



ABOUND

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*Reflections on Progress & Joy from Paul's Letter
to the Philippians*

INTRODUCTION

There are few books in the Bible that capture the spirit of summer quite like Paul's letter to the Philippians. The letter is effervescent in its joy, shining from its pages as Paul shares his heart with the young church he had helped found only a few years prior. Throughout the letter, his words seem to tumble forward over themselves, as if barely able to keep pace with his joy.

And it is this joy, and this pressing forward, around which we chose to center our reflections for this summer guide. Paul writes, "I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, so that through my being with you again your boasting in Christ Jesus will abound on account of me" (Philippians 1:25-26 NIV).

We begin the guide with the journey to Philippi in Acts 16, as Paul and his companions enter the city for the first time. We then move into his letter to this same city, written within ten years of his first visit while once again imprisoned for his faith.

We have included four readings each week, with the following options for Monday through Thursday:

- The **Spotlight Passages** are the passages on which our writers have focused their reflection.
- The **Prayer Prompt** is designed to help you center down in God's presence for a time of silence, reflection, and prayer.
- The **Candlelight Prayer** is a brief, scripted prayer. As you read, make these words your own.

On Fridays, we will provide another **Spotlight Passage** and steps to lead you through a spiritual reading exercise. In this way, we will balance Bible study with listening to the Lord through his living and active Word.

As Paul could write to the Philippians, it is our prayer "that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God" (Philippians 1:9-11 ESV).

The Devotional Writing Team

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Week 1

Acts 16

Spotlight Passage: Acts 16:6-15

There is a fascinating prologue to the story of Paul's journey to Philippi during the early months of his second missionary journey; a prologue which may take us only moments to read, but a prologue in which we find Paul and his companions, Silas and Timothy, traveling over three hundred miles with very little success.

Their wandering was not aimless — they had strong intentions to preach the gospel in Asia, and then once again in Bithynia. But at each turn, the Holy Spirit forbade them. Only when they reached Troas, likely several weeks later, did they discover their next steps — a call to Macedonia, and shortly thereafter, to the city of Philippi.

But it is in this prologue, this difficult journey, that we can often find ourselves. Long miles with no clear resolve. Weeks, or longer, that can seem wasted. Progress that can appear unattainable. Yet it is in Paul's words years later to this very city of Philippi where we can find courage in just such a time — a call to rejoice, an encouragement to press on, and the humility of a Savior who gave everything that we might have life.

Prayer Prompt: *Spend 60 seconds (or more!) in silence.*

Consider times in your life where forward progress has seemed unattainable. It is often in these "holding patterns" where God molds and strengthens our character for our next steps. Ask the Holy Spirit to prepare you for these times, or, if you are in the midst of such a time, that he would comfort and guide you.

Candlelight Prayer: *"And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ."*

Philippians 1:6 (ESV)

Father, as we begin the study of this letter to the Philippians, prepare my heart. I pray for patience and wisdom, for courage to face difficult or restless times, and for joy as we celebrate your goodness and kindness.

Week 1

MONDAY

It is in Paul's words where we can find courage - a call to rejoice, an encouragement to press on, and the humility of a Savior who gave everything that we might have life.

Week 1

TUESDAY

Do you seek
out all sides
of a story
before casting
judgment, or
are you quick
to decide your
position?

Spotlight Passage: Acts 16:16-24

In this passage, we are introduced to a woman who is controlled by demons and used by her owners for their gain. I can't begin to imagine the darkness and crushing despair she faced every day. Her persistent cries grieve Paul, who seizes the moment to cast the demon out of her by the power of Jesus's name.

In short order, Paul and Silas are judged, beaten, and thrown into prison. The magistrates act rashly and appear to not take the time to hear all of the facts. From this passage, it seems the magistrates inflicted punishment on the two men without ever hearing their testimony.

Have you ever been wrongly accused or judged, or been ostracized because of your faith? Conversely, have you ever made a judgment or acted upon an accusation without hearing all sides? Proverbs 18:13 tells us, "If one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame."

James would later write, "My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires" (James 1:19-20).

Prayer Prompt: *Spend 60 seconds (or more!) in silence.*

Take a moment to consider, do you seek out all sides of a story before casting judgment, or are you quick to decide your position? Pray for wisdom and discernment to grow in this area, knowing that we are called to care for others as we would like to be cared for ourselves. If you have been wrongly accused or judged, pray for a deeper understanding of God's forgiveness, that you may extend it to those who have wronged you.

Candlelight Prayer: *"Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God." 2 Corinthians 5:20 (ESV)*

Heavenly Father, you have forgiven me when I did not deserve it. Give me courage like Paul and Silas to stay calm and resolved even in the face of injustice, and the heart to rejoice even when it is hardest to do so.

Spotlight Passage: Acts 16:25-34

Paul and Silas sang praises of thanksgiving in a dark, desolate dungeon at midnight after being physically attacked and publicly ridiculed. They likely prayed not only for their situation to change, but for their situation to change *them*. They probably prayed not only for their hearts to stay steadfast in their suffering, but also for the hearts of their oppressors.

When I read this passage, I am humbled. I couldn't imagine being cheerful in a situation like theirs. There would be lots of groaning, exasperation, and complaining in my cell. Nevertheless we see two men turning to prayer and praise when faced with turmoil.

We then see God's response to the prayer and praise; a mighty earthquake. An earthquake so immense that it crumbled the foundation of the jail. Matthew Henry comments that, "The Lord was in these earthquakes, to show his resentment of the indignities done to his servants, to testify to those whose confidence is in the earth the weakness and instability of that which they confide, and to teach people that, though the earth be moved, yet they need not fear."

Miracles happened within those prison walls, a reminder that God can do abundantly above all that we can ask or think, even when all we could do in the moment is sing.

Prayer Prompt: *Spend 60 seconds (or more!) in silence.*

At times, we might feel confined behind prison walls in our own life, sometimes by our own doing. In prayer, hold fast to the promise that we are free in Christ and that he draws close to the brokenhearted.

Candlelight Prayer: *"Call to me and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known." Jeremiah 33:3 (ESV)*

Heavenly Father, there have been times where I have let my emotions cloud the truth. Please forgive me for the moments where I run to anything but you in times of distress. Please help me have unwavering faith like Paul and Silas.

Week 1

WEDNESDAY

Miracles happened within those prison walls, a reminder that God can do abundantly above all that we can ask or think, even when all we could do in the moment is sing.

Week 1

THURSDAY

We can stand
confidently
in our
heavenly
citizenship
through the
finished work
and grace of
Christ.

Spotlight Passage: Acts 16:35-40

He could have left quietly. He could have “[gone] in peace”, as he was encouraged to do so by the jailer. But this was not Paul’s method. This was not the way he worked.

After the earthquake, the magistrates quietly order the men to be released. But Paul is not pleased. If they were beaten publicly, he reasons, they should be pardoned publicly. In doing so, he makes them aware of a grave error they have made — Paul is a Roman citizen, and he was beaten and imprisoned without a fair trial. Suddenly, the roles are reversed — the magistrates have broken Roman law; it is their lives that are now in danger.

Paul leans upon his Roman citizenship in a call for justice. And it is in the safety of this citizenship, and Paul’s boldness to confront the city’s rulers, that fertile soil begins to form and nourish the roots of a healthy young church in the heart of the city.

The faithful companions depart, but years later, Paul would remind this same church of an entirely different citizenship; this time, a citizenship of hope - our citizenship in heaven (Philippians 3:20) from which “we await our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Prayer Prompt: *Spend 60 seconds (or more!) in silence.*

Consider the significant power imbalance between Paul and the magistrates. Yet, Paul could stand confidently upon his citizenship. Likewise, let us stand confidently in our heavenly citizenship through the finished work and grace of Christ as we enter into a time of prayer for the needs of the world around us.

Candlelight Prayer: *“When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?”*

Psalm 8:3-4 (ESV)

Father, who am I that you would look upon me and know me? You have fashioned the world and the stars, and all that is around me, and yet you draw close to me. I praise you for your compassion and your lovingkindness, your everlasting power and your justice, and the confidence you have given me in Christ.

Week 1

FRIDAY

Spiritual Reading

1. Ready

Take 60 seconds (or more) in silence as preparation for spiritual reading. Breathe deeply and center yourself on God's presence with you.

2. Read Spotlight Passage: Acts 16:30-34 (ESV)

Read the Spotlight Passage using the text below or in your Bible. Listen to the text by reading it slowly. Reread up to three times if desired. Ask God to speak through his Word.

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Then he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family. Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God.

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3. Receive

Reflect on what word, phrase, or sentence speaks to you from the text. Write it down in a journal. Notice your reaction to this word, phrase, or sentence without judging yourself. Sit in silence as you listen to the Lord.

4. Respond

Pray in response to the words God has stirred within you or spoken to you.

5. Rest

Rest in the presence of God, allowing the Scripture to take root and the Holy Spirit to transform you.

Week 2

Philippians 1

Spotlight Passage: Philippians 1:1-6

"Step back from your canvas and view it from a distance," our painting instructor said smiling.

What a difference that made.

When I moved away from my *Fiery Sunset*, it came together like an orange and crimson jigsaw puzzle. Before that, I could see only imperfections, including spots where I had painted over erroneous strokes, and I had thought it paled in comparison to my friend's rendition.

"You have to look at your artwork from a different perspective," our teacher reminded me. "When you're too close, you lose the beauty of its composition as well as its uniqueness."

The same is true of our spiritual journeys. Even when I feel as though I keep making the same blunders or I fall short upon comparing myself to others, I remember Paul's encouraging words to view my progress through the eyes of God. Based on God's promise to ultimately fulfill the work he has begun in me, I know he is continuously shaping me until his one-of-a-kind handiwork is completed.

Prayer Prompt: *Spend 60 seconds (or more!) in silence.*

Take a moment to reflect upon God's work in your life. What lessons has he been teaching you and how have you responded? In what ways are you learning to trust God to redeem your perceived regrets, missteps or failings? In what areas can you practice more self-compassion? Rest in the knowledge that he is molding you according to his will and on his timetable.

Candlelight Prayer: *"He will again have compassion on us..."*

Micah 7:19a (NIV)

Heavenly Father, help me to have self-compassion when I make a mess of things. Give me faith to accept that you are in control of my spiritual growth and to trust that you're continually working within me although I may not always feel it. Color my world with your beautiful array of hope.

Week 2

MONDAY

God is
continuously
shaping each
of us until his
one-of-a-kind
handiwork is
completed.

Week 2

TUESDAY

God's love is
the unending
wellspring
from which
we can always
tap into to be
filled afresh.

Spotlight Passage: Philippians 1:7-11

During our workplace quarterly reviews, we rate ourselves not only on tangible results achieved, but also on how well we've developed certain performance behaviors. We classify our professional personas into four categories: 1) owner, 2) advocate, 3) multiplier and 4) igniter. We ask ourselves how well we have practiced accountability, promoted collaboration, implemented priorities and educated others on a daily basis. The hope is that this will help us concentrate on improving our skills and become more engaged with our colleagues.

In his letter to the Philippians, Paul prays for similar behavioral outcomes based on God's abounding love. Receiving and owning God's love helps us know him better and become wiser, enabling us to walk on his path daily. When we advocate for God and share his path with others, we give him the glory and multiply his love. And when we do that in community, we ignite a spark for him. God's love is the unending wellspring from which we can always tap into to be filled afresh.

Prayer Prompt: *Spend 60 seconds (or more!) in silence.*

Recall a time when a friend prayed for your specific needs. Reread Paul's prayer and replace "your" and "you" with your own name. Let this personal petition comfort you deep in your soul and surround you like a warm embrace. Use this prayer as a guide to pray for your circle of family and friends as well as your church body.

Candlelight Prayer: *"But God has surely listened and has heard my prayer."
Psalm 66:19 (NIV)*

Father God, thank you for hearing my prayers. Grant me confidence that you are constantly increasing my ability to care for others; give me abounding love which can only come from you. Remind me to be cognizant of the behaviors and motivations behind my actions and show me the best way to impact those around me for your glory.

Spotlight Passage: Philippians 1:12-20

When I initially heard the sad story behind the beloved hymn, "It Is Well with My Soul," I was moved to tears. The lyricist Horatio Spafford penned the inspirational words aboard a ship to England to retrieve his wife after their four daughters had tragically perished in a collision at sea. This man who had lost so much gave us a song that pours out comfort like a refreshing summer rain when our spirits are parched.

Paul, too, teaches us that it glorifies God when we patiently endure suffering. He wrote his joyful letter to the church at Philippi from prison and held the deep assurance that his less-than-desirable circumstances would still ultimately lead to the furtherance of the cause of Christ. His hope was expectant and he confidently anticipated God's provision of just enough courage to withstand his circumstances so he could continue to spread the good news of the gospel.

Prayer Prompt: *Spend 60 seconds (or more!) in silence.*

Think about the most recent interruption in your life and how you responded or are responding. Are there any small pockets of gratitude you can fill? Ponder Paul's confidence that everything was eventually going to be all right even though he was in physical chains at the time. Set an intention to follow his example and choose to praise God and his character even when it's difficult.

Candlelight Prayer: *"Being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience..."*
Colossians 1:11 (NIV)

Dear God, grant me an extra measure of perseverance when I face unexpected detours and my carefully laid plans are interrupted. Give me strength, wisdom and grace. Help me to remain steadfast during stormy seasons and to be assured that whatever befalls, I'm on my pathway to heaven.

Week 2

WEDNESDAY

Set an
intention to
praise God and
his character
even when
it's difficult.

Week 2

THURSDAY

Our true
identity in
Christ can
never be
stolen.

Spotlight Passage: Philippians 1:21-30

It's not easy keeping track of our personal information and protecting our identities in this high-tech world filled with security breaches, passwords and access codes. The nightly news tells us that while identity theft can usually be resolved, it may be quite labor intensive and time-consuming.

That's one reason it's so refreshing to know that our true identity – in Christ – can never be stolen.

Paul tells us that to live is Christ and to die is gain because we are guaranteed an eternal home with Jesus in heaven. Forever. No matter what. God has promised to hold us in the palm of his hand and he will never let us go. We cannot be snatched away from him. We won't even have to answer a list of questions when we find ourselves at heaven's door. The only password we will ever need is *Jesus*.

In the meantime, we're called to make the most of the time we've been given on earth to follow Christ's example and live to please God.

Prayer Prompt: *Spend 60 seconds (or more!) in silence.*

Picture your own reunion with friends and loved ones in heaven and keep that image in your mind as you go about your daily round. Pray for people in your sphere of influence who need to hear the gospel message and consider inviting them to church this week.

Candlelight Prayer: *"Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved."*

Acts 4:12 (NIV)

Dear Lord, thank you for giving me the key to eternal life with you; may I always treasure it and rest in the permanence of it. Help our church community to be united in faith and to follow Christ's example until you call us home.

Week 2

FRIDAY

Spiritual Reading

1. Ready

Take 60 seconds (or more) in silence as preparation for spiritual reading. Breathe deeply and center yourself on God's presence with you.

2. Read Spotlight Passage: Philippians 1:3-6, 25-26 (NIV)

Read the Spotlight Passage using the text below or in your Bible. Listen to the text by reading it slowly. Reread up to three times if desired. Ask God to speak through his Word.

.....

I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, 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...

Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, so that through my being with you again your boasting in Christ Jesus will abound on account of me.

.....

3. Receive

Reflect on what word, phrase, or sentence speaks to you from the text. Write it down in a journal. Notice your reaction to this word, phrase, or sentence without judging yourself. Sit in silence as you listen to the Lord.

4. Respond

Pray in response to the words God has stirred within you or spoken to you.

5. Rest

Rest in the presence of God, allowing the Scripture to take root and the Holy Spirit to transform you.

Week 3

Philippians 2

Spotlight Passage: Philippians 2:1-4

I regularly remind my children to be kind to one another, not only in their words, but in their tone and actions. It hurts my heart when the people who treat my kids the harshest in the world are their own siblings.

Kids aren't the only ones who can be ruthless. Our relationships in the family of God are often riddled with gossip, resentment, self-serving motives, and unkind words, tone, and actions. I imagine we grieve the heart of our Heavenly Father when we treat our brothers and sisters in Christ so harshly.

Paul wrote that unity among brothers and sisters in Christ would "make [his] joy complete" (Philippians 2:2). He instructs us to humbly count others more significant than ourselves, to have the same mind, the same love, the same spirit of unity. We are siblings in the same spiritual family. Let us bring our Father joy, for he said, "How wonderful, how beautiful, when brothers and sisters get along!" (Psalm 133:1 MSG).

Prayer Prompt: *Spend 60 seconds (or more!) in silence.*

In the presence of the Holy Spirit, do a mental scan of your relationships with your brothers and sisters in Christ. Confess any selfish ambition or conceit, unkindness or resentment. Ask God for direction in how to seek the interests of others over your own interests.

Candlelight Prayer: *"Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind." 1 Peter 3:8 (ESV)*

Christ, my brother and Lord, teach me your way of brotherly love, your tenderness of heart, your sympathy, your humility. I pray for unity among my brothers and sisters as we follow you and are conformed into your image. Let me lay down my rights, my opinions, my interests, and my advantages for the sake of others, and so follow your example today.

Week 3

MONDAY

Humbly count
others more
significant
than ourselves,
have the same
mind, the same
love, the same
spirit of unity.

Week 3

TUESDAY

The way of
the Cross, the
way of our
Christ, the
way of
progress in
our faith, is
kenosis living.

Spotlight Passage: Philippians 2:5-11

This passage, known as the *Carmen Christi*, the Hymn to Christ, was probably sung by the early church and Paul included it in his letter. One Greek word within it has become dear to me. The verb *kenosis* — to empty — expresses how Jesus gave up his divine prerogatives in his incarnation.

The Son of God “emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant” (Philippians 2:7 ESV). Jesus did not give up his divine nature; rather, he took on human nature, the form of a servant. Paul instructs us to “have the same mindset of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:5). This is a high calling in a downward direction; we emulate Christ when we empty ourselves and take on servanthood.

Author Marlena Graves describes *kenosis* living this way: “*Kenosis* is a voluntary self-emptying, a renunciation of my will in favor of God’s. It’s a life characterized by self-giving... to choose emptiness entails a deep trust in God as we take the downward descent into servanthood and humility” (*The Way Up Is Down*, 6-7).

Kenosis living is counter-intuitive. We do not need to lift ourselves up. Christ emptied himself by taking on servanthood and humility. Christ’s increased humility and obedience unto death led to his exaltation (Philippians 2:9). God favors the humble and lifts up those who humble themselves in obedience to him (1 Peter 5:5-6).

Kenosis living is also counter-cultural. We are called to empty ourselves of our will in favor of God’s. To humble ourselves and put others first. To refuse to cling to our prerogatives. To reject self-centered ambition and descend into servanthood. The way of the Cross, the way of our Christ, the way of progress in our faith, is *kenosis* living.

Prayer Prompt: Spend 60 seconds (or more!) in silence.

“A life emptied of our own agenda in favor of God’s is a powerful presence, a servant life” (*The Way Up Is Down*, 144). In God’s presence, consider what it would mean for you to empty yourself like Jesus. Are you clinging to rights or equality? Are you increasingly being humbled? Are you obeying God even if it leads to suffering? Which are you seeking; a higher position, or servanthood? Ask the Holy Spirit to give you the mind of Christ.

Candlelight Prayer: “Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.” Romans 8:17-18 (NIV) I worship you, Jesus, for you are the Exalted One. You gave me an example of self-emptying that goes against all my natural inclinations. Help me to be a servant, to empty myself in order to gain more of you, and someday to share in your glory.

Spotlight Passage: Philippians 2:12-18

Week 3

WEDNESDAY

My father plays music in his house constantly. When I was a kid, one of his albums I grew to love was the soundtrack from the 1971 musical *Godspell*. There's one song that has stuck with me, entitled "Day by Day." The prayerful lyrics are:

Day by day / Day by day / Oh, Dear Lord / Three things I pray
To see thee more clearly / Love thee more dearly / Follow thee more nearly
Day by day

In Philippians 2:12-13, Paul calls us to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling. He does not say "work *for* your salvation" – we are saved by grace through faith in Christ, not by works (Ephesians 2:8-9). So, what does it mean to work out our salvation?

Paul is calling us to progress in our faith, working alongside God who is already working in us. We do this with "fear and trembling," recognizing the majesty of the Lord God Almighty who desires our maturity in Christ. This is serious business; so much so that Paul requires obedience. He says, "What I'm getting at, friends, is that you should simply keep on doing what you've done from the beginning. When I was living among you, you lived in responsive obedience. Now that I'm separated from you, keep it up. Better yet, redouble your efforts. Be energetic in your life of salvation, reverent and sensitive before God" (Philippians 2:12-13a MSG).

Paul is calling
us to progress
in our faith,
working
alongside God
who is already
working in us.

Making a decision of faith is just the beginning. The rest of our lifetime we need to progress; to see God more clearly, love him more dearly, and follow him more nearly, day by day.

Prayer Prompt: *Spend 60 seconds (or more!) in silence.*

Reflect on your journey of faith, recalling how you came to know Jesus. Then, ask the Holy Spirit to help you reflect on your growth in maturity. How have you progressed in your faith? Where is he working in you, taking you deeper in spiritual maturity? How can you work alongside the Spirit? Respond to God as he shows you yourself.

Candlelight Prayer: *"For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil." Hebrews 5:12-14 (ESV)*

Spirit of Life, you brought me to new life in Christ and you are always working on my transformation. Show me where I am still a spiritual child. Teach me to constantly practice, to diligently progress, and to move towards maturity in Christ. Take me deeper, I pray in Jesus' name.

Week 3

THURSDAY

We are called
to support
one another,
care for one
another, and
love others as
Christ has
loved us.

Spotlight Passage: Philippians 2:19-30

There is an interesting structure to the second chapter of Philippians. In the first third of the chapter, Paul includes the breathtaking hymn and praise of Christ's *kenosis*. In the second third, Paul addresses the relationships of believers to the world in light of this divine humility. But tucked beneath in the last few words of the chapter is an endearing and vivid window into the life immediately around him.

Here, two of his close friends, Timothy and Epaphroditus, are commended to the church at Philippi for their work. Both have labored tirelessly and have sought the welfare of others and of the gospel above themselves. And in commending them, Paul very clearly states that he is not above them or beyond them either. Rather, his very well-being is tied to their own.

And so, before he continues his letter, we are granted this small yet rich glimpse of true Christlikeness. Like these three friends, we too do not labor alone. We are called to support one another, care for one another, and love others as Christ has loved us. Only then will we "shine.. like stars" (Philippians 2:15b NIV).

Prayer Prompt: *Spend 60 seconds (or more!) in silence.*

Take a moment to consider your relationships with believers in your church or community. Do you tend to travel alone, avoiding close connections or taking on a large degree of ministry work yourself? Or do you seek others out, knowing that full growth as a Christian happens in strong community with fellow believers? Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you in ways to strengthen and grow your connections with others.

Candlelight Prayer: *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made." John 1:1-3 (ESV)*

Father, before creation, you were, and still are, in perfect harmony with Christ Jesus and the Holy Spirit. And you desire for me to be in relationship with the people where you have placed me. Help me to grow in this area, to mend any relationships that are broken, and to strengthen friendships with those I love.

Week 3

FRIDAY

Spiritual Reading

1. Ready

Take 60 seconds (or more) in silence as preparation for spiritual reading.
Breathe deeply and center yourself on God's presence with you.

2. Read Spotlight Passage: Philippians 2:1-8 (NIV)

Read the Spotlight Passage using the text below or in your Bible.
Listen to the text by reading it slowly. Reread up to three times if desired.
Ask God to speak through his Word.

.....

Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

*Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;
rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.
And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death—
even death on a cross!*

.....

3. Receive

Reflect on what word, phrase, or sentence speaks to you from the text.
Write it down in a journal. Notice your reaction to this word, phrase, or sentence without judging yourself. Sit in silence as you listen to the Lord.

4. Respond

Pray in response to the words God has stirred within you or spoken to you.

5. Rest

Rest in the presence of God, allowing the Scripture to take root and the Holy Spirit to transform you.

Week 4

Philippians 3

Spotlight Passage: Philippians 3:1

Our contentment, joy, happiness, pleasure, gladness, and bliss should all be bound up in knowing Jesus Christ. Every other source of these emotions will eventually fail us. Jesus never will. But how can we believe this when all the worldly sources that bombard us tell us otherwise — that success, money, or good looks are the keys to happiness?

When we accept Jesus Christ as our Savior, the Holy Spirit comes to reside in us and help us learn and live by the truth. Where do we find the truth? The Word of God. Paul was chosen by God to write much of the New Testament; the goal of his life was to know Christ. He writes here that this truth of seeking and knowing God needs to be a consistent pattern in our life, to keep us from being drawn back into what the world tells us our joys should be.

Prayer Prompt: *Spend 60 seconds (or more!) in silence.*

Spend some time today asking God to show you where you have been seeking out joy. Then ask him to strengthen you to seek him first, knowing that there is no greater joy that we can have than to know him.

Candlelight Prayer: *“But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” Matthew 6:33 (ESV)*
Lord Jesus, you tell me to seek you first above all else, but this is so difficult because I often forget. Forgive me Lord for allowing so many daily distractions to take my eyes off of you. Thank you that I can be daily refreshed by your Word and your truth.

Week 4

MONDAY

The truth of seeking and knowing God needs to be a consistent pattern in our life, to keep us from being drawn back into what the world tells us our joys should be.

Week 4

TUESDAY

Salvation is a gift. It is unearned. We need to believe and have faith that Jesus Christ is the way, the only way, to salvation.

Spotlight Passage: Philippians 3:2-9

Paul tells the new believers, very strongly, to watch out for those who were spreading false teachings that circumcision is required for salvation. NOTHING that we DO can save us. What believers do to please God is the *result* of faith, not the *prerequisite* of faith. Paul relates that if salvation was the result of what we do, then he would have been saved already without Christ. His pedigree and his strict obedience to the law was peerless. Now he counts his past as garbage, worthless.

You can have the highest degree, a sterling reputation in your community, and a strong devotion to your church, but it doesn't bring you any closer to gaining salvation. In fact, all of those *things* could become a source of pride and make us think that we have somehow "earned" it. Salvation is a gift. It is unearned. We need to believe and have faith that Jesus Christ is the way, the only way, to salvation.

Prayer Prompt: Spend 60 seconds (or more!) in silence.

Ask God to reveal to you any ways you have tried to earn your way to salvation. "If I just do *this* he will accept me." Pray for the faith and belief that Jesus Christ has already accomplished this for you, and rejoice that he freely offers you the gift of eternal life with him in his glorious presence.

Candlelight Prayer: "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast." Ephesians 2:8-9 (ESV)

Lord God, remind me that my works do nothing to earn my way to you. Thank you for making it so attainable for all of us, no matter who we are or our station in life. May my life be a glorious praise for what you have done for me.

Spotlight Passage: Philippians 3:10-16

Resurrection power. What is that?

As Timothy Keller states: "In the resurrection we have the presence of the future. The power by which God will finally destroy all suffering, evil, deformity and death at the end of time has broken into history now and is available – partially but substantially – now. When we unite with the risen Christ by faith, that future power that is potent enough to remake the universe comes into us" (*Hope in Times of Fear*, 31).

No wonder that Paul would give up everything to obtain this.

Paul does not pretend that he has it all together, that he has "arrived." He knows he is not perfect but he also knows how important it is to put the past behind him, press on and strain forward to reach the goal of knowing Christ in such an intimate way that we become one with him.

Paul knows it is like a race, and like a trained athlete, we must set everything aside that could distract us. There is no higher calling.

Prayer Prompt: *Spend 60 seconds (or more!) in silence.*

Pray for encouragement from God as you continue on your journey towards knowing Christ. God knows your struggles; he is there ready to assist you when you call on him. As Mark Batterson writes, "Whenever the enemy reminds you of your past, remind him of his future," knowing that Jesus Christ has forgiven you of all your sins, past, present and future.

Candlelight Prayer: *"Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses." 1 Timothy 6:12 (ESV)*

Father God, help me to fight the good fight of faith. If I could see the spiritual battle going on for each of us, I would be terrified. Knowing you are with me and in me, sustaining me, gives me the courage to keep going. Remind me to take respite with you alone, that you would lead me beside the still waters to refresh my soul.

Week 4

WEDNESDAY

We must set everything aside that could distract us from knowing Christ.

Week 4

THURSDAY

We should remember that our citizenship is in heaven and take heart that our lowly body will one day be like his glorious body, by the power of his resurrection.

Spotlight Passage: Philippians 3:17-21

Have you ever, as a kid, admired someone, perhaps an athlete, a performer, or a movie character, so much that you copied how they acted or dressed, or even how they talked or walked? That's what Paul is advising the Christians of his time to do. "Dear brothers and sisters, pattern your lives after mine and learn from those who follow our example" (Philippians 3:17 NLT). Remember, the believers couldn't just grab their handy Bible and see "what Jesus would do," so Paul, although not perfect by his own admission, was one of the best examples to follow.

Rather than setting our minds on earthly gain and risk becoming like the enemies of the cross, we should remember that our citizenship is in heaven and take heart that our lowly body will one day be like his glorious body, by the power of his resurrection.

Prayer Prompt: *Spend 60 seconds (or more!) in silence.*

Ask God to show you how you spend too much time and energy on things of this earth, this life, leaving little time to read the Word, worship, and enjoy the presence of God. Take heart in the glimpses Scripture gives us of the world to come — eternal life in the perfect peace of presence with our Creator.

Candlelight Prayer: *"So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God..."*
Ephesians 2:19 (ESV)

Oh Lord, when I think of being in your presence, I am undone. I find joy in the thought of being among the saints of the past, my loved ones and those who have gone before me. Thank you for the finished work of our salvation and the gift of grace. I want to live for you, all of my days.

Week 4

FRIDAY

Spiritual Reading

1. Ready

Take 60 seconds (or more) in silence as preparation for spiritual reading. Breathe deeply and center yourself on God's presence with you.

2. Read Spotlight Passage: Philippians 3:17-21 (MSG)

Read the Spotlight Passage using the text below or in your Bible. Listen to the text by reading it slowly. Reread up to three times if desired. Ask God to speak through his Word.

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Stick with me, friends. Keep track of those you see running this same course, headed for this same goal. There are many out there taking other paths, choosing other goals, and trying to get you to go along with them. I've warned you of them many times; sadly, I'm having to do it again. All they want is easy street. They hate Christ's Cross. But easy street is a dead-end street. Those who live there make their bellies their gods; belches are their praise; all they can think of is their appetites.

But there's far more to life for us. We're citizens of high heaven! We're waiting the arrival of the Savior, the Master, Jesus Christ, who will transform our earthy bodies into glorious bodies like his own. He'll make us beautiful and whole with the same powerful skill by which he is putting everything as it should be, under and around him.

.....

3. Receive

Reflect on what word, phrase, or sentence speaks to you from the text. Write it down in a journal. Notice your reaction to this word, phrase, or sentence without judging yourself. Sit in silence as you listen to the Lord.

4. Respond

Pray in response to the words God has stirred within you or spoken to you.

5. Rest

Rest in the presence of God, allowing the Scripture to take root and the Holy Spirit to transform you.

Week 5

Philippians 4

Spotlight Passage: Philippians 4:12

Paul comforts and assures us that our needs will be met in the ups and downs of life. Human needs are met with superhuman power, and when we can express gratitude, we can know that we are on the right road to recovery and renewal. Is there no better place to look for direction? This should be a perpetual theme in our lives.

I'm reminded that gratitude and adoration is expressed so clearly in classical music, the great hymns, and praise songs. In consideration for space, I'd like to give one example of each - in classical music, Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*; in the hymns, "May the Mind of Christ My Savior"; and finally, imparted throughout the book of Philippians, "You Raise Me Up":

When I am down and, oh, my soul, so weary,
When troubles come and my heart burdened be,
Then, I am still and wait here in the silence,
Until you come and sit awhile with me.

You raise me up, so I can stand on mountains.
You raise me up, to walk on stormy seas.
I am strong when I am on your shoulders.
You raise me up to more than I can be.

Wherever we are, and whatever state we are in, we can be assured that God will supply our every need.

Prayer Prompt: *Spend 60 seconds (or more!) in silence.*

Gratitude, even in the face of loss or suffering, can be transformative. Throughout his life, Paul consistently framed his circumstances in light of Christ, and was strengthened to persevere even when all seemed lost. In prayer, express gratitude to God for all that he is and all that he has done.

Candlelight Prayer: *"Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him; bless his name." Psalm 100:4 (ESV)*

Father, I come to you with thanksgiving, grateful for all that you are and all that you have given me. No matter my circumstance, I know that through Christ I can be strengthened.

Week 5

MONDAY

Human needs are met with superhuman power, and when we can express gratitude, we can know that we are on the right road to recovery and renewal.

Week 5

TUESDAY

Ask the Spirit to continually teach you a proper heart posture both in times of want and times of abundance.

Spotlight Passage: Philippians 4:6

Throughout Philippians, Paul is encouraging us to “press on.” To press on in whatever state we find ourselves. Are we at war? Is there illness? Are there family tensions? Are there personal issues? Is there a drought, famine, or forest fire? Whatever it might be, we have an incredible example in Paul.

Can you imagine yourself being in prison and yet able to accomplish so much? This is hard for me to take in. Even so, he says concretely, “The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything...”

Shouldn't this concept get us through anything and everything? It is a privilege to witness this verse come alive, even in times of deep sadness or uncertainty. “I know how to be brought low,” he writes, “and I know how to abound.”

Prayer Prompt: *Spend 60 seconds (or more!) in silence.*

Take a moment to recall ways in which God has pulled you through challenging trials. How did you respond? What did your heart look like? Was it filled with gratitude, or with a sense of entitlement? Ask the Spirit to continually teach you a proper heart posture both in times of want and times of abundance.

Candlelight Prayer: *“Remove far from me falsehood and lying; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me, lest I be full and deny you and say, ‘Who is the Lord?’ or lest I be poor and steal and profane the name of my God.” Proverbs 30:8-9 (ESV)*

Father, I know my tendency to depend on you during times of need and then to forget to thank you when you see me through my challenges. Forgive me, O Lord. May your will be done in my life, and not my own.

Spotlight Passage: Philippians 4:8

From an artistic point of view, this verse could stand next to the *Mona Lisa* or *The Last Supper* by da Vinci. It is so beautiful. But, by practical analysis, there is much to extract.

Life is not filled with watershed moments only; when life is painful and disappointing, that's when it is most important to follow Paul's admonition. The Tempter vies to whisper in our ears; he wants to separate us from the love of God. But we can counterattack by remembering to dwell on things pure, lovely, excellent, and praiseworthy. When we do so, we are better able to stay focused on God's love and Christ's sacrifice for us.

My son, Eric, was deployed seven times to Iraq and Afghanistan with the Army. In his small group Bible study with fellow soldiers, they used this acronym: T N R P L A — true, noble, righteous, pure, lovely, admirable — a clear and concise way to recall the power of this verse.

There is no better summation than this: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Romans 12:2 ESV).

Prayer Prompt: *Spend 60 seconds (or more!) in silence.*

In prayer, consider each word of Philippians 4:8, expressing gratitude to God for the thoughts and memories that arise from each word. Consider ways you can adopt this verse throughout your day today.

Candlelight Prayer: *"You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you." Isaiah 26:3 (ESV)*

God of all creation, your goodness and compassion overwhelms me. Search me and know me, O God. Thank you for your tenderness, that you invite me to bring to you my cares and worries, and that through your Holy Spirit I can have peace.

Week 5

WEDNESDAY

Remembering
to dwell on
things pure,
lovely,
excellent, and
praiseworthy
enables us to
stay focused on
God's love
and Christ's
sacrifice for us.

Week 5

THURSDAY

By his example, Paul has taught us not only to share the gospel with those around us, but to walk alongside our brothers and sisters in both the joys and the failures of life.

Spotlight Passage: Philippians 4:14-23

Paul had an endearing manner of appealing for steadfastness and unity in all of his letters, especially in Philippians. "...brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends!" Even in places where he was trying to resolve dissonance and differences, he always managed to do so in love.

We are indebted to Paul for these compelling four chapters written to the faithful in Philippi. Coffeecup inscriptions abound in this letter, and Paul's mastery of language, rhetoric, and prose are on full display, as they are throughout much of the New Testament.

In all the aforementioned, we cannot diminish Paul's sensational conversion from a Christian-hater to a man so replete with a love for Christ. No matter what state he was in, he always found a way to articulate encouraging words, even to the least of these. It's hard to comprehend how he wrote such a beautiful letter to the Philippians from prison. Perhaps Paul's tremendous growth in Christ was due to his caring and leading others to faith with such intensity. The more he gave, it seemed, the more he grew.

By his example, he has taught us to be a missionary in our own backyard — our own local church and community or wherever we might be. Winning souls for the kingdom, like the poor jailer, no matter our circumstances. And not only to lead them to Christ, but to walk alongside them as they faced the many trials, uncertainties, and joys of life — the failures as well as the victories.

What tremendous grace that we can still be deeply moved by his words and his heart centuries later. In his letter to the Corinthians, he writes, "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1). We would do well to listen!

Prayer Prompt: *Spend 60 seconds (or more!) in silence.*

In prayer, take a moment to think of those around you — your family, friends, fellow believers. To whom can you share the hope of the gospel with today? Like Paul, consider ways both to be a witness of God's grace, as well as to encourage others in their faith.

Candlelight Prayer: *"To our God and Father be glory forever and ever."*
Philippians 4:20a (ESV)

Father God, to you be glory and honor and praise, forever and ever. Thank you for the gift of salvation, the finished work of Christ at Calvary, and the hope we have in his resurrection. And we thank you for the life and faithfulness of your servant, Paul, and the grace you have given us to preserve his letters to this day. Amen.

Week 5

FRIDAY

Spiritual Reading

1. Ready

Take 60 seconds (or more) in silence as preparation for spiritual reading. Breathe deeply and center yourself on God's presence with you.

2. Read Spotlight Passage: Philippians 4:4-9 (ESV)

Read the Spotlight Passage using the text below or in your Bible. Listen to the text by reading it slowly. Reread up to three times if desired. Ask God to speak through his Word.

.....

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

.....

3. Receive

Reflect on what word, phrase, or sentence speaks to you from the text. Write it down in a journal. Notice your reaction to this word, phrase, or sentence without judging yourself. Sit in silence as you listen to the Lord.

4. Respond

Pray in response to the words God has stirred within you or spoken to you.

5. Rest

Rest in the presence of God, allowing the Scripture to take root and the Holy Spirit to transform you.

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