

# OSC Bible Study Notes

## Philippians: Joy in Lockdown 1

### Warm up

How did you feel when you found out we were going into Tier 4?

What do you miss most because of the coronavirus restrictions?

What do you know about Paul's letter to the Philippians or the church in Philippi? If you have time, take a look at Acts 16: 11-40 and see who some of its first members were.



### Philippians 1:1-8

Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus,

To all God's holy people in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons\*: <sup>2</sup> Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

<sup>3</sup> I thank my God every time I remember you. <sup>4</sup> In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy <sup>5</sup> because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, <sup>6</sup> 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.

<sup>7</sup> It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart and, whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me. <sup>8</sup> God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.

*\*Overseers and deacons - the local church leaders*



### Explore

1. What do we learn about the author(s) of the letter?

- *How do they describe themselves (v.1) ?*

- *Why are they writing (v.2-8)?*

2. What do we learn about the recipients?

- *How are they described in v.1? What slant does this give compared to just saying 'the church in Philippi'?*

- *How do they relate to the authors?*

3. What makes Paul confident that these Christians will carry on in the faith?

4. How do these verses help us to understand Paul's joy, even in prison?



### Live it out

Think of three ways your life and attitude would be different if you approached lockdown with Paul's confidence in God, a thankful heart, and a concern for Jesus to be glorified. Be specific and practical.

*Each day this week, take a moment to respond to the day's news (either 'out there' news about the country/world or news closer to home) with confidence in God, thankfulness, and a prayer for more people to know Jesus.*



### Pray

Thank God for his work in one another and that he will complete what he has begun.

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## Philippians: Joy in Lockdown 1

### A lockdown letter

Philippi was a well-known, wealthy Roman colony. You can read about the beginnings of the church there in Acts 16:11-40. Lydia, a wealthy Jewish business woman was the first convert, and the first recorded Christian in Europe. It was also at Philippi that Paul and Silas famously sang hymns in prison before being released during an earthquake and leading the jailer to faith in Jesus.

At the time of writing this letter, Paul is in prison again, probably in Rome. A member of the Philippian church has arrived with news and gift (2:25). Without email, communication would have been slow and Paul is clearly delighted to hear from them.

You would expect prison to be frustrating for an active, driven man like Paul. Instead, his letter is characterised by joy. Hopefully it will inspire us in our current circumstances.



### Reflections

#### 1. The authors

**Paul and Timothy** (v.1) - the letter is addressed from both Paul and Timothy, although the rest of the letter is in the first person, suggesting that Paul is the main author. Timothy doesn't know the Philippians personally, but he is about to go to Philippi (as we'll find out in chapter 2) so perhaps Paul wants to emphasise their partnership by involving him in the writing of the letter.

**'Servants'** (v.1), or literally 'slaves' of Christ Jesus - Jesus, not Caesar, is Paul's master and the one who is in control of where Paul finds himself. This helps us understand how Paul is able to accept his situation. However, as well as humility and submission, there is authority here: a slave works and speaks on behalf of the master. By implication, Paul's words to the Philippians are also Christ's words to them.

**Grace and peace** (v.2) is the objective in writing. Everything the Philippians need and everything we need is summed up in these two words. As we'll see, God has begun his work in the Philippians and Paul prays and works for its continuation.

**Love and compassion** (v.3-8) shine through these verses. Paul's only regret in prison is that he can't be with them. He is no big name speaker who sweeps into town and sweeps out. He loves these people, has suffered for them, and constantly prays for them. This is true Christian fellowship.

#### 2. The recipients

**God's holy people** (v.1) - in Paul's mind the identity of Christians as God's people in Christ Jesus comes before geographical location, social status, ethnicity, or anything else. 'Holy' describes God or anything set apart for him. It is a status the Philippian Christians (or Christians anywhere!) already enjoy - they have been called by God and set apart as his; but it also speaks of their calling to be holy as God is holy. Holiness is 'in Christ Jesus': we can't make ourselves holy. It is by being united to Jesus that we enjoy our new status as God's people and begin to live that out.

**A local church** (v.1) - this particular group of Christians is based in Philippi and has local leaders. From the earliest days of the church, it was the practice of Christians to gather together to support and strengthen each other. The New Testament teaches that God provides members of these local churches with different gifts for the good of the whole group.

**Partnership** (v.3-8) - Paul's love for the Philippians is clearly reciprocated in their support for his work. This theme of Christian fellowship and partnership will come up again as the book goes on, but here we see how it is characterised by love, prayer for one another, and working together to see others come to know Jesus.

#### 3. Paul's confidence (v.3-8)

Paul is confident that his Philippian friends will make it as Christians because salvation is God's work from start to finish. God initiated it - Paul saw that when they first responded to his message, and he knows God doesn't begin saving us and leave us to finish the job. Salvation is grace from beginning to end: that's our only hope too if we look closely at our own hearts! It makes Paul very happy: although the Philippians are a work in progress, God won't leave them unfinished. Paul is also confident because he can see the evidence of God's good work in them: they want to partner with him because they share his passion for God's glory and want other people to know Jesus too.

#### 4. Paul's joy

Paul is joyful even in prison because he is confident that God is in control. He doesn't need to worry about his own circumstances or whether his friends in Philippi will make it in the Christian life. Instead, he can focus on being thankful for all the ways he sees God at work. As we will see throughout the book, Paul's main concern is always that Jesus is glorified and more people get to know him. Nothing else matters by comparison.

# OSC Bible Study Notes

## Philippians: Joy in Lockdown 2

### Warm up

Is love blind? Why? Why not?

List the things you pray for most, both for yourself and for other people.



### Explore

1. Today we focus on Paul's prayer but the context is important so we'll start with a recap. He prays with joy (v.4), confidence (v.6), and affection (v.8). Why does he feel this way?

2. Re-read Paul's prayer (v.9-11).  
(a) Why is love such an important mark of spiritual life? Can you think of any other verses in the Bible to back that up?

(b) What evidence of it is there in the Philippians (CLUE: see a bit of the story of the start of the Philippian church on p.2)?

3. Would Paul agree that love is blind? How do knowledge, love, and insight relate to each other?



### Philippians 1:4-11

<sup>4</sup> In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy  
<sup>5</sup> because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, <sup>6</sup> 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.

<sup>7</sup> It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart and, whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me. <sup>8</sup> God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.

<sup>9</sup> And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge\* and depth of insight, <sup>10</sup> so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, <sup>11</sup> filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ – to the glory and praise of God.

*\*In the New Testament, this word is used for spiritual knowledge*

4. What is the result of knowledge- and insight-infused love (v.10,11)?

5. Where do all these good things come from and where are they heading (v.6, 11)?

6. How does Paul exemplify this kind of love in practice for the Philippians?



### Live it out

What do the things we pray for most indicate about our priorities? How can we adjust our priorities and attitudes to seek 'the best'?



### Pray

Use Paul's prayer to pray for one another.

# OSC Bible Study Notes

## Philippians: Joy in Lockdown 2



### Reflections

#### 1. Background

Paul's prayer pours out of the love he has for these Christians in Philippi. They have the same foundation and aim in life: they share together in God's grace and they are passionate to see other people experience it too. Grace also the basis of Paul's confidence in praying. He knows that God is at work in them, and therefore they will make it to the end as Christians because it depends on God, not them. Confidence in God's sovereignty doesn't mean we don't pray - it means we pray with joy and hope as we ask God to complete what he has begun!

#### 2. Love

Love is one of the hallmarks of the Christian life (John 13:35). Any true understanding of the radical, life-transforming grace and love of God will result in love: 'We love because he first loved us' (1 John 4:19). We have seen that in the Philippian church already - the first thing Lydia did when she became a Christian was to invite Paul and the other missionaries into her house; the first thing the jailer did was to wash their wounds. When they experienced God's love, they started to live it out. But Paul prays that they will do that more and more.

#### 3. Knowledge and depth of insight

Knowledge refers to knowledge about God and understanding of spiritual things. Isn't it interesting that love and knowledge aren't in competition but that they feed and complement one another? The more true knowledge we have of God and the more we understand all he has done will do for us, the more we will love him; and the more we love him, the more want to know him better and the more we will love other people as he loves them.

Insight or discernment are about making the right choices. We all know people who are really clever, but make some really poor life choices. Most Christians (and indeed most non-Christians) know

in most situations the difference between right and wrong - I shouldn't murder my sister - but we are to pray for discernment and to seek what is 'the best' - how I can show God's love and grace to my sister in the way I speak and act today.

#### 4. Purity

Love, knowledge, and discernment are played out in practical choices and the evidence of them in someone's life will be purity and godliness. Isn't it interesting that Paul's prayer started with love and with the knowledge that will cultivate that love, rather than with a prayer for holiness? Purity and godly behaviour are a fruit of a heart that is in the right place. There is no point hanging fruit on a tree! It needs to grow out of the tree, so Paul prays for their hearts in order that he will see the fruit in godly living. That's something adults need to remember when we are talking to teenagers! We like to give you rules. It would be good if we prayed as much for your hearts!

#### 5. Through Jesus to God's glory

The beginning and end of the prayer (v.6 and v.11) remind us of the end game. We are living not for this world, but towards Jesus's return, but they also remind us that we can't work this kind of thing up in ourselves. By nature, our hearts aren't in tune with God and aren't full of love. We need to pray for the work of Jesus and we can pray with confidence because he has begun that work.

#### 6. Paul's example

Paul exemplifies what he prays: his understanding of God's love and grace fills him with love for God and his people. He works out that love in practice by seeking what is best for the Philippians.

There's a lot we can learn from Paul's example. What we pray about can be a good indication of what we value and desire most. As can the things we admire or value in other Christians. Do we look up to someone because of their style or their godliness? Let's be praying for hearts overflowing with love, knowledge, and discernment that leads to practical godliness and glorifies Jesus.

**Acts 16:11-15:** From Troas we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, and the next day we went on to Neapolis. 12 From there we travelled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia. And we stayed there several days.

13 On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. 14 One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. She was a worshipper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. 15 When she and the members of her household were baptised, she invited us to her home. 'If you consider me a believer in the Lord,' she said, 'come and

# OSC Bible Study Notes

## Philippians: Joy in Lockdown 3

### Warm up

Share some of your ambitions and how likely you think you are to fulfil them!



### Explore

1. Based on what we have already studied in Philippians and today's passage, what is Paul's top ambition in life?

2. How does this work out in how he thinks about:

- (a) being in prison (v.12-14)?
- (b) other in the church who don't like him and try to make life difficult for him (v.15-18)?
- (c) his trial and possible execution (v.20-26)?

3 (a) How do our priorities in life impact how we will view death, even as Christians? Is it morbid to be as happy about the prospect of death as Paul is?

(b) Can you share modern-day examples of people whose faith in very challenging situations has been a powerful witness to those around them?



### Live it out

What differences would there be in your life if you lived with Paul's motto and priorities? Think about:

- how you spend your spare time
- friendships
- decision making (subject choices/ambitions)



### Philippians 1:12-26

<sup>12</sup> Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel. <sup>13</sup> As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. <sup>14</sup> And because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear.

<sup>15</sup> It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. <sup>16</sup> The latter do so out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defence of the gospel. <sup>17</sup> The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. <sup>18</sup> But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice.

Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, <sup>19</sup> for I know that through your prayers and God's provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance. <sup>20</sup> I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. <sup>21</sup> For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. <sup>22</sup> If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labour for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! <sup>23</sup> I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; <sup>24</sup> but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. <sup>25</sup> 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, <sup>26</sup> so that through my being with you again your boasting in Christ Jesus will abound on account of me.



### Pray

*Dear Lord, Paul's example is very challenging to us. We confess that it is hard for us to say 'To me to live is Christ, to die is gain'. Please work in our hearts and increase our love for Jesus so that we can come to the point of saying this with Paul's confidence and joy. Amen.*

# OSC Bible Study Notes

## Philippians: Joy in Lockdown 3



### Reflections

#### 1 Paul's ambition

Paul's overriding concern for the glory of Jesus has been clear all throughout the letter. It comes to a climax in this chapter with his declaration, 'For me to live is Christ and to die is gain.' We see this applied in practice in a number of areas of Paul's life and thinking:

#### 2(a) Prison

Paul doesn't think of the inconvenience to himself or dwell on the anxiety of what might happen next. Never mind death, he had in front of him the real possibility of torture. If you know anything about the Romans, I think you will agree that would be playing on most people's minds in his situation. Instead, his overriding concern is for the good of the Gospel. His imprisonment is a whole new opportunity to preach to people he wouldn't otherwise have had the opportunity to reach. His guards are quite literally a captive audience! There is no doubt that his attitude to his situation would have been a very powerful testimony as well. But not only has his imprisonment opened new opportunities for Paul to witness, it has also had an impact on the church, with more people stirred into action by his example and his suffering. Isn't it an amazing work of God's Spirit that the other Christians were inspired by his suffering rather than scared into silence by it? 2000 years on, it is still an incredible challenge to us to aim to follow his example of seeking Christ above all else.

#### 2(b) Rivals

For many of us, people we know saying horrible things about us or slighting us and trying to undermine us might be even more difficult to put up with than outright persecution. Something like that is happening here. These people are presumably Christians since Paul seems to be happy with their message, but there is something wrong with their attitudes and they don't seem like Paul. We don't know the exact circumstances, but it must have been hurtful. It is always very sad when Christians don't get along, but think what a difference it would be if every Christian's priorities were as pure as this and their only concern was whether Christ was being shared with others.

#### 2(c) Trial and execution

As Paul contemplates the possibility of death, he finds himself faced with a real dilemma. All he cares about in life is Jesus. If he dies, he gets to go and

be with him forever, so what could possibly be better! But because he loves Jesus and delights to serve him, he feels torn because he also sees how much work is left to do here and now. For that reason, he tends towards thinking it would be better for him to stay for now, even though he would rather go and be with Jesus straightaway. Again his motivation is whatever will bring most glory to God and most good to other believers.

#### 3(a) Life and death

How we think about life and death is a good spiritual thermometer. It isn't really possible to have Paul's attitude to death until we have his attitude to life. Death has no fear for Paul and only the prospect of joy because his living is all about Jesus and so the idea of seeing him face to face is his ultimate ambition and joy. I think that for many of us, there are lots of other things in this life that are in competition with Jesus for the top place in our affections and ambitions. We really don't like the idea of letting go of them and leaving them behind. Of course we should enjoy all the good things God has given us, but we need to pray that we will see these things as gifts from him and that we will see the purpose of our lives as to serve him, using the gifts and talents that he has given us. When we start to think like that, we will be able to enjoy those good things more because we won't be clingy and desperate about things but we will be delighting in the giver as well as the gifts.

If we want to be able to face death with Paul's faith, we need to start with how we are living and what we value today. That's the challenge to think through in the living it out section. Remember that Paul's motivation comes from the depth and strength of his relationship with Jesus, so you could start with thinking about how you make decisions and spend your time in a way which strengthens your love for Jesus.

#### 3(b) Other examples

Don't spend too long on this as you need plenty of time to talk through the Live It Out section. Hopefully someone in your group will have a personal example. Some of us may have seen this kind of faith as a Christian relative or someone in our church has faced either their own death or the death of someone close to them. I also have friends who have given up very well-paid jobs to go as missionaries overseas, even though their non-Christian families didn't understand. It might be a good homework to go and have a look at some of the testimonies on the Open Doors website. Today, people are still living out their faith like Paul.

# OSC Bible Study Notes

## Philippians: Joy in Lockdown 4

### Warm up

What first attracted you to the Christian faith?

What does the average Cherwell student know about CU? What would their opinion of it be?



### Explore

1. Think back to earlier in the chapter. What does Paul mean by 'whatever happens'?

2. Put the phrase 'conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ' into your own words.

3. What characterizes the unity Paul wants to see in the Philippian church?

4. How does Paul's description of the suffering they have been 'granted' relate to his description of his own suffering earlier in the chapter?



### Pray

*Heavenly Father, this is one those of those passages which isn't too hard to understand, but is very hard to put into practice. We need your help and we depend on your grace to live it out tomorrow. Please be with us as we interact with our friends and families this week. Help us to live lives worthy of the gospel of Christ. Amen.*



### Philippians 1:27-30

<sup>27</sup> Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in the one Spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel <sup>28</sup> without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved—and that by God. <sup>29</sup> For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him, <sup>30</sup> since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.



### Live it out

What does it mean for you to live as a citizen of heaven:

(a) in Cherwell?

(b) in your family?

CU is not church, but as Christians students you do represent the body of Christ to the school. How can you stand together to do this more effectively?

How do you feel about the description of suffering as a gift? In what ways do you face opposition for being a Christian? Are there ways you can support one another in this?

# OSC Bible Study Notes

## Philippians: Joy in Lockdown 4



### Reflections

#### 1. 'whatever happens'

There is a shift in Paul's letter at this point. He started by giving the Philippians news about himself and how he is doing in prison. He knows that he may be executed, but he has told them that he thinks that he will be released to continue serving them. Now he turns his attention to the Philippians and how he wants them to live, regardless of what happens to him. This section continues into chapter 2. In the verses we are looking at today, Paul focuses on the interface between the church and the world - so how they look from the outside. At the beginning of chapter 2, he's going to talk about what it should be like on the inside. We'll come to that bit next time.

#### 2. 'conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ'

The phrase 'conduct yourselves' could be more literally translated as 'live as citizens of'. Philippi was proud of being a Roman colony and Philippians were proud to be Roman citizens. Paul wants them to see their primary allegiance to Jesus in a similar way, and to live in the light of that. They are Jesus's representatives in Philippi. When people look at them, they see what it means to be a citizen of heaven - just as looking at Philippi would have been an indicator of what life in Rome was like. There are lots of practical applications of this to work through in the 'Live it out questions'. You could think about:

##### - values

When we became a Christian we were given a new identity. Jesus bought us and we belong to him. That's an enormous privilege. Let's live as his people. One implication of this is that we won't do things just because everyone else is doing them. Our values and our behaviour are not determined by people around us, but by what honours Jesus.

##### - witness

Sometimes we might think that people's view of Christianity depends on how we or Christian leaders articulate and defend the faith against the questions and objections people might have (God v. Science, etc). There are great speakers and resources to help us think through these issues, but primarily Jesus is commended by you and me living faithful Christian lives. And it is those ordinary Christian lives that God tends to use to attract people to himself. Sadly, Christians messing up badly and not living out God's love is something that puts people off and that they use to excuse the fact they are not interested.

##### - when no one is looking

Notice that Paul wants them to live this way whether he comes or not. He is very nearly finished his race and the baton of holding and sharing the truth of the Gospel is being passed on to others. We need to live because God's eyes are on us, not our parents' eyes or our youth group leader's eyes. Let's be consistent Christians from Monday to Sunday, in school, out of school, at church, in our families. Learning to do that is to play your part in taking up the baton as the next generation of God's representatives on earth.

##### - living out grace

Finally on this, I want you to notice that we are to live worthily *of the gospel* - and the gospel is all about grace. Live as people who have received grace from God, not as if you have to earn it. As we will see in chapter 2, those who have received grace and forgiveness they don't deserve will treat other people in the same way.

#### 3. 'stand firm in one Spirit'

Individual Christians committed to heavenly citizenship and living out the grace they have received will unite in standing up for Jesus. We have seen the unity the Philippians have with Paul because of their partnership in the Gospel. This should be played out locally as God works in them by his Spirit and they unite in the faith he taught them. There is a myth that truth doesn't matter, but in fact real unity and love come from truth. We are at war. An army where everyone is working and fighting alone will be defeated. But if it unites and serves under one leader with one aim, it will be strong. Remembering we are in a battle might also remind us what unites us and that there is no need to divide over lesser matters, but there is more on how we treat other Christians next time.

#### 4. 'granted' to suffer

Salvation is a gift we are happy to accept, but Paul says that suffering is a gift too. Mysteriously, God chooses to use suffering to confirm our faith and draw others to himself. Perhaps suffering more than anything else shouts out the fact that our hope is not for a better life here but to know Jesus and be with him forever. So, as the Philippians hold on to the faith, they will be opposed, but God can enable them to be courageous and unafraid of those who oppose them. The courage and unity they experience in these trials will be an encouragement to one another that God is at work among them and will be a challenge to the watching world (v.28).

The Philippians had seen this worked out in Paul firsthand - as he was beaten and imprisoned, he remained joyful and had the opportunity to lead the jailer to faith in Jesus.

# OSC Bible Study Notes

## Philippians: Joy in Lockdown 5

### Warm up

What would make your 'joy complete' right now?  
Last week my son said it would be if I got him a dog!



### Explore

1. This passage is part of the section that began at 1:27. First Paul talked about how he wanted the Philippians to relate to the outside world. Now he turns to life in the church. What does he say would make his joy complete (v.2)?

2. We started in the middle of the paragraph. Paul doesn't begin with an instruction. What is his command to love and unity rooted in (v.1)?

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3. Why does understanding the truths of v.1 help us to live the instructions in v.2-5?

4. What very specific and practical instructions does Paul give in v.3-4? How do each of these help the Philippians reach the goal of v.2?

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### Pray

Heavenly Father, we confess that we are naturally selfish and put our interests first. Please change us through your living Word. Help us to delight in your grace and love may that overflow into treating others as you have treated us. Amen.



### Philippians 2:1-5

<sup>1</sup> 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, <sup>2</sup> then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. <sup>3</sup> Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, <sup>4</sup> not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

<sup>5</sup> In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus...



### Live it out

If you are struggling to live in the way Paul describes (and who doesn't!), what truths do you need to go back to? How are you going to do that?

Does being like-minded mean you have to have the same opinions about things? Why? Why not?

What is the difference between being humble and lacking self-esteem?

Paul is writing about life in the church. To what extent does it apply more widely?

Think of 3 ways you can put someone else's interests above your own this week.

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*If v.4 still leaves you wondering how to 'consider someone better than yourself' when you know they aren't, come back next week for v.5-11!*

# OSC Bible Study Notes

## Philippians: Joy in Lockdown 5

### Paul's happiness

#### 1. What would make Paul's joy complete (v.2)?

Paul's picks up on the theme of oneness we saw at the end of chapter 1. If there is one way the Philippians could make his joy complete, it is by being united, of one mind, one love, and one spirit. As he shows, this is not only how they will stand firm in a hostile environment, it is at the heart of who they are as Christians.

### The basis of unity

#### 2. What is the command rooted in (v.1)?

You could read 'since' instead of 'if' in v.1. These are rhetorical questions because Paul knows these things are true of his Christian friends - he has already strongly expressed his confidence in their faith. Think about each statement in turn. Are they true of you too?

(a) They are joined to Jesus. That's a definition of a Christian - someone who has been united to Christ in his death and resurrection and who can say with Paul that Christ is now their all in all.

(b) They have experienced the comfort of God's love. If you are a Christian, you must have felt at some time joy and amazement at God's infinite love for you, at how he forgives again and again.

(c) They all have the life of Christ in them through the Holy Spirit, given to all believers.

(d) They have experienced Christian love and compassion. I think he is referring to the Christian fellowship they have shown and received in the past - we can't read Philippians and not see that they were a loving church, particularly to Paul. This is another evidence that God is at work in them and Paul wants to encourage it.

#### 3. Why does understanding v.1 help us live v.2-5?

(a) Unity with other Christians starts with being united to Jesus ourselves, and part of that is to die to ourselves as Paul will talk about later in his letter. If two people are both united to Jesus, how could they not be united to one another! Equally, if one of them is not united to Jesus, there can be no real Christian unity and fellowship, however lovely the friendship between them might be.

(b) God doesn't expect us to live out something we haven't received. On the contrary, a true understanding of ourselves and the greatness of God's love and grace should overflow into our relationships with other people.

(c) Jesus promised that when he returned to heaven he would send the Holy Spirit. That means we aren't left on our own to work this out. We have power to live it! And if we all have the same Spirit in

us whose aim is to glorify Jesus, hopefully we will all ultimately want to pull in the same direction.

(d) Look back on love. There might be challenges and people you are struggling with today, but when you have been a Christian for a while, can you look back at times when God has given you his love for other Christians, or you have experienced his love through them. Let that encourage you that he is at work and pray for the same to happen again, as Paul does here.

### Putting it into practice

#### 4. What very specific and practical instructions does Paul give in v.3-4?

(a) Do nothing out of selfish ambition - we all like to be acknowledged in some way, and some of us love to be the centre of the attention. We want to be special and we want other people to think we're great. Have you seen the Yorkshireman sketch or been in one of those conversations where someone tells a story about something that happened, and then the next person betters it with something that happened to them, and so on...? Think about your words in the next week. Why do you want to say that? Is it to build someone else up or is it to make yourself look good? You don't need to build yourself up in front of other people (or loudly put yourself down in some kind of false humility). God sees you and loves you with an everlasting love.

(b) Value others above yourselves - grace leaves no room for pride. If you are tempted to judge someone else, think about your own sin instead and rejoice that God has forgiven you and that the other person is also precious to him. Then go and treat them accordingly. In friendships at school, in family life, at work, at church, I have seen again and again how hard it is to make the first move when something has gone wrong. Don't ever say, 'they need to apologize first': be humble and reach out.

(c) Look to the interests of others - Paul doesn't leave them with an abstract instruction to 'feel humble'. Look for tangible ways to promote the interests of other people instead of your own. Offer your brother the bigger slice of pizza! In church different groups (the old, the young, the single, families) can compete for the time and resources of the community. Don't fall into that trap as you get older: instead look for opportunities to serve people different to you. Believe me - this is the path to joy!

Note: Paul is writing to Christians struggling to get on because of the pride in all of us that can so easily spoil our relationships. This teaching does not mean we ignore or sweep under the carpet dangerous or abusive behaviour - that is not the kind of situation addressed here at all. It's also not directly about relating to non-Christians, but if we respond to his message about looking to Jesus's example, we should treat everyone in a similar way, and what a wonderful witness that would be!

# OSC Bible Study Notes

## Philippians: Joy in Lockdown 6

### Warm up

What are some of the ways we see Jesus's humility in the Gospels?



### Explore

What are the steps 'down' that Jesus takes in v.6-8?

What is the most amazing aspect of how he humbles himself?

How does God respond to what Jesus has done (v.9-11)?

What should our response be, according to this passage?

Paul uses some of the most profound theology in the Bible to address very practical everyday issues. Why does considering Jesus's humbling of himself and Jesus's exaltation help us live right?

(a) humiliation

(b) exaltation



### Pray

*Lord Jesus, we worship you for the depth of your sacrificial love and praise the Father that he has exalted you to the highest place. You are Lord. Help us to follow your example of sacrificial service.*



### Philippians 2:5-11

- <sup>5</sup> In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:
- <sup>6</sup> who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;
- <sup>7</sup> rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.
- <sup>8</sup> And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death – even death on a cross!
- <sup>9</sup> Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name,
- <sup>10</sup> that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
- <sup>11</sup> and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.



### Live it out

How does Jesus help us to understand the difference between 'low self-esteem' and humility? You might find the Tim Keller quotation on the back helpful in thinking this through.

If someone read v.4 and asked how you can 'consider someone better than yourself' when they aren't, how would v.6-8 help you to answer?

Why is understanding theology important to learning to live out the Christian life?

Over the next week, how should this passage change:

(a) how you respond to Jesus?

(b) how you treat other people?

Try to think of very specific examples for each.

# OSC Bible Study Notes

## Philippians: Joy in Lockdown 6



### Reflections

#### 1. Humiliation

In the Gospels we see Jesus's incarnation and life from the outside. In this passage we have a glimpse into the perspective of heaven and eternity. Much has been written about these verses by very clever people, but while there are mysteries to marvel at for the rest of our lives, there are also truths clear and simple enough to change our lives today. John 1 would be good to read in your own time to ponder more on the bigger themes.

*What are the steps 'down' that Jesus takes, v.6-8?*

- **Not claiming what was rightly his:** Jesus is in nature God: he has always been fully God from all eternity (c.f. John 1:1). He created the world, and yet he does not hold on to the privilege and recognition which are his by right. The NIV interprets this as not choosing to use his authority and power for his advantage.

- The one who deserves to be served and worshipped by the whole universe chooses to become a servant.

- **God becomes a man; his deity is veiled.** John puts this powerfully when he describes the Creator entering the world he made 'unrecognized'.

- **Becomes obedient to death;** he lives and obeys God's laws as we should have done and becomes subject to death. There are echoes of Adam and Eve in the garden here. They 'grasped' at being 'like God'. They didn't obey and as a result, death entered the world. By contrast, Jesus does not 'grasp' at 'equality with God', but instead obeys as Adam and Eve didn't, even to the point of death.

- **Although sinless and perfect,** he takes on the curse of death on a cross.

Perhaps the most amazing aspect of his selfless love is the heights from which Jesus comes and the depths to which he goes. It would be amazing for one human being to show this kind of love for another, but it is mind-blowing that Jesus, who is God of God, shows this love to rebellious people in his own creation.

#### 2. Exaltation

*How does God the Father respond, v.9-11?*

The Father is pleased with his Son's obedience and sacrifice. His response is to exalt him and to call everyone to see! He will ensure that his Son is worshipped and honoured.

Yet another amazing aspect of Jesus is that he not only takes on humanity without denying his deity,

"The Christian Gospel is that I am so flawed that Jesus had to die for me, yet I am so loved and valued that Jesus was glad to die for me. This leads to deep humility and deep confidence at the same time. It undermines both swaggering and sniveling. I cannot feel superior to anyone, and yet I have nothing to prove to anyone. I do not think more of myself nor less of myself. Instead, I think of myself less."

Timothy J. Keller in *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism*

but now his humanity is also glorified as he is exalted to the highest place.

*What should our response be?*

Our first response should be an 'Amen' to God's response. We should worship and wonder at the love and humility of Jesus and rejoice that he is now exalted and reigning. Our second response should be to imitate him in self-sacrifice (v.5).

#### 3. Imitation

- **A sledge hammer to crack a nut?** Isn't it interesting that Paul uses some of the most wonderful and mysterious theology to address an everyday problem of a few Christians not getting on very well? Perhaps it shows that there aren't really any 'everyday' problems. Anything which threatens Christian unity is serious and the remedy is not just a 'team talk' or a bit of emotional manipulation, but rather to understand what is at the heart of being a Christian. We don't need more inspirational talks, but a better understanding of the Gospel.

- **A powerful example.** If v.4 left me wondering how to consider someone better than myself when I think they aren't, v.5-8 should stop me in my tracks as I remember Jesus and the depths he went for me. How can I look at a fellow Christian again and think that I don't want to serve them because 'they should do it themselves' or 'they don't deserve it' or 'there are better things I could do with my time' if I understand even the tiniest bit of the extent to which Jesus humbled himself to serve me?

- **A Gospel pattern.** Jesus is also a reminder of the pattern that the path to glory leads through sacrifice and suffering, so we shouldn't be surprised if this is also our experience.

- **A great encouragement.** I think the main reason Paul emphasises Jesus's exaltation here is that it is so encouraging and such a motive in itself to live and serve him: surely I would want to serve, honour, and obey such a wonderful king.

# OSC Bible Study Notes

## Philippians: Joy in Lockdown 7

### Warm up

What makes you grumble and complain?



### Explore

Recap: who is this letter written to? How does Paul feel about them and about their faith?

What's the 'therefore' there for?

What is the encouragement and what is the challenge in v.12b-13? What is the relationship between the two?

(a) Encouragement

(b) Challenge

(c) Relationship

Why do you think Paul gives the very practical application he does in v.14?

What will be the impact of the Philippians putting this teaching into practice, v.15-18?

In v.16-18 how is Paul following the example of Christ that we read about at the beginning of this chapter?



### Philippians 2:12-18

<sup>12</sup> 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, <sup>13</sup> for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfil his good purpose.

<sup>14</sup> Do everything without grumbling or arguing, <sup>15</sup> so that you may become blameless and pure, 'children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.' Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky <sup>16</sup> as you hold firmly to the word of life. And then I will be able to boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labour in vain. <sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> So you too should be glad and rejoice with me.



### Live it out

How should God's sovereignty in your salvation encourage and motivate you to greater godliness?

Let's get specific. Thinking back to the circumstances when you are most tempted to grumble and complain, how can you use the teaching of Paul's letter to the Philippians to promote change?



### Pray

*Lord God, we confess that grumbling and complaining can be a bit of a hobby for some of us. Help us instead to follow the example of Jesus and Paul and to be people full of joy who delight to service others. What a light that would be! It's hard for us to change, but thank you that you are at work in us, so please help us to be different this week. Amen.*

# OSC Bible Study Notes

## Philippians: Joy in Lockdown 7



### Reflections

*Recap: who is this letter written to? How does Paul feel about them and about their faith?*

Paul is writing to the Christians in Philippi. He has already made very clear how much he cares for them, and the evidence he has seen that God is at work among them and that God will complete the good work he has begun among them. It's important to remember that context as Paul continues to urge them to live out what they are, even although he is far away in prison. These are instructions for people who are already Christians, not instructions for how to become a Christian.

*What's the 'therefore' there for?*

Paul began the chapter by addressing how they were to relate to one another in the church. He said they should have the mindset of Christ Jesus and then launched into that amazing hymn of praise and wonder at Christ's self-humbling service. In v.9 we had God's 'therefore' - his response to Jesus's sacrifice was to exalt and honour him. In v.12 we have our 'therefore' - in view of Christ's sacrifice, this is how we should now respond by following his example.

*What is the encouragement and what is the challenge in v.12b-13? What is the relationship between the two?*

**Encouragement** - God is at work. This should remind you of chapter 1:6 where Paul gave thanks that God had begun a good work in the Philippians and would carry it on. God doesn't save someone and then leave them to get on with it. He goes on working. 'To will and to act' sums up the fact that God is both willing and also able to complete what he has begun. If you are a Christian, God has saved you, but his work of transforming you to be like Jesus is still ongoing and he is just as much invested in that work as he was in saving you in the first place, so be encouraged! Theologians call this the difference between 'justification' (when God saves us and declares us righteous because of Jesus's death on the cross - a one off event) and 'sanctification', the on-going work of God to make us more like him.

**Challenge** - We are to work too. The encouragement that God is at work isn't an excuse to be lazy, but to reassure us that working at being more like Jesus is worth it - it isn't a lost cause even if it sometimes feels like that. Notice Paul says we are to obey God with fear and trembling. This includes a healthy awe of God, a sense that spiritual life matters, and probably a fear of

offending and hurting such a loving God. Paul has just reminded us of the depths that Jesus stooped to raise us up - how could we want to go back to live sinful lives when we have experienced such love and kindness. When you reflect on Jesus's love, doesn't that make you tremble when you think that you might deliberately chose to ignore him?

**Relationship** - The way we experience and feel God's work in us is through obedience. God's work in us doesn't mean we do nothing; on the contrary it means we do 'everything' (v.14) with hope and enthusiasm, knowing that he will complete and bless that work he has begun.

*Why do you think Paul gives the very practical application he does in v.14?*

It's interesting that the specific instruction is about an attitude rather than a list of specific actions. It relates again to the teaching about how Christians should treat each other in the church by following the example of Jesus who willingly humbled himself in service without any complaining or grumbling. The fact that it is an attitude is reminder that God is interested in the heart, not just compliance. Again these verses are urging us to be what we are: God has made us his 'children', so we should live that way, following the example of his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

*What will be the impact of the Philippians putting this teaching into practice, v.15-18?*

If the Philippians live this way, (1) they will stand out, and (2) Paul will be encouraged and feel proud of them. Have you ever gone through a day when you didn't hear someone grumble or complain? If we followed the example of Christ wholeheartedly, living lives of service without complaining or grumbling, we really would shine like stars and that really would make the message of the Gospel attractive to other people. Sadly, all too often we blend in rather than stand out, and we complain about all the same things as everyone else as though we didn't have a loving, reigning Saviour.

*In v.16-18 how is Paul following the example of Christ that we read about at the beginning of this chapter?*

Paul really does live what he preaches, doesn't he? We have had no grumbling about being in prison. Instead, we have seen again and again his enormous love for the Philippians and his ungrumbling willingness to humble himself, even to the point of death, in the service of others and for the glory of God. By comparison to Paul, I really have nothing to complain about and no excuse not to serve my brothers and sisters in Christ.

# OSC Bible Study Notes

## Philippians: Joy in Lockdown 8

### Warm up

Who do you admire or look up to? Why?



### Explore

We get an insight into the lives of three excellent Christian role models here. Who are they and what do we know about them from this passage?

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Take each in turn. How do they live out the example of Jesus that we had at the beginning of the chapter. Give examples.

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Why do you think Paul gives so much space to talking about Timothy and Epaphroditus?



### Pray

*Thank you for godly Christians in my life [name them now] who follow the example of Jesus and show me what selfless service looks like in practice. Please bless them and help me to encourage them, especially by following their example of godliness. Amen.*



### Philippians 2:19-30

<sup>19</sup> I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. <sup>20</sup> I have no one else like him, who will show genuine concern for your welfare. <sup>21</sup> For everyone looks out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. <sup>22</sup> But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel. <sup>23</sup> I hope, therefore, to send him as soon as I see how things go with me. <sup>24</sup> And I am confident in the Lord that I myself will come soon.

<sup>25</sup> But I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, co-worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger, whom you sent to take care of my needs. <sup>26</sup> For he longs for all of you and is distressed because you heard he was ill. <sup>27</sup> Indeed he was ill, and almost died. But God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, to spare me sorrow upon sorrow. <sup>28</sup> Therefore I am all the more eager to send him, so that when you see him again you may be glad and I may have less anxiety. <sup>29</sup> So then, welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honour people like him, <sup>30</sup> because he almost died for the work of Christ. He risked his life to make up for the help you yourselves could not give me.



### Live it out

How does this challenge the kind of people we look up to or admire?

How can you put Jesus's interests above your own and serve his people this week?

What ways can you honour and encourage the people in your church or CU who lead and serve you selflessly week after week?

# OSC Bible Study Notes

## Philippians: Joy in Lockdown 8



### Reflections

*We get an insight into the lives of three excellent Christian role models here.*

- Timothy. Paul describes Timothy as his son, who has served alongside him. There is clearly a close relationship between them, and we know from elsewhere that Paul led Timothy to Jesus and that Timothy was still a young man when he started working alongside Paul. He also seems to have been quite a timid person, but Paul clearly considers him to be reliable and plans to send him to visit the Philippians, presumably to teach them and to bring back news. He served in a similar way with other congregations when Paul was in prison.
- Epaphroditus. We've thought quite a bit about the close relationship between Paul and the Philippians. The Philippians had gladly collected money to support Paul, but you can almost imagine the silence in the room when they asked who would take it to him. It would be a long, difficult, potentially dangerous journey. It would mean leaving family and work/business interests for a substantial time. Epaphroditus steps up to the task. He seems to have become seriously ill at some point on the journey or while he was with Paul, but is now on the mend and is going to return to Philippi. Presumably he will bring the letter with him.
- Paul. We get a new insight into Paul in this little section - he is team player, isn't he? He loves to serve alongside and promote others.

*How do they each live out the example of Jesus that we had at the beginning of the chapter?*

- Timothy. Paul trusts Timothy with the task of going to visit, teach, and report back on his beloved Philippian church because Timothy has a track record of putting God's work above his own interests. The sad implication of v.21 is that this seems to be a rare quality - we are reminded of chapter 1 when Paul said there were some who were preaching out of wrong motives. Timothy is someone who loves God's people and will want to do what is best for them - regardless of what that means for himself.
- We also see something of his humility in the way he has worked alongside Paul. The people in chapter 1 were happy Paul was in prison so they could get more of the limelight. Timothy by contrast serves alongside Paul and is happy to be 'sent' rather than furthering his own reputation. It is a sad fact that we can do the most spiritual of activities from wrong motives because we want to look good in front of other people rather than because we want to serve God. Look for opportunities to serve that

might go unnoticed. Be willing to be 'second fiddle' to someone else.

- Epaphroditus. Epaphroditus followed the example of Jesus by leaving the comfort and security of home and becoming a servant for the sake of God's people, almost to the point of giving up his life. He was a man with a big and sensitive heart, glad and loving in his service of Paul, but horrified at the anxiety he caused his home church when he got sick. You can imagine how mortified he was that he became the centre of attention in that way - that wasn't what he wanted. Paul's description of Epaphroditus is wonderful, his 'brother, co-worker, and fellow soldier'. As far as we know his role was that of a postman/courier - bringing news and money from Philippi to Paul and perhaps helping out with his ministry in Rome for a time. This is a great in practice reminder of the different roles God has given us in the church and that none of them should be despised. When our Lord Jesus was willing to be a servant for us and set us an example by washing his disciples' feet, then surely we should honour all God's people who gladly serve, whether their gifts are the 'upfront' type or not.
- Paul. Paul loves these two men and is clearly encouraged and blessed by having them around, but he doesn't hold on to them. He releases them for God's service because he puts the Philippians' interests above his own.

*Why do you think Paul gives so much space to talking about Timothy and Epaphroditus?*

After a bit of an update on his own circumstances, Paul has spent most of his letter, urging his Philippian friends to show selfless love to one another. There might be some practical arrangements to update them on about Epaphroditus's return and Timothy's visit, but I don't think there is a sudden shift in emphasis here. Paul is providing the Philippians with two real life role models of what he has been teaching. And just in case they thought you had to be the Son of God or an apostle like Paul to live this way, the men he holds up are quite unremarkable people in other ways. Timothy is young and a bit timid and Epaphroditus is no apostle either. He's probably just a regular member of their church entrusted with a very practical task. But each in their own way has demonstrated that it is possible to put God's work and God's people above their own personal interests. Imagine we all lived like that!

This is a good opportunity to reflect on how we can choose God's interests and other people's interests above our own in the coming week. But it is also an opportunity to give thanks for people we know - whether Christian leaders or just 'Epaphrodituses' - who set us a goodly example of service.