

A STUDY ON

PHILIPPIANS

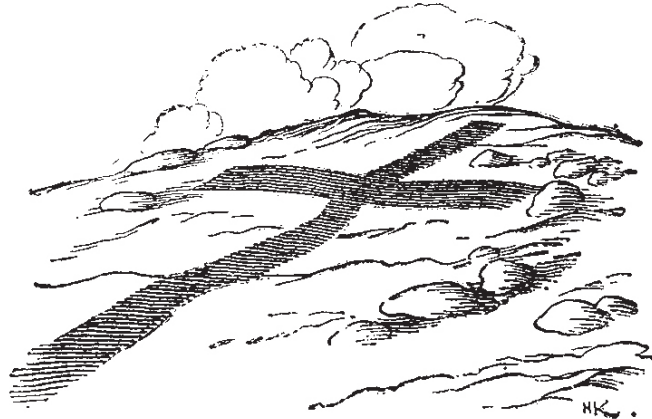
INTRODUCTION

The Letter to the Philippians was written by Apostle Paul. It was addressed to the church in Philippi. This letter is one of Paul's prison epistles, written during his imprisonment in Rome.

The church at Philippi was Paul's "joy and crown" (4:1) because they gave him the least trouble, perhaps no trouble at all. Therefore, Paul's letter to them brims with expressions of gratitude, affection, and love. It is the most personal of Paul's letters. Almost every sentence allows us to see the pastoral heart and mind of Paul. Although Apostle Paul was imprisoned, the letter shouts triumph, with words such as "joy" and "rejoice" appearing frequently (Philippians 1:4, 18, 25, 26; 2:2, 28; 3:1, 4:1, 4, 10).

The birth of the church in Philippi took place during Paul's second missionary journey. The Holy Spirit led Paul to Philippi (**Acts 16**), where a business woman called Lydia and her family received Jesus as their Lord. Later, Paul was imprisoned for casting an evil spirit out of a slave girl. While he was still in prison, God worked miracles to touch the lives of the jailor and his family. They believed in Christ and thus the early church grew into a community for Jesus. This letter was written after many years when the church was well established with overseers and elders (1:1).

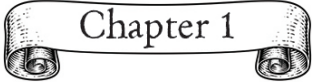
THE BIG IDEA OF PHILIPPIANS



Apostle Paul's purpose in writing the letter to Philippians is for every believer to possess a strong sense of Christ's presence, a confidence that our life is in God's hands and a determination to fulfill God's purposes with joy in all circumstances. Paul wrote that he poured out his life as an offering for the sake of Christ, leading Paul to find great joy and contentment in Christ's service. His letter to the Philippians showed them that by centering their lives on Christ, they, too, might live in true joy.

Philippians is themed on the example of the Lord Jesus Christ who is the crucified and risen Lord. He did not consider equality with God but humbled himself to the point of suffering and death. Like Christ, instead of self-exaltation, one must surrender to God's plan, even if it's a cross, knowing that He will exalt us in due time. In essence, right Christian experience is the outworking - whatever our circumstances may be - of the life, nature, and mind of Christ living in us (Philippians 1:6, 11; 2:5, 13).

CHAPTER SUMMARY

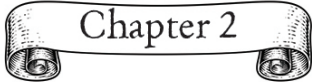


Chapter 1

Being Confident in the Lord

Philippians 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.”

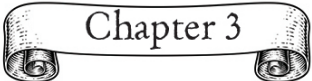


Chapter 2

The Servant who is the Lord

Philippians 2:6-7

“Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; ⁷ rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant...”

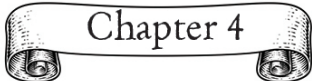


Chapter 3

Knowing Christ & His Power

Philippians 3:8,

“What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ.”



Chapter 4

Rejoicing because the Lord is near

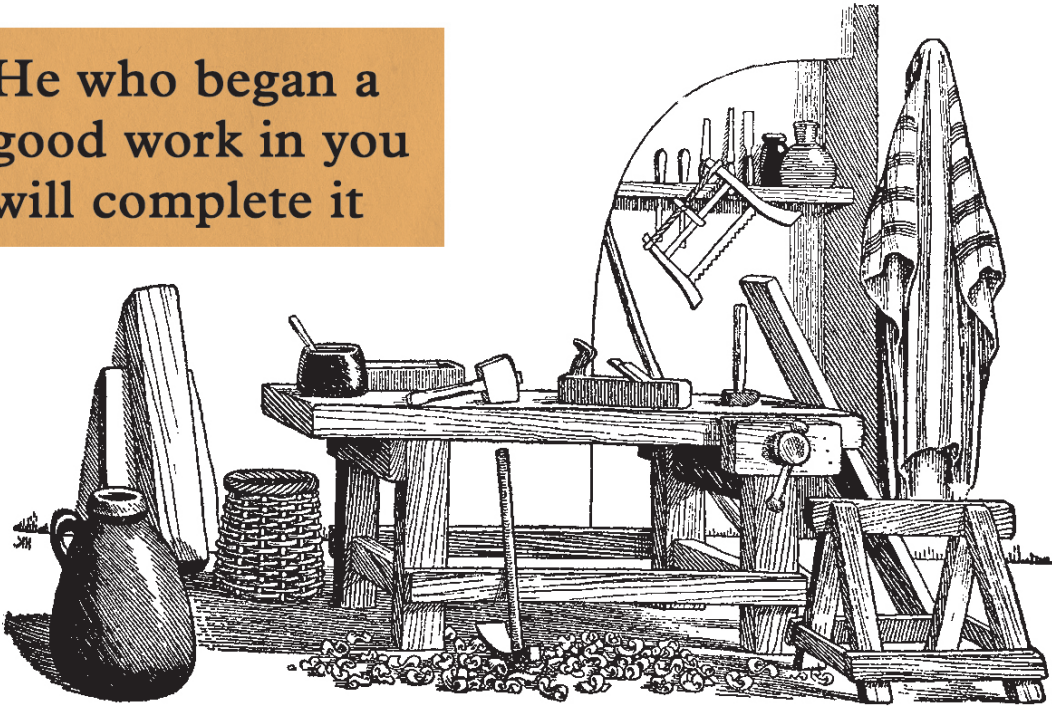
Philippians 4: 4-6,

“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! ⁵ Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. ⁶ Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.”

PHILIPPIANS 1

Confidence in the Lord

He who began a
good work in you
will complete it



Philippians 1:6, “being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ;”

The truth of Philippians 1:6 has a major influence on Paul’s theological stance. He persistently insists that “God is faithful” (1 Cor.1:9; 10:30; 2 Cor. 1:18; 1 Thess. 5:24).

Because God is faithful:

- He is going to complete what He started in us. We can connect this to the cross-resurrection way of life.
- We can “go on to perfection” because God has already invested His all in us.
- We can face the future judgment without fear since our relationship with God has been made right through Christ.

Paul's prayer for excellence

Philippians 1:9-11, “*And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment,¹⁰ that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ,¹¹ being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.*”

- **A Prayer for love among one another**



“And this I pray, that your love may abound....”

Paul's prayer is that all the members of the church in Philippi abound more and more in love - the 'Agape' love. Our language poorly conveys the richness of the meaning of agape. Therefore, mental images are necessary to explain agape love: a father welcoming a wayward son to his house, a forgiven woman pouring precious perfume on Jesus, a shepherd risking the wild to find one lost sheep. The ultimate expression of agape is the unmerited, undeserving love that the Son of God presented to us when He gave His life on the cross for sinners like us. Hence, we too must display the love of Christ to others.



- **A prayer for more knowledge and discernment (light)**

“And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment...”

Some might quote that “Love is blind”. But Paul’s prayer is that love may abound in more knowledge and discernment. Spiritual knowledge and discernment are gifts of the Spirit and are desperately needed, especially in times of moral and spiritual confusion. Love calls for and seeks after knowledge. It is not blind. It does not overlook faults and weaknesses in others, but sees them clearly. Nevertheless, it looks beyond them to “the heart of things” and continues to love. Love does not downplay the truth, or resort to sugar-coated conversations to avoid confrontation, but speaks the truth to effect change and healing in others.

- **A prayer for excellence to display Jesus in your life**

“that you may approve the things that are excellent...”

Paul encourages us to differentiate between good and evil. But that’s not all. He takes it a step further and urges us to differentiate between good and better, and finally, better and the best. Excellence is a quality that will enable us to display Christ and His teachings in every area of our lives. This, in turn, will produce the fruits of the Holy Spirit – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

To Live is Christ

Philippians 1:21, “*For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.*”

Verses 21–26 forms one of the most marvellous passages in the Bible. Here, Paul opens the door to his innermost being and shows us his struggles with deep longings and desires. I want to go and be with Christ, he says; what joy that would be. Yet, what about the fruit of my labour? I’m hard-pressed to decide whether I want to go and be with Christ, or stay with the Philippian church, which was the fruit of his labour. Interwoven in the struggle is one of the boldest of Paul’s claims: “*For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain*”

Paul’s foremost desire is simply that through every situation Christ is exalted, whether by life or by death (1:20). Paul is writing this from the prison knowing that the church in Philippi is praying for his deliverance. He is courageous enough to uphold his faith, irrespective of the situation.

Paul is convinced that his relationship with Christ will survive death. He is also certain that death is a mere passing over into Christ’s presence. Therefore, he is torn between the two. He knows that departing this life to be with Christ would be better by far (1:23), but he also knows that if his life is extended, he would have more time to minister to the Philippians (1:2).

Mystery will always surround death and our “passage” from this life to the next, but that mystery does not diminish our hope. We live in the certainty of Paul: *“to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”*

Paul also stresses on the privilege to suffer for Christ (1:29). He states that in suffering for Christ we not only experience God’s comfort but also learn to rely less on ourselves and more on God. Our hope and joy in our relationship with Christ is that He uses everything in life to promote our spiritual growth (Romans 8:28).

PHILIPPIANS 2

The Servant who is the Lord

Have the Mind of Christ

Philippians 2:5-11, *“In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: ⁶ Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; ⁷ rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross! ⁹ Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

Paul introduces this great theological statement of who Jesus is to support his call to the Philippians. He encourages them to look out not only for their own interests, but also for the interests of others. In many ways verses 5–11 make up the greatest and most moving passage that Paul ever wrote about Jesus—certainly the most descriptive. This passage is not just a description of Jesus, but a call to each one of us to have the mind of Christ who emptied Himself, and became a servant.

Paul's own experience of the risen Lord was such a vital factor in the formation of his thoughts. He knew that the Lord Jesus did not begin to exist at His birth. He existed as the divine Lord of all even before time began, but He became a man to save us. He did empty Himself, though, of the glories of heaven, of the privileges of being divine, of rank and rights. The Lord became a servant. Doesn't this harmonize with Jesus' prayer in John 17? — *"I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do. ⁵And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began."*

Jesus is the Lord who is a servant, and Jesus is the servant who is the Lord. As the Lord who is a servant, Jesus identifies with human life so as to establish a redemptive relationship. As a servant who is the Lord, Jesus calls us to acknowledge his lordship through our servanthood. The grace of God in Jesus Christ calls us to practice self-abandonment when it comes to loving God and our neighbour.

Work out your Salvation

Philippians 2:12-13, *“Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³ for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfil his good purpose.”*

Would the Philippians have been shocked when they learned that they had to work out their own salvation? The recipients of this letter were already Christian. Then what does it mean to work out your salvation?

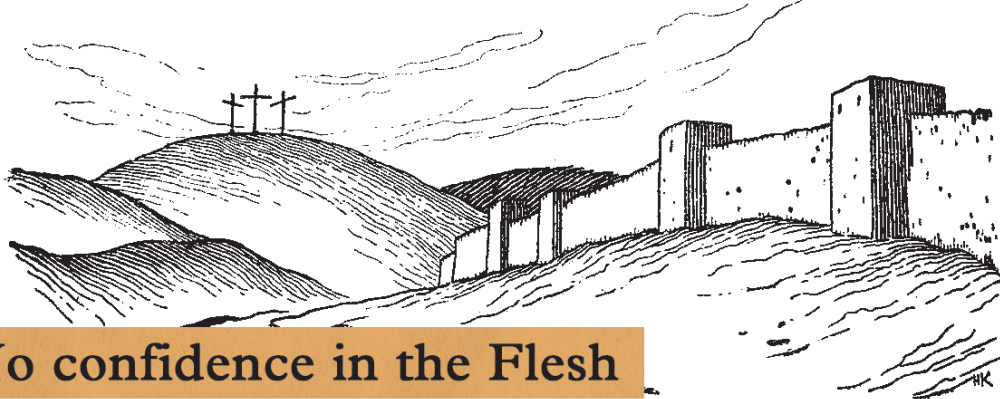
The word “salvation” comes from a Latin root word “salve”, which means an ointment for healing. To be saved is to be made whole. In Greek the word is *sōtēria* , meaning not only salvation, but preservation.

Paul’s great message of salvation was that we are justified by grace through faith alone. We cannot properly understand Paul’s meaning of faith unless we know that the primary ingredients of it are trust and obedience. If you want a biblical example for obedience, none is clearer than that of Mary, the mother of Lord Jesus.” *Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word*” (Luke 1:38).

Please note that fear and trembling does not refer to the nervousness of future judgements while standing before God. It is rather awe-inspiring to know that God is with us and He is working things out for us to move into spiritual maturity. With trembling wonder, we are to recognize God’s presence. In all circumstances, even in pain, suffering, loss, death, prison, uncertainty and perplexity, the process of salvation is ongoing for those who love and trust the Lord. So, rejoicing is the order of every day. Rejoice because God is at work.

PHILIPPIANS 3

Know Christ and His Power



No confidence in the Flesh

Philippians 3:7-11, “But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. ¹⁰ I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.”

The entire chapter focusses on knowing Christ and nothing else. Paul considers his heritage and privileges of being a passionate Jew as loss compared to the blessing of knowing Jesus Christ and being found in Him. What was once the very basis of his confidence is now considered loss and garbage. Also, he had once sought a righteousness of his own, which was attained by following the law. Now, what he wanted above all else was the righteousness that comes from God and is received by faith as a gift of God’s grace (3:9).

What does it mean to know Christ?

Verse 10 answers the question.

Philippians 3:10, “I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,¹¹ and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.”



- ***The power of resurrection***

To know Christ is to have His resurrection power now. This is not something that we commemorate just on Easter as a historical event nor is it just for the future when we die. It is something that we can experience now as we come to know Him in whom we now live. The power of resurrection is the power of God to help us walk in the newness of life on a daily basis.

- ***The participation in His suffering***

It is a harsh, hard, difficult, demanding, but essential truth. We do not know Christ completely until we know Him and participate in His suffering. This suffering here is death to our selfish desires and living a life in line with God’s plan and purpose.

- *The becoming like Him in His death*

This was another recurring theme for Paul throughout all his epistles: “I have been crucified with Christ” (Gal. 2:20). “You have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God” (Col. 3:3). A Christian is to die to the old order of life (Rom. 6:5; Gal. 6:14), and pass from death to life through a process of letting the old man die that the new man may be born. However, the implication of this must be lived out. I must consider myself dead to sin and alive to God (Rom. 6:11). I must allow the Spirit to renew my inner nature and transform me from stage to stage into the likeness of Christ.



- *Resurrection from the dead*

Paul doesn't stop with what really matters in this life - Knowing Christ means that life goes on beyond death and all who follow Jesus have a life beyond the grave.

The Prize of the High Calling

Philippians 3:13-14, *“Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.”*

Here, Paul tells us that it is God who took hold of him, and now his priority is to take hold of what God has for him. Indeed, he is determined to “*press on*” to achieve this. Paul reiterates that he hasn’t *already obtained all this*, nor has he *already arrived* at his goal of fully knowing Christ, but, he says, *I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me* (3:12). Instead, he keeps going, forgetting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead. Paul compares believers to athletes who strive to win the prize. An athlete competing in a race does not look back to see how far he has come or how his rivals are doing. Rather, he keeps his eyes on the finish line.

Every day, then, we begin where we are—claiming boldly and confidently that Christ has made us new creatures, but confessing humbly that we have not become in fullness what Christ wants us to be. Paul lives with a holy dis-satisfaction: the risen Christ has taken hold of him for a purpose and Paul will not be satisfied until that purpose is fulfilled in him.

PHILIPPIANS 4

Rejoice because the Lord is near

Living as citizens of Heaven

Philippians 4:4-7, “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! ⁵ Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. ⁶ Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

The three distinct qualities of believers who live as citizens of heaven but residents on earth are – **Joy, Gentleness and Peace through Prayer.**

Joy: The joy of the Christian is not a passing quality. Rejoicing is not to be reserved for special times of worship or praise. It is to be uninterrupted and unbroken. Paul urges those in the church in Philippi to rejoice in the Lord always (4:4). There was much that could have taken away his joy and peace. Paul was in Prison, his friends were struggling and sick, there was disunity in the church, and they were having to deal with opposition, hostility and false teaching. Being overwhelmed by circumstances, however, is not consistent with being joyful. So, Paul appeals to them to remember that the Lord is near. He tells them to not be anxious about anything (4:5).

Gentleness: The Gentle are courteous and kind. They exercise limits, practice silence in speech knowing that words can wound, do not intrude into another's life but are available to and responsive to others' needs. It is no wonder Paul names gentleness as a fruit of the Spirit in Galatians. Paul is requesting the Philippians to not become anxious or aggressive, but let their gentleness be evident to all (4:6).

Peace through Prayer: The Christian answer to anxiety is confident prayer, which issues in "*the peace of God which surpasses all understanding*". His offer of prayer is not an easy solution. It is the serious business of:

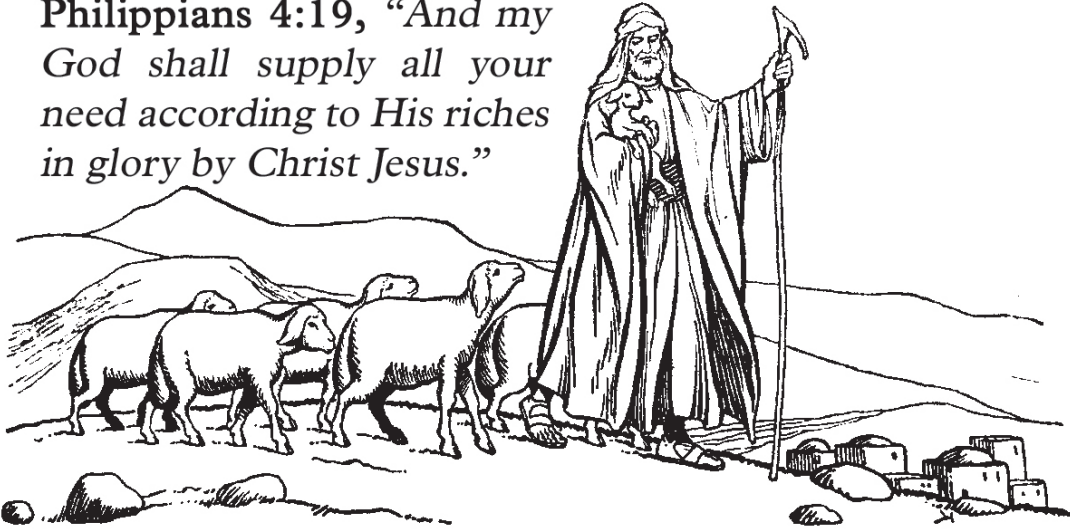
- Bringing our lives before God
- Examining our dependence upon God
- Placing our lives in God's hands to be used
- Remembering and celebrating what God has already done
- Confessing our needs and dedicating our gifts
- Committing ourselves and all that we are to make our common cause God's kingdom, not our own kingdom.

The opposite of anxiety is peace. Not numbness nor unconcern, not the absence of inner and outward struggle. God's peace, the peace that is from Him, gives us hope and confidence, strengthens us to carry on with joy when the burdens of life are heavy and the pathway is rough. This has little to do with outward circumstances, which is why Paul said the peace of God would guard our hearts and mind. (Note: Paul uses the same sense of a Roman military guarding the city from enemies)

Sufficiency in Christ alone

Philippians 4:13, *“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”*

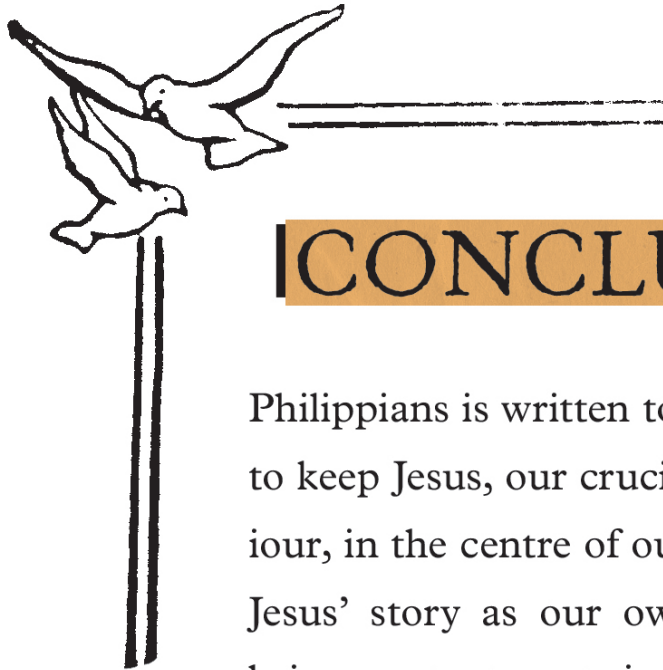
Philippians 4:19, *“And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.”*



Paul's letter to the Philippians ends with a strong climax of trusting in the sufficiency of Christ in every circumstance and His abundant provision in times of need. Here Paul is content with what God provides in every situation whether riches or poverty, sickness or health, freedom or bondage. In everything he is determined to bring glory to our God and Father!

Contentment comes from leaning on Christ and not leaning on ourselves or the things of this world. Your joy should not be connected to what you have or what you don't have. It's about who has you. When the Lord is your shepherd, you can find perfect contentment and you won't lack anything as He will provide all that you require for life's journey.

Paul learnt the secret to contentment no matter what his circumstances were: *“Simple dependence on the Lord Jesus who strengthens you.”*



CONCLUSION

Philippians is written to encourage people to keep Jesus, our crucified and risen Saviour, in the centre of our lives and live out Jesus' story as our own. This alone can bring contentment, joy and peace as we live in this world. In our day-to-day context of living, let's learn to experience God's love and presence to know Christ more and become more like Him.



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