

STUDY GUIDE

LETTERS FROM PRISON: PHILIPPIANS (Week 4)

A MESSAGE SERIES AT NEW CITY CHURCH

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Philippians 2:1-7

2 So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, 2 complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. 3 Do nothing from rivalry or (vein) conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. 4 Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. 5 Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. (ESV)

Background

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.”)

Why do we fight?

For hundreds, if not thousands, of years it has been argued that education is the key to end fighting. The idea is simple: if people are more educated on the issues then they can become more

objective and thus, be less prone to engage in argument and fighting that leads nowhere. In a recent book, [Peace Education](#), Ian Harris and Mary Lee Morrison suggest that “education is the key to making choices.”

While it is clear that education and healthy models of behavior help to address the issues of fighting and war, it appears that the cause of fighting is more complex than that. After all, even after all of the advances in education we have had over the centuries, we still fight.

Questions for Reflection

1. Before we go any farther, why do you think people fight? Why do you fight?

A Spirit of Rivalry.

*3 Do nothing from **rivalry** or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.*

From the time we are in high school, we have rivals. It continues through college and even further. Mac vs. PC? Coke vs. Pepsi? Batman vs. Superman? Wherever your interests lie, there is sure to be a rival.

Most of our “battles” against rivals are fun and don’t harm anyone. But, this spirit of rivalry that Paul writes about here can be extremely damaging. In [Galatians 5:20](#), Paul warns us that spirit of rivalry is contrary to the spirit of God. What is this spirit? Well, in this sense it means that we fight for no other reason than to meet our own needs. Paul was saying that you cannot let your needs or desires dictate what is truth and what isn’t because if you do that, you’ll be a “hyper-fighter.” You’ll be easily offended and you’ll take everything personally.

Questions for Reflection

2. Discuss some “fun” rivalries you’ve been a part of.
3. Have you ever let a rivalry with another person get to an unhealthy place? Have you ever found yourself taking things personally and fighting back out of a spirit of “wanting to be right?”

Vein Conceit ... Our Glory.

*3 Do nothing from rivalry or **conceit**, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.*

Doxology.

In traditional church settings there is often a portion of the Sunday service that is referred to as the **doxology**. This comes from the word: doxa, which means “God’s glory.” Doxology is the “word or saying of glory” and is typically a short hymn of praise to God. Here the word Paul uses for “conceit” or “vein conceit” is “keno-doxia,” which means our glory.

Paul is warning the church that our hearts will try to manufacture our own glory. This happens often because we feel insignificant so we act big on the outside, hiding our inner insecurity. We are afraid that we are nothing that we will not be remembered so we have to make sure we are seen as successful.

Me Monster.

In the [message on 07/04/11](#) we talked about people who have the need to “one up” other people. These people always have the better vacation story; they’ve met a more famous person; they’ve experienced something better...always. We called these people “me monsters,” those who find significance in putting themselves on a pedestal. This is “keno-doxia.”

Questions for Reflection.

4. Have you ever been around a “me monster?” How did/do you respond?
5. Do you ever find yourself being a “me monster?” When are you most likely to do so?

Eternal Consequences.

The ironic thing about those seeking their own glory, is that the more attention they try to get, the more ignorable they become. Think about the “me monsters” you’ve encountered. Do you like being around them? Probably not.

The scary thing about seeking after our own glory is that the Bible says there are eternal consequences. Jesus warns that if we are selfish and do not look outside of ourselves, then we will, in effect, become eternally ignored. See [Matthew 7:23](#). If you think this is awful. You are right; it is. However, it is exactly what we do to “me monsters.” We eventually ignore them. It is the natural consequence of their actions. Jesus shows us that His response is like ours: to reject people who are about themselves.

Questions for Reflection.

6. Reflect on Matthew 7:23. What thoughts come to mind?

The Remedy.

4 Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. 5 Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.

As scary as it is to think about being eternally ignored, this passage teaches us that we have a Savior who emptied Himself of His glory so that we could be with Him forever. Paul tells us that it is possible

to have the mind of Christ. See [1 Corinthians 2:16](#). We do this, not by seeking our own glory, but by acknowledging Jesus and the fact that He laid down His life and His glory for us. Jesus' glory is eternal and available to all who believe. See [Romans 10:11](#).

In Jesus, we find a God who gave up His glory for us. He teaches us that it is not about seeking our own glory but about laying our lives down in the service of others and allowing God to be glorified in those actions.

Questions for Reflection.

7. Do you believe that Jesus laid down His life, or His glory, for all of mankind?
8. How does your answer to question 7 shape your day-to-day life.