

# Philippians

A Meditative Journey  
through Paul's Letter  
to the Philippians



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## Introduction

During these days of separation and social distancing, many of us are missing the regular times of study we have grown accustomed to participating in with other believers. While we look forward to the day when we can once again sit around a table with our friends and open up the word of God and study together, let us not fail to embrace the rich opportunity this pandemic is affording us to sit around our kitchen table and personally engage the God of scripture as individual disciples in the privacy of our homes.

During this pandemic, we have a great opportunity to feed our spirit and fill our mind with the wisdom that comes from above. Rather than just waiting for things to get back to “normal,” we can use this time to deepen our faith and, perhaps, even renew our relationship with God. Through the years, prayer, along with reading and meditating on scripture, have been the staple diet of faithful disciples of King Jesus. While there are many spiritual disciplines that contribute to and help foster spiritual growth, prayer and regular contact with the word seem to be the fertile ground out of which all the others grow.

One of the “blessings” to come out of this pandemic is a renewed awareness of our need for God and his daily guidance. But, while many recognize this need, they aren’t sure how to act on it. So, we decided to put together this guide to help those who want to use this time of challenge and uncertainty to draw closer to God through two fundamental disciplines: prayer and reading scripture.

## Prayer

If you’ve ever tried to learn a foreign language, you know that you learn it best when you actually have to speak it. The same is true with the “foreign language” of prayer. There are many good resources for learning how to pray, but the best way to learn how to pray is to pray. (Donald Whitney – *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, pg. 85).

Andrew Murray, author of *With Christ in the School of Prayer*, wrote, “Reading a book about prayer, listening to lectures and talking about it is very good, but it won’t teach you to pray. You get nothing without exercise, without practice. I might listen for a year to a professor of music playing the most beautiful music, but that won’t teach me to play an instrument.” (Christianity Today, February 5, 1990, pg. 38).

The truth is the Holy Spirit teaches praying people how to pray. So, pray! And remember, prayer is basically just having a conversation with God. Tell him about your day, tell him about your fears, your hopes, your dreams and aspirations. Talk to him about the people you love and those you’re concerned about. Talk to him about what you’re reading in scripture and what you’re thinking about and ask him to help you understand his word and obey it, even when you don’t fully understand it. As the old Nike commercial used to say, “Just do it!”

## Reading Scripture

When reading scripture, keep this mind - Bible study is not an end in itself. We want to know God through scripture. We want to have a relationship with the teacher, not just knowledge of his teachings. We want to avoid the mistake some have made in the past. Speaking to some of God's people in his day, Jesus said - "You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life" (John 5:39, 40).

We shouldn't just read the Bible to gain information, but rather, to seek transformation. Through his word, God is calling us to experience life with him. As we encounter Him in his word, He reshapes us into the image of his Son. One particular approach to the Bible that many have found helpful in bringing about the spiritual transformation we seek and that God desires is a meditative approach.

Don't be intimidated or put off by the word meditation. Although this way of reading scripture may sound new or faddish, it has a long heritage among God's people. The psalmist, in particular, was very fond of this word. (Psalm 1:2; 39:3; 119:15, 23, 27, 48, 78, 97, 99, and 148). Meditation is taking the words of scripture to heart and letting them ask questions of us. It is slowly chewing over a text, listening closely, reading God's message to us over and over.

It's not about how much scripture we read but letting what we read soak into our spirit and change us. For this reason, each daily reading will be relatively short. Again, it's not about getting through a certain amount of scripture in a designated time, it's about listening, digesting, and obeying.

## Conclusion

Through daily personal prayer and meditation on God's word, the Holy Spirit will do his mysterious and marvelous work of transformation. Consider this your invitation and opportunity to draw closer to God during this time of uncertainty and separation. While we may be apart from each other, God is close and ready to draw even closer, if we will draw near to him. (James 4:8).



## **Week One: To Live is Christ, to Die is Gain (1:1-30)**

Prayer for the Week: “Sovereign God, Almighty King, teach us to live in that place where life is always meaningful and death itself is gain!”

### **Day One – 1:1-9**

- What was the reason for Paul’s gratitude for the Philippians?
- Of what was Paul confident? What did he mean by this?
- What was Paul’s prayer for the Philippians? Why?

### **Day Two – 1:12-18a**

- How did Paul react to his imprisonment?
- What happened as a result of Paul’s imprisonment?
- What was Paul’s attitude toward those who trying to cause him trouble while in prison? What does this tell us about Paul?

### **Day Three – 1:18b-26**

- What do you think Paul means by “my deliverance?”
- What do you think Paul means by saying “to live is Christ?” What would it look like to live this way?
- How is it that Paul desired to depart, yet “chose” to stay? How do you view death?

### **Day Four – 1:27-30**

- What does Paul mean by encouraging his readers to “conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ?” How would that look?
- Why should the Philippians not be afraid of those who might oppose them? What and/or who do you fear?
- How is it that it is granted to us not only to believe but also to suffer? How do you view personal suffering?

### **Day Five – 1:1-30**

- If Paul were to tell you that Christ would bring to completion the good work begun in you, what would that good work be? How can you make yourself more available to God and his work in you?
- Have you ever had anyone do something to intentionally harm or disparage you? How did you react? What might you have done that would more fully honor God?
- Can you say, “For me to live is Christ, and to die gain?” How can this more fully become your mindset?

### **Day Six - Meditation**

Paul has much to teach us about how we view our own lives. Paul wants every believer to be full of joy and gratitude—no matter what the circumstances. With us living in a culture that floods our minds with the idea that life is good it—Paul’s call to joy and thanksgiving in all circumstances is a real challenge!



## Week Two: The Christ Hymn (2:1-30)

Prayer for the Week: “Dear Father, there are no words that can adequately express our amazement at what Jesus Christ was willing to do in order to show us the way to abundant life. Train our hearts and minds to sing our Savior’s song of life. May we fully submit our lives to you after the example of our Lord.”

### Day One – 2:1-4

- How do you think the Philippian church answered this series of questions? Why? How would you answer his questions?
- How could Paul’s joy be made complete? Would he be joyful if he knew of the relationships in the family of faith of which you are a part?
- How is it that we are to consider one another as better than ourselves? What would happen if an entire community of faith chose to see each other in this way?

### Day Two – 2:5-11

- In what way should our attitude be like that of Jesus? How can you demonstrate more of a humble, servant mindset today?
- Why did Jesus not grasp or hold on to his “equality with God?”
- What was the result of Jesus’ obedient life, suffering, and death?

### Day Three – 2:12-18

- How are we to work out our salvation if we are saved by God’s grace?
- Is this an overstatement or did Paul really mean we are to do everything without complaining or arguing? What do you complain about most often? Who do you most frequently argue with? What can you do today to change this behavior on your part?
- What do you think Paul meant by the believers shining like stars in the universe?

### Day Four – 2:19-30

- What made Timothy unique for Paul?
- What image does Paul use to describe his relationship with Timothy? Do you have relationships in the Lord similar to this? A spiritual father or child? If so, take a moment to thank God for such a gift.
- What does Paul ask the Philippians to do in receiving Epaphroditus? Why?

### Day Five – 2:1-20

- How would it change our churches if members did nothing out of self-interest? Is this possible? How would it change you if you did nothing out of self-interest? What would that look like?
- How can we encourage one another to embrace the story of life Jesus came to give us? Is the life of Jesus the model of life you pursue? Why or why not?
- How is it that God works in us, to will and to act according to his purposes? How might we be more cooperative with God in this endeavor?

**Day Six - Meditation**

This is the heart of the gospel. For all we have received in Jesus Christ, it means nothing unless our only intent in life is to be like him. Jesus came to save us not only from our sins but from ourselves. His pattern of life is unlike any other. Being God himself, he demonstrated life in its only true form—that of a servant fully submitted to God. The result of such a life? Exaltation to the highest place!

I can't help but think of the failure of the children of Israel. God called them to be a nation above all nations. They wanted that, but they insisted on doing it their own way. The results were tragic. We risk the same mistake. We all seek to be exalted. And so we should. We are the image of God—created for greatness! Yet, if we seek to exalt ourselves, we are as foolish as the child attempting to pick himself up by his own shoestrings. The way up is down, and Jesus proved this by his amazing life.

So, what will you do with your life? Will you be a star shining in the sky to God's glory? That is God's invitation. But there is only one way to get there. "If you would be my follower, deny yourself, pick up your cross daily, and follow me." We know these words. But will we sing the Christ hymn? "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: . . ." I challenge you to read these verses (2:6-11) and meditate on them every day. Let's make this song the theme of our lives.

"Dear Father, there are no words that can adequately express our amazement at what Jesus Christ was willing to do in order to show us the way to abundant life. Train our hearts and minds to sing our Savior's song of life. May we fully submit our lives to you after the example of our Lord."

Adapted from Earl Lavender's *Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians & Philemon: Jesus Above All*.

**Notes**

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## **Week Three: Spiritual Transformation (3:1-4:1)**

Prayer for the Week: “Loving God, give us eyes to see our Lord in such a way that the pursuit of anything else would seem foolish.”

### **Day One – 3:1-6**

- Who are the “mutilators of the flesh” of which Paul warns?
- What are the marks of “true circumcision?” Do we bear these signs of authentic faith?
- Did Paul have any reason to be proud of his earthly accomplishments? Why did Paul bring this up? What accomplishments are you most proud of in your life? How do they stack up to knowing Jesus?

### **Day Two – 3:7-11**

- What did Paul find to be of greater value than earthly wealth and accomplishments? What do you value the most in your life?
- What righteousness did Paul find? What does this mean?
- What did Paul still want to know more about? Does the resurrection give you hope?

### **Day Three – 3:12-16**

- What had Paul not attained?
- What did Paul choose to forget and what did Paul choose to pursue?
- What is “the prize” of which Paul speaks?

### **Day Four – 3:17-4:1**

- What is the example Paul called his readers to follow? What are the specifics of such an example?
- How does Paul describe the lives of those who are living as “enemies of the cross of Christ?” What are the implications of our citizenship being in heaven?

### **Day Five – 3:1-4:1**

- What do you value most in your life? If it is not Jesus Christ as the model of life, why not?
- What can we do to help one another set the life and teachings of Jesus as the ultimate pursuit of our lives? What things that you once highly valued have become less attractive and meaningful to you? Why?
- Paul said if our minds are on earthly things we are living as enemies of the cross. How could he say this? How can we encourage one another to live for things of true value? What do you spend the most time thinking about: earthly things or spiritual things?

### **Day Six – Meditation**

This is one of my favorite texts in the Bible. For purposes of teaching personal spiritual formation, there simply is no more helpful passage. We see what Paul experienced when he encountered Jesus Christ and continued to grow in that relationship. Apparently, his detractors accused him of teaching a gospel of emptying one’s self because he had nothing of which to be proud. On the contrary—he had every reason to have pride in his material



## Week Four: Rejoice in the Lord (4:2-23)

Prayer for the Week: “Lord, may we find that life offered only in Jesus. A life of true meaning and joy, not based on our expectations, but rather on your promises.”

### Day One – 4:2-7

- What do we know of Euodia and Syntyche through these verses? Who do you know who currently isn't getting along? What can you do to encourage them to work together?
- Why should we “rejoice always in the Lord”? Is this really possible?
- What should replace worry in our lives, according to Paul?

### Day Two – 4:8,9

- Why does Paul care about the things which occupy our thoughts?
- List things in your life that can be described with these words. Intentionally think and meditate on these things. Reflect on these things as often as you can. After a few days, write down how this practice influenced your life.
- What do we need to do to experience the peace of God being with us?

### Day Three – 4:10-19

- For what was Paul thankful? What are you most thankful for today?
- Upon what did Paul's contentment depend? Are you content? If not, why not? What more do you need to be content?
- What was the benefit Paul received from the gift sent to him by the Philippians? What was the last gift someone gave you? How did you express your thanks for the gift?

### Day Four – 4:20-23

- Why does Paul end in an ascription of praise to God? Write out a note of praise to God.
- What does Paul's greeting tell us about the spreading of the gospel?
- What is “the grace” which Paul desires to be with us?

### Day Five – 4:2-23

- Do you know of contentions in your community of faith you might help resolve? If so, spend much time in prayer and then be God's minister of reconciliation.
- Do you worry? If so, develop the practice of going to God in a prayer of thanksgiving for all he has provided you in the past. Make a list of things you're thankful for today.

### Day Six – Meditation

Once again, we come to the topic of the contented life. It is, I believe, the desire of every human heart. To live a life of meaning, purpose, and joy is what all seek—what philosophers call the *summum bonum* (life of ultimate goodness). Every significant teacher, spiritual leader or guru in history has provided their own interpretation of this. Every world religion attempts to lead its adherents to this. What is the true “good life?” For Paul, it is found in one word: Jesus. In him, you truly rejoice. In him, there is no place for anxiety. Can you imagine? In the

