



BOOK L · NEW TESTAMENT · EPISTLE

# The Book of Philippians

Joy, Humility, and the Mind of Christ

*“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.”*

— Philippians 4:4–5

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# PHILIPPIANS

## *Joy in Chains*



**JOY**  
PHIL 1:4; 4:4



**HUMILITY**  
PHIL 2:3-8



**CONTENTMENT**  
PHIL 4:11-13



**CITIZENSHIP**  
PHIL 3:20; 4:20

*"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me"*  
— Phil 4:13



WRITTEN c. AD 61-62



ROMAN PRISON



CHURCH AT PHILIPPII

Full-page visual overview — four chapters, key themes, and structural flow at a glance

## CHAPTER-BY-CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Philippians is the most joyful letter in the New Testament — written from prison. In four compact chapters, Paul addresses joy, humility, spiritual maturity, and contentment. The letter is deeply personal, warmly affectionate, and theologically profound. Its central invitation is to have "the same mindset as Christ Jesus."

### SECTION 1

#### Philippians 1 PARTNERSHIP IN THE GOSPEL — JOY IN CHAINS



- 1:1–11** Paul opens with warm thanksgiving for the Philippians' 'partnership in the gospel from the first day until now' (1:5). The letter is saturated with joy — the word appears 16 times in four chapters. Paul writes from prison, yet his dominant emotion is gratitude.
- 1:12–26** Paul's imprisonment has actually 'served to advance the gospel' (1:12) — the whole palace guard has heard about Christ. He faces the possibility of death with equanimity: 'For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain' (1:21). A remarkable statement from a man in chains.
- 1:27–30** Paul urges the Philippians to 'stand firm in one spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel.' Suffering is not a sign of God's abandonment — it is a gift: 'It has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him' (1:29).

### SECTION 2

#### Philippians 2 THE MIND OF CHRIST — HUMILITY AND OBEDIENCE



- 2:1–11** The Carmen Christi (Christ Hymn) — possibly the earliest Christian hymn. Christ, 'being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing' (2:6–7). The incarnation is the supreme model of humility.
- 2:12–18** 'Work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose' (2:12–13). Human effort and divine sovereignty are held together in a single sentence. Paul calls them to 'shine like stars' in a crooked generation.
- 2:19–30** Paul commends Timothy and Epaphroditus as living examples of the selfless service he has described. Epaphroditus 'almost died for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up for the help you yourselves could not give me' (2:30). Theology becomes biography.

### SECTION 3

#### Philippians 3 KNOWING CHRIST — PRESSING TOWARD THE GOAL



- 3:1–11** Paul lists his impressive religious credentials — circumcision, tribe of Benjamin, Pharisee, blameless — then declares them 'garbage' compared to knowing Christ (3:8). The Greek word is stronger: 'dung.' His entire religious resume is worthless apart from 'the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith' (3:9).
- 3:12–16** 'Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me' (3:12). Paul — the apostle, the church planter, the theologian — still considers himself a work in progress. Spiritual maturity includes knowing how far you still have to go.

**3:17–21**

Paul warns against those whose 'god is their stomach' and whose 'mind is set on earthly things' (3:19). In contrast, 'our citizenship is in heaven' (3:20) — a politically charged statement in a Roman colony like Philippi, where Roman citizenship was a source of pride.

SECTION 4

**Philippians 4** THE PEACE OF GOD — CONTENTMENT IN ALL CIRCUMSTANCES



**4:1–9**

'Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus' (4:6–7). The antidote to anxiety is not positive thinking but prayerful thanksgiving.

**4:10–13**

'I have learned, in whatever state I am, to be content' (4:11). Contentment is not a personality trait — it is a learned discipline. 'I can do all this through him who gives me strength' (4:13) — one of the most quoted verses in the Bible, and one of the most misunderstood. Context: Paul is talking about contentment in poverty and abundance, not athletic achievement.

**4:14–23**

Paul closes by thanking the Philippians for their financial support — the only church he accepted money from. 'Not that I desire your gifts; what I desire is that more be credited to your account' (4:17). Generosity benefits the giver. The letter ends with grace: 'The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.'

## KEY THEMES

*Philippians distills four transformative themes — joy as conviction, Christ's self-emptying humility, the surpassing worth of knowing Christ, and the learned secret of contentment.*

### 01 JOY AS A THEOLOGICAL CONVICTION



# 01

**Joy** appears 16 times in Philippians — more per verse than any other New Testament letter. What makes this remarkable is the context: Paul writes from **prison**, facing possible execution, dealing with internal church conflict (4:2), and aware of opponents who preach Christ 'out of selfish ambition' (1:17). This is not the **joy** of favorable **circumstances**. It is the **joy** of a man who has found something that cannot be taken away: 'Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: **Rejoice!**' (4:4). The repetition is not enthusiasm — it is a **command**.

#### MODERN APPLICATION

Joy in Philippians is not a feeling to be cultivated but a choice to be made. It flows from fixing attention on what is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, and admirable (4:8). What would it look like to practice this kind of intentional, directed joy in your current circumstances?

*"Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!" — Philippians 4:4*

### 02 THE KENOSIS — CHRIST'S SELF-EMPTYING HUMILITY



# 02

Philippians 2:5–11 contains one of the most theologically dense passages in the New Testament. Christ, 'being in very nature God' (the Greek *morphe theou* — the very form of God), 'did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage.' The word translated 'emptied himself' (*ekenosen*) gives us the theological term **kenosis**. Christ laid aside not His divine nature but the independent exercise of His divine prerogatives — taking on human flesh, human limitation, and ultimately human death. 'Even death on a **cross!**' The exclamation is Paul's own — the **cross** was the most shameful death imaginable in the Roman world.

#### MODERN APPLICATION

The Christ Hymn is introduced as the model for Christian community: 'In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus' (2:5). Where in your relationships are you holding onto status, rights, or recognition that Christ would have you release?

*"He made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness." — Philippians 2:7*

### 03 KNOWING CHRIST — THE SURPASSING WORTH

# 03



In Philippians 3, Paul performs a radical reevaluation of his entire life. He lists **credentials** that would have made him the envy of any first-century Jew: circumcised on the eighth day, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews, a Pharisee, zealous, blameless. Then he declares them all 'loss' — and uses a stronger word: skubala, which means **dung** or rubbish. The goal is not religious achievement but relational knowledge: 'that I may know him and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings' (3:10). **Knowing** Christ is not intellectual assent — it is participatory union.

#### MODERN APPLICATION

Paul's reevaluation challenges us to examine what we are trusting in for our standing before God and others. What credentials, achievements, or religious performances are you tempted to rely on rather than the righteousness that comes through faith in Christ?

*"I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord." — Philippians 3:8*

### 04 CONTENTMENT — THE LEARNED SECRET

# 04



Philippians 4:11–13 contains one of Paul's most personal disclosures: 'I have **learned**, in whatever state I am, to be content.' The word 'learned' (emathon) is significant — **contentment** is not a gift some people have and others don't. It is a discipline acquired through practice. Paul has been through abundance and need, freedom and imprisonment, honor and shame. In all of it, he has discovered a secret: 'I can do all this through him who gives me **strength**' (4:13). The 'all this' refers specifically to **contentment** in any circumstance — not to unlimited achievement. This is one of the most misapplied verses in the Bible.

#### MODERN APPLICATION

Contentment is not passive resignation — it is active trust. It says: 'What I have is enough, because the One who gives me strength is enough.' In what area of your life are you most tempted toward discontentment? What would it look like to practice contentment there this week?

*"I have learned, in whatever state I am, to be content." — Philippians 4:11*

## SYMBOLISM & IMAGERY

*Philippians uses four powerful symbols — the prison, Roman citizenship, the mind, and the race — to communicate its theology of joy, identity, and perseverance.*



## THE PRISON

SYMBOL 01

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Paul wrote Philippians from **prison** — most likely Rome, though Ephesus and Caesarea are also proposed. Roman imprisonment was not the isolated cell of modern **prisons**; Paul would have been chained to a guard, with limited movement but some ability to receive visitors and dictate letters. The 'whole **palace guard**' refers to the Praetorian Guard — the elite soldiers who rotated through guard duty with Paul.

### THEOLOGICAL MEANING

The prison becomes a symbol of the **paradox** at the heart of Philippians: the most joyful letter in the New Testament is written from the most constrained circumstances. Paul's imprisonment 'has served to **advance the gospel**' — God uses limitation for His purposes. The prison challenges our assumption that effective ministry requires favorable circumstances.



## ROMAN CITIZENSHIP

SYMBOL 02

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Philippi was a Roman colony — its citizens held **Roman citizenship** and were intensely proud of it. Roman citizenship conferred legal rights, social status, and military protection. It was not easily obtained and was deeply valued. Paul himself was a Roman citizen, which he used strategically throughout his ministry.

### THEOLOGICAL MEANING

Against this background, Paul's declaration in 3:20 — 'our **citizenship is in heaven**' — was politically and socially provocative. He is not dismissing earthly citizenship but relativizing it. The Philippians' ultimate allegiance, **identity**, and security belong to a different city. This shapes how they live as '**resident aliens**' in Roman Philippi — engaged in the world but not defined by it.



## THE MIND (PHRONEIN)

SYMBOL 03

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Greek word **phronein** appears 10 times in Philippians — more than in any other Pauline letter. In the ancient world, the 'mind' was not merely the intellect but the whole orientation of a person — their values, desires, and direction of life.

### THEOLOGICAL MEANING

Paul's repeated use of phronein reveals his conviction that **transformation** begins in the mind. 'Have the same mindset as Christ Jesus'. 'Whatever is true... think about such things'. The **renewal of the mind** is not a one-time event but a continuous practice of directing **attention** toward what is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, and admirable. The mind shapes the life.



# THE RACE

SYMBOL 04

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In Philippians 3:12–14, Paul uses the imagery of a runner in a **race**: 'I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.' Athletic imagery was common in Paul's letters and would have been immediately understood in a Greco-Roman culture saturated with athletic competition.

## THEOLOGICAL MEANING

The race metaphor captures the tension between what has been secured and what is still being pursued. Paul is not running to earn salvation — he is running because he has been 'taken hold of by Christ Jesus'. The **prize** is not a wreath that fades but the '**upward call** of God in Christ Jesus.' The Christian life is not a sprint but a long-distance race that requires sustained focus and **forward momentum**.

### SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

*These 8 questions are designed for a 60–90 minute small group session. Begin with the icebreaker, then work through observation, interpretation, and application questions. Close with the prayer prompt.*

#### ICEBREAKER

**Think of a time when you experienced genuine joy in a difficult circumstance. What made that possible? How did it differ from ordinary happiness?**

..... 01

#### OBSERVATION

**Read Philippians 2:5–11 aloud slowly. What specific actions does Paul describe Christ taking? What does each action cost Him? What does each action accomplish?**

Leader's Note:

*The progression is deliberate: existing in God's form → not grasping → emptying → taking servant form → becoming human → humbling → obedient → to death → on a cross. Each step is a further descent.*

..... 02

#### OBSERVATION

**Count how many times the words 'joy,' 'rejoice,' or 'glad' appear in Philippians. What does the frequency of these words tell us about Paul's emotional state — and his theology?**

..... 03

**INTERPRETATION**

In Philippians 3:8, Paul calls his religious credentials 'garbage' (or 'dung') compared to knowing Christ. What is he saying about the relationship between religious achievement and genuine faith? How does this challenge common assumptions about spiritual maturity?

04

**INTERPRETATION**

Philippians 4:13 ('I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me') is one of the most quoted — and misquoted — verses in the Bible. Read it in context (4:10–13). What is Paul actually saying he can do? How does context change the meaning?

**Leader's Note:**

*Leader's Note: Context is everything. Paul is talking about contentment in poverty and abundance — not athletic achievement or career success. This is a verse about sufficiency, not unlimited capability.*

05

**APPLICATION**

Paul says contentment is 'learned' (4:11) — it is a discipline, not a personality trait. What practices or habits help you cultivate contentment? What circumstances most challenge your contentment?

06

**APPLICATION**

Philippians 4:6–7 offers a specific practice for anxiety: 'in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.' What is one specific anxiety you are carrying right now? How would it look to apply this practice to it this week?

07

**PRAYER PROMPT**

Close by reading Philippians 4:4–7 together. Have each person share one thing they are anxious about and one thing they are grateful for. Then pray for one another, presenting these requests to God with thanksgiving.

08

## KEY CHARACTERS

### Paul

The apostle who planted the church at Philippi on his second missionary journey (Acts 16). He writes from prison — possibly Rome — with remarkable warmth and joy. His relationship with the Philippian church is



### Epaphroditus

The Philippians' messenger who brought their financial gift to Paul and stayed to serve him. He became seriously ill — 'almost died for the work of Christ' (2:30) — and was distressed that the



### Timothy

Paul's closest co-worker, commended as one who 'genuinely cares for your welfare' and who has 'proved himself' by serving with Paul 'like a son with his father' (2:20–22). In a letter about selfless service



### Euodia & Syntyche

Two women in the Philippian church who are in conflict with each other — the only named conflict in the letter. Paul urges them to 'be of the same mind in the Lord' (4:2) and asks a 'true companion' to help



## PRACTICAL APPLICATION — LIVING IT OUT TODAY



### Practice the Discipline of Joy

Joy in Philippians is a command, not a feeling. This week, practice Philippians 4:8: identify one true, noble, right, pure, lovely, or admirable thing each day and deliberately direct your attention toward it. Keep a simple log.



### Identify Your Credentials and Release Them

Paul called his religious resume 'garbage' compared to knowing Christ. Make a list of the achievements, credentials, or performances you tend to rely on for your sense of worth. Then pray through Philippians 3:7–9, releasing each one.



### Replace Anxiety with Prayerful Thanksgiving

Philippians 4:6–7 offers a specific practice: take each anxiety to God with thanksgiving. This week, when you notice anxiety rising, pause and name three things you are grateful for before presenting your request to God.



### Serve One Person with the Mind of Christ

Philippians 2:3–4 says: 'Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit... look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of the others.' Identify one person this week whose interests you will prioritize over your own — and do it without recognition.

# PHILIPPIANS

## My Study Journal



### ① TODAY'S PASSAGE

Three horizontal lines for writing the passage.

### ② WHAT I OBSERVED

Five horizontal lines for writing observations.

### ③ KEY VERSE

A scroll-shaped frame containing two horizontal lines for writing the key verse.

### ④ HOW I WILL APPLY THIS



Three horizontal lines for writing the application.

### ⑤ PRAYER RESPONSE



Three horizontal lines for writing the prayer response.



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*“Rejoice in the Lord always!”*

*— Philippians 4:4*