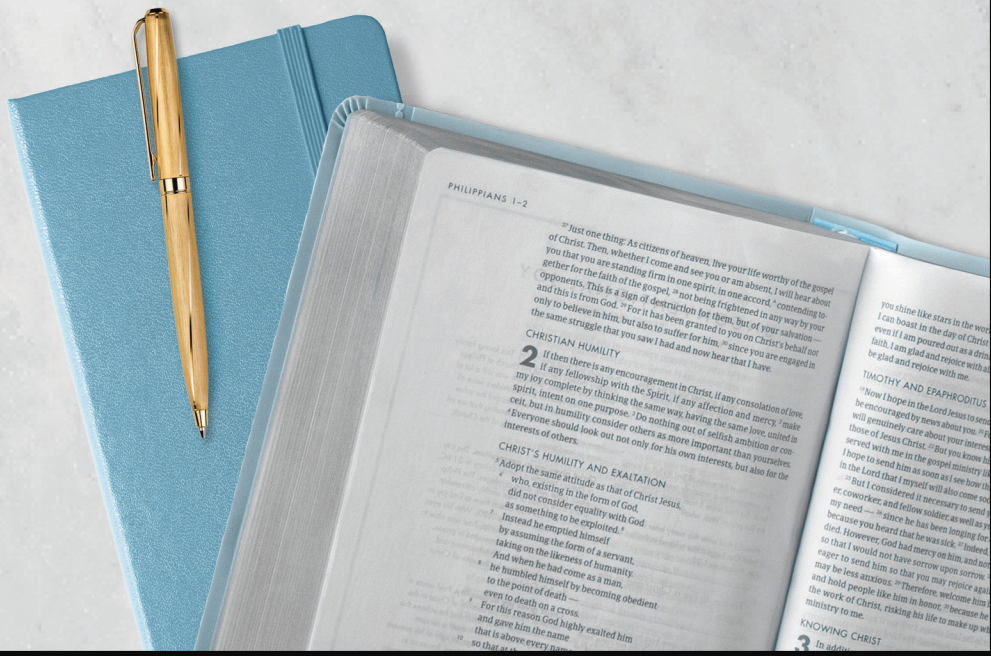


PRACTICAL INSIGHTS  
FOR EVERYDAY CHRISTIAN LIVING

# PHILIPPIANS

A Biblical Study

JOYCE MEYER



PHILIPPIANS 1-2

<sup>1</sup>Just one thing. As citizens of heaven, live your life worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or am absent, I will hear about you that you are standing firm in one spirit, in one accord, contending to-  
gether for the faith of the gospel, <sup>2</sup>not being frightened in any way by your  
opponents. This is a sign of destruction for them, but of your salvation —  
and this is from God. <sup>3</sup>For it has been granted to you on Christ's behalf not  
only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him, <sup>4</sup>since you are engaged in  
the same struggle that you saw I had and now hear that I have.

### CHRISTIAN HUMILITY

**2** If then there is any encouragement in Christ, if any consolation of love,  
if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, <sup>2</sup>make  
my joy complete by thinking the same way, having the same love, united in  
spirit, intent on one purpose. <sup>3</sup>Do nothing out of selfish ambition or com-  
peting interests. <sup>4</sup>Everyone should look out not only for his own interests, but also for the  
interests of others.

### CHRIST'S HUMILITY AND EXALTAION

<sup>1</sup>Who, existing in the form of God,  
did not consider equality with God  
as something to be exploited,  
but emptied himself,  
by assuming the form of a servant,  
taking on the likeness of humanity.  
And when he had come as a man,  
<sup>2</sup>he humbled himself by becoming obedient  
to the point of death —  
even to death on a cross.  
<sup>3</sup>For this reason God highly exalted him  
and gave him the name  
that is above every name,  
so that at the name of Jesus every  
knee should bow, in heaven and on earth  
and among the spirits, and every tongue  
confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
to the glory of the Father forever.  
Amen.

you shine like stars in the world. I can boast in the day of Christ even if I am poured out as a drink offering, because I have been glad and rejoice with you. He will be glad and rejoice with me.

### TIMOTHY AND EPAPHRODITUS

<sup>1</sup>Now I hope in the Lord Jesus to send you  
word, as I have done many times, but I  
have not been able to do so. I hope to  
be encouraged by news about you, <sup>2</sup>so  
that I may see you. I have heard that you  
are genuinely care about those of Jesus Christ. <sup>3</sup>But you know how  
I have served with me in the gospel ministry. I  
hope to send him as soon as I see how the  
Lord that I myself will also come to  
you. <sup>4</sup>But I considered it necessary to send  
my coworker and fellow soldier, as well as my  
need — since he has been longing for  
me because you heard that he was sick. <sup>5</sup>Indeed,  
I have heard that he has recovered, and  
so that I would not have sorrow upon sorrow,  
I have sent him so that you may rejoice again  
and bold people like him in honor. <sup>6</sup>Therefore, welcome him  
and help him in his work of Christ, raising his life to make up with me.  
I am glad and rejoice with you.

### KNOWING CHRIST

3

# PHILIPPIANS

*A Biblical Study*

JOYCE MEYER



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## HOW TO STUDY THIS BOOK



I would like to suggest that you take your time studying this book. Don't just skim over the book so you can finish it quickly, but take your time not only reading but also pondering what you read. Stop at places that are important to you, and think about how they apply to you personally and whether or not you need to make changes in your life in order to walk more fully in God's will.

I encourage you to answer the questions provided for you at various points in this study, because they will help you recognize areas in which you need to grow.

I also want to suggest that you take the time to look up the Scripture references that appear throughout the book. Space does not permit us to print out each verse in full, but you can open your Bible to the references mentioned and read the Scripture passages for yourself. The effort you put into doing this will enhance your overall experience and will allow you to truly absorb the truths of God's Word.

Remember that studying is different than simply reading. When we read, we take in information, but when we study, the information becomes revelation to us—it becomes part of us and transforms our lives and behavior in deeper ways than a quick reading does.

## ABOUT PHILIPPIANS



**Author:** *Paul*

**Date:** *Around AD 61*

**Audience:** *Christians in the city of Philippi*

The apostle Paul's letter to the Philippians is considered "the epistle of joy," and Paul mentions joy approximately thirteen times in the four chapters of this book of the Bible, sometimes more, depending on the translation we read. Although Jesus was "a man of suffering, and familiar with pain" (Isaiah 53:3), He also possessed a deep joy beyond anything the world can offer. As He faced a terrible death on Calvary, Jesus spoke to His disciples, saying, "I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete" (John 15:11). Jesus came to Earth so that we might "have and enjoy life, and have it in abundance [to the full, till it overflows]" (John 10:10 AMP). God wants us to be happy and joyful. Paul definitely understood that and helps us understand and experience this truth through his warm and personal letter to the believers at Philippi.

Paul wrote this epistle while he was held captive in a Roman prison. Even under the difficult circumstances of incarceration, he still found joy! What was his secret? I believe it was that he learned to think according to God's Word. He mentions the mind and/or functions of the mind at least ten times in this letter, so we can see that joy is connected to our thoughts and mindsets. If we choose to live with a positive perspective, even the worst circumstances cannot steal our joy.

Paul visited Philippi for the first time during his second missionary journey, which took place around AD 52. If Paul was approximately twenty years old when his Damascus Road experience took place—the dramatic encounter in which Jesus appeared to him and radically changed his life (you can read about it in Acts 9)—he would have been at least seventy years old when he wrote this letter. Yet he was still determined to do God's will, which for him was to preach the gospel.

Paul strategically chose the cities to which he took the gospel. He selected places that were important in themselves but also major hubs for entire geographic areas. Philippi was one of these cities, and if we understand its significance, we see that Paul's choice to preach and minister in such an influential place is not surprising. Philippi was important because it had been known historically as a city of rich gold and silver mines, though the mines had been exhausted by the time of Paul's ministry.

In 368 BC, King Philip II of Macedonia, the father of

Alexander the Great, founded this city, and it was named after him. In 42 BC, after the assassination of Julius Caesar, Philippi was the site of a major battle. In that contest, an army under the command of Mark Antony and Octavian defeated the forces of Brutus and Cassius, who had led the effort to kill Caesar, and thereby determined the future of the Roman Empire.

In Paul's day, Roman colonies were scattered throughout the vast Roman Empire, and they helped keep the empire at peace. The well-known Roman Road system was constructed for travel among these colonies.

By the time Paul visited Philippi, the city had been raised to the status of a Roman colony, and the people who lived there were either Jews or Roman citizens. Paul was both. His being a Roman citizen and a Jew allowed him to preach to both Jews and Romans. It also afforded him special protection on several occasions as he went about preaching the gospel.

Paul's writing reveals that he formed close ties with the believers at Philippi and enjoyed an intimate friendship with them. His bond with them was greater than his bond with any other church. In Philippians 4:1, he affirms his special relationship with the Philippians, calling them his "joy and crown."

At the time Paul wrote Philippians, most aspects of daily life in Philippi were strongly influenced by Roman culture. Citizens spoke Latin, the language of the Roman Empire. People wore Roman clothing styles, and a strong Roman

military presence was noticeable around the city. The citizens of Philippi also had a robust sense of cultural pride in their identity as subjects of the Roman Empire and aggressively resisted non-Roman cultural influences.

In Philippi, the citizens who staunchly aligned with Rome persecuted the Christians in their midst, accusing them of trying to institute laws and customs that did not align with those of Rome. The primary purpose for which Paul wrote this letter was to encourage the Philippian believers during this time of hardship. Paul's Roman citizenship did help him during this time of difficulty for Christians, but not enough for him to avoid all persecution and illegal imprisonment.

Acts 16 includes a story about Paul's visit to Philippi, which involved three main characters—each of them very different. We meet Lydia, a female merchant from Asia referred to as “a dealer in purple cloth” and “a worshiper of God” (Acts 16:14). We also read about a slave girl, whose owners viewed her—as other slaves of the day were viewed—not as a person but as a tool to be used in the hands of her master, who, in this case, used her to tell fortunes. And we are introduced to a jailer, who was a Roman citizen. As we can see from the variety of personalities and backgrounds represented in Acts 16, Paul encountered many segments of Philippian society, from the highest to the lowest.

It also is about two women and one man with vastly dissimilar backgrounds. This chapter of the New Testament shows that Jesus offers an all-inclusive faith to everyone, and Paul's ministry reached different types of people as well.

Philippians is one of my favorite epistles because it not only encouraged believers in the early church but also addresses a wide variety of situations that we encounter in our lives today—such as conducting ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel (Philippians 1:27); overcoming selfishness (Philippians 2:3–4); resisting the temptation to complain and argue (Philippians 2:14); letting go of the past and looking toward the future (Philippians 3:13); rejoicing in the Lord, no matter what (Philippians 4:4); staying at peace instead of living in anxiety (Philippians 4:6–7); godly thinking (Philippians 4:8); and trusting God to meet our needs (Philippians 4:19)—and helps us know how to handle them properly. I am sure you will be enriched by your study of Philippians, and I pray that this book helps you on your journey of spiritual growth.

### *Key Truths in Philippians*

- We can be confident that God has begun a good work in us and that He will complete it (Philippians 1:6).
- Jesus laid aside His rights and privileges and took on human flesh, feeling sorrow, pain, and the weight of our sin. He did this in obedience to His Father so that we might ultimately be reconciled to Him (Philippians 2:5–8).
- Salvation is a gift from God, and it changes us completely. Once we receive it in our hearts, we are to demonstrate it in our lives (Philippians 2:12).
- We may be tempted to place our confidence in all kinds of things, such as our abilities or our resources,

but our confidence and trust should be in Christ alone (Philippians 3:3).

- God puts people into our lives as examples and role models to help us grow in faith. Paul provided this kind of example to the Philippians (Philippians 3:17).
- As Christians, joy should be one of the hallmarks of our lives (Philippians 4:4).
- We do not have to think whatever thoughts come into our minds. We can choose our thoughts (Philippians 4:8).

CHAPTER 1



**PAUL'S POWERFUL  
OPENING WORDS TO  
THE PHILIPPIANS**





## A Greeting to Friends

*Philippians 1:1–2*

*Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all God's holy people in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

It is noticeable, and I think commendable, that in many of his letters Paul links himself with younger, less experienced fellow laborers. He makes mention of the young man who is traveling with him, Timothy, and writes of him when he addresses this letter to the church leaders, in addition to all the believers at Philippi. Paul did for Timothy what more mature Christians should do for younger believers today. He was mentoring him in the ministry, teaching him not only by word but also by living closely with him, enabling him to see his consistent example. Paul was a model for other teachers and ministers, and we can learn from his example (Philippians 3:17).

The people we choose as friends and mentors are extremely important, because we become like those with whom we spend our time. I encourage you to find people who model characteristics and qualities you would like to develop in yourself and spend time with them. Watch how they handle various situations in life, and let them be a pattern of godly

behavior for you. If the Lord leads you to do so, ask them if they are willing to mentor you by meeting with you on a regular basis for the purpose of teaching you and providing a measure of accountability for you.

Maintaining a high level of generosity in my life is important to me, so I choose generous people with whom to spend my time. If I spent my time with stingy and greedy people, I might drift in their direction, and I don't want to do that. I also don't want to spend time with people who murmur and complain or gossip and criticize. I want to be a positive person and an encourager, so I choose to spend the majority of my time with people who model optimism and encouragement.

### Personal Reflection

Who do you know who would be a good mentor for you? What qualities does this person have that you would like to incorporate into your life or in which you would like to grow?

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I have heard many stories from people who have been deeply disappointed by church leaders who preached and taught godly behavior but did not live according to their teachings. Some of those disillusioned people left the church and returned only after years of encouragement, and some never came back. As leaders in the church, we have a great responsibility to live what we teach, realizing that people look to us not only to exemplify proper behavior but also to see if we are truly doing what we tell others to do. This is important for Christian business leaders, parents, and teachers, as well as for every believer.

People who tell others how to behave while failing to behave that way in their own lives are called hypocrites. Bible students know that Jesus harshly rebukes hypocritical people. Matthew 23:27–28 includes a strong reprimand from Jesus to religious people who were hypocrites, and He tells them they are like whitewashed tombs filled with dead men's bones. They tell others what to do but do not do it themselves.

In Paul's letter to Titus, whom he called his "true son," he writes, "In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us" (Titus 1:4; 2:7–8). This reminds me of a familiar anonymous quotation: "Preach at all times. When necessary, use words." In other words, we are to let our lives be like living sermons, demonstrating through our words and actions our faith and our love for God and for other people.

### *Servants to All*

In Philippians 1, Paul and Timothy claim no official title except “servants of Christ Jesus.” They considered themselves purchased by Christ with no rights to their own lives. They had renounced everything except the will of God. To serve God means to serve others, but some people don’t understand that. To say that we serve God sounds very spiritual, but to serve people because of our love for God is the proof of being a servant.

The Bible gives us an account of Jesus wrapping a servant’s towel around Himself after dinner and washing the disciples’ feet (John 13:2–5). Jesus tells the disciples that they are to do what they see Him do. He says, “You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you” (John 13:13–15). Being a true servant to God and to others is the character trait of a great man or woman of God. When the disciples asked Jesus who was the greatest among them, He replied that the greatest of all is the servant of all (Matthew 20:25–26).

In the Old Testament, prophets are usually referred to as servants of God, as are great men of faith, such as Moses and David. I wonder how many of us consider greatness to consist of serving others. I would venture to say that if we took the world’s view of serving people, rather than the biblical view, we would think that greatness means being served, not being servants. I have found quite a few of the principles regarding the Kingdom of God to be the opposite of what the

world would expect. For example, the world would urge us to exact revenge on our enemies, but Jesus teaches us to forgive, pray for, and bless them (Luke 6:27–28). The very reason life doesn't work without God in it is that He is the One with all the right answers about how to live and behave, even if some of them don't seem to fit into our logical thinking.

I am the president of a ministry and therefore the highest official of that organization, but I consistently make an effort never to think of myself as above any of the others who serve along with me. We are a team, and it is important for each one to do his or her part. I think this would be a good time for each of us to set aside a little time and examine our own life and attitudes and see how we rate when it comes to serving others as a service to God.

### Personal Reflection

Think about your life and your attitude toward serving others. Do you serve people as a way of serving God? In what ways do you—or could you—make a priority of serving others?

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### *Grace and Peace*

Paul opens many of his letters with the same greeting he uses in Philippians: "Grace and peace to you." I must admit that I read the Bible for years without giving any thought to the importance of these opening words. But I now realize how valuable and beautiful they are. Grace is God's favor and power freely given to those who don't deserve it. Grace opens the door for us to know God and therefore be happy. We are saved by grace and can do nothing without it. In addition, we all want and need peace. A life without peace is a miserable life, but we cannot have it without an understanding of grace.

Grace accomplishes with ease, through us, what we could never do with any amount of our own effort and struggle. It is by God's grace through faith that we are saved, and we should live each day the same way (Ephesians 2:8). In our dealings with others, we should learn to extend grace as God does to us. More mercy and less criticism would heal a lot of wounded relationships.

God's Word teaches us to live in peace and also to be peacemakers (1 Peter 3:11). Jesus Himself said in Matthew 5:9: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God." Being a person who works toward maintaining peace at all times requires a great deal of humility. Human nature causes us to want to have the last word in any kind of disagreement and to want to be right. However, in order to keep peace, at times we will need to give up any "right" we feel that we have to be right and refuse to argue simply for the sake of expressing an opinion that no one even wants to hear.

My son once said, “Being right is highly overrated.” After many years of defending my opinions and offering them too frequently, which often led to arguments and strife, I finally realized that if I needed others to recognize that I was right, God could easily take care of that. I also learned that where humility is present, appearing to be wrong doesn’t bother us at all.

I pray that God’s grace and peace would be upon you all the time, and that God would give you a receptive heart to receive and live in them.

### Personal Reflection

What can you do to receive God’s grace and peace on a deeper level in your life?

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## CHAPTER 2



# HOW TO DEVELOP AND MAINTAIN GODLY RELATIONSHIPS





## Thanksgiving and Prayer

*Philippians 1:3–5*

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

Paul begins this section by letting his readers know that every time he thinks about them, he thanks God for them. Paul had a grateful heart, and that is beautiful to God. The psalmist says that we enter His gates “with thanksgiving” (Psalm 100:4), which helps us understand that a grateful heart is a prerequisite to enjoying God’s presence. Many scriptures throughout the Bible instruct us to be thankful and give thanks to the Lord.

Paul also lets the Philippians know that it is his joy to pray for them all. Paul had a closer relationship to the Philippian church than to any others, and I think these verses show us why. The believers at Philippi became partners in Paul’s ministry from the first day they heard the gospel and were still supporting him when he wrote this letter. Later in our study of Philippians, we will find Paul stating that they were the only church to enter into true partnership with him. Others gave offerings at times, but only the Philippians are referred to as partners in his ministry.

Paul diligently avoided asking for financial support from those to whom he ministered and instead worked to make his own living. He normally refused to ask people to help him because he did not want anyone to discredit him as a false apostle merely looking for monetary gain. Apparently, though, the Philippians so strongly insisted that they be allowed to partner financially with Paul that he ultimately yielded to their request.

Paul understood the importance and benefits of giving to the work of the ministry. We know this because he encourages the Corinthians to give and teaches them about the power of giving (2 Corinthians 8:7, 11; 9:6–11). He writes that they will reap as they have sown and that they should be cheerful givers. He also promises they will be enriched in every way through their generosity (2 Corinthians 9:11). Teaching people to give to the Lord's work and to those in need is important. It prevents us from being greedy and selfish while opening a door of blessing for us and for those to whom we give.

In John 13:8, when Jesus washes His disciples' feet, Peter first refuses to let Him wash his feet. He states that he is the one who needs to wash his Master's feet. Jesus replies, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me." Jesus seems to be indicating that the only way to have a real relationship is to both give and receive from one another.

Many people are comfortable giving to others, but giving to them is very difficult. They know how to give graciously, but not how to receive graciously. Their usual reply is, "I'm fine, I don't need anything," but that statement may be birthed

either in pride or in such a poor self-image that they believe they don't deserve anything. We should give graciously and receive graciously as well.

### Personal Reflection

Are you a giving person, eager to bless others? Do you also allow others the joy of giving to you by receiving their blessings graciously?

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### *Healthy Relationships*

We can learn a lot about healthy relationships from Paul's relationship with the Philippians. One lesson I have learned about relationships is that a one-sided relationship is not a healthy one. Good relationships require participation with one another, each contributing something to it. If one person does all the giving while the other does all the taking, the relationship soon declines into something unhappy,

unfulfilling, and unhealthy for the one who gives and never receives. If you are in any relationships like this, I suggest that you pray and ask God to intervene and put it on the heart of your co-worker, relative, or friend to do their part in giving as well as receiving.

I prayed this prayer recently and was astounded at how quickly things turned around in the relationship I was praying about. Prayer invites God to work in our lives and should be our first step in dealing with any situation. I am involved with someone I compliment often, especially regarding her work effort. Several years into the relationship, I started noticing that she rarely ever complimented me on anything I had done. I asked God to change the situation, and almost immediately she began complimenting me quite regularly. The power of simple, sincere prayer is amazing.

Let me encourage you not ever to say, “Well, I guess there is nothing left to do but pray.” Praying is always the first thing we should do, not the last. Prayer invites God to help us, and without His help we become quickly worn out from fleshly efforts, trying to make something happen that only God can accomplish. Only He can change a person’s heart, and in this instance He did so very quickly.

I have a great relationship with a woman who owns a clothing boutique where I have purchased most of my clothing for approximately thirty-five years. I give her money through purchasing, and she gives me great service. We are also friends beyond the buying and selling relationship. We have lunch together, she calls when she needs prayer, and I

can always count on her to get me what I need to wear for any event I am attending. It is not a one-sided relationship. This year on my birthday she gave me a very generous gift certificate to a spa, and she said she just wanted to do something special for me so I would know how much I mean to her.

These activities—such as sharing meals together or giving and receiving gifts and others—are the glue that holds good relationships together. An exchange between friends does not need to be financial. It can take many forms. All we need to do is ask God to show us what someone else needs and listen. He may let us know by giving us a thought or an idea, but often the person will soon tell us without even intending to do so what they need or would like. When we are ready to be givers as well as receivers, our relationships will remain healthy.

I have also had many one-sided relationships in which I was continually asked to do favors for people, yet they never did anything for me. I realize that Jesus says we should give to others without expecting anything in return (Luke 6:35). But I believe that refers more to developing an attitude of blessing and generosity than to thinking we should never receive anything.

I once had a strong desire to be content and not want anything for myself. Because of that, I continued to give into the lives of several people who never gave back even a word of encouragement to me. One day I realized that these relationships were draining to me, and that I was enabling these people to continue in selfish lifestyles. I prayed diligently and felt that God showed me that these relationships were unhealthy. He had used me to give to people, but since they continued to give

nothing in return, they were disrespecting the relationship and taking advantage of me. I came to understand that allowing that unhealthy pattern to continue would not be good for them. I am always happy to give to anyone to whom God desires me to give, but I am also willing to say no to them if He leads me to do so. I am no longer in unhealthy, draining relationships.

We should choose our friends wisely, and I look for people with whom to partner in life and ministry. I look for people who are there for me when I have a need, just as they expect me to be available for them. I have many such people in my life—people who receive from me or from the ministry but who are also givers in many different ways. I once spoke at a man's church upon request, and since that time he has not failed to send me occasional gifts. It is not the item that is important, but the fact that he is still in some way saying, "Thank you, Joyce, for coming to help my church."

I strongly suggest that we examine all of our relationships and discern what types of relationships they are. There may be seasons when God will guide us to be in a relationship in which we do all the giving. He may be trying to use us as examples of how to be a good friend, but if other people never learn the lessons, God will release us from the responsibility. We should always obey God without expecting anything in return, but God would never function in that way with us. Throughout His Word, He promises to reward those who are obedient and faithful to Him. We don't obey God to get a reward, but because we love Him; however, when we give with right hearts, His blessings will chase us.

### Personal Reflection

Think about your relationships. Which ones are healthy and include both giving and receiving? Which ones do you need to pray about and reconsider because you are giving too much?

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## God Finishes What He Begins

*Philippians 1:6–8*

*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. 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. God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.*

In Philippians 1:6, Paul tells us that we can be confident that God, who has begun a good work in us, “will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus,” meaning the day when Christ returns to take us home to heaven. For many years after I received grace for salvation, I behaved as though I had to finish the work God had begun. I tried very hard, with a great deal of frustration and struggle, to be everything God wanted me to be, but I kept failing. My failure was due to trying to change myself by my own effort without asking for God's help or leaning and relying on Him. I'm thankful that I finally know I can do nothing without Christ (John 15:5).

This promise in Philippians 1:6 is a great encouragement to most people. Anyone who loves God will want to please

Him and to be and do all He desires, but we soon discover that when a good desire fills our heart, evil always comes to block the path to success. We need God's help in everything we do, and the best way to get it is to ask for it! We have not because we ask not (James 4:2).

## Paul Prays for the Philippians

*Philippians 1:9–11*

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

Just as all of Paul’s letters are written for us today, as well as for his primary audience during his lifetime, so are his prayers. I have learned many lessons about right and wrong ways to pray for people by studying Paul’s prayers for the churches to whom he wrote. When I began to study them, I noticed right away that he does not ask God to deliver them from their circumstances, but to give them the ability to endure their circumstances with good temper (Colossians 3:12 AMP). Rather than asking for temporal benefits, Paul prays for things that would help the people spiritually.

In Philippians 1:9–11, he prays that their “love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight” and that they would be able to discern the most excellent things and be “filled with the fruit of righteousness that

comes through Jesus Christ.” If we take even a few minutes to think about what Paul prays, we will realize the infinite value of his prayers. For example, he prays for the Philippian believers to be strong spiritually, and if we are strong enough spiritually, we can endure whatever comes and remain steadfast in our faith and continue being good examples of godly behavior.

Studying Paul’s prayers helped me realize that I prayed too much about the circumstances that I felt needed to improve and not enough about the spiritual blessings and insights that would lift me to resurrection life in Christ, where I could live above my circumstances. We all have unpleasant and difficult circumstances, but we don’t have to let them control our behavior. I also realized that I did not pray nearly enough about my spiritual growth, and I prayed too much about things that I wanted or needed or about situations I wanted God to solve or remove from my life. It is certainly not wrong to ask God to help us concerning painful circumstances, but it is more important that we pray to be strengthened with all might and power in our inner being, and be filled with the fullness of God (Ephesians 3:16–19).

### Personal Reflection

In what areas could you pray less about your circumstances and more about your spiritual life?

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Paul prays for the Philippians to abound in love, to have depth of spiritual insight, and to be “filled with the fruit of righteousness.” This reminds me that we should guard against becoming complacent. Complacency is dangerous because it is only one step away from decline. If a person aspires to be a world-renowned musician, no matter how good she may be now, if she becomes complacent about practicing her instrument, her skill will soon begin to decline.

The same thing happens to us spiritually if we become complacent about spiritual growth. To abound means to exist in large amounts, to be packed with, to overflow, and to be crowded or full of. Let us always seek to grow more and

more in every spiritual aspect of our lives. Let us desire to be like Jesus in all our ways.

Paul also prays that the Philippians would be excellent. I first learned Philippians 1:10 this way: “So that you may surely learn to sense what is vital, and approve and prize what is *excellent* and of real value” (AMPC, emphasis mine).

We should never become complacent once we reach the “good enough” stage. We may think, *I’m doing all right. I’m certainly doing as well as other people I know.* We are not called to “good enough,” but to press on to excellence in all areas of our lives.

How do excellent people behave? They are on time for appointments, they get to work on time, they don’t leave messes for others to clean up, and they don’t park in handicapped parking spaces if they are not handicapped. These people even replace the toilet paper when they use the last of it. They put their grocery carts back into the spaces marked for carts, and they respect the signs that say, “Please return your cart.” If excellent people are not charged enough for an item they purchase, they will return to the store and ask the clerk to correct the mistake. They treat people with excellence. In essence, they try to do what Jesus would do in every situation they face.

Our first response to this kind of description of excellent people may prompt the thought or statement “These are little things that don’t make much difference.” But God sees everything, and nothing is hidden from His sight. If we are truly living for God, we should want to please Him in every

“little” thing. Jesus says that if we are faithful in little things, He will make us rulers over much (Matthew 25:23). These little things in life may be situations no one will notice except God, but pleasing God is supposed to be our goal. Let’s live as though He is always watching us, because He is.