

## Family and Youth Study Guide: Philippians Series

### Introduction

When we open the book of Philippians it is like opening a gift full of your favorite things from someone who knows you well, and how to cheer you up and encourage you. Paul was writing to this group of believers from a prison cell to build them up when they were tempted to look around and be really discouraged by what was going on - and even more than that, he wanted them to know what real joy was: knowing Jesus Christ!

As Pastor Joshua teaches through the book of Philippians on Sundays, we have the chance to focus in on some of the key truths tied in to his messages. Each week we will be using God's word to examine the key ideas and some important questions about them, to really get a hold of them and make them part of our day to day relationship with Jesus.

Before you begin each time you spend in this study, be sure to ask the Holy Spirit to help you understand and be your guide into all truth with just a simple prayer. Ask confidently - God *wants* you to open the great gift we find in this book of Philippians to experience the joy of knowing Christ fully!

**Week 1: He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. Philippians 1:6**

1. How does God begin this work in me?

- ✓ Please read Romans 10:14-21.
  - What is the first thing that someone needs to do in v. 10 and again in v. 11 to begin this relationship with God?
  - Faith, belief with the heart, and trust are the really the same thing. According to v. 17, how does someone come to faith?
  - How is God pictured in v. 21 to those that He wants to hear and believe the good news of the gospel? How does this make you feel about God who patiently waits with open arms -- have you believed with your heart and gone to Him?
  
- ✓ Please read 1 Corinthians 3:3-7
  - In these verses Paul is scolding the Corinthians because they are not allowing God to work in them. What is causing division among them according to v. 4-5?
  - God uses preachers and teachers, like Paul and Apollos, to bring us the word of God, but look in v. 6-7! What really causes His word to be at work in us?

The transformation that God can do in us begins when we hear and believe God's word, both the first time we repent and believe in Jesus as our savior, and every time we are listening to His truth. Other people may be used by God to help us along, but they can't change us from the inside -- we need to rely on God the Holy Spirit to do this good work and grow us into people who are like Jesus.

2. Nobody's perfect, we all know that...so why even try?

- ✓ The books of the New Testament were written in Greek, and the Greek word that Paul used in our key truth of Philippians 1:6 was "telios." This is translated into English Bibles as "perfection" or "completion." Another way to think about that word is "lacking nothing"— we may see life in Christ as *lacking nothing* because God is caring for us and willing to keep changing us for the better!

- ✓ Please read 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14
  - What does it say God chose us for in v. 13? Being sanctified is another way of saying that we become set apart from the world, or holy and more like Jesus.
  - When we look in v. 14 we can see that the true reward God has in mind is in the future - what is it?
  
- ✓ Please look ahead in Philippians and read Phil. 3:12-14
  - These words are from the example of the apostle Paul's own life. Was he living as a perfect Christian?
  - What does his example call us to do?

We can see from these verses that God's will is to sanctify us, or bring us to maturity as fully formed followers of Christ. The promises don't say that we should be perfect already, but that God wants to take us on the journey to Christ-likeness and sharing in His glory.

3. So if I am trying to follow Jesus and keep messing up, does this mean I am not really a Christian or won't ever have God at work in me?

- ✓ Please read Romans 7:15-20
  - What does the writer, Paul, say he keeps on doing in v. 15?
  - Is there some habit or behavior that you have told yourself you would not do again, and then found yourself in the same position again and again with frustration?
  - What does Paul say is responsible for this ongoing struggle? Look in v. 17 and 20.
  
- ✓ So are things hopeless for me to be like God wants me to be? Please read Romans 7:24-8:5.
  - Who can set us free from this conflict inside ourselves because of the sinful desires that we all experience?
  - How do we need to take our steps each day according to v.4 and 5?

Paul was an incredible teacher and leader who performed many miracles and led many to salvation. And even he lived with the struggle of sin and temptation to follow the desires of his flesh! We have already seen that God wants to work in us to make us complete and lacking in nothing, like Jesus, and it is the Holy Spirit that

will lead us in His will and give us the power over all the things we try to overcome on our own.

4. What can I do to work with the Holy Spirit to become more like Jesus?

✓ Please read James 1:22-25

- What did James think about people who are always hearing the Word of God and good teachings but never do anything about what they heard? (If you don't know what "delude oneself" means, ask an adult or look up the word in a dictionary)
- If hearing God's word is like looking in a mirror, what are some ways you could remember what your life is supposed to look like even when you are not in church, youth group, or Sunday school?

✓ Please read Romans 12:1-2

- What are we told to break free from in v. 2?
- How is the Holy Spirit going to start changing us?
- What kinds of real influences do you have from the world that you should test against God's good will for you?

The Holy Spirit becomes active in us when we hear the word of God and respond by changing the way we think, which will change the way we act. To become the person God wants to make us - a reflection of Christ - it requires a real knowledge of the truth, as Paul prays in Philippians 1:9-11.

To close this week, pray that God would increase your understanding so that you would seek the things that are best and be filled with His righteousness.

**Week 2: Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. Philippians 1:12-13**

1. Why did Paul have such great faith that God would use his imprisonment for the spread of the gospel?

- ✓ Please read Acts 21:30-36, the story of Paul in Jerusalem before his current imprisonment.
  - Imagine an entire city mob beating and chasing you, until you are bound in chains and brought to prison. What past experience did Paul have in Philippi that would have really built his trust in God? If you missed the background from Pastor Joshua's first message about Philippians, you can read the story of Paul and Silas in Philippi in Acts 16:16-34.
  - How can this be an example for how we respond when we are in desperate situations and see no way out?
- ✓ As this encounter with the mob and officials plays out, Paul uses it as an opportunity to preach the gospel of Jesus. This is recorded in Acts 22 and the beginning of Acts 23. Read what occurs at the end of this sermon, in Acts 23:9-12.
  - How did Paul know that he wouldn't be "torn to pieces" and killed right there in Jerusalem by these crazy mobs?
  - What was going to happen in Rome? How does this back up his claim in Phil. 1:12 that being in chains was a good thing?

2. Why would God allow Paul to suffer to spread the gospel?

- ✓ Please read 1 Peter 2:15-24.
  - In v. 15 we can see that God has a different way to deal with foolish men than we would usually want to; what is it?
  - Why does getting punished or suffering for doing good show the world about Christ? What are they used to seeing people punished for?
  - According to our example, what do we trust in when we are suffering (v. 23)?

- ✓ Please read Matthew 5:43-48
  - Jesus was teaching what is known as the Sermon on the Mount. What does He have to say about our enemies and those who cause suffering in our lives?
  - How does dealing this way with people who are unfair or even evil toward us really draw people's attention?
  - Have you ever seen or known of someone who offered love or forgiveness to a person who didn't really deserve it? How did this demonstrate the good news of Jesus Christ to you?

3. Does this mean that God brings terrible things in our lives so that we can witness about Jesus?

- ✓ Definitely not!! Please read Genesis 3:17-19 and Romans 5:12
  - What were the consequences of Adam's disobedience?
  - How does Romans 5:12 explain the effects of Adam's disobedience or sin on you and me?
  
- ✓ Please read James 1:12-17
  - James connects our trials with being temptations. How does facing a trial tempt you away from God, especially when doing the best thing in His eyes is the most difficult?
  - What things do come from the Father according these verses?

Pain and suffering and trials are part of the world because of the curse of sin. Yet our loving God brings good and perfect gifts, especially life in Christ. That life gives us the promise of overcoming all sin and death in an eternal kingdom where there will be no more tears or pain. Knowing this brings joy even in difficult times, as it did for Paul.

To close this week, pray that God would open your eyes to see how you can demonstrate the love and forgiveness of Jesus even in bad situations and testify with the way you respond to them about the hope you have because of Him.

**Week 3: 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 one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel. Philippians 1:27**

1. Why does Paul make it sound like having unity in the church is one of the main ways we can act in a manner worthy of the gospel?

- ✓ Please read 1 John 3:10-18
  - How does John say we can tell the children of God from the rest of the world?
  - According to v. 16, how far does is this loving one another supposed to go?
  - So most Christians won't be in a position to die for another believer, but how can we lay down our own interests for others?
  
- ✓ 1 John 4:19-21
  - Why do we love each other? How does this relate to the good news of the gospel (think John 3:16!)?
  - Can people who follow Jesus say they have a good relationship with Him and still not get along with other believers?

Because one of the central truths of the gospel is that God is love, and God loved us enough to send His Son to die for our sins, our words and actions need to show the world that love. Jesus told His disciples before He went to the cross for us, "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." And even though we don't "feel like" loving many of the people we barely know or find hard to get along with, we can walk by the Spirit of God and His power to overcome those feelings, as we looked at in Week 1.

2. I have nothing in common with most of the people at church, how can I "stand in one spirit" with them?

- ✓ Please read John 15:5-12
  - What word picture is this teaching from Jesus drawing of what life in Christ looks like? What does He call Himself, and what do all believers have in common?
  - How will we show ourselves to be His disciples? And which fruit of the Spirit is repeatedly mentioned here in v.9-12?

- ✓ Please read John 17:20-23
  - When Jesus has the opportunity to pray for all the believers yet to come to faith, what does He ask for?
  - We're seeing a repeated pattern - according to Jesus, why is this His will for us (v. 21 and 23)?
  - Jesus says the key is for us to be "in" God to achieve unity. Can you recall a time when you felt a real bond with another Christian(s) because you were both focused on God's perspective about living or serving?

The real key to having love and unity with other Christians is living for Jesus and trying to line our lives up with His -- this is abiding or dwelling in Him. When the way we see the world and react is more and more influenced by Christ, we will always have a bond with others who are living the same way.

3. I don't mind doing my own thing to serve God, but why do I need to "strive together" with all these people?

- ✓ Please read Ephesians 1:22-23 and Ephesians 4:3-7
  - Jesus is called the head, what is the church called in 1:23?
  - In 4:3-6, oneness of the body is the focus and then there is "BUT" that begins v. 7. What does God want to point out about each one of us?
  
- ✓ To better understand why there is a relationship between each one of us and the body as one, please read 1 Corinthians 12:12-27
  - The grace given to each one of us is the gifting that determines our part in the body. What do these verses say about how God has designed His body, the church, to work together?
  - From what is taught in this passage should any Christians feel like what he or she has to offer is not important or needed—why or why not? Check out v. 22-26 again!

The key truth we were thinking about this week from Philippians 1:27-28 is called an "exhortation," which means something we are called to do, kind of in between an encouragement and a command -- the way a coach might call to you in a game. This call to stand and strive together comes just after Paul's statements about living

for Christ. We've seen from Jesus' own words that when our purpose and source of strength is all wrapped up in Him, we will also have an incredible bond with each other. And this bond allows us to be a functioning and healthy body to do the work He left as our assignment until He returns!

**Week 4: Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Philippians 2:3**

1. There are some kids, and adults, that are just *bad* people. How can I look at those people that are doing everything wrong or seem really evil as better than me?

- ✓ Please read Romans 3:23 and 1 John 1:8-9
  - What condition are all of us in without the grace of God?
  - What does John say about thinking that we're good compared to other people?
  
- ✓ Please read the story in Luke's gospel, 19:1-10
  - What was causing the people to grumble in this story?
  - This man was considered the bottom of society by his peers. How did he respond to the grace shown Him by Jesus?
  - Are there people in your path who have been written off or rejected that would find being shown the grace of God through you amazing? Why would that speak louder than just telling them they're acting or living wrong?

2. There is a saying about "Looking out for #1," and isn't it true that if I don't look out for myself the world is going to take advantage of me or leave me out?

- ✓ Please read 1 Samuel 16:6-13, the story of the prophet Samuel going to the house of Jesse to find the new king chosen by God for Israel.
  - What did God tell Samuel about man's perspective on who's "#1" compared to *His* perspective on who receives His favor and blessing?
  - Was David busy trying to establish himself as more successful or praiseworthy than his brothers?
  
- ✓ Read a little further in this story of David, 1 Samuel 17:17-28
  - Even though David has already been chosen over his brothers and anointed by the Lord, what do we find him doing in this passage?
  - How did David resemble the character of Christ as described in Philippians 2:5-9? Realize this is what leads up to his great victory over the giant, Goliath.

- ✓ Also read Luke 16:19-25

- In this story, what happens to the man that the world would see as being on top?
- What perspective is Jesus trying to give his listeners about striving to be better than others, or regarding yourself that way?
- How much of your energy is spent trying to win people's approval? Does a story like this make you re-think what you worry about and where you put your energy?

In James 5:10 it says, "Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will exalt you." This starts with acknowledging our own sin and need for God's grace. We can't ever just be good enough to earn our way into God's kingdom, but when we confess our sin and need for Him, God can do the work of transforming us into a reflection of Jesus. Even more shocking to the world is that a Christian can count on God to reward us correctly, and we don't need to try to one-up each other and have people think we're the best at things to have self-worth. Now that is truth that can give us rest!

**Week 5: But whatever was to my profit, I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. Philippians 3:7**

1. What kind of things that are good get in the way of knowing Christ and following Him?

- ✓ Please read Psalm 33:13-22
  - What things are presented by the Psalmist as taking our hope away from knowing and serving God?
  - Why should I expect my help to come from God rather than my own ability or possessions (note v. 13 and v. 18)?
  
- ✓ Please read Luke 18:18-27
  - What are all the things that this man had going for him? Was that enough for Jesus?
  - Why did the young ruler refuse to follow Jesus when he had been keeping God's commandments all his life?
  - What things in your life seem too difficult to give up if Jesus asked you to?
  
- ✓ Read Hosea 13:4-6 where God speaks through His prophet to His people
  - What happened after the Lord had protected and provided for them?
  - When have you been closest to God? How much of a priority is it to seek a deeper relationship with Him when everything is going great at school, at home, and with family and friends?

The Bible provides so many examples of how we can easily get tripped up by trusting in worldly things, even outward religion, rather than the God who rules it all. Some who are smart trust in their own understanding, those who are strong believe they can rely on themselves, some depend on their family's reputation, and the wealthy can become contented with things that won't last forever. All of this pulls us away from walking humbly with Jesus and finding wisdom, strength and a real inheritance through His spiritual blessings.

2. Does Jesus need us to give up all our material things and things we are good at to follow Him then?

- ✓ Please read 1 Timothy 6:6-11, 17-19
  - Is being rich an evil? How do people fall into a trap that causes them to stray from devotion to Christ?

- Does it look like people who are rich should become poor? What are they commanded to do?
- ✓ Please read Proverbs 16:1-5
  - From what you read here, when we are setting goals or approaching things we are good at, what is the Lord checking in us?
  - What do think it would look like to commit your next quarter of school or next basketball season, for example, to the Lord?

Paul had a long list of personal strengths and a religious background he could point to that he might have trusted in to have a good life. But in the end he knew it was all meaningless - actually *garbage* - compared to knowing Christ and His power to change his life right then and forever. God is the one who created us with certain abilities and gifts, and blessed us with any of the stuff we have. If we don't give thanks in everything and seek God's purposes in how we use and think about all of it, *beware...*we might let the gift take the place of the Giver in our lives!

Close this week by praying that you will surrender all your talents and treasure to the Lord and ask Him to show you how to use them for His kingdom's sake. Read 2 Corinthians 10:17-18 and talk to God about what that means and that it would be true in you.

**Week 6: Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ. Philippians 3:19-20**

1. How can I keep my mind on things that I haven't seen and are really a mystery to me?

- ✓ In Romans 8, Paul writes of future things that we are to be eagerly awaiting (see 8:18!); please read Romans 8:24-25
  - What is the key to keeping our minds on the things we haven't seen? (Hint: It is the word that is repeated the most in these two verses)
  - What is one area of life where you have really been given hope by believing in Christ?
  
- ✓ Read also 2 Corinthians 5:7 and Hebrews 11:1
  - Faith requires that we walk without seeing sometimes - but what things did God give us as a guide to our steps?

In order to take our focus off of earthly things and think about the promises of God we have to have faith in what we do not see. We know for sure that someone loves us even if we can't see "love" in front of our eyes or pick it off a shelf at the store...but like loving someone, there will be evidence of our faith in the way we act and think!

2. What exactly am I hoping in? What did God promise about heaven or His eternal kingdom?

- ✓ Please read John 14:1-6
  - Look closely at v. 2, why has Jesus gone into heaven without us?
  - Thomas also is unsure of Jesus' promise about eternity with Him. What does Jesus explain to him about how to end up in heaven with Him?
  
- ✓ Please read Revelation 21:1-5 which describes what it will be like in the future after Jesus has destroyed Satan and all His enemies
  - What will happen after this world ends? Where will the church rule and reign with Jesus Christ?
  - What are the incredible promises of this new kingdom?
  - When you think of all the things that you sometimes hope for, how do

they seem compared to a place like you read about here? Can you imagine a world where you would never be sad or fearful ever, and no one would die?

3. It seems hard to "eagerly await" our Savior from heaven - when will all of this happen and will it be scary like some of the movies about the end of the world?

- ✓ Many people have tried to figure out exactly when Jesus will come back and take us with Him; read Acts 1:7-11
  - The disciples wanted to know exactly when He would establish His earthly kingdom. What did Jesus answer?
  - What did they learn about His return? What were they going to have to keep and protect them until that time (check out v. 8 for that one)?
  
- ✓ 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18
  - How will we know that it is the time of the Lord's return?
  - Paul thought this would be encouraging to the believers; do you agree?

Paul says those who are focused on earthly things are bound for destruction, but contrasts that with believers who are hoping in their eternity with Christ. God has revealed many glimpses of what that eternity will be like through His word, and they are all priceless promises that are FAR from what Hollywood portrays about the end of things as we know it. As the final book of the Bible, Revelation, ends Jesus says twice that He is coming quickly (Rev. 22:7, 12) so we always need to have a mind-set of being ready!

End this week by thanking Jesus for making a way for us to enjoy life with Him forever, and ask God to help you with the things that are hard to believe about the future plans He has for the world. Commit to hoping in what God has planned for you more and more rather than what we can do or have right now.

**Week 7: Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:6-7**

1. Isn't worry just normal?

- ✓ Let's read what Jesus has to say in Matthew 7:25-34
  - Do the kind of things that Jesus says not to worry about sound like important ones to be concerned with? Why does He say not to worry?
  - Again we can see a contrast between non-believers (pagans) and believers. What are the believers told to do instead of worry?

Although it is pretty normal for people to worry, Jesus told His followers not to. Just like many of us have earthly parents who look out for the things we need, every Christian has a heavenly Father who loves us and cares about our well-being - and He knows even better than us just what we need! As we learn to trust and believe God more and more we will find that we don't need to live in constant worry.

2. When things are out of control or seem too difficult for me to handle, how can I stop being anxious about them?

- ✓ Please read Matthew 11:28-30
  - What does Jesus offer to all His followers?
  - How can we take Him up on His offer? What does this mean you would need to be doing on a regular basis?
  
- ✓ Jesus also had comforting words in John 14:25-29
  - What will the gift of the Holy Spirit do to help us when we are tempted to be afraid or worried?
  - How do you think the peace of Christ is different than the peace of the world? What makes "the world," which usually means those that do not believe in Jesus, feel at peace? How dependable and stable are these things?

When we commit to following Jesus and serving Him, He can carry our burdens with us. He has given us the gift of the Holy Spirit living inside us, who knows our anxious thoughts and reminds us of every promise of God that quiets our hearts -- we just need to take time to hear Him and really listen.

### 3. Does praying really stop Christians from worrying?

- ✓ The book of Hebrews teaches us a lot about Jesus as our High Priest, someone who serves God and sacrificed for your sake. Please read Hebrews 4:14-16, the end of a chapter on finding the rest of God (the opposite of uncertainty and working to earn blessing).
  - Where is Jesus now according to these verses?
  - The throne of grace is where God sits and hears the prayers of His children. How and why can we approach there?
  
- ✓ Also read Hebrews 7:24-26. Before you start you need to know that "to intercede" means to plead on another's behalf, or offer prayer for the sake of another person.
  - Do we need to wonder if Jesus will be listening to hear our prayers?
  - Why is going to Jesus with our worries and fears better than going to anyone else we know?

Paul calls us to pray about everything because that is one way we can seek Him first rather than worry. After all, Jesus has been here and experienced extreme sorrow and fearful things happening to Him, so He knows what we're going through. But even better, He has gone to sit and rule from heaven with God the Father! He constantly acts like that friend who always sticks up for you, especially when someone says something that is not true about you. Satan tries to lie to us and make us worried and afraid, but Jesus sits beside the Father and constantly says we're not guilty because our sins are forgiven -- so we have nothing to fear because Almighty God will help and protect us as His own!

Before you finish up, thank God for offering to take our troubles on, help us, and bring us peace. Tell Him you want to seek His kingdom and righteousness, and ask the Spirit of God to help you to pray when you're worried or afraid.

**Week 8: Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy--think about such things.**

1. How can I figure out which things God would find worthy of thinking about or filling my head with, because Christians seem to have all different opinions?

- ✓ Please read Hebrews 5:12
  - What does God say these believers still need, even though they should be past it?
  - If the word of God and teachings about righteousness are part of our regular diet, what should we be able to do (look at v. 14)?
  
- ✓ John also had something to say about being able to tell what is truly excellent by God's standards. Read 1 John 4:1-3
  - There are spirits from the deceiver, Satan, who are part of trying to influence us every day. From looking at these verses, how will we recognize these false spirits?
  - We have to think harder about this one. What kinds of things would go against the character and name of Christ in books, movies, music or people we hang out with?

There are really 2 important parts to figuring out what kinds of things we should be filling up on mentally. First we have to have a steady intake of God's word. Just like you went from babyfood to burgers as you got older, God wants to mature us and make us wise in His word. Then, from what we've learned, we need to be able to compare everything we see and hear to God's character and will for His children. This is called discernment and it comes through the Holy Spirit in us. What sorts of influences in your life don't really hold up to this kind of test? What will you do about it?

2. How can I look at the world around me and focus on the things that really do reflect the true nature of God, or have His "stamp" on them, when it comes to culture and creation?

- ✓ Read Psalm 104
  - What types of things did the author of this Psalm focus on that led him into worship?
  - Once we observe these kinds of things, what is the example we should follow from the author in verses 33 and 34? How will this help you to

keep the right perspective even when you come across TV, books, or people's comments that are opposite of what you see here?

- ✓ We can also follow Paul's example of mixing with the world around him; read Acts 17:22-31
  - Does Paul begin by telling them the evil of their religion?
  - What things from their own culture did he use to teach to them (check out v. 23 and 28)?
  - Does using their own culture as a starting point mean that Paul is OK with their beliefs? Now read 17:16 so you really know where Paul was coming from.

Last week we studied the connection between prayer and having peace rather than worry in our lives. A big part of having the peace of God in your life is doing what you can to see the world through His eyes, which is called "having the mind of Christ," in 1 Corinthians 2:16. So Paul encouraged us to fill our minds with the good stuff. Think of it the same way that the food we eat affects how our bodies run - has anyone ever said, "You are what you eat!" to you? Then it makes sense that if we fill up with the Word of God and learn how to recognize what fits with His truth, we will be able to discern the good from the evil. With discernment, we are ready to go out in the world and show people how God has been there all along and help them to see Him too!

**Week 9: I know what it is to be in need and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength. Philippians 4:12-13**

1. Paul doesn't seem to be talking about happiness the way I think of it; what does he mean by this "secret"?

- ✓ First, go back and re-read Philippians 4:4-8.
  - If Paul was actually living the way he was encouraging the Philippians to live, what words would you use to describe his attitude?
  - From what you are seeing, how would this kind of perspective on things allow Paul to be content even when things were hard?
  
- ✓ Read Hebrews 13:5-6
  - The Hebrew believers had experienced having their money and property taken from them as a form of punishment for being Christians, which is also called persecution. If they had loved money too much, would they have risked it to stand up for Jesus or other Christians?
  - What is the most important material thing that you possess? How would you feel if it was lost or stolen from you? Compare that to knowing you have God on your side and life in Christ -- which can't be taken from you!

For Christians, this secret of contentment can bring the greatest joy. While the world depends on money and all it can buy to bring happiness, Jesus reminded His followers that earthly treasures will be destroyed by time or stolen (Matt. 7:19-20). The excitement of that new iPhone will fade when your service is disconnected, the phone breaks, or there is a new and better gadget everyone else has. The blessings and security of having a relationship with Jesus can bring us contentment through the times when we don't seem to have anything else. On top of that, this relationship can never be taken from us against our will, and there will never be anything better!

2. How can I use the strength that Paul talks about to tackle every challenge?

- ✓ Read 1 Chronicles 29:10-14, an account of the great King David's prayer before his death.

- David begins His prayer by coming to God with an attitude of worship. What kinds of things does David say to describe God?
- What does God do with what is in His hands in v. 12? Have you ever thought about the God in control of everything in heaven and earth offering to share that with you? What situations would you approach differently if you really had a sense that you could use His strength and power to take it on?
- ✓ Please read the prayer in Ephesians 3:16-21
  - How many times do you see the word "power" in this prayer? What do you learn about power here?
  - The word for power in the Greek language that the Bible was written in is, "dunamis." It means the power that lives *inside a thing* because of its nature. Where exactly does Paul pray that power will be active? How does it get there?
  - If we've got a source of power inside us, like the electricity in our house, what do you think you'd need to do to flip the switch and experience it? What kinds of things does this passage, or other examples from the Bible, suggest?

The good news of Jesus Christ contains all the power of God. The power of God raised Jesus from the dead in victory over sin and death. And this resurrection power of God transforms us into new creations with new life that is victorious over any circumstances. We can rejoice that we have this power living inside us in the form of the Holy Spirit, who is not just our comforter and teacher as we've studied before, but MIGHTY within us!

3. So if I have a powerful secret as Paul says, what am I supposed to do with it?
  - ✓ After receiving the power of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost the apostles were able to heal a crippled man as a sign of the powerful good news. Read their prayer after being threatened for testifying of God's grace and power in Acts 4:29-33.
    - What did the apostles ask God to do?
    - What kind of example does this set for what we could be doing with the power of God to share the joy of the Gospel with a world crippled by sin and death?

- ✓ Read 1 Corinthians 4:18-20, which is written by Paul about returning to visit the Corinthian church
  - What does Paul say the arrogant ones in the church do a lot of? Have you come across people like this?
  - What does he say will really demonstrate the kingdom of God? How will the world see this demonstrated in our lives - what could it look like?

Because of our relationship with Christ we have every sure promise of God, who is always for us and our good. This knowledge brings joy and contentment no matter what situation we find ourselves in. How can we contain this good news that gives us access to the power of Almighty God? In fact, God gives us this power so that we can show Him to the world - by the way we face every challenge with "power like the working of His mighty strength" (Ephesians 1:19). Believers in Jesus Christ can be used by God to defy the schemes of Satan and perform miracles or mighty acts! Close this week in a prayer based on Ephesians 3:15-21. Ask God to help you understand how true riches are found in Christ and how you can share the power of God with a world that desperately needs His transformation.

**Conclusion:**

The truth and encouragement in this book begins with how our own personal journey through this world can be changed for the better. But that is not all. The body of Christ, His church, would be an unstoppable force for the kingdom of God if we lived with the kind of joy that Paul writes about in Philippians. How can joy be so powerful? As we've seen over our study, when we rejoice in Christ we don't cling to worldly things to make us happy, and we are willing to take risks for Him. On top of that, when we find our joy in Christ as our source for life, we are also connected with other believers hooked into that same source. Then we can work together as one and forget ourselves! If Satan can't deceive us into thinking possessions, personal achievements, and fame are the only way to have value and comfort, OR divide us to make the body of Christ lame, like a runner with a crippled leg, he knows that Jesus has got him beat. Are you ready to let the joy of Christ take hold of your life?