

# Philippians

Lesson 4

Chapter 2:1-18

Leader Guide

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## Lesson 4

### Philippians 2:1-18

### Encouragement in Christ

*“For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose”  
(Philippians 2:13)*

#### Prayers

#### Introduction

This portion of Paul’s letter includes two important themes, imitating Christ’s humility and finding joy in difficult circumstances. Christ’s humility and obedience to his Father’s will - even to death, is the basis of our attitude toward humility. Paul encouraged his friends to look after their own interests and the interest of others out of their love for Christ. Paul relates following Christ’s example of humility to submission in other letters. Believers are to submit to governing authorities (Romans 13:1), to the pastors who serve them (1 Corinthians 16:16), and to one another (Ephesians 5:21) out of their love for Christ. Likewise, wives are to submit to their husbands (Ephesians 5:22), and husbands are to love and serve their wives (Ephesians 5:25).

Paul’s joy transcended his circumstance of facing death in prison. Paul’s joy was founded in his life as Christ’s disciple. Despite his many sufferings, Paul saw his work coming to fruition in the life of his friends – the believers in Philippi, Thessalonica, Ephesus, Corinth, Rome, Galatia, and many more. Although some early churches faced internal division, the Philippian church was united in faith, love, and obedience. They were living out Christ’s promise, *“If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father’s commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete”* (John 15:10-11).

#### Read Philippians 2:1-18 Imitating Christ’s Humility

Phil 2:1 If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion,

Phil 2:2 then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.

Phil 2:3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.

Phil 2:4 Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Phil 2:5 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

Phil 2:6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,

Phil 2:7 but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.

Phil 2:8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death — even death on a cross!

Phil 2:9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name,

Phil 2:10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

Phil 2:11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Phil 2:12 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,

Phil 2:13 for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.

Phil 2:14 Do everything without complaining or arguing,

Phil 2:15 so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe

Phil 2:16 as you hold out the word of life—in order that I may boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor for nothing.

Phil 2:17 But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you.

Phil 2:18 So you too should be glad and rejoice with me.

## Discuss

1. In verses 1-3, what are some of the behaviors that result from being united in Christ?
  - a. Verse 2:1 **encouragement, comfort, fellowship, tenderness, and compassion**
  - b. Verse 2:2 **like-minded, united in love, spirit, and purpose**
  - c. Verse 2:3 **humility**
2. Which of these speaks most to your situation now?

## Answers vary.

3. Looking out for the needs of others can be both wonderful and a real challenge for discernment. How does Paul's command in verse 2:4 challenge the church and you personally?

**The scope of needs in our congregations can be enormous; comforting the sick and dying, those who are divorcing, domestic abuse, substance addiction, and financial distress including losing a home during joblessness. The needs for monetary assistance and effective counseling are beyond most congregations. Some who look for charity will never be seen again. These situations take discernment and wisdom. No wonder Paul prayed for knowledge and insight for the Philippians.**

**I have been blessed by the thoughtfulness of others when I've been sick. They have prayed for me, visited, provided meals, and sent notes of encouragement. Likewise, it has been a blessing when I've been able to encourage and comfort others.**

4. In verses 5-8, how does Paul describe Christ's humility?

Phil 2:6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,

Phil 2:7 but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.

Phil 2:8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death — even death on a cross!

**Christ was divine but set his glory aside to become a human, a servant of God and man. He was both fully man and fully God, parented by the virgin Mary and the Holy Spirit. As man, he bore the sin of all mankind to reconcile all who believe in him to God. In the Garden of Gethsemane, the night before his crucifixion, Jesus asked God if there was any other way to accomplish mankind's redemption besides his death, but the answer was no; there was no other way.**

5. How did God exalt Jesus Christ's humility, verses 2:9-11?

Therefore, God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:9-11)

**Jesus was raised from the dead, ascended into heaven, and is to be worshipped as our Lord.**

6. Humility can easily be confused with self-depreciation, but humility is a trait of strength, whereas self-depreciation is a trait of weakness. Which of the following words are part of humility?

Submission	Insecurity	Self-doubt	Inferior
Servant	Sacrifice	Passive	Pride
Indecisive	Obedience	Arrogance	Patience
Compassion	Dependence		Privileged

**Submission, servant, sacrifice, obedience, patience, compassion, and dependence, all describe aspects of humility. Some attributes, like dependence, can also be negative if their focus is misplaced. Christ modeled dependence on God, but dependence on someone else for emotional well-being is unhealthy.**

7. Philippians 2:12 is a verse that can challenge our understanding of salvation – “continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling.” A similar verse is 2 Peter 1:10, “Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure.” A fundamental understanding of our faith is that our salvation is found in Christ alone (Acts 4:12), not through our works (Ephesians 2:9). Christ is our total security; we do not earn our salvation through good works. How do you interpret these difficult passages on salvation?

**Both Peter and Paul taught that salvation was by God's grace through faith in Christ. Paul wrote in Ephesians 2:8-9, “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.” When Peter addressed the Jews in Jerusalem about how to be saved, he told them in Acts 2:38 that salvation is found in Christ, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”**

**In the difficult passages, Paul and Peter discuss practical aspects of Christian living. Our lives should have abundant good works – not to earn our salvation but as an act of living out our salvation. Because we are saved, we are called to love others out of gratitude for our Lord. The phrase “with fear and trembling” emphasizes that even this act of obedience is to be done in humility and reliance on God.**

8. Verse 2:13 is another great verse in scripture, “for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose,” which speaks to how God is continually at work in our lives, bringing about his good purposes for us. A simple lesson that takes a lifetime to comprehend is that it is God’s work to bring you and keep you in Christ. Summarize in your own words God’s work in bringing you to Christ in the following verses:

- a. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. (Ephesians 1:4)

**God chose us to be holy and blameless in his sight – through his son, Jesus Christ.**

- b. He will also keep you firm to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. (1 Corinthians 1:8-9)

**God calls us into fellowship with Jesus Christ and will keep me secure until the end, holy and blameless in Christ**

- c. Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives in you? (1 Corinthians 3:16)

**God has given me his Holy Spirit to abide with me so that I may abide in Christ and bear his spiritual fruit.**

- d. For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (Ephesians 2:10)

**God has prepared wonderful things for me to do, to bless my life and further his kingdom. I confess that I do not even know what these things are, but I pray that God will further his kingdom as I am a steward of his many gifts, participate in acts of service, and celebrate the joy of knowing my neighbors.**

- e. And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen. (1 Peter 5:10-11)

**God called me to eternal life through faith in Christ.**

9. In his book “The Blessing,” Gary Smalley includes imagining a bright future for your child as part of the blessing. In verses 2:14-16, Paul imagines the spiritual future for the Philippians as shining like the stars as they hold out the word of life to a lost generation.

Phil 2:14 Do everything without complaining or arguing,

Phil 2:15 so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe

Phil 2:16 as you hold out the word of life—in order that I may boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor for nothing.

- a. How can you encourage the spiritual development of others?

- b. How do you hold out the word of life to a lost generation?

**The most effective Christian outreach ministry is to children by their family and friends since eighty-five percent of Christians come to faith by age fourteen through the nurturing of their parents and grandparents. The remaining 15% come to faith as adults, usually because someone, not necessarily a friend or family member, engaged them in a spiritual conversation that led to involvement in a “connective ministry” – a small group Bible Study, fellowship group, or service ministry. Jesus described connective ministry in slightly different terms in the parable of the sheep and goats (Matthew 25:35-36), “For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes, and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.”**

- 10.** Paul describes life as a drink offering in verse 2:17. His language comes from Genesis 35:14, when Jacob set up a pillar at Bethel and poured a drink offering of oil on it. What would happen to a drink offering poured on a rock or onto a fire? It would return to the ground or go up in steam. What is Paul’s meaning of this figure of speech?

**His life would pass away, but Christ would be exalted forever. Paul was living his life to glorify Christ.**

- 11.** Paul closes words of comfort and encouragement to the Philippians with the reason for his joy in life, even while in prison, in verse 2:18, “So you too should be glad and rejoice with me.” How would you summarize the reason for Paul’s joy?

**The faith of the Philippians was the source of Paul’s joy. His joy was from seeing the love of Christ grow in his friends.**

**Closing Prayer**