Philippians:

Ancient Wisdom for

*Modern Times*

Welcome and Orientation

Welcome to our engagement of Saint Paul’s Letter to the Church in Philippi.

The Lord be with You … let us pray …

So here’s our learning process:

* First, everyone please be sure you are on the sign-up sheet. We need your name and email address. We will send emails out following each session. This way you can keep up if you miss a session. My teaching will be recorded and made available.
* Each week we will begin at our tables in groups of six or so and begin with twenty-five or so minutes of sharing. We will spend time getting acquainted, and we will respond to the “HolyWork” we did during the week.
  + This small group time will be facilitated by a trained facilitator.
  + In your packet this morning is a “small group covenant” that you are asked to review this week. It is part of the HolyWork.
  + You will remain in the same group throughout the class, five or six weeks. Of course, if you like, you can arrange to gather in groups with people you know. And some of you are here from pre-existing groups. That’s all good. Also, I encourage you to be open to meeting and getting acquainted with new people.
* Following the small group time, I will teach and answer questions for about thirty minutes. This teaching will prepare you for the “HolyWork” to be done between our sessions.
* “HolyWork” -- *The* Art *of Engaging Holy Scripture*
  + The HolyWork will have layers. You are encouraged to do as much of it as you can. Hopefully, each week you can do enough so that you can actively participate in your small group. Later this morning I’ll share the HolyWork for our first week.

So, that’s it. Any questions?

Let’s now learn the method of *The* Art *of Engaging Holy Scripture.* It’s really quite simple and straightforward. I like to call it “Bible Study for everyone, from the novice to the scholar.”

Ode to Joy image used here

**Translation of Philippians**

**How language works**

* The ambiguity of language. For example: What do you hear, think, feel, image when I say “love”?
* The idiosyncrasies of translations, especially the difference in the syntax between Greek and English. Because of this, my translation is at times smooth and at times edgy.
* The footnotes offer alternative translations and modest explanations and comments.
* Brackets in the translation […] supply words that are omitted but implied in the Greek text. See 1:21 as a good example.
* You might prefer your favorite translation. Consulting multiple translations tends to be fruitful.
* Reading and hearing in community
* The gift of scholarship

Salutation

1:1 Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi with the overseers[[1]](#footnote-1) and administrators,[[2]](#footnote-2) (2) grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul’s Thanks for Their Partnership in the Gospel

1:3 I thank my God every time I remember you, (4) always in every prayer of mine for all of you, praying with joy, (5) because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now, (6) since I am confident of this very thing, that the One who began a good work among you will bring it to completion until the day of Jesus Christ; (7) for it is indeed right for me to think this way about all of you because I have you in my heart,[[3]](#footnote-3) since both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all became partners with me in the grace [of God]. (8) For God is my witness how I long for all of you with the affection[[4]](#footnote-4) of Christ Jesus.

1:9 And this is what I am praying – that your love may continue to grow[[5]](#footnote-5) still more and more in knowledge and all insight[[6]](#footnote-6) (10) so that you may continue to determine the things that really matter,[[7]](#footnote-7) so that you may be pure[[8]](#footnote-8) and blameless all the way to the day of Christ, (11) having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God.

The Advancement of the Gospel, Paul’s Whole Focus

1:12 Now I wish you to know, brothers and sisters, that my situation has actually resulted in the spread of the gospel (13) so that it has become clear to the whole imperial guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for the sake of Christ, (14) and most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord through my chains to a much greater degree to dare fearlessly to speak the word.

1:15 Some, for sure, proclaim Christ out of envy and strife,[[9]](#footnote-9) but others out of goodwill; (16) the ones indeed out of love, knowing that for the defense of the gospel I have been placed here, (17) but the others out of rivalry[[10]](#footnote-10) proclaim Christ, not with a pure motive, thinking to stir up trouble for me in my imprisonment. (18) So what?! Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is being proclaimed, and in this I rejoice.

But not only this, I shall continue to rejoice, (19) for I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayers and the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ (20) in accord with my eager expectation and hope, that in no way will I be disgraced but in all openness as always so now, Christ will be exalted in my body,[[11]](#footnote-11) whether through life or through death. (21) For to me to live [is] Christ and to die [is] gain. (22) But if [I am to continue] to live in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me, and what I should choose[[12]](#footnote-12) I do not know. (23) But I am held fast, constrained, between the two, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, which is much better by far; (24) but to remain in the flesh is more necessary for you. (25) And since I am confident of this, I know that I will remain and continue with all of you for your maturation[[13]](#footnote-13) and the joy of faith, (26) in order that your ground for boasting may abound in Christ Jesus, in me, through my coming to you again.[[14]](#footnote-14)

Only This: Be Worthy Citizens of the Gospel

(27) Only this:[[15]](#footnote-15) conduct yourselves worthily as citizens of the gospel of Christ, in order that whether I come and see you or whether I remain absent, I hear about you, that you stand steadfast in one Spirit, in one soul struggling side by side for the faith of the gospel, (28) and not being intimidated in any way by those who oppose you, which is to them a sign of destruction, but of your salvation, and this is God’s doing; (29) because[[16]](#footnote-16) to you has been freely granted [by God] on behalf of Christ, not only to continue to believe in him but also to continue to suffer for him, (30) since you are having the same struggle you saw in me and are now hearing to be in me.

Let Nothing Divide Your Unity in the Gospel:

You Have Christ’s Mindset

2:1 Therefore, if there is any comfort[[17]](#footnote-17) in Christ, if any consolation[[18]](#footnote-18) of love, if any sharing[[19]](#footnote-19) of the Spirit, if any tender mercies[[20]](#footnote-20) and compassion[[21]](#footnote-21) (2) [then] make my joy complete in that you think the same, having the same love, harmonious,[[22]](#footnote-22) the one [thing] thinking, (3) [doing] nothing for selfish ambition, [doing] nothing for vanity, but in humiliation[[23]](#footnote-23) consider one another as surpassing[[24]](#footnote-24) yourselves, (4) each of you not looking to your own interests but to the interests of others, each [and everyone] of you. (5) You have this mindset in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus,[[25]](#footnote-25) who though he existed in the form of God did not consider equality with God as a prize to be grasped[[26]](#footnote-26) (7) but emptied himself the form of a slave taking, in the likeness of humanity being born; and in outward appearance perceived as human, (8) he humiliated himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (9) Therefore God has indeed exalted him beyond measure and freely given to him the name that is above every name, (10) so that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth (11) and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

(12) So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, with reverence and awe continue working out what your salvation means as a community; (13) for God is the One who is at work in and among you, [granting you] both to will and to work for God’s good pleasure.

(14) Do everything without grumbling or wrangling, (15) so that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish amid a crooked and corrupt generation among whom you shine as luminaries in the world, (16) because you hold on to the word of life – which is grounds for my boasting on the day of Christ, that I did not run in vain nor labor in vain. (17) But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering in the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and rejoice together with all of you; (18) in the same way, you, too, rejoice and rejoice together with me.

Paul’s Concern for Them

(19) But I do hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, in order that I too may be heartened[[27]](#footnote-27) knowing how things are with you. (20) For no one do I have of kindred spirit,[[28]](#footnote-28) who will genuinely care about your interests. (21) For they all seek after their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. (22) But Timothy’s proven character you know, because as a child with his father, with me he served the gospel. (23) Therefore I hope to send this man quickly, as soon as I see how things go with me, (24) and I am confident in the Lord that I myself will come soon.

(25) But I do consider it necessary for now to send Ephaphroditus to you, the brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier of mine, and your apostle and minister to my need, (26) because he was longing for you all and distressed because you heard that he was ill. (27) For he was indeed ill, coming close to death; but God showed mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, that I might not have grief upon grief. (28) Therefore, I am all the more eager to send him, so that when you see him again you may rejoice and I may be free from anxiety.[[29]](#footnote-29) (29) So then, welcome him in the Lord with all joy, and such persons hold in high regard,

(30) because on account of the work for Christ he came near death, having risked his life in order that he might fill up what was lacking in your service to me.

Do Not Be Dissuaded from the Gospel

3:1 Further, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you does not cause me hesitation, and it is a safeguard for you.[[30]](#footnote-30)

(2) Beware the dogs! Beware the evil workers! Beware the mutilation! (3) For we are the circumcision, the ones who serve by the Spirit of God and who boast in Christ Jesus and who place no confidence in human credentials,[[31]](#footnote-31) (4) although I myself have grounds for confidence in human credentials. If anyone else thinks to have confidence in human credentials, I have more; (5)[[32]](#footnote-32) With regard to circumcision, on the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews, as to Law, a Pharisee, (6) as to zeal persecuting the church, as to the righteousness in the Law being found blameless. (7) But whatever was gain to me, these things I have considered on account of Christ, loss. (8) More than that, I indeed consider all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of everything, and consider it dung,[[33]](#footnote-33) in order that I may gain Christ (9) and be found [by God] in him, not having a righteousness[[34]](#footnote-34) of my own that is derived from the Law, but the righteousness that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness that comes from God based on faith, (10) to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing[[35]](#footnote-35) of his sufferings, being conformed to his death, (11) if somehow I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

(12) Not that already I have attained this or already have been perfected, but I press on if also I may lay hold of that for which I was also laid hold of by Christ Jesus. (13) Brothers and sisters, I myself do not consider myself to have laid hold; but one [thing], the things behind indeed forgetting but the things ahead stretching out for,[[36]](#footnote-36) (14) according to the goal I press on toward the prize of the upward[[37]](#footnote-37) calling of God in Christ Jesus. (15) Therefore, as many of us as are mature, let us think this way; and if any of you think differently, this, too, God will reveal to you; (16) but into what we have attained, in this [let us] walk.

(17) Imitators of me be, brothers and sisters, and take note of those who walk in this way just as you have an example in us. (18) For many walk of whom I have often spoken to you, but now even weeping I speak, who are enemies of the cross of Christ, (19) whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly and who glory in their shame, those whose concern is earthly things. (20) For our citizenship in the heavens exists, from which also a savior we eagerly await, the Lord Jesus Christ, (21) who shall transform the body of our humiliation to the likeness of the body of his glory, according to the operative power of his ability to subject to himself all things.

How to Live as Citizens of the Gospel

4:1 And so, my brothers and sisters, beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, in this way stand in the Lord, beloved. (2) Euodia I urge and Syntyche I urge to think the same[[38]](#footnote-38) in the Lord. (3) Indeed, I am asking you[[39]](#footnote-39) also, true fellow-worker, take part and assist them, who in the cause of the gospel struggled together with me, and also alongside Clement and my other co-workers; whose names are written in the book of life.

(4) Rejoice in the Lord always. I shall say it again, rejoice. (5) Let your gentleness[[40]](#footnote-40) be known to everyone. The Lord is near.[[41]](#footnote-41) (6) Do not continue to be anxious about anything,[[42]](#footnote-42) but in everything[[43]](#footnote-43) in prayer and in petition with thanksgiving let your requests constantly be made known to God. (7) And the peace of God that transcends all mind shall keep guard over your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus.

(8) Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever things are true, whatever honorable, whatever just,[[44]](#footnote-44) whatever pure, whatever lovely, whatever appealing, if any virtue and if any praise[[45]](#footnote-45) these things ponder; (9) and the things you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these things keep practicing, and the God of peace will be with you.

(10) I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last you have revived your concern for me, a concern upon which you were long intent, but lacked opportunity to express. (11) Not that I speak from need, for I have learned in whatever circumstances I am in to be content. (12) I know how to be brought low,[[46]](#footnote-46) and I know how to abound with plenty; in everything and in all things[[47]](#footnote-47) I have learned the secret[[48]](#footnote-48) [of contentment], both to eat to the full and be satisfied and to go hungry, both to abound and to lack, (13) [for] all things I am strong in the One who strengthens me.[[49]](#footnote-49)

(14) Nevertheless, you did well to share with me in my troubles. (15) And as you yourselves know, Philippians, that at the beginning of the gospel when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving except you alone. (16) And that even in Thessalonica, more than once, you sent me something for my needs. (17) Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds more and more to your account. (18) And I have received everything and I abound; I have all I need having received from Ephaphroditus what you sent, a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God. (19) And my God shall fulfill every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. (20) Now to our God and Father be the glory into the ages of ages,[[50]](#footnote-50) amen.

(21) Extend greetings to every saint in Christ Jesus. The co-workers who are with me greet you. (22) All the saints greet you, and especially those of Caesar’s household.

(23) The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be[[51]](#footnote-51) with – and is with – your spirit.

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HolyWork week 1

1. Review the small group covenant and be prepared to ask questions or to acknowledge your acceptance of it.
2. Read all of Philippians in one sitting. This should take around 30 minutes.
3. At a different time, read all of Philippians again and be attentive to a section you want to engage using the *taehs* method. This could take an hour or more.
   1. Engage the passage you have chosen:
      1. What do I notice or observe? Write your observations.
      2. Of the observations I have written, do I find one or more drawing my attention? Pause and spend a little time with what has attracted my attention. Again, write this down.
      3. What is my response to what has attracted my attention? This might include questions or thoughts about other Bible passages that I want to look up, or it might include recalling comments from other authors or speakers. I might feel the need to do some research. Treat google and Wikipedia as your friend. Also, feel free to consult Bible dictionaries or study Bibles or any dictionary.
         1. As you allow your response to go where it needs to go, see if you are not being led to offer your response to God in some form of prayer. If this does not happen on its own, see if you can’t intentionally form it into a prayer. Anything from, “O God, I am confused and have questions and need to learn more,” to “O God, I am longing for this in my life,” to “O God, please grant me grace and help that I might be a more faithful disciple,” to “O God, I open myself for you to do this work in me,” etc.
            1. Be open to God responding to your prayer. We will learn more about “hearing” or “intuiting” God’s response and how to respond to that in coming weeks.
      4. At the end, spend some time resting by faith in Christ’s/God’s/the Spirit’s presence. When you have completed your time, offer thanks. You might end with the Lord’s Prayer.
4. If you have time for more and are interested, you can read the story of the founding of the church in Philippi in Acts 16:6-40.

Small Group Covenant and Participation Process

A small group covenant is simply a list of ground rules by which a small group agrees to operate. The list below includes some basic ground rules typical of a small group. Please read through the items and think through the questions that follow. During Session #2, we will take a moment to determine whether we all agree to follow them:

*Attendance:* I understand that I am an important member of the group and will do my best to be here each week and to be on time.

*Preparation:* I will do the HolyWork during the week as I am able and will be open to share with the group some of what I discover and experience.

*Participation:* I will enter enthusiastically into the group discussion and sharing.

*Prayer:* I will pray for the members of my small group and for our experiences together.

*Confidentiality:* I will not share with anyone outside of the group the personal stories shared by other participants during the group session.

*Openness:* I will be candid with others in appropriate ways. I will allow others the freedom to be open in ways appropriate to them.

*Respect:* I will not judge others, give advice, or criticize. I will listen attentively when others are speaking.

*Care:* I will be open to the needs of each person in appropriate ways.

*Facilitator’s*

*Role:* I will respect the facilitator’s role to assist me in being faithful to the small group covenant, to keep the group on topic, and to keep the group moving along in a timely manner. I give the facilitator permission to invite individuals to respond if they want to and to help us make time for everyone.

Do these ground rules seem reasonable and appropriate for our group?

Is there anything that needs further clarification?

Is there anything that you would change, delete, or add?

Our small group process is designed such that each participant responds either to a getting acquainted question or to the HolyWork. We are not primarily responding to what someone else has said. The diagrams below depict how the conversations in our groups are intended to flow. The diagram on the left represents what is intended to be the primary pattern of interaction in our groups. The diagram on the right represents an interaction pattern we avoid as the primary flow of conversation. Our responses are directed to the group as a whole, which is represented by the smaller circle in the middle of the diagram.

This pattern of small group sharing is sometimes referred to as “no cross-talk.”

1. Or guardians, bishops. The Greek word is *episkopos* from which we get the word bishop. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Or servants, agents, deacons. The Greek word is *diakonos* from which we get the word deacon. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. “The heart is the ‘center and source of the whole inner life, with its thinking, feeling, and volition’” (Walter Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians,* p. 52 quoting BDAG, the standard Greek-English dictionary used in Biblical studies). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Inner parts, bowels, heart, which, in the ancient world “served as the referents for psychological aspects” … the seat and source of love, sympathy, and mercy (BDAG). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Literally, abound [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Or discernment [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Or are superior [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Sincere, transparent, authentic [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Or rivalry [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Or ambition [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. That is, through me or through what happens to me. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Or what I prefer. Paul doesn’t have a choice in this matter. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Or progress or advancement [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. The idea here is not human pride but being strengthened in faith and joy in Christ through Paul coming to be with them again. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Or “The important thing is this:” [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. This conjunction, “because,” is an important word in a very important paragraph. The gospel was everything for Paul. His awakening. His calling. His hope. His affection for the Philippians flows from them being his partner in the work of the gospel, which is, for Paul, the salvation of the world. And to make the gospel one’s life – to believe into the gospel (the good news) of Christ – is also to embrace suffering … as a gift! But not just any suffering. Suffering for the gospel of Christ. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. And exhortation [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. And encouragement [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. And fellowship [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Affection, love, heart [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Pity, mercy [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Of one heart, soul, life, mind [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Or humility [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Likely as a higher rank, above, more important [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. There’s a significant debate among scholars about this verse because the verb is absent and needs to be supplied. It literally reads: “This mindset in you which also in Christ Jesus.” Should we translate “You have this mindset,” or should we translate, “Have this mindset.” One is a statement of what is. The other an admonition to emulate Jesus’ example. I have chosen the translation above for many reasons within Philippians and because Paul writes to the Corinthians, “But we have the mind of Christ” (I Cor. 2:16). The passage in Corinthians is a context of teaching about the Holy Spirit, which I think is relevant to our passage in Philippians. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Or “as something of which to take advantage” [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Heartened, encouraged, be glad, with the implication of release from anxiety [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Literally “of like soul/mind” [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. The idea being that Paul will be less concerned about them knowing he has sent someone. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Or and provides steadfastness for you [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Literally “flesh” [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Verse 5 contains an “honors race” in the form of a list that uses great brevity and comes out in staccato-like language. “With regard to circumcision” is one word. “Of the nation of Israel” is two words. “Of the tribe of” is one word. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Or refuse, garbage [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. “Righteousness” = right relationship with God [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Participation, fellowship [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Straining for [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Heavenly [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Or agree or be of the same mind [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. We don’t know who this is [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. “Not insisting on every right of letter of law or custom, yielding, gentle, kind, courteous, tolerant” (BADG). Make room! [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Probably to be understood as both temporal, that is, the Lord is coming soon, and spatial, that is, the Lord is always close. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Or “stop being anxious.” [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. The language contrasts poignantly: In nothing, in everything. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Or right [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Or “if anything worthy of praise” [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Or humiliated [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Or in every situation and in all circumstances [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Or I have had my initiation experience [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. My translation is literal. This verse is often translated, “I can do all things through him who strengthens me.” [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Usually translated “forever and ever.” [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Literally “with your spirit.” There is no verb. Do we supply “is” with, “be” with, or both? [↑](#footnote-ref-51)