

STUDY GUIDE

LETTERS FROM PRISON: PHILIPPIANS

A message series at New City Church

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Philippians 1

1 Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons: 2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 3 I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, 4 always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all, 5 in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now. 6 For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus. (NASB)

Paul wrote this letter to the church in Philippi during his first Roman imprisonment, approximately **61 AD**, 10 years after he started the church there. During the same imprisonment he wrote four epistles: Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon and Philippians.

Many commentators call this letter the “Epistle of Joy.” Since we know that Paul was locked in a prison cell when he wrote this letter, it is safe to say that joy is NOT related to circumstances. Joy is a gift from God to those who believe in Jesus. Joy is produced by the Spirit in people who, focused on eternal purposes, obey the word of God in the midst of trials. (See [Galatians 5:22](#) for more on the “fruit of the spirit.”)

Questions for Reflection

1. How do you define joy?
2. Is it possible to have Jesus first in your life and NOT have joy? That does not mean some sort of fake or shallow happiness, but rather a confidence in Christ that cannot be taken away.
3. Do you have joy in life right now?

Paul

Paul was taught the Scriptures from an early age and from the age of 10-25 (per Jewish custom), he was sent to learn under Gamaliel. (See [Acts 5:34](#)). Paul was a brilliant scholar, educated in secular philosophy, and an excellent Pharisee (See [Philippians 3:3-8](#)). Paul thought he was serving God but He was actually persecuting God’s church. Paul had it all, except for Jesus.

Paul, then known as Saul, met Jesus on the road to Damascus:

3 As he was traveling, it happened that he was approaching Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him; 4 and he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" 5 And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" And He said, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting, 6 but get up and enter the city, and it will be told you what you must do." [Acts 9:3-6](#) (You can read the rest of Paul’s conversion story by reading the rest of Acts 9).

Paul went from a persecutor of the church to a “bond servant of Christ Jesus.” (Phil. 1). A *bond-servant* was a slave who freely gave himself to his master for life. A bond-slave served out of love, not out of obligation. See [Exodus 21:5](#) for more

information on what it meant to be a bond slave. As a bond-slave, Paul gave himself freely to the service of Jesus, the eternal Lord.

Questions for Reflection

4. How did Paul's transformation happen?
5. How should an encounter with Jesus be different than studying more or trying harder?
6. Why is it so important that Paul called himself a bond-servant of Christ Jesus? What did this say about the depth of his commitment? Can you imagine calling yourself a bond-servant of Jesus?

Philippi

Philippi, on the northern coast of the Aegean Sea, was originally settled due to its tremendous gold and silver mines and it became a commercial center in the ancient world. It was a strategic location because the Ignatian Way, that connected Asia and Europe, ran through it and it was the connection point between these two continents. It became a Roman colony and an important city in the Roman empire. The story of Paul's work in Philippi is found in [Acts 16](#). There, we meet Lydia, the first convert to Christianity in Europe! Take the time to read about Paul and Timothy's early work there.

Questions for Reflection

7. How did Paul end up in Philippi? What does that teach us about who builds the church? (See [Psalm 127](#), [Matthew 16:18](#))
8. Is it significant that the first convert in Europe was a woman? (note: This is not a "battle of the sexes" question but rather one to stimulate conversation about how the church of God moves in ways that seem counter to culture.)

Joy

We see in Paul a person full of joy even though his circumstances certainly did not warrant feelings of joy. Specifically, we see this joy work itself out in several ways. In this lesson, we mentioned three of those things:

- joy of **recollection**: recollecting the good in others; joy has a way of forgetting wounds and hurts. (verse 3)
- joy of **intercession**: praying for others' needs. (verse 4)
- joy of **participation**: participation here means, fellowship (coming together with a common vision) and community; people in the church should be delighted to be connected with others. (verse 5)

Questions for Reflection

9. When you think about others in the church or others you've served with in the past, what are your primary thoughts? Positive? Negative? If negative, how do those memories impact the way you interact in your current church situation?
10. Do you view your role in the church as a part of a collective movement of God's people? Or, do you see church participation as something that is primarily isolated to Sunday morning attendance? What do you think it would look like to "participate" in the gospel with other believers in your community? How might this speak unbelievers?