man to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. The jailer and his household eagerly placed their faith in Jesus as Savior (16:29–32).

12. To what “trembling” unbelievers has God led you?

13. What were the circumstances that led you to them? How did you respond to those circumstances?

The next day, Paul and Silas revealed their Roman citizenship, meaning they had been beaten and imprisoned illegally. The magistrates were more than happy to release them. The missionaries returned to Lydia’s house to strengthen the believers before moving on (16:33–40).

God led Paul and Silas to the religious, the desperate, and the troubled. In each case the missionaries trusted God and shared the gospel without hesitation. The missionaries looked for ways to help people even though the inroads into the unbelievers’ lives were sometimes paved with hardships and even pain.

Keeping Believers in Our Thoughts

Paul wrote to the Philippians about ten years after he founded their church and about five years after his last visit to the city.

Paul's "remembrance" of the Philippians wasn't an occasional reminiscence but an intentional recollection (Phil. 1:3). "Remembrance" means "mention." Paul thought of the Philippians believers purposefully and thankfully. He wanted them to know he was glad he had led them to Christ and strengthened them spiritually. He identified them as the key to reaching their world with the gospel.

14. Read Philippians 1:1–3. Do you purposefully think about fellow believers? What is your response? Do you have jealousy, hatred, and regret or thankfulness, concern, and joy?

15. What might believers reveal about themselves by rehearsing how other believers have hurt them?

Keeping Believers in Our Prayers

When Paul thought about the Philippians, he naturally began to pray for them.

16. Read Philippians 1:4–6. What characterized Paul's requests for the Philippians?

God's faithfulness is a given. He stands ready to help believers grow, and He will glorify all believers at Christ's return. It was for the Philippians' fellowship, or partnership, in the gospel that Paul prayed. The Christian life isn't an every-man-for-himself endeavor. Paul believed the Philippians needed his prayers if they were to succeed in carrying out the Great Commission in Philippi and beyond. Paul was right. Keeping fellow believers in our prayers isn't just nice, it is necessary if they are to grow in the Lord and do His will.

Keeping Believers in Our Hearts

Paul went on to write that thinking of and praying for the Philippians was part of his duty as their fellow believer (Phil. 1:7). It was his moral obligation before God. So having thoughts and prayers toward our fellow believers isn't just something we could do if we felt like it; it is something we must do. Being in each other's thoughts and prayers is a vital part of our lives and ministries.

17. Read Philippians 1:7. When have you experienced God's grace through the prayers of your fellow believers?

Beyond Paul's moral obligation to pray for the Philippians was his heartfelt love for them. He gladly performed his duty because he cared for them. The Philippians felt the same for Paul. While he confirmed and defended the gospel in his testimony before Roman officials, the Philippians upheld him with their thoughts and prayers, which became the avenue for God's sustaining and empowering grace in Paul's life.

To be abundantly clear, Paul called on God as his witness to his affection for the Philippians (Phil. 1:8). He even added that his affection for them came from Christ and was therefore modeled after Christ's type of affection.

18. Read Philippians 1:8. What are some characteristics of Christ's affection for others?

There was nothing fake or superficial about Paul's love for the Philippians. We are to have the same Christ-originating, God-verifying love for others.

SESSION APPLICATION

19. What are your ambitions? To buy a bigger house? Get a better job? Retire in a dream location?

20. How does God fit into your planning? How should He fit into your planning?

21. Name three people to whom God has led you. How have you and how will you minister to those people?

22. What does your prayer list reveal about your love for your fellow believers? Make a prayer list below and use it this week.