

April to June 2023

“Peace & Joy: A Study of the Epistle to the Philippians”

by
Rev Ko Lingkang

About the Author



Rev Ko Lingkang serves as the Pastor of Sydney Bible-Presbyterian Church in Australia. He obtained his Bachelor of Theology (2005) and Master of Divinity (2015) degrees from the Far Eastern Bible College in Singapore, and his Master of Theology (2018) degree from the Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary in the United States. He is married to Serena Ko, and they have been blessed with three children – Alethea, Derek and Zoe.

SATURDAY, APRIL 1

PHILIPPIANS 1:1-5

PHILIPPIANS 4:1-9

“...to all the saints in Christ Jesus
which are at Philippi...”

AN EPISTLE OF JOY AND PEACE

The Epistle to the Philippians is one of the more personable epistles that Paul wrote. The tone of the letter is that of someone writing a letter to his friend, exhorting his loved ones out of love and concern. It adopts a markedly different tone from some of the epistles that Paul had written, such as the letter to the Galatians where it is more of a stern word of instruction and rebuke from the Apostle.

This epistle is often described as the epistle of joy. The idea of rejoicing is found no less than sixteen times in this short epistle. Here, Paul exhibited a true understanding of the Christian's purpose, for even amid the adversities that he was facing, he was able to share his own joy, and exhort his readers to rejoice together with him.

While not mentioned as many times, it is also an epistle that conveys the thought of peace in its various aspects. Although he was in bonds and had numerous enemies who were seeking to antagonise him (Phil 1:12-17) and was facing a very real prospect of death (Phil 1:18-23), Paul expressed the state of peace that he was in. He also encouraged his readers to put aside all conflicts and seek to obey God, for He is the “*God of peace* (who) *shall be with you*” (Phil 4:9).

The reason he could have such joy and peace was because his ambitions and goals in life have been changed by the Lord Jesus Christ. As a Christian, for him to live is Christ and to die is gain (Phil 1:21), and daily he had no other desire than to press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus (Phil 3:14). He exhorted his readers to “*rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice*” (Phil 4:4), and assured them that through prayer they can have “*the peace of God, which passeth all understanding*” (Phil 4:7).

As we study this epistle over the next three months, may we too be able to enjoy the joy and peace that comes through our Lord Jesus Christ.

THOUGHT: Should the lives of all Christians be characterised by joy and peace?

PRAYER: Father, may I learn to rejoice in Thee always, and have the peace from Thee which passeth all understanding.

LORD'S DAY, APRIL 2

PHILIPPIANS 1:1-8

ACTS 16:11-15

*“For your fellowship in the gospel
from the first day until now.”*

WHO WERE THE PHILIPPIANS?

The church at Philippi was first established by Paul during his second missionary journey. The city of Philippi was the first major city that Paul ministered in upon entering Europe. There, he preached to a few Jewish women who had gathered by the side of a river, among whom was Lydia. As Paul preached to them, the Lord opened her heart, and she became the first recorded convert in Macedonia (Acts 16:11-15). She welcomed Paul into her home, where it was likely that a home church started, for it would be at her house that Paul would later meet with the brethren at Philippi after he was released from prison (Acts 16:40).

From then on, Paul enjoyed a close and abiding relationship with this church. He would probably visit them two more times during his third missionary journey: first when Paul received an offering that they had collected for the needy Christians in Jerusalem (2 Cor 8:1-5), and again just before he returned to Jerusalem (Acts 20:6).

Now, about four to five years after his last visit, while he was imprisoned in Rome, Paul received a delegation from the church through the hand of Epaphroditus, a minister of the church. He recounted how they had supported him financially in the past (Phil 4:15-16) and was very thankful for the present contribution as well (Phil 4:10). He was writing then to thank them for the gift and encourage them in their walk with the Lord. He also wanted to assure them that even though he was in prison, he was doing very well, and thankful for the opportunities he had to share the Gospel with everyone that he came into contact with (Phil 1:12-17).

As we meditate on Paul's relationship with the Philippians, we see a beautiful example of what it means to have fellowship in the Gospel. It was a bond that began with the Gospel and continued in the defence and confirmation of the Gospel. How wonderful it would be if all Christians could enjoy this same fellowship of the Gospel!

THOUGHT: What sort of relationship do I share with the fellow believers in my life?

PRAYER: Father, may my life be wholly given over to the cause of Christ and His Gospel.

MERE PLATITUDES OR GENUINE SPIRITUAL CONCERN?

Throughout the epistle to the Philippians, we see a genuine love and close friendship that Paul had with the Philippian church. It was written to thank and encourage the church for their support in his ministry, and to exhort them concerning certain issues that they were facing.

In the first few verses of this epistle, we catch a glimpse of that warm relationship between Paul and the church. It is easy to sometimes gloss over these opening words and see them as just mere platitudes. But we know that every word of Scripture is inspired. Paul was not writing these words as a mere formality or perfunctory greeting. He sincerely meant every word that he had written.

As he wrote to them, he wished grace and peace upon them. Grace would be the unmerited favour that we have received from God, of both the salvation and sanctifying grace that the Lord bestows upon us. Peace speaks of the new relationship that we have in the Lord as believers, whereby we are no longer enemies of God, but reconciled to Him by His grace, able to have an abiding relationship with God through Christ.

In the rest of his epistle, we read more of the affection that Paul expressed through his writing, showing that he truly did care for them. He would back those wishes he conveyed through heartfelt exhortations and prayers that he made for them. This reflects a true spiritual concern that God’s grace and peace would indeed abound in their lives.

When we greet each other, whether in person or in writing, we would often say certain words of greeting. Do we do this more out of habit, or in true sincerity? When we say, “God bless,” “have a blessed day,” greet someone “in the blessed name of Jesus Christ,” or tell a person “May God’s grace be with you,” what do we really mean? Will we back the greeting with actions that would truly help their lives to be blessed? Will we also encourage them spiritually and pray for them?

THOUGHT: Is it better to not greet someone, or to greet them but not mean it?

PRAYER: May the words of my lips, including the well-wishes that I make, be yea, yea, nay, nay.

TUESDAY, APRIL 4

PHILIPPIANS 1:3-5

COLOSSIANS 1:1-14

*“Always in every prayer
of mine for you all...”*

DO YOU PRAY FOR YOUR CHURCH?

Paul was a prayerful man. The Philippian church was constantly in his prayers. He shared that every time he thought of them, he was full of thanksgiving to God. He was effusive in his prayers for their sakes, joyfully praising God for the relationship that they shared and constantly interceding on their behalf. His prayers were warm and earnest, reflective of the deep personal relationship he had with them.

What did he pray for? To him, he was most thankful for their *“fellowship in the gospel”* (Phil 1:5). They were his fellow companions and helpers in the ministry of the Gospel, sharing the burdens of the work with him. The word he used translated as *“fellowship”* is the Greek word *koinonia*. This word has the meaning of sharing and communion. It can sometimes refer to monetary or material sharing. The Philippians had always been generous in their support of Paul (2 Cor 8:1-5; Phil 4:10-16), and he was writing to thank them for their most recent gift. But more than just monetary giving, the word also describes how he was so thankful for the strong bond of unity and fellowship that he had with them. From the very first day when he witnessed to them (Acts 16:11-15), this church had stood strongly with Paul, encouraged him, and gladly served together with him. As a result, this church had a special place in Paul’s heart, and he was always very fond of the special bond of unity that he shared with them.

How is your relationship with your church? Can you say that you enjoy strong bonds of fellowship one with another? Are you appreciative and thankful for the spiritual bonds that bind you all together? Do you thank God, and constantly pray for one another? When you think of the church and all the times that you have served alongside one another, does it bring a smile to your face, and a warmth in your heart? If it is not already something that you are doing, will you make your church part of your daily prayers, that she will *“always (be) in every prayer of (yours)...making request with joy”* (Phil 1:4)?

THOUGHT: Should I make it a priority to attend my church’s prayer meeting?

PRAYER: May my prayers be constant, and may I be constantly interceding for those around me.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 5

PHILIPPIANS 1:6-8

1 THESSALONIANS 1:1-10

“...because I have you in my heart...”

TRUE SPIRITUAL RELATIONSHIPS

When you look at the congregation in your church each Sunday, how well do you know your fellow worshippers? You may know each other's names, something about their background and occupation, maybe a bit about their likes and dislikes, or certain character quirks of them. But do you really know them at a spiritual level? What do you know of their walk with the Lord? Are you concerned for their spiritual welfare?

When Paul thought of the Philippian Christians, he spoke with an assured confidence concerning their salvation. He addressed them as “*the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi*” (Phil 1:1). Because he had served together with them and maintained regular correspondence with them, he learnt of their spiritual struggles and triumphs, of their joys and pains. He was certain that God, who had begun a good work in them in calling them and saving them, would certainly keep them “saved” all the way till the return of the Lord Jesus Christ.

What a blessed thing it is to have such an assurance! While we can never be absolutely sure (for only God knows our hearts), yet we can have a good certainty of someone else's salvation if we know them well on an intimate spiritual level. For that to happen, we must be willing to be involved in one another's lives. Our concern for one another ought to be about their walk with the Lord, and their obedience to His Word. It is sad that we may call someone a friend for many years and yet know nothing about their relationship with God.

True spiritual relationships are a gift that God grants us to enjoy here on earth. He has made us to be social people with the need to connect with the people around us. They are there to encourage us when we are down, to admonish us when we stray, and to mutually edify one another in the Lord. May you strive to build up more meaningful relationships with the brothers and sisters-in-Christ around you.

THOUGHT: When God said “*it is not good that the man should be alone*” (Gen 2:18), can that apply to friendships as well?

PRAYER: Father, may Thou bring meaningful spiritual relationships into my life!

THURSDAY, APRIL 6

PHILIPPIANS 1:7

ACTS 16:35-40

“...ye are all partakers
of my grace.”

THE GRACE OF ADVERSITY

Can adversity ever be considered a grace? Paul experienced his share of adversity in his time at Philippi. Shortly after he witnessed to the first group of converts, Paul and his companion Silas were hauled before the magistrates, beaten and imprisoned. All that happened because they were faithfully serving the Lord and telling others about Christ (Acts 16:16-24). While they were in prison, God sent an earthquake, and through that Paul had a chance to share the Gospel with the jailer (Acts 16:25-34). After they were finally released, Paul spent time with the brethren at Philippi, where they would have tended to his wounds and encouraged him in the Lord (Acts 16:40).

Since then, the Philippian church continued to support Paul, especially through the many trials that he had experienced. He encountered much opposition as he journeyed from city to city in the defence and confirmation (establishment) of the Gospel. He faced shipwreck, beatings, multiple incarcerations, all for the cause of Christ.

Through all that, Paul remembered the Philippian Christians as “*partakers of my grace*” (Phil 1:7). Yes, Paul saw the adversity that he experienced as a grace from God! He saw it as a privilege to be counted worthy to suffer for Christ. The fact that the saints at Philippi stood together with him during all those difficult times made Paul so thankful for them. He praised God for their fellowship in the Gospel (Phil 1:5) and shared, “*I have you in my heart*” (Phil 1:7). Such was the strength of their relationship, that even though they were not physically present with him, yet they supported him spiritually and materially, and therefore had a share in the grace of Paul’s adversity.

When trials and difficulties arise, do the leaders of our church have the assurance that you are in it together with them? Whether it is in the trials that they face, the pains and labours of their ministry, are they able to say that they have us in their heart, and that we are all partakers of grace together with them? A church that practises such love will be able to stand together with one another through thick and thin.

THOUGHT: Are all adversities I face a gift of God?

PRAYER: May I have the wisdom to understand the grace of adversity.

LONGING FOR SPIRITUAL FELLOWSHIP

During the long months of lockdowns and restrictions that we all experienced during the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021, the whole world was suddenly made to isolate one from another. Churches were forced online, and all fellowship activities had to cease for a season. How did you feel during that period of time?

The fourth stanza of the hymn “Blest be the Tie that Binds” goes:

*When we asunder part, it gives us inward pain;
But we shall still be joined in heart, and hope to meet again.*

Such is the strength of the bonds of Christian fellowship, that it should pain us to be parted one from another. At every departure, our hope is that we can soon be reunited. Is that a longing that you have experienced before?

That was the sentiment of Paul as he wrote to the Philippians, telling them, “*how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ*” (Phil 1:8).

As Paul was languishing in prison in Rome, what he missed was their fellowship. The contact he yearned for was not just a social gathering, of idle banter or meaningless chit-chat. What he longed for was the spiritual fellowship and encouragement that he had previously experienced with the Philippians.

He described it as greatly longing after them in “*the bowels of Jesus Christ*” (Phil 1:8). The Bible often uses “*bowels*” in the way that we would use “heart,” referring to the seat of our emotions. The longing he had of them was a true spiritual longing, the same way the heart and tender mercies of Christ long and yearn for us too. He loved them, with a Christ-like affection, just as Christ loves the Church.

Have we ever tasted such fellowship before? When we all draw near to Christ and grow in our love for Him, we will naturally draw near to our fellow believers as well.

THOUGHT: Do I enjoy the company of believers or unbelievers more?

PRAYER: Father, may Thou increase the love and affection that I have for my fellow believers.

SATURDAY, APRIL 8

PHILIPPIANS 1:9-11

1 THESSALONIANS 3:12-13

“...that your love may abound...”

ABOUNDING LOVE

The church at Philippi was characterised by its love. The deep mutual love and affection that Paul and the church had for each other is especially clear in the opening and closing verses of this epistle. Yet as Paul wrote this epistle to thank and encourage them, his prayer for them was that their love might abound.

To “*abound*” (Phil 1:9) means to increase; to be in abundance, to overflow. In Paul’s prayer, it was for them to grow in their abundance of love, both in the quantity and quality of it. To further emphasise that idea, Paul added the phrase “*yet more and more*” (Phil 1:9). Yes, that was Paul’s desire, that their love would increase and keep on increasing more and more!

You may read this and wonder: Why did Paul make such a request? Were not the Philippians a very loving church already? Surely as a faithful church they would have sincerely loved the Lord! Did Paul not just commend them for their loving care and support for him? Why did Paul need to pray that their love would abound?

When Paul made that prayer, it was not an indication that they were lacking or deficient in their love. But, as it is for every believer, there are always aspects in a believer’s love that can be improved upon. While we have the love of God shed abroad in our hearts from the time that we are saved, it is something that we must certainly grow in. To have our love abound, means to increase our zeal towards God and His Word, increase in our fervour in service, worship, and evangelism, and increase in our desire to obey and glorify Him. Love is certainly an essential virtue in our relationship and walk with God.

Certainly no one who is honest with himself can ever declare that he is sufficiently loving or think that there are no areas of his life that he could increase in with regard to his love. Let us all pray that our love may abound yet more and more as well.

THOUGHT: In what ways can I grow in love?

PRAYER: “This is my earnest plea: More love, O Christ, to Thee, more love to Thee, more love to Thee!”

LOVE AND TRUTH

When Paul prayed for the love of the Philippians to abound, it was “*in knowledge and in all judgment*” (Phil 1:9).

Yes, it is important to abound in love. Unfortunately, our understanding of love has been corrupted and tainted by this sinful world. If our love is misguided, if it is not based upon the truth of God’s Word but our own man-centred experiences, it can lead to disastrous consequences.

That is why Paul prayed for their love to abound yet only “*in knowledge and in all judgment*” (Phil 1:9). Love must abound, but we must be careful that it is within the bounds of our knowledge of God and His Word. This knowledge is not just an intellectual understanding of the facts of Scripture. It is to have a full experiential knowledge of all that God has revealed to us. Truth and doctrine are just as important as our love and zeal.

We cannot love properly unless we have knowledge. Yet knowledge is useless if it is not tempered with love. As A.W. Pink wrote, “warmheartedness should be accompanied and directed by a well-instructed understanding, that they might have spiritual judgment which would cause them to weigh things and enable them to discriminate between the true and the false, that they might perceive what to love and what to hate, what to seek and what to shun.” The right measure of both will enable us to have such a discerning love – that “*in all judgment,*” we would have the godly wisdom to know between right and wrong, truth and error.

This is therefore how our love must be applied – based on knowledge and dispensed with discernment. It is not just a blind increase of misdirected love, or a proud pursuit of knowledge without application. It is a very careful Scriptural balance that one must have, and therefore it was something that Paul prayed for, and what we ought to pray for as well.

THOUGHT: “Love unites but doctrine divides” – what is wrong with this statement?

PRAYER: “*And this I pray, that your (my) love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment.*” (Phil 1:9)

MONDAY, APRIL 10

PHILIPPIANS 1:9-11

1 THESSALONIANS 5:16-24

“That ye may approve things that are excellent...”

DISCERNMENT AND PERSEVERENCE

To have a right understanding of truth and love is an important trait that we ought to pray for. But what makes it so vital to our Christian lives? In Philippians 1:9-10, Paul explained what would result when our love abounds in knowledge and in judgment.

First, we will be able to *“approve things that are excellent”* (Phil 1:10). To *“approve”* here does not mean to just agree or to sanction something, but it has the idea of testing something, putting it through a rigorous analysis to determine if something is right and good, or *“excellent.”* This is our daily Christian duty. We must endeavour to be discerning: *“Prove all things; hold fast that which is good. Abstain from all appearance of evil”* (1 Thess 5:21-22). We face multiple decisions every single day, about a myriad of different things. How are we to discern each one? How do we know God’s will? We must have the right understanding and application of love and truth to achieve this.

Next is the ability to persevere *“till the day of Christ”* (Phil 1:10). In every endeavour and undertaking, we will not only be both pure and sincere, because of love, and will also be *“without offence”* (i.e. free from any known or obvious faults, not causing others to stumble), because of knowledge and judgment. This is necessary in enabling us to be consistent in our spiritual lives. We will not give up or succumb to temptation easily but will have the ability to be steadfast in our faith all the way till the day of Christ. This is something that we must earnestly pray for, as Paul did too: *“And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ”* (1 Thess 5:23).

How blessed it will be if all believers can have that wise discernment to seek only the things that are excellent in the sight of the Lord and can maintain that unblemished testimony all their life until the Lord returns!

THOUGHT: Can I persevere without discernment?

PRAYER: Father, may Thou sanctify my heart and grant me the wisdom to seek only that which is excellent and pleasing in Thy sight.

TUESDAY, APRIL 11
PHILIPPIANS 1:9-11
HEBREWS 12:5-11

*“Being filled with the
fruits of righteousness...”*

GLORIFYING RIGHTEOUSNESS

A farmer plants a fruit tree with the expectation that the tree will be able to yield abundant fruit. As trees planted by the rivers of water (Ps 1); as branches in the Lord's vineyard (John 15:1-8); as the good ground upon which the seed falls (Matt 13:1-9), the Bible's constant exhortation for God's people is that we will bear fruits of righteousness for the Lord.

In like manner, that is the prayer that the Apostle Paul made in Philippians 1:11, that we would be *“filled with the fruits of righteousness.”* This speaks of the evident change that is effected in the life of a believer because of his salvation through Christ. He has turned away from sin and now seeks after righteousness in his life.

If we make the right decisions daily, coupled with a consistent perseverance till the day of Christ, then surely our lives will be filled with fruits of righteousness. We will be able to bear fruit for the Lord. It will be an abundant, full life that brings great praise and glory to our Saviour.

Yes, that is the end result of our fruits of righteousness – the glory of God! When our lives testify to the effects of the Gospel, it will be to the glory and praise of God! It demonstrates the great grace and mercy of Christ in transforming a sinner into a saint and guiding him on his journey of sanctification. It exalts the love of God who will call such unworthy souls unto Himself and grant us the ability to bear fruit for Him. God will be most pleased with our lives, and we can be effective witnesses for Him. We will be able to fulfil the chief end of men: that our whole lives will be glorifying to God as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to Him.

Surely, this is a description of the life that we want to live for the Lord. This can result when we pray and seek the Lord for our love to abound in knowledge and judgment. Have you been praying?

THOUGHT: What will a farmer do to a tree that does not bear fruit?

PRAYER: Father, may my life bear abundant fruit for Thee.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 12

PHILIPPIANS 1:12

2 TIMOTHY 2:8-10

“...but the Word of God
is not bound.”

FOR THE FURTHERANCE OF THE GOSPEL

Many years ago, I chanced upon this noodle stall in Singapore which sells exceptionally delicious noodles. From the first bite, I was won over by its rich flavours and dubbed it a “life-changing wonton mee.” I liked it so much that I soon became an advocate for this stall, introducing it to my friends, and sometimes even offering to bring them there to experience this same gastronomical euphoria. This might seem a little extreme for what is, at the end of the day, just a simple plate of noodles. Yet in some sense, it is a natural thing to want others to share in the same joys that you have and to endeavour to lead others to experience the same.

For Paul, his joy was the Gospel. He experienced the life-changing effects of knowing Christ while he was on the road to Damascus. For the rest of his life, his singular goal and mission was for the furtherance of the Gospel, rejoicing in every instance where the Gospel was preached, and people were saved. That is why he wrote (in Phil 1:12-18) to assure the Christians at Philippi that they did not need to be concerned about his current situation in prison, for he was able to see God’s providential hand in ensuring that all things that happened “*have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel*” (Phil 1:12).

Paul rejoiced in his circumstance because, in living for Jesus, he was able to turn what the world perceived to be a bad thing into a wonderful opportunity for Christ. In being chained to a Roman soldier under 24-hour guard (Caesar’s Imperial Guard), he had a superb evangelistic opportunity, so much so that the whole palace was hearing of Christ, and many of Caesar’s household were being converted (Phil 4:22)! Many were hearing his story, his testimony, and about his fervour and zeal for the Lord. They knew that the reason Paul was in bonds was not because of any criminal act, but because of his testimony for the Lord.

What a wonderful testimony of one who lived for the furtherance of the Gospel! Do we have the same zeal?

THOUGHT: Is there anything more “life-changing” than the Gospel?

PRAYER: May the zeal for the furtherance of the Gospel be my heart’s earnest desire.

THURSDAY, APRIL 13

PHILIPPIANS 1:12-18

EPHESIANS 6:18-20

*“...Christ is preached;
and I therein do rejoice...”*

REJOICE, FOR CHRIST IS PREACHED!

One of the results of Paul’s imprisonment was that many people were now more confident to preach the Gospel. Perhaps in hearing of Paul being imprisoned for the cause of Christ, they were spurred on in their own efforts, realising that it was not too much to be arrested, or even to be killed for Christ. They saw past their own fears and worries and were courageously willing to hazard their lives for Jesus. They continued Paul’s work of evangelism, now emboldened to speak the word without fear. Paul’s testimony therefore not only encouraged those outside the church, but those within as well.

Sadly, there were others who took advantage of his imprisonment as an opportunity to get at him or get ahead of him. The tragic thing was that these enemies were found inside the church. These were pastors and preachers who were not preaching out of love for God, but out of envy and strife. Perhaps they were jealous of the success and popularity of Paul and were now using his current state as a means to hurt him and add affliction to his bonds, or perhaps to “steal his sheep.” Paul knew this, but he was not complaining; he was able to see the good that came out of it.

Despite all that was happening, Paul was able to say that he did rejoice, yea, and would continue to rejoice. To him, what was most important was that Christ’s name was preached. As long as that happened, he was content. It did not matter that he was in prison, or that his name and reputation were being maligned. Christ was preached, and he rejoiced.

Of course, this did not mean that he condoned the actions of those who were preaching Christ out of contention. In fact, by writing about them, he was actually rebuking them for their actions. Paul’s point was that as long as the true Gospel was being preached, even if it was motivated by a malicious intent against him, he did not take offence, but could instead rejoice. This is the heart of one who lives for the furtherance of the Gospel. Is that what we care about as well?

THOUGHT: Have I ever shared the Gospel for the wrong reasons?

PRAYER: May I learn to rejoice because Christ is preached!

FRIDAY, APRIL 14
PHILIPPIANS 1:19-21
COLOSSIANS 1:9-14

“...as always, so now also
Christ shall be magnified
in my body...”

PRAYER HELPS US LIVE FOR CHRIST

Amid the busyness of life, it can be difficult to remember our purpose as believers. We get so caught up in the affairs of this life that we forget we have been saved to magnify Christ with the life we live. We forget that we should no longer do things for self, but for the Lord who loves us and gave Himself for us. We selfishly go through life seeking after the things of this world to gratify our carnal desires.

This was not the heart of the Apostle Paul, for to him, to live is Christ! His earnest desire was whether in life or death, he would be able to do all things for the glory Christ. And this is possible *“through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ”* (Phil 1:19), i.e. it is through prayer and the work of the Holy Spirit that we can live for Christ.

From this we learn the importance of prayer. We need to pray that God will help us to focus our hearts upon Him. Through prayer we are reminded that all we have is from Him, and that all that we do ought to be for His glory. We need to pray for those around us as well. When we intercede for one another, we are acknowledging the fact that all of us, the whole body of Christ, need the Lord’s help to enable us to live for Him. Just as the physical body requires the head to function properly, we all need our Head, the Lord Jesus Christ, to enable us to operate as one for His glory. Paul acknowledged this need when he shared that he was confident that what he was going through in prison would lead to his *“salvation”* (Phil 1:19; not in the sense of eternal salvation, but spiritual deliverance from the trial that he was in). That can come about only *“through your prayer.”* He was teaching the Christians at Philippi of the importance of intercessory prayer. It was vital that they continue to pray for him in his time of need, that the Lord would enable him to continue to live for Him even while he was in prison.

THOUGHT: Am I able to live for Christ if I do not pray?

PRAYER: May the focus of my prayers be on the spiritual priorities of this life.

SATURDAY, APRIL 15
PHILIPPIANS 1:19-21
LUKE 11:9-13

*“...through your prayer,
and the supply of the Spirit...”*

THE HOLY SPIRIT HELPS US LIVE FOR CHRIST

The other essential component necessary to enable us to live for Christ is the supply of the Holy Spirit. The word “*supply*” (Phil 1:19) has the sense of a full, lavish supply. This is what is promised to every believer, for we are taught to pray for the filling of the Holy Spirit.

Paul was certain that it was the abundant grace of God working through the Holy Spirit that enabled him to be able to live for Christ amid the adversity that he faced. It was through the encouragement and guidance of the Spirit that he was not discouraged by the many people who opposed him. They preached out of envy and strife, seeking to add afflictions to him in his bonds (Phil 1:15-16). It was the Spirit’s empowerment that granted him the strength and conviction to boldly preach Christ to the soldiers who were standing guard over him in prison. In like manner, all of us need the Holy Spirit in our lives to enable us to live victorious Christian lives.

Remember that as believers, we too have access to God through prayer, and have been promised the abundant supply of His Spirit. As the Lord Jesus Christ assured His disciples: *“If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?”* (Luke 11:13).

In times where we feel down, or distant from the Lord, remember to pray. Remember to quench not the Spirit. Rather, yield to His guidance, to allow the Spirit to turn our desires away from the world and towards Christ. Continually pray for the filling of the Holy Spirit, that we will have a clear sight of our purpose in this life, that we can confidently echo with Paul: *“For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain”* (Phil 1:21)!

THOUGHT: How often should I pray for the filling of the Holy Spirit?

PRAYER: Father, may Thou fill me with Thy Spirit that I may be able to live each day for Christ.

LORD'S DAY, APRIL 16

PHILIPPIANS 1:18-23

1 THESSALONIANS 4:13-18

“...*having a desire to depart,
and to be with Christ...*”

TO DIE IS GAIN?

Our natural human tendency is to love life and to dread death. No one looks forward to death. We spend much time and effort trying to delay this seemingly terrible but inevitable thing. We invest in healthcare, nutrition, diets, exercise, healthy living, etc. But do we ever ask ourselves, what is it that we cherish so much about life? Why do we want to live so long, and what is it about death that we fear?

For Paul, he had a wonderful, Christ-centred perspective. He declared in verse 21 that *“for to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”* It is a view that is very much at odds with the common ideal of the world today. In most cultures, a long life is seen as a blessing, and an untimely death is “unlucky” and not to be desired at all. Hardly anyone looks forward to death or ever considers it a “gain.” It is something that is mourned, dreaded, and not often talked about.

We can consider death as a gain only if we first live for Christ. Paul was so close to God, so dedicated to Christ in all things, that Christ was all that really mattered to him. Whether he lived or died, it was all about Christ. To live, was to live for Christ, a life dedicated to Him in all things. To die, would be gain as he could then finally be forever with the Lord whom he loved. He described being with Christ as something that is *“far better”* (Phil 1:23), far better than this earthly existence that we presently have. When we are with the Lord, it means that we have entered eternity. It means that we are no longer plagued by the struggle with sin; it means we are free from our earthly toils and labour; it means we will *“ever be with the Lord”* (1 Thess 4:17).

It was only with such a perspective that Paul could become the effective man of God that he was. He could have joy and hope even while in prison. He not only did not fear death, but even described it as something he desired! Can we have such a perspective as well?

THOUGHT: What would I do if I am diagnosed with a terminal illness today?

PRAYER: Father, help me to have the right biblical perspectives towards life and death.

MONDAY, APRIL 17

PHILIPPIANS 1:18-23
2 CORINTHIANS 5:1-10

*“According to my earnest
expectation and my hope...”*

THE IMPORTANCE OF HOPE

How was Paul able to make such statements? What was the thinking behind such a perspective? Paul was not suicidal or depressed. He did not look upon death as a sort of easy escape from reality, thinking to run away from the misery of prison and persecution. That was certainly not the case.

The basis of this desire was according “to (his) *earnest expectation and (his) hope*” (Phil 1:20). This “*hope*” was not just wishful thinking, or a wistful desire. It was a conviction based on his strong faith in the hope of eternal life. He was certain that when he died, it would be “*absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord*” (2 Cor 5:8). Paul believed in this hope with the full assurance of faith. He knew that what God has promised in His Word will most certainly come to pass. He believed in a sure and certain blessed life after death, and therefore was able to most assuredly proclaim: “*For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain*” (Phil 1:21).

Do we have the faith to believe this? Can we stare death in the face and declare 1 Corinthians 15:55? “*O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?*” Do we have this same conviction that not only do we not fear death, but we even look forward to it? The only way we can have such a hopeful desire, to be able to see death as something “*far better,*” is if we have the absolute certainty based on God’s Word to know where we will spend eternity. This is a hope which Hebrews 6:19 beautifully describes as “*an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast.*”

The world has much to fear about death because their only hope is in this life. To them, once this life is over, their hope is gone. They have no certainty of what will happen to them after that, so they fear. As believers, we have nothing to fear, but everything to look forward to!

THOUGHT: “My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus’ blood and righteousness.”

PRAYER: Father, grant me the faith to believe in Thy Word, and a hope that is steadfast and sure.

WHAT ARE YOU LIVING FOR?

Every day that we wake up and get out of bed is another day that the Lord has given us to live. It is another day that we are allowed to exist in this mortal body, another day where life goes on. Do we ever stop to think: What are we living for?

Paul's heart's desire was to be with Christ. Yet he knew he could not ignore his calling and just wish for death, for that would be sinful and irresponsible. Paul knew that God's will for him was to live and to serve Him. He had to follow God's timetable for his life, and not try to forge his own. He acknowledged that although his wish was to depart and be with Christ, it was nonetheless better for him to stay as it was more needful for the furtherance and joy of faith of the Christians at Philippi. Paul's life was all about service and doing the will of God. His desire was for the Philippians' spiritual advancement and profit. He wanted them to come to the same understanding and joy of faith that he experienced. Out of love for them, he wanted to return to them and do that which was most needful for the church. This is what a life in Christ ought to be, where we endeavour to *“deny self, and take up [our] cross daily, and follow [Christ]”* (Luke 9:23).

With the life that God has given us, we must seek to obey Christ and follow His will each day. As long as we are “abiding in the flesh,” we must always seek God's will to know what is most needful for us to do, for Jesus' sake. We must strive to be a better friend, better worker, better family member, so that we can bear a good testimony for Christ and bring glory to His name. We no longer live for any selfish indulgences or seek to fulfil our own petty wants and needs. We must have spiritual priorities in our lives, not carnal ones.

Is this the consuming desire that we have in life – to know Christ and to make Him known? Do we love God's people and want to live for their sakes? Do we want to do more to bless the lives of those around us? Do we seek to do all we can to live for Christ, or are we still living for ourselves?

THOUGHT: What shall I seek to accomplish for the Lord today?

PRAYER: Father, may Thou help me to live for Thee, and not for self.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 19

PHILIPPIANS 1:27-30

PHILIPPIANS 3:20-21

*“Only let your conversation be as it
becometh the gospel of Christ...”*

CITIZENS OF THE GOSPEL!

Many count it a privilege and honour to be a citizen or resident of affluent and developed countries like the US or UK. For others, it is a dream to be able to emigrate and live in such countries.

As Christians, the Bible speaks of a citizenship. The word “*conversation*” (Phil 1:27) is translated from the Greek word *politeuomai* which has the meaning of citizenship that far exceeds any citizenship that this world can offer. It is granted to every believer who has received the Gospel of Christ. It is a citizenship for eternity in heaven with all the glorious promises of everlasting life with God.

However, this citizenship also comes with certain duties and obligations in the present life that we have. In Philippians 1:27, Paul’s exhortation to them was that they must be mindful of the fact that they were citizens of heaven and were to live in a manner befitting that status. They had all heard the Gospel, repented, and believed in Jesus as their Saviour. Now they must be consistent in living it out. After all, heaven is their final and permanent destination. They ought no longer to set their affections on things of the earth or seek after the sins of the earth. They were to set their affections and hearts on things above, and constantly seek for God and heaven.

Likewise, for all of us, we must conduct ourselves as becometh the Gospel of Christ! That is, we must live in a manner befitting our status as subjects of Christ. We must seek to be faithful to our Lord and live according to the Gospel. We must practise what we preach, living a life consistent with what we claim to be. This is our witness to the world around us. Simply put, if we call ourselves a Christian, then we must live like one!

As citizens of heaven, we must remember our allegiance to Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour. He has welcomed us into His kingdom. Will you offer your grateful service to Him as a loyal and faithful subject?

THOUGHT: What happens to citizens who do not meet the obligations of their citizenship?

PRAYER: “My heart I offer to Thee, O Father, promptly and sincerely.”
(John Calvin)

THURSDAY, APRIL 20

PHILIPPIANS 1:27

1 PETER 3:8-12

*“...whether I come and see you,
or else be absent...”*

WHEN NOBODY IS WATCHING

During the 2020 and 2021 Covid-19 lockdowns, when working from home became commonplace, there were reports of bosses who insisted that their employees keep their webcams on throughout the working day. They did not trust their subordinates and felt the need to continually monitor them to ensure that they were not slacking off.

While many would find such micromanagement excessive, intrusive and overbearing, in some ways we can understand where they are coming from. Our human tendency is that we alter our behaviour when we know that people are watching us. This is a common problem experienced not just by children; adults struggle with it as well. When we know that no one is watching us, we think we can do whatever we want – and this is often when we are up to no good.

This stems from the fact that we tend to be man-pleasers. We conduct ourselves in a certain manner only because of our bosses, our parents, our friends, our spouses, our teachers etc. We look to the one that has authority over us and seek to please him or her. The moment they are not there to monitor our conduct, we change.

As Christians this ought not to be! Paul’s exhortation to the Philippians was that whether he was there with them, or whether he was absent, it should not change the way they conduct themselves. His hope was that no matter what, he would continue to receive reports that they were indeed doing well spiritually, that they were walking close to the Lord, standing firm and striving for the Gospel.

Likewise, we must be consistent in our Christian conduct. We must remember why we consistently obey the Lord and walk in a manner that is worthy of the Gospel. It is not something we do just for show. We do so because we love the Lord, and desire to live for Him. We must act consistently according to the Word of God regardless of whether other people see and know because we are doing it for God alone!

THOUGHT: How do I conduct myself when I am all alone?

PRAYER: May my life of holiness be not just a façade but a true expression of my desire to live for Thee, Father.

FRIDAY, APRIL 21

PHILIPPIANS 1:27

EPHESIANS 4:1-6

“...in one spirit, with one mind...”

THE IMPORTANCE OF UNITY

It is important that every church be a united church. Unity of spirit is something that we must all be “endeavouring to keep” (Eph 4:3). Paul’s exhortation to the Philippians was that they “stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel” (Phil 1:27). This term “stand fast” has the idea of being firmly rooted, of standing firm and never wavering. It is like a soldier who is appointed to stand guard at a certain place, and must never leave his post (eg. in 1 Cor 16:13: “Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong”). It carries the idea of perseverance, allegiance and loyalty. That was Paul’s desire for them, that whether he was there or absent, he would hear that as a church, they were standing fast, persevering in their faith and had not compromised or sinned in any way.

This must be done “in one spirit, with one mind striving together” (Phil 1:27). It is not persevering alone but persevering together, for united we stand, divided we fall. The only way a church can hope to stand firm and persevere, is if we do so together. Every member of a church must stand fast together, knit together as one in the Lord. They must stand fast with their leaders, to support them in the fight for the truth. They must willingly participate in the programmes of the church, always asking how they as members can contribute and be useful for the Lord.

We must not allow any petty differences to tear the church apart. Any wrongly held biases, prideful ways, or sinful desires can so quickly cause division and factions to arise in the church and must be guarded against. We must endeavour to put aside all such causes of disunity.

When we can truly stand fast together, it will be a most blessed unity. We will be as one in our desires for the Lord to do His will. We will be able to enjoy wonderful communion and fellowship one with another. Is this something you are willing to endeavour to keep?

THOUGHT: What sins contribute most to disunity?

PRAYER: Father, may Thou bless my church, and help us all walk together with one spirit, united in the Lord.

SATURDAY, APRIL 22

PHILIPPIANS 1:27

JUDE 1:1-4

“...*striving together for the faith of the gospel.*”

THE PURPOSE OF UNITY

But what is the purpose of unity? Why do we care so much that we are standing and persevering together? It must be for the faith of the Gospel, for the cause of Christ. If we are united but with no clear spiritual purpose, then we are no different from a community club. If we maintain only a superficial unity, but we are not like-minded in the faith, then again it is not a useful unity. We must stand fast “*with one mind*” (Phil 1:27), having a common purpose and aim to strive for the Gospel, to preach and defend the faith, to hold fast to the truth together, to fight for what is right.

That is the idea given in the phrase “*striving together.*” It comes from the compound of two words in Greek: *sun/athleo*. From the second word we get the English word “athlete.” It gives a picture of athletes competing together on the same team. As a group they train together, establish a good rapport, and have a common purpose, that is to win! They are in complete sync with one another, complementing one another with their strengths and knowing one another’s weaknesses well. They can hope to succeed on the field only if they are united, each doing his part. If any member of the team is concerned only for his own glory, or chooses to slack off, or worse be corrupt and fight for the other team, that is a sure recipe for failure. Everyone must be focused on the goal and purpose, that is to do one’s best for the team.

In the Christian race, it is the same. As a church, it is one body striving together for the faith of the Gospel! To fight well, we must ensure that we are all on the same page, united in doctrines, united in our common aim and purpose to ensure that the pure Gospel is propagated, and that no sin stands in our way. We cannot afford to have any in our midst who will not strive for the Gospel, who is selfishly concerned for self or has his own hidden agenda or evil motive for being here. To strive together really means that we are in complete unity, with one heart and mind, all desiring to live for Christ!

THOUGHT: If a church does not strive for the faith of the Gospel, then what does it strive for?

PRAYER: Father, may Thou help me to do my part in the body of Christ.

LORD'S DAY, APRIL 23

PHILIPPIANS 1:27-30

2 TIMOTHY 1:7-8

*"...in nothing terrified
by your adversaries..."*

TERRIFYING ADVERSARIES!

Peter warned us in 1 Peter 5:8: *"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour."* Like a lion stalking its prey on the savannah, Satan is constantly on the prowl, seeking out faithful Christians who are witnessing for the Lord. Admittedly, that does sound frightening. Yet that is the spiritual reality that we are facing. There is a constant battle being waged in the spiritual realm. Satan and his demons will never rest as long as faithful Christians are serving the Lord and bringing others to Christ.

Persecution was a problem that the early church (and much of Christianity through the ages) faced. Oppression and hostility arose because of the enemies of Christ. There were adversaries who were troubling them, making life difficult for faithful believers. As a result, they suffered great adversity, and it caused much fear and concern in every community of Christians.

Paul exhorted the Philippians not to be terrified by these adversaries. It was a very real problem for them, just as Paul himself had experienced when he first entered Philippi in Acts 16. He explained that the trouble that these adversaries were causing was but evidence of their perdition (ruin or loss). When the persecutors went about causing him hurt and harm, Paul explained that it was an *"evident token"* (Phil 1:28), a sign or proof of their own sin and coming judgment. They would suffer their fate. When they did these things, they were just revealing their sin, and showing to the world that they were destined for destruction one day.

Therefore, there is no need to fear the enemies of the cross, for God's judgment upon them is sure. While we may not know when, we can be assured that God knows exactly what is going on, and what is the fair and just retribution that they deserve. Instead of fear, our response towards them should be one of compassion. We should endeavour to share the Gospel even to those who would persecute us for our faith.

THOUGHT: What sort of persecution do I face?

PRAYER: Father, may Thou grant me the boldness and courage to share the Gospel even with those who persecute me.

MONDAY, APRIL 24
PHILIPPIANS 1:28-30
1 PETER 4:12-13

“...not only to believe on him,
but also to suffer for his sake.”

AN EVIDENT TOKEN OF SALVATION

When a believer suffers for righteousness' sake, it is described as “*an evident token of...salvation*” (Phil 1:28). What that means is that when we go through persecution, it is a visible proof that we are true believers, that we have been counted worthy to suffer for Jesus' sake. It is a suffering that comes of God, given to believers as a gift of His grace.

Suffering is a gift? It may be an idea hard to stomach, but it is a teaching consistent throughout Scripture that all who live righteously and in a godly manner will suffer persecution (2 Tim 3:12; 1 Pet 4:12-13)! Why? Because Jesus Himself suffered for our sakes, can we as His disciples expect any less? It should be a comfort to know that when we or our church go through trials and tribulations, it is a sign to us that the devil is working against us, that we are engaged on the frontlines of the spiritual warfare, and that we are indeed useful for the Lord!

Paul himself was facing so much of it, and he comforted the believers with the assurance that when they too suffered these things, it was for their good, and not something to be terrified of or dreaded. The important thing was that no matter what, they must maintain their consistent testimony, and always stand firm on the side of the Lord.

The stage is being set all around us. The prevailing culture of our time is becoming increasingly hostile against Christianity and the conservative values that we hold. When we stand up for what is right, be sure that we will suffer the ire and scorn of the world around us.

Are we fearful for our children who are growing up in an atheistic environment? Do we allow such fear to cripple us and prevent us from witnessing for Him? Be comforted in the fact that the persecution that we face is proof to us that we are fighting on the side of the Lord. Let us continue to trust in the Lord and pray that He will grant us the courage to press on for Him amid any hostilities that we may face.

THOUGHT: Can I be a faithful Christian and yet not have to suffer persecution?

PRAYER: I thank Thee, Father, for the comfort and assurance I can have in Thy Word.

TUESDAY, APRIL 25

PHILIPPIANS 2:1-2

JOHN 14:26-31

*“If there be...
any consolation in Christ,
if any comfort of love...”*

THE BLESSEDNESS OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE (I)

Paul continued with the thought that he previously began in Philippians 1:27 where he was exhorting the congregation to unity, to *“stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.”* He now urged them on a more personal level, that it would be his joy (as he languished in prison), that they would put aside any differences and *“be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind”* (Phil 2:2). The basis upon which he urged them to unity is the shared experience they all had as Christians. If they had all been so richly blessed by God, then they should very naturally want to live for Christ and no longer for self.

He then put forward four simple thoughts as the grounds of his appeal for their unity, four things that every Christian would have experienced as part of their Christian walk. The way that these “ifs” are expressed in the Greek assumes that these are certainties and not just possibilities. It could also be phrased as “since you have”:

Since you have experienced the encouragement of Christ: The word *“consolation”* (Phil 2:1) means “to come alongside and exhort.” This is the same root word as the name of the Holy Spirit, the Comforter (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:7). This is what every believer has already received - Christ who encourages and exhorts us, who comes alongside to help us along in our life’s journey. Any time we need help, Jesus is our constant support who guides us and strengthens us.

Since you have been comforted by love through God’s Word: The word *“comfort”* (Phil 2:1) is slightly different from the word *“consolation”* above in that here it has the idea of coming alongside to comfort through talking. It is an encouragement that comes through discourse or address. Thus, the guidance and comfort here is more specific—it is from the Word of God. This is what God, as our loving heavenly Father, has given to us.

THOUGHT: The Word of God can grant us comfort even in the darkest hour.

PRAYER: I thank Thee, Father, for blessing us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 26

PHILIPPIANS 2:1-2
ROMANS 8:9-17

“...if any fellowship of the Spirit,
if any bowels and mercies.”

THE BLESSEDNESS OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE (II)

There are two further blessings that Paul highlighted in the second half of Philippians 2:1.

Since you have enjoyed communion with the Holy Spirit: At our conversion, every believer receives the gift of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. This is the abiding presence of God with us, who is working and active in our lives. In Him, we have the “*communion of the Holy Ghost*” (2 Cor 13:14) to guide us through life. This is a precious assurance in this life, to know that we are never alone, but God the Holy Spirit is ever with us, guiding us through each step that we take. He helps us to understand spiritual things, assures us of our sonship through Christ, convicts us of our sins, guides us into all truth, and draws us nigh unto God.

Since you have experienced compassion and mercy: “*Bowels*” (Phil 2:1) is regarded as the seat of one’s passion and affections. It is perhaps equivalent to how we understand our heart to be. Used in a phrase together with “*mercies*,” it describes the hearty tender compassion and care that one would have for another. This is what we have so abundantly received from God, that through His great lovingkindness and tender mercies, He has saved us and called us unto Himself. This is the compassion and mercy that we as God’s children ought to then show forth to the people around us: “*Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering*” (Col 3:12).

Have you experienced such precious blessings of God in your life? Are you truly saved and enjoying the fruits of salvation in this present life? Indeed, we have been so blessed by God with blessings that we do not deserve! Would you not want to share this with others, with the people around you? Would this not cause you to want to live for Christ each day?

THOUGHT: “*The LORD hath done great things for us; whereof we are glad.*” (Ps 126:3)

PRAYER: Understanding the rich blessings that Thou hast bestowed upon us, help me to seek to give of my life as a living sacrifice for Thee.

BEING LIKEMINDED

As the word suggests, to be likeminded is to be alike in our thinking. The mind is responsible for our thoughts, which leads to our will and our passions. But how can we all have the same mind?

As Christians, our thinking is guided by the Word of God, through the work of the Holy Spirit. To be likeminded does not mean that we always have the same exact thought patterns or have the same likes and dislikes. But it does mean that we are all guided by the same principles and purposes. If we Christians study the Scriptures regularly and allow our minds and our thoughts to be saturated with God’s words, then likemindedness will come naturally as we are all transformed by the renewing of our minds. We will all grow in our godliness and become more and more Christ-like, not just in our ways, but also in our thoughts.

The problem with many of us is that even after becoming Christians, we continue to cling to many of our old mind-sets, our old prejudices, superstitions, and way of thinking. Some claim to be Christians but still think and act very much like the world. Others are guided more by their emotions than their thinking. They are not patient to seek to learn the truth from God’s Word but act according to what they feel is right or wrong. Then there are those who think that they have finished all their learning. They are set in their ways and think that they have all the answers. All such ways are hindrances to becoming likeminded and are obstacles to true unity.

Likeminded brethren are those who have the same love, desire and passion for God and His Word. Yes, there will still be differences of opinion, and we may at times disagree on certain issues. However, if we humbly submit ourselves before God and His Word, being guided by the Holy Spirit, the promise is that the Spirit of truth *“will guide you into all truth”* (John 16:13). Disunity happens when we resist the guidance of the Spirit and stubbornly insist on our own ways. When we are not open to guidance and instruction from God’s Word, we stop learning, and we become close-minded, not likeminded.

THOUGHT: Is it possible to have unity without being likeminded?

PRAYER: May I always be teachable and humble before Thy Word.

FRIDAY, APRIL 28

PHILIPPIANS 2:1-2

1 PETER 3:8-12

“...having the same love...”

ELEMENTS OF LIKEMINDEDNESS (I)

While we know that all believers ought to be likeminded one with another, we also know that it is a very difficult endeavour. We are all different, with our own background, education, personalities, and characteristics. However, the fact that the Word of God exhorts us to be likeminded shows that it is not an impossible task.

In the second half of Philippians 2:2, Paul explained some of the key elements of what likemindedness entails that we need to take note of:

First, we must have the same selfless, unconditional, sacrificial love of God. This is the love that we learn of from God and His Word. All Christians are called to love God, and to love one another with this same love. It means that we love our neighbour as much as we love ourselves. We care greatly for the spiritual welfare of the person next to us. We are so devoted in love to each other that we would willingly serve, minister to them, to spend and be spent.

Do you have this same love? Do you love those around you enough to overlook flaws, faults in others, or do you allow pride and self to get in the way? Will you decide to love one another, putting aside whatever personality differences or biases that may come in the way, disrupting the peace and preventing unity? That is the love that God has for us – unconditional love, whereby He chooses to love us even when we were enemies of God.

This does not mean that we overlook sin or error. Rather, because we love, we would lovingly admonish, chasten or guide the person to come to the understanding of the error of his ways and turn to the Lord. If any doctrinal differences arise between brethren, in love, we would see to better understand the issue at hand, and prayerfully seek the guidance of God’s Word and His Holy Spirit to come to the right understanding of the truth. Only then can we be likeminded, for we all have the same love for God, and desire to have the same knowledge of His truth.

THOUGHT: *“Hatred stirreth up strifes; but love covereth all sins.”*
(Prov 10:12)

PRAYER: May I learn to love others as Thou lovest me, Father.

SATURDAY, APRIL 29

PHILIPPIANS 2:1-2

ROMANS 15:5-7

“...being of one accord, of one mind.”

ELEMENTS OF LIKEMINDEDNESS (II)

Besides love, there are two further “ones” that we must strive for in order to achieve likemindedness one with another:

Being of one accord: To be of one accord is literally that we be together as one spirit, with one will and one purpose. It pictures a scene of harmonious unity where all our spirits are knit together, our hearts beating as one. That is the extent of unity that we ought to have, whereby our desires, our wants and wishes for spiritual things are all aligned. We ought all to have the desire for the Gospel work to advance, and for God’s glory and name to be magnified. A person who cares only for his own will and his own selfish wishes will be the cause of disunity in the church. Everyone is going in one direction, and he, being here only to fulfil his own agenda, goes in another direction. This will certainly result in conflict and problems!

Being of one mind: Similar to the term “*likeminded*,” Paul reiterated the importance of our thinking. The Christian’s mind is one that has to be guided by God’s Word. When our minds are filled with His perfect truths, it will sanctify our thoughts, which in turn will guide our thoughts and actions. This is the renewing of our minds that we must strive for, such that we are no longer conformed to this world, but transformed by God’s Word (Rom 12:2).

As we have all experienced the same common salvation, and being guided by the Holy Spirit and the Word of God, then our minds ought to be in tune with the will of God. Our thoughts, desires, goals and aims are all for the glory of Christ. This becomes the top priority in our hearts and minds! It is no longer what I want and what I think, but it is now what God wants, and what His will is. If we are all able to think that way, it can certainly go a long way towards achieving true unity and true likemindedness.

THOUGHT: We strive for unity, not uniformity.

PRAYER: Lord, may Thou sanctify me through Thy truth, for Thy Word is truth (John 17:17).

THE PROBLEM OF PRIDE

Pride can manifest in a person in a variety of ways. It is often the cause of many conflicts and the root of much strife. We are all, to varying degrees, proud people. As Paul exhorted the Christians at Philippi to be united in Christ, he reminded them to put aside their pride and to be clothed in lowliness and humility.

The word for "*strife*" (Phil 2:3) is sometimes used as a technical term to describe "electioneering or intriguing for office." It speaks of the political machinations that occur behind the scenes, where one would resort to lowly and unethical means to get ahead. Sadly, such strife happens in churches as well because some seek after "*vainglory*"—man's vain, self-seeking desire for recognition and praise. How foolish it is to fight for our own glory and "face"! The moment we begin to feel that desire for glory or acclaim arising within us, we must nip it in the bud and remind ourselves that this is vanity and the cause of much conflict.

Instead, we must be meek and lowly, and show respect to others. To have "*lowliness of mind*" (Phil 2:3) means you have a humble opinion of yourself. It is not to be self-deprecating, or to be so lacking in confidence that you are crippled and cannot do anything at all. We must be fair and objective in our talents and abilities, and use them when we know that this is what God has gifted us with. We must have a realistic and practical approach, where, on one hand, we have a deep sense of our own moral frailty and weaknesses, but on the other hand, recognise that with the help of God, we can and must serve Him with our talents.

With such an attitude, we then consider or regard others better than ourselves. We must have the humility to admit that many around us are objectively better than us in various areas. We must have a practical, modest, and respectful attitude in our interactions one with another. Always remember that we all are only sinners saved by grace and are in constant need of guidance and instruction. Never brashly and proudly assert ourselves. Instead, we must always relate to others tactfully and respectfully, in meekness and not in arrogance.

THOUGHT: If vainglory is foolish, why do so many still seek after it?

PRAYER: Father, may Thou help me to be meek and humble.

MONDAY, MAY 1

PHILIPPIANS 2:1-4

2 THESSALONIANS 3:6-15

*“Look not every man
on his own things...”*

A GODLY BUSYBODY?

A busybody is one who delights to pry and meddle in other people's business. He interferes with matters that ought not to concern him, much to the ire of the parties concerned. The Bible condemns such behaviour, as one who is “...*idle, wandering about from house to house; and not only idle, but tattlers also and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not*” (1 Tim 5:13). Yet Philippians 2:4 seems, at least on the surface, to encourage such behaviour. Is there a sort of “busybody” behaviour that is actually good?

Philippians 2:4 comes in the midst of Paul's exhortation to the Philippian Christians to put aside their proud strivings for vainglory, but instead to strive to have the humble mind of Christ. When he told them not to look on their own things but on the things of others, it was not in the sense of being nosy. It was rather the opposite.

The word “*look*” is from the Greek word *skopeo* which means to focus attention on. What Paul is telling us here is that we must stop having such a selfish fixation on self: our own comforts, our own wishes, our own desires. Such self-centred behaviour is not pleasing to God.

Instead, we must have an outward-looking, caring concern for others. We must learn to place the needs of others before self, to care for the needs of others. This of course does not mean that we become busybodies, to poke our noses into the affairs of others just for our own perverse curiosity's sake. It also means that we should not try to offer unsolicited advice, to criticise and find fault in the affairs of others, or to gossip and pry into their private matters. But what it does call for is a loving care and concern for the needs and problems of those around us. We must stop being caught up in our own little worlds and our trivial concerns, but to have the Christian heart of care and compassion. If all of us can learn to be such godly “busybodies,” it can go a long way towards making our church a much more caring and edifying place.

THOUGHT: How do I draw the line between helpful concern and nosy busybody?

PRAYER: Father, grant me the love and wisdom to know how to be loving and edifying in my concern for others.

TUESDAY, MAY 2

PHILIPPIANS 2:1-8

1 CORINTHIANS 2:6-16

*“Let this mind be in you,
which was also in Christ Jesus.”*

THE MIND OF CHRIST

What is the mind of Christ? How can we, sinful beings, have the mind of our perfect Saviour? According to Philippians 2:5, it is a possibility that we ought to strive for.

True humility begins with the mind. We must have the right thinking: of God, of ourselves, and of the people around us. We must actively seek to put the wants and needs of self aside and learn to put others first. Pride comes when we have an overinflated idea about self, and think that our image, our wants, or our emotions are far more important than anything else. Because of sin, we are all naturally proud and selfish people. Change can only come when we seek God through His Word and learn more of Christ.

Yes, we must know Christ! The chief example of perfect humility is found in Christ. From Philippians 2:5 onwards, Paul presented the humility of Christ exemplified through His incarnation. Truly, in the history of man, no one has ever demonstrated such pure and self-sacrificial humility as our Lord Jesus Christ has. In the grand story of redemption, Jesus shows us the greatest and most perfect example of humility. What He gave up in choosing to come; what He had to endure in living as a man; what He had to suffer in giving His life – they are all second to none. Yet He chose to do so. And for who? It was for the sake of selfish, proud, rebellious, and unworthy sinners such as we are.

Therefore, if we want to have the mind of Christ, then we need to know what He did for us and understand the thinking behind His actions. Philippians 2:5-8 is a very rich, deep and meaningful passage that gives us a behind-the-scene glimpse into the mind of Christ as He came down to earth to live and die for our sins. It is a beautiful story of Christ's infinite love for us, and the unconditional sacrifice that He made in order that we can be saved. It is a passage that we ought to study carefully for our edification, that we can have the mind of Christ.

THOUGHT: To have the mind of Christ is not just a possibility, it is a necessity!

PRAYER: Father, may Thou grant me the mind to know, the heart to will, and the hands to do Thy bidding.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 3

PHILIPPIANS 2:5-7

PROVERBS 22:3-5

*“But made himself
of no reputation...”*

PERFECT HUMILITY

In His incarnation, Jesus left heaven's glories and became a man on this earth. He did not do so grudgingly or reluctantly, but willingly out of love towards us. It is a perfect example of selflessness and humility.

Jesus was *“in the form of God”* (Phil 2:6). This means that He was (and is) God. It does not just mean that He was like God or had some aspects of being God. Jesus is indeed *“equal with God”* (Phil 2:6), fully and completely God. He always has been, and always will be. He was in heaven, with all the divine glory associated with being God: all-powerful, all-knowing, all-present, unrestricted by time and space. He was perfect in all His ways, infinite and eternal. Words cannot adequately describe the greatness, majesty, resplendence, and power of God.

Yet, Jesus *“thought it not robbery to be equal with God”* (Phil 2:6). What this means is that He did not think that having all the benefits of being God was a highly prized possession that He must strive for, or something that one would hold tightly to and to be retained at all costs.

Christ voluntarily left His throne in heaven. He *“made himself of no reputation”* (Phil 2:7) to come into the world to be our Saviour. Out of love, He willingly set self aside, that we may be saved. He did not set aside His divine nature or cease to be perfect as God. He continued to be 100% God, but is now also 100% man. He forsook the divine rights and privileges of being in heaven and allowed His divinity to be veiled for a season, in order that He could become the unique God-Man. As a man, Jesus was subject to the limitations of His earthly body. He was fixed to be in one place at one time. Though He never stopped being omniscient, yet in His humanity, He chose not to exercise it.

Indeed, what a beautiful picture of humility this is. Christ gave up so much for our sakes. In Him, we see a humility that far exceeds anything that we can ever do in return for Him. Paul called on us to have such a mind of Christ. Will we be willing to make such sacrifices for the sake of others? Can we love one another, as Christ has loved us?

THOUGHT: Did I do anything to deserve such a selfless sacrifice?

PRAYER: Teach me to comprehend the magnitude of Christ's love!

JESUS THE SUFFERING SERVANT

Jesus was conceived and born into this world in a lowly stable in Bethlehem, for there was no room for them at the inn. He did not come with the fanfare of a highborn king, surrounded with riches and glory. Though He is indeed our King, yet His purpose in His first coming was to come as a suffering servant. He was born into a humble carpenter's family, entering this world in a most modest and unassuming setting. He led an obscure childhood, submitting Himself to the authority of human parents.

As Isaiah 53:2-3 prophesied: *“For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.”*

He was a servant, in the sense that He came in submission to God the Father. His whole purpose was to do the will of the Father who had sent Him. As Jesus explained in John 5:30: *“I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me.”* He came to fulfil the covenant established before the foundation of the earth, that He would willingly come to live this perfect life as a man, and then to die as a propitiation for our sins.

In so doing, He was also humbly serving man. As Jesus also explained to His disciples in Mathew 20:28: *“Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered (served) unto, but to minister (serve), and to give his life a ransom for many.”* His whole purpose was one of service, whereby He gave His all, as a servant would, in humble obedience to his master. He did this willingly out of love, for a rebellious and sinful people who did not even acknowledge Him. Has there ever been a more humble servant than Jesus?

THOUGHT: Will I still serve if the people I am serving despise me?

PRAYER: Father, as I meditate more about the sacrifice of Christ, may Thou teach me to be selfless and humble as He was.

FRIDAY, MAY 5

PHILIPPIANS 2:6-7

2 CORINTHIANS 8:1-15

“...and was made
in the likeness of men.”

JESUS THE PERFECT MAN

Imagine the son of the richest man in the world, with all the wealth and power of his father at his disposal. One day, he decides to seek out the poorest, most squalid slum in the world. It is filled with societies' outcasts and rejects, with the most wicked and degenerate people. He gives up all the comforts and luxuries that he is used to and goes to live in their midst. He suffers together with them and endures the hardships of life in such a place. His purpose in doing so is to seek to help them change and improve their lives. As noble (and unlikely) as such a sacrifice in this imaginary scenario may be, it does not even begin to compare to the magnitude of sacrifice that Jesus made in coming to this earth in the likeness of men.

In terms of His humanity, Jesus was just like any other person who ever lived. He subjected Himself to all the limitations and difficulties of living in this human body. He had to eat, rest, and sleep. He grew tired and hungry. He also experienced the whole range of human emotions of joy, sorrow, love, and anger. He was never materially rich. In His public ministry, He never had a permanent place to call home. He was surrounded by sinful, faithless disciples who often failed to grasp His teachings, though He patiently and lovingly guided them. He was constantly challenged and ridiculed by the scribes and Pharisees and opposed by the religious rulers. All this was done willingly, that He might obtain righteousness for our sakes, that we might be justified.

Yet there was one key difference: He was perfect in all His ways. As Hebrews 4:15 explains, He experienced all the infirmities of what it means to be human, for He “*was in all points tempted like as we are.*” Despite that, He was completely “*without sin.*” Though Jesus faced many temptations, He never succumbed to them in the slightest. It was because of His perfect sinlessness that He was able to be sacrificed as the unblemished Lamb of God, attaining the righteousness for our justification.

THOUGHT: Is there anything in my life that I am unwilling to give up for the cause of Christ?

PRAYER: Oh, how I thank Thee, Father, for sending Thy Son, the perfect Lamb of God!

SATURDAY, MAY 6
PHILIPPIANS 2:1-8
JOHN 15:9-14

*“...he humbled himself,
and became obedient unto death...”*

JESUS THE OBEDIENT SACRIFICE

The humility of Christ is evident not just in His incarnation as a man, but it is seen also in how He willingly submitted Himself to a most agonising death on the cross at Calvary.

The purpose of Jesus’ incarnation was so that He could die to make an atonement for our sins. God the Son willingly agreed to come to this world, to be sacrificed on the cross in order that man can be saved. He knew that it was necessary that He as both God and man, bear the punishment for man’s sin, and it would be only through this death that the penalty of sin could be atoned for. Therefore, *“we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man”* (Heb 2:9).

It was for this sacrifice that Jesus *“humbled himself, and became obedient unto death.”* Realise that Jesus could have easily escaped death if He wanted to. It was not because Judas outsmarted Him, or that He was overpowered by the Roman soldiers. It was something that He knew was coming, and He obediently submitted Himself to the hands of wicked men to be put to death. As Jesus had explained in John 10:18: *“No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again...”*

A proud and selfish man would never be willing to make such a sacrifice. He would feel that his own life is far too important to give up. In his eyes, no one, and no cause, is worthy enough for him to give up his life for. In fact, for most of us, we are not even willing to give up our own comforts and luxuries for the sake of others, not to mention make the ultimate sacrifice of death. Jesus never thought that way. He did not think His own life was something too great to give up for the sake of mankind. Even though we are terrible sinners, unworthy to warrant even His notice, yet He willingly suffered and died, so that we can live.

THOUGHT: *“Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.”* (John 15:13)

PRAYER: I thank Thee, Father, for the perfect obedience of my Saviour, Jesus Christ.

THE DEATH OF THE CROSS

When we think of the death of the Lord Jesus Christ, we must remember that it was not just any death, but the most painful and humiliating death possible: being crucified as a criminal on the cross.

Jesus was betrayed through a kiss from his very own disciple, Judas Iscariot. He had to stand trial before the corrupt priests and heathen Roman authorities. The very people whom He came to save cried “*crucify him, crucify him.*” Wicked soldiers mocked Him, spat on Him, and scourged Him. They pressed a crown of thorns upon His head. Sinful hands nailed His hands and feet upon wooden beams, and then gambled to take His garments at the foot of the cross as His blood flowed freely around them. As He hung on the cross, His entire weight was borne by the nails driven into His bones. Every breath He drew was a deliberate effort, pushing off His feet and pulling on His palms to fill His lungs with air.

Yet the physical pain and the humiliation suffered on the cross, was nothing compared to the anguish He faced when the weight of sin was put upon Him, and God the Father turned His back upon His Son, whereby He cried: “*My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*” (Matt 27:46). There on the cross, 2 Corinthians 5:21 explains: “*he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.*”

Why did He do that? It was because of love. This was the only way, in which God could redeem man. We are all sinners who have broken God's law, and we rightfully deserve death. We are born in sin, live in sin, and we should die in our sins. We should have been the ones hanging on the cross. There is nothing that we can do to save ourselves. That is why Jesus came, to die in our place, to pay the penalty of our sins, and give us life! O what wonderful love, what great humility!

THOUGHT: “*But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*” (Rom 5:8)

PRAYER: O Father, may I never forget the great sacrifice of Christ in dying for my sins.

MONDAY, MAY 8
PHILIPPIANS 2:1-11
EPHESIANS 1:15-23

“...and given him a name
which is above every name.”

A NAME ABOVE EVERY NAME!

There are certain names in the history of men that are universally recognised. Some are venerated for their great or noble deeds, others for their intellectual ability or their contribution to arts and culture. In church history, we remember those who have done much for the cause of Christ. Yet the prominence of all these “greats” is nothing compared to the name which is above every name, the name of Jesus Christ.

At Jesus’ first coming, He was *“despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not”* (Isa 53:3). This was God Himself coming into this world. Yet the world ignored Him, and He was hostilely rejected by the very people He came to save. How tragic a thing it is, that *“He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not”* (John 1:10-11).

Today, the name of Jesus is blasphemously used by many as merely a swear word and a punctuation. Much of the world does not honour the name of Jesus. Instead, they choose to idolise celebrities. They exalt the names of these fallible and often very sinful “superstars,” and ignore the One who is by far the greatest that this world has ever known.

Yet what we must understand is that Jesus is already in the state of exaltation. Through His resurrection from the dead and ascension into heaven, Jesus was raised from a position of most abject shame and humiliation, to a position of highest glory and honour. Jesus is presently seated at the right hand of the throne of God as our Mediator and Intercessor, and rules and reigns over all of God’s creation.

The world rejects Jesus, but Christians must worship Him for who He is. He is greater than any leader that this world has, wiser than any writer or philosopher, more loving and noble than any philanthropist. He is our loving Saviour who gave His life so that we may live! We must extol Him most highly as the King of kings and the Lord of lords.

THOUGHT: Is the name of Jesus precious to me?

PRAYER: May I always exalt the name of Christ in word and in deed.

TUESDAY, MAY 9
PHILIPPIANS 2:9-11
REVELATION 5:11-14

*“And that every tongue
should confess that
Jesus Christ is Lord...”*

WHEN SHALL THESE THINGS BE?

As believers, we ought to highly exalt the name of Jesus. Yet it can sometimes feel like a very lonely endeavour. Hardly anyone else around us cares to know anything about Jesus. Even Christians shy away from proclaiming His name – yes, the beautiful name that is sadly used by many as nothing more than a swear word.

How is it then that Paul described a scene where every knee will bow to Jesus, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord? It is not just of believers, but of every single one on earth, in heaven, and even under the earth (referring to the dead in their graves). The verse gives no timeframe to when this global worship of Jesus will take place. But it is a certainty that one day, the whole world (i.e. everyone) will acknowledge Jesus for who He is.

We see a similar description in Revelation 5:13. This was a glimpse that John was given into the future of a scene in heaven where the angels and saints will be worshipping God (Rev 5:11-12). They sing a chorus which is echoed by everyone in verse 13: *“And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.”* It describes a future day when the whole universe will have no choice but to confess that Jesus is indeed the Lord over all, that He is the Almighty, sovereign God.

This will happen only at the Second Coming of Jesus. He will come in power and glory, as the King of kings and Lord of lords. As He assumes His position as Ruler and Judge of all the world, His glory will be known to all. It will be a day where everyone in the world, both dead and alive, will realise the truth of who He is.

May we not wait until the final day of judgment before we fall to our knees and confess that Jesus is Lord. Right now, we have the chance to bow before Jesus and worship Him as both Lord and Saviour. Will you?

THOUGHT: Do I presently confess that Jesus Christ is Lord?

PRAYER: May I always acknowledge Jesus as the Lord over my life.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 10
PHILIPPIANS 2:12-18
1 THESSALONIANS 1:5-10

*“...not as in my presence only,
but now much more
in my absence...”*

A CONSISTENT CONDUCT

Sometimes when we try to share the Gospel, we are met with such a retort: “I don’t want to go to church because all Christians are hypocrites!” Sadly, there is an element of truth to that observation. There are many that are not consistent in their conduct, and do not live out the Gospel that they proclaim.

That was Paul’s concern for the Christians at Philippi. He exhorted them to make sure that their testimony was consistent with the Gospel that they believed in. Perhaps because of the close and warm relationship that he shared with this church, he knew that when he was there in their midst, they were very willing to hearken to his words. However, he stressed that it was not just about obeying in his presence, but much more in his absence. The purpose of our obedience is not to please man, but to please God! If we put up a show of obedience just because we know that is expected of us, then what will happen when we are surrounded by unbelievers? Will our behaviour change just because of the environment that we are in?

The true test comes when no one is watching, or when we are surrounded by unbelievers who are not concerned about our obedience. Will we give in to temptation and fall into sin? Will we succumb to the pressure to conform to the ways of the world? Or will we still be able to maintain a consistent conduct for the Lord?

If our service to God and our testimony for Him is not a consistent one, then we become hypocrites, trying to put up a mere façade of obedience in order to please man. No, what we must have is true, sincere, obedience to the Lord. It should not matter who is watching, or who is present with us. We must seek to live a life of holiness, and do so consistently, diligently, for the Lord alone. That is when our testimony is most effective, for people will be able to see that we are truly living for God, pleasing Him and not man.

THOUGHT: What is the motivation behind my obedience?

PRAYER: Father, may Thou grant me the conviction and courage to obey Thee consistently, no matter what.

THURSDAY, MAY 11

PHILIPPIANS 2:12-18

JAMES 2:17-26

“...work out your own salvation
with fear and trembling.”

WORK OUT YOUR OWN SALVATION!

The phrase “*work out your own salvation*” (Phil 2:12) is sometimes used as a call for Christians to check their salvation to see if they are truly saved or not. It is also sometimes misunderstood to mean that there is some sort of works that we must do to earn or ensure our salvation. Neither of these interpretations fits the context of this passage.

What Paul is calling us to do is to “*work out*” (i.e. to do, to carry out, to perform) our salvation. This does not mean that we accomplish our salvation by our works, but it means that we must show our salvation through the things that we do and the way that we live. In so doing, we demonstrate the fact that our lives have been changed by the Gospel, and we are now obeying the Lord out of a sincere heart of submission.

The attitude must always be one of fear and trembling, not pride and complacency. Our fear is not that we can ever lose our salvation, or that we tremble because we think that God is angry with us. It is a fear that refers to our great reverence for the Lord. We respect Him with holy fear and serve Him with deep humility, always remembering our sinful nature and our many weaknesses. We tremble before Him, as a humble servant would before a great benevolent king. We fear Him, as an obedient child before a strict but loving father. We serve Him to the best of our abilities, not because we are terrified that He will punish us at any time, but because He is our great master, worthy of our highest devotion!

And so, we are all called to work out our salvation by showing through our lives of obedience that we have indeed believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, have repented of our sins, and now live wholly for Him. This is something we must do consistently, no matter who is watching us. When we do so, we will “*shine as lights in the world*”, as glowing testimonies for our Lord Jesus Christ!

THOUGHT: When I sin, am I more fearful of the wrath of God against me, or the fact that I have disappointed Him?

PRAYER: Father, may I always have a humble regard for Thee, coming into Thy presence with fear and trembling.

FRIDAY, MAY 12

PHILIPPIANS 2:12-13

1 CORINTHIANS 15:9-11

*“For it is God which
worketh in you...”*

GOD WORKETH IN YOU

Although it is important that we do our part, and fulfil our human responsibility, ultimately the only way in which we can and are able to have any obedience at all, is if God is the one guiding us! When we talk about our obedience, realise that it can only be done if God is the one working in us, energising us, strengthening us, granting us the grace, courage and conviction to have the desire to, and then to actually do of His good pleasure. This is the work of the Holy Spirit and it has been given to all true believers in the Lord.

Have you experienced this in your life? Do you have God working in you? Do you hear the still small voice of the Holy Spirit prompting you to turn from sin and towards holiness? Do you experience the Word of God speaking to you and guiding you? Do you have a healthy relationship with Christ whereby it is a desire to please Him that motivates and drives you? Are you manifesting the fruit of the Spirit in your life? These signs ought to be evident in everyone who is saved by grace.

We are able to obey the Lord and faithfully serve Him not by our own efforts, but only by the strength of the Lord. He enables us to have the desire and the ability to fulfil His good pleasure. We are not left alone in this quest for obedience and sanctification. Remember that without Christ we can do nothing at all. But with God abiding with us and the Holy Spirit guiding us, we can put forth this consistent obedience, desiring only to seek the pleasure of God and no one else's!

Therefore, when we do serve the Lord, and sense within us the desire to live for Him, we must never be proud and think that we are good by ourselves. We must echo with the Apostle Paul, that only *“by the grace of God I am what I am,”* and *“yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me”* (1 Cor 15:10).

THOUGHT: I must never be proud to take credit for any good that I do.

PRAYER: Father, may Thou work a mighty work in me, that I will be able to both will and to do of Thy good pleasure.

MURMURINGS

As humans, we have a natural tendency to complain. Like the Israelites in the wilderness, we murmur at the slightest inconveniences or discomforts. When things do not go our way, we get upset and grumble. At any perceived injustice, we are up in arms and contend and fight for what we think are our rights.

However, Philippians 2:14 very directly rebukes us for such an attitude, calling us to *“do all things without murmurings and disputings.”* In all that we do, we must remember that our purpose in life is not our own luxuries or comforts, but is for the glory of God. Remember also that God is always in control of all things, and nothing happens by chance. Everything happens only according to His good will and pleasure.

Realise then, that whenever we murmur and complain, what we are doing is blaming God. We know that God is sovereign over all things. He has promised to take care of us, and we know that all He does is always perfect and never wrong. Therefore, when we are upset by the things that happen, we are not just upset with the people and circumstances around us, but much more so, we are showing our displeasure with God!

We must learn to complain less and start to appreciate more of God's goodness in our lives. When we start to feel the slightest hint of discontent or disgruntlement at the things that happen, remember the words of Hebrews 13:5-6: *“Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.”*

When we do so, we portray a powerful testimony that shows we believe in the sovereignty of God. No matter what adversity we face, let us show our faith by trusting in God, and remember to be thankful for what He is doing in our lives.

THOUGHT: *“But godliness with contentment is great gain”* (1 Tim 6:6)!

PRAYER: Father, may Thou teach me to be content with all that happens in my life, and never be tempted to murmur and complain.

LIGHTS IN THE WORLD

In the Bible, the world of sin is often portrayed as being in darkness, whereas Christ is the light that shines in this darkness (John 1:1-9). When Christians are described as shining lights in the world, we are to be reflections of Christ's brightness, like how the moon shines in the darkness of the night sky. It does not have any inherent light of its own, yet the moon shines brightly because it reflects the light of the sun. Likewise, amid this crooked and perverse world, our testimonies are to be like shining lights, not for our own glory's sake, but to show forth the glory of the Light of the world, who is Jesus (John 8:12; 9:5; 12:46).

When we work out our salvation with fear and trembling, when we do all things without murmurings and disputings, others around us would notice a difference. They will witness our Christian testimony. We can be seen as blameless (irreproachable, faultless) and harmless (innocent, simple, without guile), without rebuke in the midst of a crooked and perverse people. We will be recognised as sons of God, for as true children of God, we reflect the attributes of our Father.

The world is a sinful place. However, through Christ, we have been changed. We have seen the Light and are now called to shine as lights for Him. We no longer have to conform to the wicked ways of the world. We must instead be distinct from the world. The way that you respond to situations around must be different; the way that you interact with the people around must be different; the way that you conduct yourselves and make choices must be different.

This difference in our lives is what causes us to shine for Christ. Just as light is opposed to darkness, so must our lives be completely opposed to the ways of the world. That is the testimony that we are called to bear for Christ, that others may see and come to know Christ as well.

THOUGHT: "In this world of darkness we must shine, you in your small corner, and I in mine."

PRAYER: Father, help me to shine forth as a bright light for Thee in this dark world.

MONDAY, MAY 15

PHILIPPIANS 2:16-18

EPHESIANS 4:17-24

“Holding forth the word of life...”

HOLDING FORTH THE WORD OF LIFE

What does it mean to hold forth the Word of Life? The term “hold forth” has the meaning of presenting or offering something. What we are to do is clearly not to hold up the Bible physically, but to exemplify the Word of God in our lives, so that others can see it and receive it.

We hold forth the Word of Life when we live by it and obey every letter of it. We hold it forth as our high, holy standard, as our sole guide, as our only source of instruction. This is the important duty of every Christian, that through our lives, we prove to the world that the Word of God is true! The world may never get to read the Word of God or hear the Gospel, but what they do see is our life, our conduct, and testimony. You prove to them by your works, your consistent obedience and contrasting testimony that indeed, God is real. Through that, they can come to know the living Word – Jesus Christ.

God’s Word must therefore be central in our lives. When we preach, obey and defend God’s Word, we are a living embodiment of all that is written therein. We reflect the image of Christ to all who are around us.

For Paul, that was his hope and joy. If the Philippians held forth the Word of Life in their lives, then for him it would be a sign that his labour among them was not in vain. He would be able to rejoice in the day of Christ, that as he stands before the Throne of Christ on the day of judgment, he would have these lives to show forth. He himself held forth this life-giving Word, and because of that, others were led to Christ, and in turn they too brought others to the saving knowledge of the Saviour. This unbroken chain comes all the way to us, for someone once held forth this Word to us. Will you now hold forth the Word of Life to all those around you?

THOUGHT: “Your life’s a book before their eyes, they’re reading it through and through. Say, does it point them to the skies, do others see Jesus in you?”

PRAYER: Father, may I always be faithful to the Word of Life, that others may see Christ in me.

TUESDAY, MAY 16

PHILIPPIANS 2:17-18

1 THESSALONIANS 2:17-20

“...*offered upon the sacrifice
and service of your faith...*”

JOYFUL SACRIFICE

There will be times when living as a Christian will cost you – whether it be in the persecution you experience for the cause of Christ, or the things you give up for testimony’s sake, or the time, effort and energy expended in the service of Christ. All these require a sacrifice on your part, or as Paul put it, to “*be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith.*”

The Greek word that is translated as “*offered*” is the technical term used to describe being poured out as a drink offering as is described in Numbers 15:5. He saw his life of service likened to being poured out on the altar of sacrifice before the Lord. He was willing to spend and be spent (2 Cor 12:15), to the point that his whole life was consumed for the service of the Lord.

Yet it was a service done with joy. He said through the life of sacrifice, “*I joy, and rejoice with you all.*” It was also an infectious joy, that as they saw the joy in Paul, they too would have joy, and rejoice together with him. This can only happen when we all have the same spiritual purpose and priorities, that we are all concerned about the glory of God and the edification of the saints.

What brings you true joy and the greatest delight? Whatever it is that gives you joy, it will be what you are willing to sacrifice for and to put in the effort to attain. If we seek after the things of the world, then that is where we will invest our time and effort on. If it is Christ, then our service will be a joy and a delight, and we will do so very willingly and not just out of mere obligation.

We must never see the task of maintaining a testimony for the Lord as a drudgery or chore. We must not regard service as a burden imposed on us. Rather, we ought to see it as a joyful endeavour. In fact, it is a great privilege that we, as sinful and unworthy as we are, are granted the honour of serving the most high God!

THOUGHT: Will parents who truly love their children ever begrudge the sacrifices made in ensuring their happiness?

PRAYER: Father, help me to understand what a great privilege it is to give of my life as a living sacrifice for Thee.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 17
PHILIPPIANS 2:19-30
1 CORINTHIANS 13:1-7

“...that I also may
be of good comfort,
when I know your state.”

SELFLESS CONCERN

In the last section of Philippians 2, Paul moved to a new subject. He wrote to them of Timothy and Epaphroditus visiting and gave a brief commendation of them. In these verses, we have a brief snapshot of the lives of these servants of the Lord, and also the heart of the Apostle Paul as he made the decision to send the pair to Philippi.

Remember that Paul was writing to them from prison. He had limited contact with the outside world, and a precious few co-labourers helping him in the ministry. It was a great sacrifice for him to forgo these companions in labour – faithful men whom he could rely on to assist him. Yet he saw it necessary to send these men to them, for their sakes.

Paul cared so much for the church, that he wanted to hear more reports of how they were doing. That was primarily what Timothy’s mission was – he was sent to give a first-hand report of how the church fared. That would bring Paul “*good comfort*.” It is a phrase translated from the Greek Word *eupsuchoe* which literally means to be of a good or cheerful spirit. That was how Paul felt - that his spirit would be cheered when he heard of how the Christians at Philippi were. Though he was confident that he himself would also be able to visit them shortly, he was so concerned about them that he thought to send Timothy first to serve among them.

For Epaphroditus, Paul was sending him back so that they would see that he has recovered from his sickness, and that all parties would not need to worry about one another concerning this.

Through this, we see the selfless concern of the Apostle Paul. Because he loved the church so much, their spiritual affairs were of a greater concern than his own physical needs. Paul was very willing to give up his faithful assistant for the sake of the Philippians.

How about us? Will we be willing to give up that which is dear and precious to us, if it can be for the spiritual benefit of others around us?

THOUGHT: “I gave, I gave My life for thee – what has thou giv’n for Me?”

PRAYER: Father, teach me to selflessly love my neighbour as myself.

NATURALLY CARING

Paul saw Timothy as a kindred spirit, one who cared for the same things and had the same spiritual concerns as he had. That was how they were able to serve together so effectively. This likemindedness was a rare and precious thing, for Paul said that there was none other like Timothy. That was truly a high commendation.

One key quality that Paul highlighted was the fact that Timothy had this natural care for the Philippians. He had first joined Paul on his second missionary journey, shortly before Paul heeded the Macedonian call to go over into Europe (Acts 16:1-10). Philippi was the first major city that they witnessed to. It must have held a special place in Timothy's heart and was a church he cared very much for. This concern he had for them was not something that was engineered or forced. He genuinely cared for them, for it stemmed from a sincere love for the Lord. It is only when we love the Lord, that we can naturally love His people.

Paul explained that the reason why most people do not “*naturally care*,” is that we are naturally selfish people. We seek and care for our own things, and not the things of Christ. It must have been very frustrating for Paul that even after so many years of ministry, many around him who were serving together with him were still very self-seeking. He was perhaps referring to those teachers that we read of in Philippians 1:12-17 who were preaching out of strife and contention and did not really care about the Gospel that they were preaching. In contrast to them, Timothy was a true servant of the Lord, and was therefore one whom Paul could trust and commend to the Philippians.

Is this not what we see in the church today? Many people claim to be serving, but are they really serving with the right motives? Do they genuinely care for one another, or are they just seeking their own selfish agenda? How about you? We must seek the things which are Jesus Christ's, and nurture an “*unfeigned love of the brethren...(and) love one another with a pure heart fervently*” (1 Pet 1:22).

THOUGHT: How can I increase in my love for those around me?

PRAYER: Father, grant me an unfeigned love for those around me, that I will genuinely care for them in the Lord.

FRIDAY, MAY 19

PHILIPPIANS 2:19-24

2 TIMOTHY 4

“But ye know the proof of him...”

THE PROOF OF OUR MINISTRY

A large part of what determines the effectiveness of our ministry and service to the Lord is our testimony for Him. It is often only when people trust us and observe the fruit of salvation in our lives, that they would be willing to listen to the message that we preach, or to participate in the programmes that we plan.

As Paul commended Timothy to the Philippians, he reminded them that they themselves had observed the ministry of Timothy, for he was there together with Paul when they first came to Philippi. Paul described Timothy *“as a son with the father.”* Paul saw him not just as a fellow labourer, but as a filial son, one who had been steadfastly following as a disciple and learning from him. Remember in those days the father-son relationship was different, in that very often a son would follow in the same trade that his father was in. For example, Jesus was known as a carpenter’s son (Matt 13:55) and would have been trained in carpentry, and likewise James and John who were fishermen like their father. As a spiritual son, he served alongside Paul *“in the gospel”* and was very faithful and trustworthy in this aspect.

In describing Timothy in such a manner, Paul was commending him to the Philippians, suggesting that having Timothy in their midst was as if Paul himself was there. This was the proof of ministry that Paul was providing, assuring them that Timothy would most certainly be able to do a good work amongst them.

What is the proof of your ministry to the Lord? Do you have such a testimony and good reputation amongst the saints, that you are known as a faithful labourer, as one whom others would entrust duties and responsibilities to? You can start by serving in small areas, proving yourself to be trustworthy and dependable. In time, others will recognise your faithfulness, and the Lord will grant opportunities whereby you can serve Him.

THOUGHT: What does a good “spiritual resume” look like?

PRAYER: Father, grant me the grace to be faithful in the little things, that I may also be faithful in much.

SATURDAY, MAY 20
PHILIPPIANS 2:25-28
ROMANS 12:9-21

“...ye may rejoice, and that
I may be the less sorrowful.”

LOVING CONCERN

Epaphroditus was one of the leaders or perhaps the pastor of the church at Philippi. Described as their “messenger,” he made the long and arduous journey to present to Paul a collection that had been taken for his needs (Phil 4:18), and to give an update on how the church was doing.

We are not told of the exact cause, but while journeying to Rome, he had suffered an injury or sickness that very nearly killed him. The Christians at Philippi had heard about it and were very concerned. Not having the modern tele-communications like what we have, they had no way of knowing if he had survived or not, or how he was faring.

Despite his condition, Epaphroditus was not full of self-pity. He did not lament about his own condition. Rather, he was very concerned that the church was concerned about him! He was “full of heaviness,” because he did not want others to have to worry over him. Indeed, what a selfless, caring individual.

By His mercy, God enabled Epaphroditus to recover. Paul said that this was God’s mercy not to him only, but to Paul also, for if he had died, it would have been great sorrow to Paul. In writing this letter, Paul was assuring the Philippians that all was well with Epaphroditus, and he explained why he thought it good to send him back to them. Although Paul found Epaphroditus useful, he decided to send him “more carefully” (speedily, diligently) to Philippi, so that upon seeing that he was well, they might rejoice, and not have to worry anymore about his condition.

Through this whole incident, we see the beautiful relationship among Paul, Epaphroditus and the church at Philippi. They all cared for one another and loved one another so much, that they very readily put the needs of others above self. It was a true, sincere, selfless care that they had for one another – a care that was rooted in the love of God that they had. Is this a love that you have experienced before?

THOUGHT: “Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep.” (Rom 12:15)

PRAYER: Father, may I have the empathy and sensitivity to care for the needs of others above the needs of self.

A DEDICATED SERVANT OF THE LORD

As Paul sent Epaphroditus back to them, he told them to receive him with all gladness and to regard him highly because of his faithful service to the Lord. Perhaps there might have been a concern that they thought that Paul had rejected him and cut short his service with him prematurely. Paul wrote to dispel any such notions and assured them that he did exemplify the highest commitment in his service to the Lord. Therefore, they should receive him joyfully, and value him for the dedicated servant that he was.

At Rome, Epaphroditus had proven to be a faithful servant of the Lord who helped Paul greatly in his time of need. Paul valued his service, recognising him as a dear brother in Christ, a companion in labour, and a fellow soldier of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul gave a further commendation of Epaphroditus' service in verse 30, that *"for the work of Christ he was nigh unto death"*! As we had seen earlier, he had risked his life to ensure that he could accomplish his mission. He refused to quit despite his condition, for his concern was not for himself or even his own life, but for the well-being of Paul, and the task that the church had entrusted to him.

Perhaps he had fallen ill or gotten injured along the journey that he was taking, and it became hazardous for him to continue. The journey from Philippi to Rome was about 1,300 km over land and sea and would have taken about two months to complete. It was a difficult journey, but he did it anyway because he knew the vital nature of his mission in sending provisions to Paul in prison. This showed the extent to which he was willing to sacrifice even himself for the service of the Lord.

How is your commitment in your service to the Lord? Are you willing to put yourself in harm's way, or sacrifice things that are precious to you if you know that it can bring a blessing to others around you? A dedicated servant of the Lord would not think twice about hazarding their lives for the cause of Christ. Would you?

THOUGHT: "Jesus paid it all, all to Him I owe."

PRAYER: Father, may I understand the Gospel debt that I owe, and seek to give my all in service to Thee.

MONDAY, MAY 22

PHILIPPIANS 3:1-2

GALATIANS 3:1-14

*“...beware of evil workers,
beware of the concision.”*

BEWARE!

In Philippians 3, Paul then shifted to warn the Philippians of a potential danger that they were facing. There were false teachers who were threatening to take their focus away from Christ, and to cause them to revert to the old ways to trust in their works. These were the Judaizers who insisted on an adherence to the law as a prerequisite of salvation. Paul spoke up strongly against them and reminded the Philippians that their confidence must be in Christ alone and not in the flesh.

He called upon them to rejoice in the Lord, but at the same time to be vigilant to the dangers that abound. He explained that the concerns he wrote of were not new, for they had heard it before. Yet it was *“not grievous,”* meaning it was not inconvenient or troublesome for him, though he be imprisoned in Rome with multiple burdens and cares. It was an issue important enough for him to write to warn them about as it was for their safety, for their own good!

Paul was very direct in his warning, denouncing the false teachers. He used strong words calling them to beware of dogs, evil workers and the concision. These three terms describe the single group that Paul was warning against – the Judaizers who preached confidence in the flesh.

“Dogs”: This was a grave insult to the Jews, describing them as unclean beasts who were detested by both the Greeks and the Jews.

“Evil workers”: Their deeds were evil works, sinful against God.

“Concision”: More specifically, the works that they did, was that of practising *“self-mutilation.”* This was a sort of a word play, to say that when these Judaizers who claimed that circumcision was still necessary for salvation and insisted on cutting the flesh, they were really practising self-mutilation for no reason other than their own sinful errors.

Vigilance and discernment are needed in every generation. Just as Paul warned the Christians to beware of the dangers then, so must we continually beware of Satan’s devices today.

THOUGHT: Who are the evil workers of today?

PRAYER: Father, help me to always be vigilant against false teachings.

TUESDAY, MAY 23

PHILIPPIANS 3:3-8

GALATIANS 6:11-18

“...and rejoice in Christ Jesus,
and have no confidence in the flesh.”

WHERE DOES YOUR CONFIDENCE LIE?

Paul was not in fact deriding the God-ordained practice of circumcision, for he himself was a Jew who was circumcised at birth. However, the problem was that the Jews were insisting on circumcision as being a necessary condition for salvation. That was salvation by works, and was what Paul described as having “*confidence in the flesh.*”

He wanted to correct that notion by teaching them that true believers were those whose worship of and service to God were spiritual in nature, and not physical. In saying “*we are the circumcision,*” he was including the non-circumcised Gentiles together with him, for they might not have been physically circumcised, but they had the circumcision of the heart (Rom 2:29), having believed in the same Gospel. Like any believer, their rejoicing is now in Christ Jesus. Note that the word for “*rejoice*” here has the idea of boasting or glorying. It is contrasted with the vain confidence that the Jews had in the flesh, for they boasted because of the physical marks they had, whereas Christians boasted of what they had in Jesus.

From Philippians 3:4 onwards, to further reinforce his point, Paul shared a very personal testimony of how he was so proud and confident in his own works in the past. He shared it not to show off, but to his shame. He very sharply disavowed the life he used to live for he would later describe it as but “*dung.*”

Yet our human tendency is to be very impressed with the tangibles. We look at one’s credentials, their long resumes, their worldly accomplishments. This is how the world functions, and sadly this is how it sometimes is in the church as well.

Paul had to give this list, not by way of a boast, but to prove to the Judaizers once and for all, that he understood their theology well, for he once fully subscribed to it as well. But now he had left it behind for something far greater, and that was the knowledge of Christ!

THOUGHT: What is more impressive to me: a wealthy self-made billionaire, or a faithful, humble servant of the Lord?

PRAYER: Father, may I never glory in anything, save in the cross of my Lord Jesus Christ.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 24

PHILIPPIANS 3:4-7
ROMANS 3:9-20

*“But what things were gain to me,
those I counted loss for Christ.”*

PROUD OF GOOD WORKS

Paul had “religious credentials” that would have impressed any Jew. If anyone could win a place in heaven because of good deeds done, Paul was probably the one. He had every reason to be proud of his accomplishments and have confidence in the flesh, or so he thought.

With regard to his parentage, Paul was “*an Hebrew of the Hebrews.*” This meant that his parents on both sides would have been pure Jews of no Gentile admixture. This was certainly a point of pride to this young Jew growing up. His parents were likely devout Jews, for they had circumcised him on the eighth day, according to the law.

He was from the tribe of Benjamin – descendants of the second child of Rachel, Jacob’s favoured wife. It was the tribe from which Saul the first king of Israel, and Mordecai the uncle of Queen Esther were from. Benjamin was also a tribe famous for their military prowess, having left-handed warriors accurate with the sling (Judg 20:16). It was a prominent tribe, and he was proud to be a part of it.

Paul was a rising star among the Pharisees, having previously studied under their foremost scholar Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). As Pharisee, he was zealous, sincere, and fervent, though very wrong. Instead of upholding and defending the law, he was actually opposed to it! Yet at that time, he did not know better, and fully engaged himself in the work of persecuting the church, thinking that he was doing God a service. He thought that since he had been keeping the law so well since birth, this was his righteousness, and his life must have been very pleasing to God.

Of course, we know what happened on the road to Damascus. His spiritual eyes were opened, and in a single moment all his perspectives changed. He now realised that he was a sinner in need of Christ. The old life that he was once so proud of did not count for anything before the perfect and holy God. No amount of good works can ever save us. It is Christ alone who can save!

THOUGHT: “...*There is none righteous, no, not one.*” (Rom 3:10)

PRAYER: Father, help me to know that apart from the Lord Jesus Christ, there is no way that I can ever do any good to save myself.

THURSDAY, MAY 25

PHILIPPIANS 3:7-9

ROMANS 5:12-21

*“...I count all things but loss
for the excellency of the
knowledge of Christ...”*

THE EXCELLENCY OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST!

Paul bitterly denounced his vain and foolish past. All that he used to take pride in, he now regarded them as all loss and dung! These things were what he used to regard as “*gain*” – as something to his advantage, merits that he thought would bring him closer to God and heaven. Yet now he said he had counted them as loss for Christ. He used the verb “*count*” in the perfect tense, meaning that this is an action that happened at a point of time in the past, but the effects continue on to the present. He reckoned, and now continued to reckon, that all these vain works that he had held on so dearly to were actually detrimental to his spiritual life. They were in fact a hindrance in helping him acknowledge his sin and his need to humble himself before the Almighty God!

Instead of all those vain works he once prided himself with, he now put them aside for the single goal of the excellency (supreme attainment) of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord! For Christ, he was more than willing to cast aside the confidence in the flesh, to regard them as nothing but refuse! Instead, what he now desired was to have more Christ in his life. The word “*win*” shares the same root word as the word for “*gain*” in verse 7. He drew the contrast, that what he used to consider as gain, was now seen as loss, and with the loss of all these things, he could now replace it with the gain of Christ.

The reason for this complete change in his perspectives was because he had realised the futility of the righteousness gained through the law, and that the only righteousness one could really have was that of God by faith. He saw how all his efforts in the past had been vain, for they were of the law. He no longer wanted to strike it out on his own, trying so hard but always failing. He realised that he must simply be found in Christ, that through his faith in Christ, he could have the perfect righteousness of God. It is this righteousness that we receive when we are justified, that will enable us to enjoy eternity in heaven with God. Is this where your confidence lies in as well?

THOUGHT: Is there any better knowledge in this life than the knowledge of Christ?

PRAYER: May I always seek to know Christ more and more each day.

FRIDAY, MAY 26

PHILIPPIANS 3:10-14

COLOSSIANS 3:1-10

"...this one thing I do...

I press toward the mark..."

SPIRITUAL AMBITIONS

When we talk about one's ambitions, we often think of it in terms of one's career, his life's dreams, goals and hopes. We imagine that when we achieve what we yearn for, we shall find happiness and fulfilment. A person's ambition can be a strong driving force which motivates him to make great sacrifices to attain what he wants. On the other hand, a person who does not have much ambition in this life will be unmotivated, lethargic, and very aimless in the way he lives his life. He will drift from one endeavour to another and will not have much drive to want to succeed in anything that he does.

It is similar in the spiritual realm. A person who has the right spiritual ambitions will be very zealous and focused. He will have the right motivation to set out to achieve all he can for God. He will be willing to deny self and suffer hardships in order to live a life that is pleasing and glorifying to God. On the flip side, we see others who may call themselves Christians, but are spiritually apathetic. They care little about their relationship with God, and just do that which is right in their own eyes, with little concern about whether their lives are lived for the Lord. We can describe such people as having little or no spiritual ambition. If they continue along this path, theirs will be wasted lives.

In Philippians 3:10-14, we see Paul sharing with us the ambitions that he now had after becoming a Christian, and what he did to attain them. He had set aside his old life, and was now striving towards a new goal, and new prize. With his heart and mind set on Christ, he strove to be the best child of God that he possibly could be.

As we study this passage, we do well to examine our own hearts and ambitions as well, to see if we too are striving for the same goals as him, or do we find ourselves uninterested in spiritual things, yearning rather for the sinful things that the world seeks after?

THOUGHT: What ambitions do I have for this life? Are they carnal or spiritual?

PRAYER: Father, may I always set my affections on things above, and not on things on the earth.

SATURDAY, MAY 27

PHILIPPIANS 3:10-11

EPHESIANS 1:15-23

“That I may know him...”

SPIRITUAL GOALS (I)

In Philippians 3:10-11, Paul laid out the spiritual goal that he was aspiring towards since becoming a Christian. He no longer sought after the vain worldly accomplishments that he was once so proud of (Phil 3:4-6), for he now counted them as dung. Instead, he had a single-minded focus on growing in his knowledge and relationship with Christ.

To know Him: This speaks of the desire he had to have a right relationship with God. This knowledge is one that is experiential and not just theoretical. It is to know a person in a close, intimate way. This is a knowledge that comes from knowing God’s Word, having a constant prayerful communion with Him, and from living a life in Christ. The more we walk with Him, the more we know Him. Our spiritual life begins with this desire to know God. It is the natural desire of every child of God, for if we love Him, we will want to have a relationship with Him.

To know the power of His resurrection: He desired also to know and experience more of the power of God that raised Jesus from the dead. As we know more about God and what He has done for us, the more we understand of His abilities, the more our faith in Him is strengthened. The spiritual might that God demonstrated in raising Christ from the dead is the same power that He has to free us from the bondage of sins and raise us up to heavenly places in Christ Jesus. The resurrection is the ultimate display of the power of God. Paul also described it in Ephesians 1:19-20, *“And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places.”*

Do you know God, and know of His power over sin and death?

THOUGHT: Which is harder: to raise a person from the dead physically, or to cleanse someone from the power and penalty of sin?

PRAYER: Father, may I grow to know and love Thee more and more each day.

SPIRITUAL GOALS (II)

To know the fellowship of His sufferings: Next, Paul spoke of his desire to have a partnership and sharing of Christ's suffering. This is the believer's experience when one is found in Christ, for Paul warned in 2 Timothy 3:12: “*Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.*” As we live this Christian life and experience the trials and sufferings because of the cause of Christ, what happens is that we conform more and more to His death. Every time we experience a measure of suffering, we have a taste (albeit still very faintly and paling in comparison to what Christ went through) of what Christ Himself experienced as He went to the cross. In so doing, we will be able to better appreciate all that Christ has done for us, grow in our love and regard for Him, and mature in our sanctification, “*for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin*” (1 Pet 4:1).

To attain unto the resurrection of the dead: Here what Paul sought to attain, what he was looking forward to, was the fruition of salvation: the resurrection from the dead. The word for “*attain*” here carries the idea of arriving at a place, with the emphasis on the destination. He was seeking for the events surrounding the Second Coming of Christ (of the resurrection whereby all the dead in Christ shall receive the glorified body), that was the destination he was yearning for.

This is not to say that Paul did not have confidence in the hope of the resurrection, or that he was working to attain salvation. What he meant was that this hope was the goal and chief aim of his life. He was willing to put his whole heart and soul towards reaching it. Now that he had learned of the Gospel and of Christ's completed work on the cross, he knew it was no longer his own righteousness that would bring him to heaven, but the knowledge of Christ, the power of God, and the sacrifice of Christ. He yearned so strongly for eternity with God, that in his present life, all that he did in seeking to know more of Him was done in anticipation of that final day where he would be with God in his glorified body for eternity.

THOUGHT: What sufferings have I experienced for Christ?

PRAYER: May I seek to understand more of the great sacrifice of Christ each day.

MONDAY, MAY 29

PHILIPPIANS 3:12-14

ROMANS 7:14-25

*“Not as though I had
already attained...”*

OUR SPIRITUAL LACK

Paul knew that he was far from perfect. He still had struggles in the flesh, just like all of us. Lest his readers think that he had already reached his goals of fully knowing Christ, he told them that he certainly had not attained any measure of spiritual perfection, and like them, he was also on the journey of sanctification.

The word in the original translated as *“attained”* in verse 12 is different from the word used in verse 11. The word in verse 12 carries the idea of taking, or to lay hold of. The emphasis here is not so much on the destination or object one is taking, but on the process or action of taking or reaching for. What Paul was seeking to highlight was the process of attaining spiritual sanctification. He acknowledged that he was still far from his goal, and therefore needed to strive hard in his life to continue to grow in holiness.

Knowing that he was not yet perfect, he then had to *“follow after.”* The word in the original has this idea of running to pursue something with all of one’s might. Sometimes, it has the meaning of pursuing to persecute or harass. It describes a very intense and concerted effort to seek after a goal or target. In this context, Paul used this word to liken his motivation to that of an athlete. It is like how a runner is exerting all his might to race towards the finish line, or an athlete fighting hard to win an event. This is a common analogy that Paul used, for he often described how we are Christians running a race, and we have the responsibility to do our best. In order to do well in this race, we must forget those things which are behind (pride and vain glory) and reach forward, always focusing on Christ! This was what motivated Paul in continuing to strive hard and run the race before him. He knew that he was far from perfect, and therefore he must continue to work harder to live for Christ each day.

Like Paul, I am sure we will all acknowledge that we too are far from perfect and have many areas in our lives that we must improve on. Will we use this as our motivation to strive hard for the Lord?

THOUGHT: What areas in my life do I need to *“follow after”*?

PRAYER: May I have the humility to acknowledge my weaknesses, and the motivation to seek change, by God’s grace.

TUESDAY, MAY 30
PHILIPPIANS 3:12-14
EPHESIANS 1:3-14

“...for which also I am
apprehended of Christ Jesus.”

OUR SPIRITUAL CALLING

Paul next explained his spiritual lack from a different perspective, speaking of the calling that he had from God. He shared how his desire was so that he might apprehend (lay hold of, to grasp tightly, to catch) that which Christ had laid hold of him for (of what Christ has “caught” us for) – his sanctification! That is Christ’s purpose in saving us, that we can be conformed to His image. Paul knew that he had not yet apprehended, that he was still far from the mark that Christ had for him. Therefore, Paul explained how he was trying with his utmost ability to live up to the expectation that was set for him when Christ took hold of his life and turned him from a sinner to a saint.

Every child of God has a calling as a Christian. All of us have been saved for a reason and a purpose. We must understand that we are not saved so that we can live a life of sin and wantonness. No! God went through all the trouble to work out the plan of salvation even before the foundation of the world, *“that we should be holy and without blame before him in love”* (Eph 1:4). Paul understood this purpose, and this was what motivated him to seek to live a life that was pleasing and acceptable to God. He was fighting to reach the goal that Christ had set for him, when He grabbed hold of him on the road to Damascus, and called him to be a servant of God.

In these verses, we see the motivations of the Apostle Paul, where it was his love for Christ and recognition of his own imperfections that motivated him to keep going. He knew that he was not there yet, and so constantly sought to better himself for the Lord. He did not rest on the laurels of his past achievements, for he knew that the moment he became complacent, that was how he would become ineffective for the Lord! That is how an ambitious person is, as he strives for the accomplishments of the world. He is driven by a discontent with his present state and a desire for success. Is this how we are as well, in terms of our spiritual ambitions?

THOUGHT: Can a true Christian be spiritually unambitious?

PRAYER: Father, may I ever be conscious of the calling that Thou hast set for me.

OUR SPIRITUAL FOCUS

A person who is ambitious will do all he can to achieve his goal. He has no qualms about working long hours, making great sacrifices, and pushing himself to his limits, if that is what it takes. He has a single-minded dedication and will fully apply himself to do the things he knows he needs to do in order to get what he wants. That is what people of the world would do in fulfilling their earthly ambitions.

For believers, we have a far higher calling. We have been saved out of the bondage of sin and called to live for the Lord Jesus Christ. God's desire for us is that we live a life for His glory and be a witness for Him. That was Paul's goal, and that granted him the drive to direct his attention towards achieving that end.

Paul described how he was so intensely set to achieve his spiritual goals. It is “*this one thing I do.*” In the original, there is no verb “*do.*” Paul simply wrote “*but one thing.*” This emphasised his focus and determination, that this was his single priority in this life. As he thought of his identity as one “*apprehended of Christ Jesus,*” and how he had not yet achieved the goal that Christ had set for him, it was the one thing on his mind, and the one thing that he would focus his efforts on.

Like an athlete, he ran with this single-minded focus. He was very mindful that he had not reached his goals yet, and therefore pushed himself to keep on going and never stop. All through the rest of his life he would keep up this ambition and did all he could to grow in his sanctification. He was not distracted by the carnal things of this world. He had one single purpose, and that was what he was most concerned about. The pleasures and luxuries of the world held little attraction for him, for he was now in Christ, and all he wanted to do was to focus on serving Him.

What is the focus of your life? There are so many things around us clamouring for our attention. If we do not set our priorities right, it is easy to be distracted by the cares of this world. We must fix our hearts on Christ and focus on living for Him each day.

THOUGHT: What are the things that move my focus away from Christ?

PRAYER: May I fix my heart upon Thee and live each day for Thee.

THURSDAY, JUNE 1
PHILIPPIANS 3:13-14
HEBREWS 12:1-11

“...*forgetting those things
which are behind...*”

FORGETTING THE PAST

Many things in our past may hold us back. There may be sins committed, bad experiences, worldly desires, or carnal mindsets that hinder our spiritual walk. We may lament that we were not Christians when we were younger and did not have a strong foundation in spiritual things; we may keep looking back at grievous sins we had committed and never fully resolved; we may have had certain bad relationships in the past that we still feel bitter about. Because of these things, we may sometimes feel “handicapped” in our walk with the Lord, and feel that we can never progress beyond being babes in Christ.

Paul, too, had his share of “baggage.” He often remembered how he so zealously persecuted Christians and described himself as a chief of sinners (1 Tim 1:15). He was ashamed of how he was a proud Pharisee who had confidence in his flesh. Yet, he refused to make excuses. He endeavoured to ensure that what remained of his life was not wasted, but was one that was useful to the Lord who had so graciously saved him.

Therefore, he was “*forgetting those things which are behind*” (Phil 3:13). He knew he had to put his sinful past behind him and focus on that which was ahead. Like a runner who has to “*lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us*” (Heb 12:1), he sought to run without the hindrances of the past to hold him back. He had already put all that baggage aside, and continued to count them as dung, refusing to dwell on them or make excuses for any lack of spiritual progress.

As Jesus taught His disciples in Luke 9:62, “*No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.*” We too must put aside any sinful desires or hindrances of the past, and look ahead to the life that we now have in Christ. There is indeed much to look forward to, and much to live for!

THOUGHT: What are some things in my life that I should forget?

PRAYER: Father, may Thou grant me the grace to lay aside any issues from my past that are hindering my spiritual walk in the present.

FRIDAY, JUNE 2

PHILIPPIANS 3:13-14

1 CORINTHIANS 9:24-27

“...reaching forth unto
those things which are before...”

ONWARD AND UPWARDS!

As Paul put his past behind him, his single-minded focus was to keep pressing ahead. His eyes were fixed on the cross of Christ, heart set on achieving the goal that Christ had called him to. Instead of dwelling on the past, he looked forward to the “*things which are before*” (Phil 3:13), to this new life in Christ that he had, and kept pressing toward the mark.

The word translated as “*press*” in Philippians 3:14 is the same word as “*follow after*” in verse 12 – describing the earnest pursuit that he was engaged in. He was running toward the mark – the end point that was set before him. It was continually in his mind’s eye as he lived his Christian life. He refused to take his eye off the prize, to be distracted by the things of the world that surrounded him.

As a runner fixes his eye on the finishing line, we too ought to strive to fix our eyes on “*the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus*” (Phil 3:14). What is this prize? It is the reward that we can look forward to as the children of God. It is the complete fruition of our status as born-again believers, or what we have been “*apprehended of Christ Jesus*” (Phil 3:12) for – eternity in heaven with God! This is the heavenly calling every believer is running towards. Therefore, in this life, we set our affections on things above and not on things of the earth. God will grant us the desire to run towards Him and away from the things of the world. We will care far more for our spiritual ambitions and work towards them, instead of vainly trying to fulfil the worldly ambitions we once held so dearly to. We will run the race with patience, looking to Jesus the Author and Finisher of our faith (Heb 12:1-2).

This is a race that we shall never complete. It is finished only when we are called home or the Lord returns. As long as we have strength we are running, pressing, pursuing, striving, fighting. Yes, it can be tiring, and yes, there will be times we feel like giving up. However, we must always keep in mind the goal and the motivation of our spiritual ambitions and continue onward and upwards for the Lord!

THOUGHT: What happens if a Christian decides to stop running?

PRAYER: Father, may Thou grant me the strength and perseverance to keep on pressing toward the mark!

BE THUS MINDED

As long as we are alive, the Christian race will never end. We might then ask: How can we have the perseverance to keep going? How can we have tangible, effective progress, such that we would be able to endure and grow in our spiritual walk? In the following verses, Paul explained the “how” – of what we must do in the meantime as we look forward to the day where Christ “*shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body*” (Phil 3:21).

Paul then called on all who were “*perfect*” (Phil 3:15). Clearly this is not describing sinless perfection, for he was the first to admit that he was not so (Phil 3:12). Instead, Paul was calling on those who had this same “*perfect*,” or spiritually rich, desire that he had. He exhorted us all to be likeminded, to share in the same goals and ambitions that he had. This can come about only if we would actively seek the Lord and have an earnest desire to obey His will.

He called upon us to remain committed to this cause, and never deviate from the course that has been set for us. We must not be distracted from this spiritual purpose or be tempted to run off in the wrong direction, to be “*otherwise minded*” (Phil 3:15). He also gave us the assurance that God is the One who will guide us and correct us if we go off course. He will reveal our waywardness and patiently guide us back to His will. Nevertheless, at whatever spiritual state we are presently in, at whatever level we have already attained, Paul exhorted us to stay the course, to have this common spiritual passion and desire, and to keep having our minds and hearts fixed on Christ.

In a sense the old adage of “slow and steady wins the race” holds true in this spiritual race that we are in. We must persevere, steadily plodding on, never giving up and never stopping. We may not always see the progress, but we know that by God’s grace, He will grant us the grace to press on!

THOUGHT: What are some things that would cause me to meander from the path that God has set for me?

PRAYER: Father, may Thou grant me the grace to stay the course, to never veer off course or be “*otherwise minded*.”

LORD'S DAY, JUNE 4

PHILIPPIANS 3:17

EPHESIANS 5:1-14

*“Brethren, be followers
together of me...”*

BE FOLLOWERS

In order to really know how to “*walk by the same rule...mind the same thing*” (Phil 3:16), it is certainly helpful to have godly examples around us that we can emulate. By ourselves, we may not always know what it means to be like Christ practically. Yes, God’s Word is our ultimate Guide, and there are many examples to be found within the Bible. At the same time, real-life examples around us are certainly also useful to have, for they are tangible, visible people we can see and learn from. Furthermore, they live in the present, and are contemporary testimonies showing us how to live a godly life in our time. Paul therefore exhorted the Philippians to be “*followers together*” (Phil 3:17, mimics) of him. He called upon them to examine his life, and insofar as he obeyed Christ, they were to follow him.

Of course, we do not have the Apostle Paul himself with us to mimic. That is why he also told them to “*mark*” (Phil 3:17, i.e. to look out for) anyone who also walked in like manner, with the same exemplary sort of life, and we are then to pattern our lives after them as well.

We should not underestimate the effects that godly examples can have on our lives. If we surround ourselves with godly people who have the right spiritual inclinations, then our lives will be rightly influenced to have the same desires, passions and hopes like them as well. On the flip side, if we surround ourselves with materialistic, carnal and sinful people, then we will learn to be like that as well.

We ought to ask ourselves: Who do we spend the most time with, and who are the ones who have the greatest influence in our lives? Our best friends should be found in the church, for these are the friends we shall have for eternity. These are the likeminded friends who will encourage us in our present walk and serve as positive examples in our lives. In turn, as we grow in the Lord, we must strive to be godly examples to those around us, such that we can exert a positive influence in their lives.

THOUGHT: Am I thankful for the godly influences in my life?

PRAYER: Father, may Thou guide me to respect and emulate the godly examples in my life.

MONDAY, JUNE 5

PHILIPPIANS 3:18-19

ROMANS 16:17-18

*“...they are the enemies
of the cross of Christ.”*

ENEMIES OF THE CROSS OF CHRIST

As Paul encouraged the Philippians to be followers of them that walk well in the Lord, he also warned them to beware of those who did not walk well, who were in fact enemies of the cross of Christ! He was possibly warning of those whom he had mentioned earlier in the epistle – those who preached Christ out of envy and strife (Phil 1:15-16), or those who would try to cause them to trust in their own confidence and not Christ (Phil 3:2-3). These were the ones he had been warning of, and now Paul wrote with tears concerning them, for they were adversaries that the Philippian Christians had to be careful of. Their ways were in complete opposition against God, and they brought harm and destruction to the lives of the people around them. He warned that their end was destruction. They might seem to have some measure of success in the present but it was certain that their end would not be an enviable or pleasant one.

What is so wrong about such people? Essentially, they are self-seeking individuals who only care about themselves. The gods that they worship are their own appetites, their own passions, their own wants. All that they do in this life is geared towards pleasing and indulging their carnal selves. Their minds are set only on earthly things. They glory in their own accomplishments, their own vain deeds, not realising that it will only result in their own shame and destruction. Some of such people may even claim to be Christians and be found in churches. However, they have no inclination to seek after God nor obey His will. They are only interested in gratifying themselves.

This is the common philosophy and mindset of the world. If we follow such people, we shall be influenced by them, and very soon we shall end up like them.

The message is clear. We must avoid such people. Their influence can so quickly harm us, lead us astray, and turn us away from the spiritual priorities we ought to have. Instead, we must seek after God, and follow after those who seek the Lord in sincerity and in truth.

THOUGHT: What can I do to help the enemies of the cross?

PRAYER: Father, may Thou help me to be discerning that I will know to steer clear of any who would oppose the cross of Christ.

TUESDAY, JUNE 6

PHILIPPIANS 3:20-21

1 CORINTHIANS 15:51-58

*“For our conversation
is in heaven...”*

OUR CONVERSATION IS IN HEAVEN!

In contrast to the ungodly, Paul reminded us of our glorious hope of salvation and our eternal destination. The word “*conversation*” (Phil 3:20, *politeuma*) describes our citizenship. He directed us to set our affections on the things above for that is where we shall be for eternity. When our minds are focused on eternity, our perspectives will change, for we shall realise how temporal and futile many things of the earth are.

We must instead focus our attention on the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. In Him alone we have all hope, for He is the one who will bring our salvation to complete fruition. He will change our vile, sinful and carnal bodies, and replace it with the incorruptible, immortal, glorified body! He is able to do so, for He is the sovereign Lord who is in control of all things, able to subdue all things unto Himself.

If we focus only on self, on the temporal, on the present, then we shall surely fail. But if we keep our eyes heavenward and earnestly anticipate the glories that await us, then like Paul, we shall be able to cry, “*For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain*” (Phil 1:21)!

Sadly, for many Christians, heaven seems to be right here, right now. They are so focused on the things of the earth, in earning a living, in having a family, in having happiness and success in this life. They hope to live as long as possible, and pin all their hopes and dreams on just the present. For us as Christians wanting to fulfil the right spiritual ambitions, we must look beyond that. We must remember that we are citizens of heaven, and start to live like one!

So, we must ask ourselves: Am I willing to do what it takes to ensure that I can reach the mark that God has for me? It must begin with having the right desires, the right goal to strive towards. We must then be actively influenced and guided by godly examples and not the sinful and carnal mindsets of the world. Through it all, our hearts must be fixed upon the things of heaven, and not on the things of the earth. Can I do this? Am I willing to make the necessary changes in my life in order to make this possible?

THOUGHT: Am I looking forward to heaven and eternity?

PRAYER: Father, “stamp eternity on my eyeballs” (Jonathan Edwards).

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 7

PHILIPPIANS 4:1

1 THESSALONIANS 2:19-20

“...*dearly beloved and longed for,
my joy and crown...*”

MY JOY AND CROWN

In the opening verse of the final chapter, Paul addressed the Philippians in a most tender, loving manner. He called them “*brethren dearly beloved and longed for*.” These are wonderful terms of endearment that expressed his regard for them as family in the Lord. He remembered them as dearly beloved ones for whom he had great affection, and whose company he truly longed for.

He also described them as “*my joy and crown*.” He saw them as his source of joy, especially amidst the circumstances he was facing. For them, he was “*making request with joy*” (Phil 1:4), and he was willing to abide in the flesh for their “*furtherance and joy of faith*” (Phil 1:25). He told them that if they were to be likeminded and united, it would fulfil his joy (Phil 2:2), and to serve them and sacrifice on their behalf was for him to “*joy, and rejoice with you all*” (Phil 2:17). As he heard of the spiritual fruit they were bearing, he “*rejoiced in the Lord greatly*” (Phil 4:10).

He also described them as his crown, like the prize an athlete looks forward to when he is victorious in his race. Because he was sure of their salvation, Paul looked forward to the day when he would stand before the Lord, where all the Christians in Philippi that he had ministered to would also be there in the presence of the Lord (1 Thess 2:19-20). That would be the great reward he yearned for, and which motivated him to continue to serve in the present.

Indeed, what a dedicated servant of the Lord the Apostle Paul was. He found such great joy in the spiritual benefit of others. For him, what mattered most was the salvation of others, and how they were walking before the Lord. It made all his labour and suffering worth it, and that was what brought him the greatest joy. Can we say the same for ourselves?

THOUGHT: What brings us the greatest joy in this life?

PRAYER: Father, may I have the right spiritual purpose and priorities, such that I find the greatest joy in the things of the Lord.

THURSDAY, JUNE 8

PHILIPPIANS 4:1-3

EPHESIANS 4:1-6

“...so stand fast in the Lord,
my dearly beloved.”

STAND FAST IN THE LORD

Wherever there are people, there will be conflict. Why? Because we are prideful, selfish people. Though we are saved, we often give in to our old carnal selves. Peace will not come naturally, not even for Christians. This is something we must strive for in the church. Left to our own natural inclinations, conflict often ensues. Some disagreements may seem rather trivial at first, but if not addressed properly, can quickly fester and escalate to serious conflicts that would disrupt the unity and effectiveness of the church.

Many a time, the reason conflicts happen is that people stand fast on their own desires, their own pride, or their own stubborn allegiances. They are strong-willed and they refuse to capitulate. When misunderstandings or differences occur, neither side wants to back down, and so problems arise.

In Philippians 4:1, Paul called upon the church to “*stand fast in the Lord.*” This term “*stand fast*” is a command often used in a military context to call upon one to stand firm at his post, not to yield any ground amid battle. It speaks of a strong, resolute and unwavering stand. Paul had already called them to do so in Philippians 1:27, that they should “*stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.*” There, he echoed his desire to them, that they must ensure that they were spiritually stable in the Lord. Their loyalty and allegiance must above all be fixed upon Christ alone. They must all stand on the firm foundation of the Lord Jesus Christ, for it was Him they served, and it was Him they were fighting for!

We too must all stand fast in the Lord, and not on our own wants and wishes. When we have the same spiritual goals, it would be easy to have peace and unity. We shall realise how foolish and immature our petty squabbles are, and we shall be united in our service to the Lord. Like an effective military unit that stands its ground together, we shall be able to stand firm against the devil’s wiles and be victorious for the Lord!

THOUGHT: What would happen to an army that does not stand fast together?

PRAYER: May Thou help me always to stand fast in Thee, Father.

FRIDAY, JUNE 9

PHILIPPIANS 4:1-2

1 PETER 3:8-11

“...*be of the same
mind in the Lord.*”

OVERCOMING CONFLICT

In the final chapter of this epistle, Paul had to deal with some personal and rather sensitive issues. He wrote in a tender, fatherly manner as he dispensed spiritual advice to the Philippian Christians. Because of his close relationship with them, he was in a good position to mediate. He began his plea with a sincere reminder of how dear they were to him. He approached them as a friend who loved them dearly and truly wanted what was best for them.

Paul addressed their church problem head-on by naming the two parties – Euodias and Syntyche. However, he did not come with authority, but by “beseeching” or pleading. These were two women from Philippi who were likely at the very heart of the conflict. The reason for their falling out is not known, but we do know that they were both Christians serving in some capacity in the church. It seems that they had a disagreement, and were no longer of one mind. They thought differently and had differing opinions on whatever matter was at hand, and that caused a rift to occur between some in the church.

Paul’s message to them was that “*they be of the same mind in the Lord.*” He wanted them to realise their commonality in the Lord. They must be of one mind because they were all Christians, and like-mindedness is expected of every believer. This is certainly nothing new, for it was an instruction that had already been repeated multiple times throughout the epistle (Phil 1:27; 2:2-5; 3:15-16).

Note that there is a difference between uniformity and commonality. Paul was not calling for them to have no individuality, or to mindlessly conform to just one standard. He was emphasising the fact that they were both in the Lord, and therefore ought to have common ambitions, goals, and desires. Their lives must be lived in accordance with the Word of God, purposing to serve and glorify God. If that commonality was reached, then surely, there would be a lot less conflict, and a lot more sweet fellowship in the church.

THOUGHT: What has Paul taught concerning the “*mind*” so far in this epistle to the Philippians?

PRAYER: Father, guide my thoughts and desires by Thy Word.

SATURDAY, JUNE 10
PHILIPPIANS 4:1-3
GALATIANS 6:1-10

*“...my fellowlabourers,
whose names are
in the book of life.”*

TRUE YOKEFELLOW

Knowing how delicate and tricky church conflicts can be, Paul called upon others in the church to lend a hand to help diffuse the situation.

He called upon a certain *“true yokefellow”* to be the primary person to help sort out the matter. Little is known about him. He was perhaps a fellow servant of Paul and was known by the title of *“true yokefellow.”* Literally, the term describes someone who bears the same burden together with you, like two animals yoked together to plough a field. He was one whom Paul regarded as a comrade, a partner, a fellow servant of the Lord. Paul requested that he help these women out, to see to it that they would be united in the bonds of Christ once again.

He also asked Clement and other fellow labourers in the church to lend a hand to ensure the unity of the church. This is how conflict is resolved – where everyone works together without any ulterior motive, to make sure that peace and harmony are wrought.

Paul told them all to band together, to unite one with another, for after all, they were all sincerely serving the same Lord. In fact, Paul knew these two women, having served together with them in the past. He pleaded with them to put aside their personal squabbles and differences and work together!

One further point he mentioned that must tie all of us together is the fact that they were all saved, with all their names written in the Book of Life. All Christians have the same destination and hope, i.e. we are headed to heaven. Seeing then that we shall be together forever in eternity, can we not get along on earth? As we are looking forward to the same hope of eternal life, our desires and motivations here on earth should align as well.

In a sense, all Christians ought to be true yokefellows one with another. We are all bound together in the service of the same Lord. We ought to be able to come alongside one another to bear one another’s burdens and be united in the Lord.

THOUGHT: What happens if one yokefellow does not pull his weight?

PRAYER: Father, may I have the grace to put aside any petty differences that I have with others and be of one mind in the Lord.

BE JOYFUL!

In Philippians 4:4-7, Paul gave a series of imperatives to instruct the Philippian Christians on how they could find peace and joy in the Lord amidst the conflicts all around them. These exhortations come by way of commands that require effort on our part to achieve.

The first command is that we must endeavour to rejoice continually in the Lord. It is repeated for emphasis – *"and again I say, Rejoice"* (Phil 4:4)! It was certainly not a new idea that Paul raised here, for it had been a major theme of this epistle to the Philippians. He himself had set the example of having this abiding joy despite his circumstances, and now he instructed the Christians at Philippi to do likewise.

If we think about it, Christians alone have every reason to be joyful, for it is a rejoicing that is *"in the Lord."* We have been saved by the Lord Jesus Christ. Our sins have been forgiven and we have the glorious hope of heaven and eternity to look forward to. Presently, we have confidence in a sovereign, loving God who has promised to take care of us. We know what our purpose in this life is – to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever. These are all precious truths that we must hold dear to our hearts. We know that as long as we are in Christ, there is always a cause for rejoicing.

Note also that the rejoicing is in the Lord, and not in other things. Many a time, our emotions and outlook on life are much affected by the changing circumstances around us. When things are going well, it is easy to have a happy demeanour and a joyous disposition. However, when things do not go our way, or when tragedy strikes, our whole world comes crashing down, and we cannot feel joy in our lives.

No matter what happens, we must remember the promises of God, that He is in control, and that there is always a reason for why things happen. As Christians, we always have a reason to rejoice. It might not be the excited exuberance of a child in a toy store, but we can have the calm, abiding confidence in the Lord, rejoicing always in His goodness.

THOUGHT: Can I rejoice in the Lord if I am not walking in the Lord?

PRAYER: Father, help me to rejoice always in Thee!

MONDAY, JUNE 12

PHILIPPIANS 4:5

2 PETER 3:8-13

*“Let your moderation be
known unto all men.”*

BE MODERATE

The next command was for their moderation to be evident and known to all men. It was an instruction for them to be temperate in their passions, both with regard to their dealings with their fellow men, and to their earthly pursuits. They were not to be extreme in any of their actions, except when it was with regard to their passion for the Lord. In all other instances, whether it was in how they reacted to the adverse circumstances and difficult people they had to deal with, or in seeking after the things of this world, they were to exercise restraint with a calm and gentle demeanour.

Why was this important? The explanation comes in the second line, where Paul reminded them that the Lord was at hand. This was to remind them of the imminence of the Lord's return.

When we are reminded that the Lord is coming soon, this ought to set things in perspective. We realise that all the things around us are temporal and will soon pass away. Our priorities will shift, for we no longer seek after the things of this earth but are now able to set our affections on the things above. We would have a calmer, more settled outlook on the things that happen around us. In the grand scheme of things, our career, our studies, our hobbies, really do not matter that much, and we should not pursue after them with such extreme passion. There should be nothing on this earth that is so attractive and alluring to us that we would pour all our energies and efforts into, save that of our service to the soon coming Lord. We would remember that our purpose is not to enjoy ourselves or to indulge in the excesses of this life, for we look forward to the return of Christ.

Thus, we realise that many things which we worry about really ought not to be our concern. Instead, we must focus on that which is most important – our relationship with the Lord, and our testimony for Him.

THOUGHT: What areas of my life need to be moderated?

PRAYER: Father, may Thou help me to live with eternity's values in view, and not to pursue after the things of this world.

TUESDAY, JUNE 13
PHILIPPIANS 4:6
MATTHEW 6:25-34

*“Be careful for nothing;
but in every thing by
prayer and supplication...”*

STOP WORRYING, START PRAYING

Are you an anxious person? Do you have trouble sleeping at night, and are constantly worrying about things throughout the day? The Lord says to us – “Stop, *‘be careful for nothing!’*” We know that the Lord is at hand. This ought to strengthen our resolve to trust in Him, not be full of cares, but be prayerful.

The simple exhortation here is that we must stop being anxious. Stop fretting, stop worrying, stop thinking that every little bit of bad news is tragedy and calamity. Paul told the Philippian Christians not to fret amidst their difficult circumstances, but instead to commit every matter to the Lord in prayer.

In times when we may be bogged down with anxiety or care, we must let our requests be made known unto God through prayer and supplication with thanksgiving. In so doing, we show our reliance and dependence on Him, whereby we trust in His sovereign and providential care over our situation and know that He certainly has a perfect solution for us.

The opposite of this is for us to try to take matters into our own hands. We often think that we can solve our problems with our own wisdom and human effort. As a result, we become so stressed, thinking that every outcome hinges on our ability and actions. That is certainly an endeavour that will end in failure. The more we try to solve our problems, the more cares and woes we take upon ourselves. In contrast, the more we pray, the more we plead with God to supply our needs, the more confidence we can have in our sovereign, loving God.

It is also important to note the inclusion of thanksgiving in our prayers as well. When we thank God, what we are doing is to recognise His hand working in our lives, and the fact that it is all part of His perfect plan. If we can give thanks in all things, this means that we know that God is in control and are confident that His solution will always be the very best.

THOUGHT: The more I pray, the less I need to worry!

PRAYER: Father, help me to pray more, and to pray with faith!

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 14

PHILIPPIANS 4:4-7

JOHN 14:26-27

“...the peace of God, which passeth all understanding...”

PEACE WHICH PASSETH ALL UNDERSTANDING

As we cast all our cares upon the Lord through prayer and supplication, the assurance we have is that *“the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”*

This is a most precious peace that the Lord has promised to every child of God. It is the peace of God that the world cannot understand. It is simply beyond their comprehension, for it is a peace that God grants only to those who are in Christ.

The world without God is lost in confusion. They are in constant turmoil and conflict, for they do not have the assurance of a benevolent God who is sovereign in their lives. They have no certainty over the future, and no confidence in the present. They sin and sin continually, and do not have any solution to the guilt in their souls. It is indeed a terrifying state to be in. Isaiah 48:22 warns, *“There is no peace, saith the LORD, unto the wicked.”*

For the believer, it is different. We know God, we know the Lord Jesus Christ. We can have a loving and abiding relationship with our Saviour and Creator. He assures us a peace that will be able to guard and protect our hearts and minds. When we face troubles and challenges in this life, it is easy for our thoughts and emotions to run wild. Yet the peace of God will enable us to be firm and resolute in our faith in Him. We shall be at peace, because we know that our loving God hears our prayers.

Every Christian can have access to this peace. We know that our sins have been forgiven and we are reconciled to God. We all can have this stability in Christ, and thus we shall not be fazed by the continually changing and oftentimes alarming circumstances all around us. The whole world may be crumbling around us, and we may find ourselves in the direst of situations, yet we can remain steadfastly confident in the Lord. We can continue to trust in the Lord, to rejoice, and to remain at peace in the midst of adversity!

THOUGHT: *“...Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.”*
(John 14:27)

PRAYER: Father, I thank Thee for this wonderful promise of peace.

THURSDAY, JUNE 15

PHILIPPIANS 4:8

JAMES 3:13-18

“...*think on these things.*”

THINK ON THESE THINGS (1)

We all understand the importance of one's thoughts. You may have heard this quote by Ralph Waldo Emerson: “Sow a thought and you reap an action; sow an act and you reap a habit; sow a habit and you reap a character; sow a character and you reap a destiny.” He may not have been a Christian, but his observation on this matter is certainly quite accurate. As Christians who desire to live a life that brings glory to God, we must be very careful about our thoughts. An undisciplined thought life will lead us down the pathways of many sins. As we know, God is certainly not just concerned about our actions and our outward appearances. He is also interested in our thoughts, our desires, our hopes, and our aspirations.

One major theme that Paul had been addressing throughout this epistle is the importance of one's thinking. He had been continually exhorting them to be of the same mind, to be likeminded one with another, and to have the mind of Christ. Now in this final section, he gave some final closing bits of fatherly advice that he wanted to impart to the church which was so dear to him, focusing again on the thoughts of a believer.

He gave a list of eight things that Christians are to dwell and fix their minds upon. The phrase “*think on these things*” is given in the present tense, describing a continuous thinking that we ought to have. The Greek word for “*think*” means more than just to have your mind musing upon these ideas, but it describes careful study, a deliberate reckoning of a matter.

These are very good guidelines for all of us, marking out clear boundaries as to what our minds ought to ponder and deliberate upon. Anything that falls outside of this list, or is contrary to it, is something that Christians must reject. But whatsoever (as many as are, or as far as) things are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, of good report, with virtue or praise, we must think upon these things.

THOUGHT: What occupies my thoughts throughout the day?

PRAYER: Father, may Thou grant me the discipline to guard my thoughts, that they will always be pleasing and glorifying to Thee.

FRIDAY, JUNE 16

PHILIPPIANS 4:8

MATTHEW 15:17-20

“...*whatsoever things are true...honest...just...*”

THINK ON THESE THINGS (2)

Let us examine each of the things that Christians ought to fix their minds upon:

Whatsoever things are true – That which is true, as opposed to that which is false. Remember, of course, that the only absolute truth in this world is the truth of God’s Word. Our thoughts must constantly be upon God and His Word, for “*thy word is truth*” (John 17:17). We must constantly meditate upon it, for that is key to our sanctification. Do not speculate over gossips, half-truths, rumours and deceits. This also protects us from fears and anxieties over the unknown and unverified. Dwell in the truth, in things which are of absolute integrity and reality.

Whatsoever things are honest – This word is translated in 1 Timothy 3:8 as “grave,” referring to the decorum expected of deacons, that they would be honourable and upright men of integrity. This describes that which is venerable, grave, worthy of respect and honour. It refers to deeds, works or activities that are not flippant, not trivial, but of dignity, decency, and decorum. It is of more than just integrity and truthfulness, but that of high moral value, gravity, and spiritual significance.

Whatsoever things are just – This refers to things which are righteous (that which is absolutely, morally upright). These are things that are in line with the perfect righteousness of God, in accordance with His perfect law – which is His yardstick of justice and righteousness. Conversely, we must avoid things that are unrighteous, sinful and wicked. To fix our minds on such things will quickly corrupt our hearts and lead us into sin.

As we go through life, the Christian must constantly ask: Are these things true, honest and just in the sight of God? If so, we must think on these things. If not, we must guard our thoughts and turn them towards the things of God.

THOUGHT: The media that I consume: Are they true, honest and just?

PRAYER: Protect me, O Father, from things which are untrue, dishonest and unjust.

SATURDAY, JUNE 17

PHILIPPIANS 4:8

PROVERBS 15:26-33

“...whatsoever things are pure...

lovely...of good report...”

THINK ON THESE THINGS (3)

The following are three more things that we ought to set our minds upon:

Whatsoever things are pure – This describes absolute moral purity, sanctification, and holiness, all that is sacred, pure and clean. The word “*pure*” is from the same root word from which we get the term “*saint*.” This would contrast with the many pagan, unchaste and wicked things that the Philippians were surrounded with. Likewise, in our world, we are surrounded by corruption, uncleanness, and carnality. We must guard our thoughts against all such evil and think only on that which is pure and good.

Whatsoever things are lovely – Things that are lovely are things which are literally “towards love” – things which guide and direct one towards love. This describes things that are pleasing to God, things which would increase our love and affection for the right spiritual things; anything that would incite greater love for God or for one another. The opposite would be things that incite contention, hatred, wrath and conflict. Those are things that are hateful and hurtful, and not lovely at all.

Whatsoever things are of good report – Things of good reputation refer to things that are blameless, above board, and well regarded or well spoken of. We must constantly set our minds on the positives (of what God wants), and reject the sinful and the negatives (of things that have a bad report). Our Christian life, and even our thoughts, must be beyond reproach. We must always be mindful of our testimony for the Lord, to ensure that we abstain from any appearance of evil and seek only what would lead others to grow in their regard for the Lord.

The world seeks to flood our minds with impure, hateful, and disreputable things. We are constantly bombarded by these negative influences that would turn our thoughts away from God and towards sin. We must sanctify our thoughts by meditating on Christ and His Word.

THOUGHT: “*The thoughts of the wicked are an abomination to the LORD...*” (Prov 15:26)

PRAYER: Father, may Thou guide my thoughts always to seek after that which is pure, lovely and of a good report.

THINK ON THESE THINGS (4)

If there be any virtue – Virtue is anything that is of moral and spiritual excellence. Things of virtue have absolutely no hint of moral corruption at all. We must think such virtuous thoughts and reject immodest or immoral thoughts.

If there be any praise – This is a word that speaks of commendation, and worship. What are described are things that bring glory to God and praise to His name. We must think upon that which is praiseworthy, and that glorifies God. Things that bring no praise but rather shame to Christ, we must reject.

Looking through this list, it is clear that God has high standards for the Christian. He wants our thoughts to be pure and clean, thoughts that will continually help us to become more sanctified and more Christ-like in all our ways. Certainly, if we fill our minds with these things, and reject the sin, the filth and the philosophies of the world, we can and will be drawn into a much closer relationship with God.

We must constantly examine ourselves: What sort of thoughts do I dwell upon? What do I fill my mind with daily? Is it of the immoral, corrupt things of the world? Do I constantly envy or dream of riches and wealth? Am I constantly fearful and anxious? Am I filled with thoughts of pride and self-glory?

Let us all pray and ask that the Lord will help us to think on the things of Philippians 4:8.

THOUGHT: Guarding my thoughts is a very important spiritual discipline that I must nurture.

PRAYER: “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.” (Ps 139:23-24)

HOW WE LEARN

In summing up this section, Paul gave an exhortation to make sure that the Philippian Christians would put into practice all that he had taught them. Before the command to “do,” he reminded them of how he had transmitted the knowledge of “those things” to them. He used four simple verbs in the passive voice to describe the whole learning process:

“Learned” – This describes the teachings and instructions that they had received from Paul. It refers to the reception of the mind towards these teachings, in knowing and understanding all that he had taught them, whether it was through his writings or direct exhortations from him.

“Received” – To receive something means to take something that is offered to you and keep it for yourself. With regard to learning, Paul was certain that they had received not just head knowledge, but had also fully internalised it in their hearts. They had grasped and embraced the teachings, fully convicted of their merits.

“Heard” – How was this learning and receiving process carried out? It was primarily through hearing, for faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God. This is the most direct form of teaching, where Paul spoke or wrote, and they heard.

“Seen” – But more than direct didactic instruction, it was also demonstrated in the lives of Paul and the godly people around them. From their examples, they had seen what it meant to live godly lives and how to be a witness for Christ.

These are the same ways whereby we learn today. Sermons and Bible studies are important, but so are discipling and fellowship. We learn through both direct and indirect means of instruction. Knowing this, we must endeavour to avail ourselves to all avenues whereby we can learn and receive the important truths that can guide us into a more fruitful life in Christ.

THOUGHT: Just as I have learned from others, I must also seek to guide and be an example to those around me.

PRAYER: Father, may Thou help me to keep on learning, and never forget the precious lessons learnt.

TUESDAY, JUNE 20

PHILIPPIANS 4:9

1 TIMOTHY 4:6-8

“...and heard, and seen in me, do...”

JUST DO IT!

The command in Philippians 4:9 is the little word “do.” It instructs us to put what we have learnt into action. The word in the original Greek carries the meaning of not just doing once, or just doing as a manner of routine, but to practise it. It is a commitment to be occupied in the observance of these teachings such that it becomes a part of our lives.

That was the measure of dedication that Paul wanted the Philippians to have as they strived to live godly lives in Christ. They were to commit their lives to training and practising godly living continually. It was a lifelong undertaking that they were to embark upon, whereby they must constantly train themselves to think upon and do these things.

Indeed, that is what godly living is. It is training, like how an athlete would dedicate his life to become the best that he can possibly be in his sport. For a sprinter, that would mean running the same distance repeatedly, till he knows exactly how many steps it would take to cover the distance, and exactly how many breaths he needs to take. He would be extremely disciplined in his diet, recovery and sleep, making sure that everything in his life is optimised towards maximum performance.

In the spiritual realm, we must have that same commitment and spiritual discipline. We must keep doing, practising, and training in things that pertain unto godliness. Practically, this means we would guard our thoughts, our words, and our actions. We would seek to be more prayerful, to study God’s Word more, to rigorously apply all aspects of God’s Word into our lives.

We may not have Paul come into our midst to teach us, but we are being taught week after week from the perfect and complete Word of God. Have we put these teachings into practice? Have we actively and consciously tried to carry out these instructions, such that we are brought to a closer relationship with God?

THOUGHT: What happens to an athlete who does not follow his training programme?

PRAYER: Father, may Thou grant me the discipline and commitment to apply all that I have learnt from Thy Word into my life.

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 21

PHILIPPIANS 4:9

HEBREWS 13:20-21

“...and the God of peace
shall be with you.”

THE GOD OF PEACE

When we think the right thoughts, and exercise unto godliness, the promise is that the God of peace shall be with us.

He is the God who brings peace; He is the God who is characterised by peace! Surely, we want this God of peace to be with us. This is the best and only way in which we can have abiding peace in this life. This is a peace not just in the sense of the absence of war and conflict, but a deep, abiding calm and spiritual stability, because God is by our side, and we know that we are reconciled to Him. When we have this God of peace, it will not matter what happens to us, what trial we go through, or what sort of people we meet. We shall always be able to have peace because the God of peace is with us!

Perhaps the best way we can understand what the God of peace can bring, is by comparing Scripture with Scripture:

Hebrews 13:20-21: “Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”

1 Thessalonians 5:23-24: “And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it.”

2 Thessalonians 3:16: “Now the Lord of peace himself give you peace always by all means. The Lord be with you all.”

2 Corinthians 13:11: “Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you.”

THOUGHT: Is the God of peace with me?

PRAYER: Father, may Thou grant me the comfort and peace in Thy abiding presence, knowing that Thou, the God of peace, is with me always.

THURSDAY, JUNE 22

PHILIPPIANS 4:10-20

HEBREWS 13:5-6

“...in whatsoever state I am,
therewith to be content.”

ARE YOU CONTENT?

As Christians, we are called to a life of contentment. Acknowledging His absolute sovereignty over all things, we know that all that we have comes from God, and His will for us is always the absolute best. It should therefore be logical that we are constantly thankful for all that we are and have, and never desire anything more than that, for God has already assured us the very best.

However, is that the reality in your life? The opposite of contentment would be sentiments such as greed, materialism, covetousness and dissatisfaction. These are attitudes that are so prevalent in the world, but are they found in us as well?

From birth, we have always been wanting and asking for more. We are constantly in a state of mind that thinks that there must be something better out there to be had, and we always feel like we are a few steps short of being entirely happy and pleased with our current state. We see such behaviour in so many people around us, from babies to adults to old folks. Their discontent would range from material, physical things to other more intangible matters, such as relationships, one's appearance, abilities, or any other circumstance that they face.

Yet we know it is a miserable thing to continually be in a state of covetousness for we are never happy. We are always seeking for something more to find fulfilment and satisfaction in life.

That is why it is such an admirable quality that we see in the Apostle Paul who stated, “*I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content*” (Phil 4:11). It is an example that is certainly worth emulating, to know that no matter what we have (or do not have) in this life, we can and must be content, for we already have Christ!

THOUGHT: “*But godliness with contentment is great gain.*” (1 Tim 6:6)

PRAYER: Father, may Thou teach me to know how to be content in Thee.

FRIDAY, JUNE 23

PHILIPPIANS 4:10-12

ACTS 22:1-15

“...I rejoiced in the Lord greatly...”

A PICTURE OF CONTENTMENT

In Paul, we see a picture of godly contentment. Paul shared his joy with the Christians of Philippi, as he had just received a monetary gift from them. He was joyful that after so many years, he had finally heard from the Christians at Philippi again and learnt of their steadfastness in the Lord. He knew that they had not sent support for a while because they “*lacked opportunity*.” Now that they knew he was in Rome, they sent Epaphroditus to bring aid and to minister to him. For that, Paul rejoiced, notwithstanding his current circumstances in prison.

He was quick to make a caveat that he shared this thanksgiving not because he was trying to subtly ask for more support. He was quick to assure them that he was certainly not in want! He told them that he had learnt, in whatsoever state that he was in, to be content.

At this juncture, it is good to remember Paul’s background. He had the privilege of being born a Roman citizen. At a young age, he was sent to Jerusalem to sit at the feet of the esteemed teacher, Gamaliel, and be trained in the best rabbinical schools. He was highly regarded as a leading Pharisee, well respected for his education, zeal and righteous living. However, he gave that all up when he became a Christian. No longer a respected leader, he was now a fugitive on the run. For the rest of his life, he was persecuted, stoned, beaten, and imprisoned. At times he had to work to support himself and his fellow co-workers. It was a harsh, difficult life of sufferings that he had to endure.

Yet, despite all that, he was able to say with full conviction, that he had learned to be content. The word “*learned*” is a verb given in the aorist tense, referring to the fact that it was a one-time event in the past. When did this happen? It was when he was saved and confronted with the Word of God. As he learned of Christ, he learned of the providential, loving care that God had for him. He no longer sought the gain of the world, but counted all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ – that was now his one single ambition, and that was what granted him full satisfaction in this life.

THOUGHT: If our ambitions are worldly, we shall never be content.

PRAYER: Father, may my desires be wholly centred on Thee alone.

SATURDAY, JUNE 24

PHILIPPIANS 4:12

2 CORINTHIANS 6:1-10

*“I know both how to be abased,
and I know how to abound...”*

TO ABASE AND TO ABOUND

Though Paul had already learned the principles of contentment, it was still something that had to be nurtured through experience. It was a continual instruction that he received from the Lord through both the blessings and adversities that he went through as he served the Lord.

The verbs in verse 12 (*“know,” “instructed”*) are used in the perfect tense. This refers to past actions with present consequences. The idea is that although he had already learned about contentment in the past, yet through the varied experiences that he had, he was continually growing in his ability to be content no matter what condition he was in.

In his life, he had experienced times of abasement and humiliation where he suffered hunger and many other afflictions. He faced real hardships where he was intensely persecuted by the enemies of Christ, stoned, and left for dead. Yet, there were also times when he abounded and experienced plenty, such as when he enjoyed the hospitality and care of loving brethren. This could refer to the times when he was welcome to the household of Lydia at Philippi (Acts 16:15), or when he was in the company of Aquila and Priscilla at Corinth (Acts 18:2-3). Sometimes, it is precisely such change that makes contentment so difficult. If we have only ever experienced poverty, we would not realise what we are missing out. It is only after we experience plenty and are full, then be cast suddenly into abject poverty, that we would find the change hard to accept. The opposite is also true, for it is only when we experience times of abasements ourselves, that we can appreciate the periods of abounding even more.

Through all these experiences, Paul was learning. He was continually reminded of the fact that he was just a sojourner on this earth, and his purpose was not to seek after the luxuries and comforts of this life. Amidst all the varying circumstances that he faced, he realised that the one thing that was constant and that kept him going, was not the food on the table or the clothes on his back, but his relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

THOUGHT: The more I have, the harder it is to learn contentment.

PRAYER: Father, may Thou grant me the grace to be thankful in whatsoever circumstances Thou allowest me to go through.

ALL THINGS THROUGH CHRIST!

How was Paul able to be unwavering in his contentment? How did he manage to remain steadfast amidst such varied experiences? He explained in Philippians 4:13 that it was because his faith was anchored firmly upon Christ. As he looked to Christ, the difficulties and pains of the present were to him but a *"light affliction"* (2 Cor 4:17), and he reckoned that *"the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us"* (Rom 8:18). That was why he could so confidently proclaim that he could do all things through Christ who strengthened him.

This was by no means an arrogant boast of superhuman ability, or a self-help mantra he was repeating to convince himself. In the context where he made this statement, it was a confident assertion in the ability of Christ to strengthen him to endure the many trials of life that he was facing.

Literally, verse 13 can be translated as *"I am having strength for all things, through Christ who is enabling me."* He recognised that it was Christ alone who was the One imbuing him with the patience and perseverance to be content and he knew how to abase and abound in all things. That was certainly a spiritual, and not physical, strength. It stemmed from his life and relationship with Christ and was what enabled him to face all his challenges with courage and steadfastness.

Indeed, all our ability to do anything at all in this life comes from Christ. As Jesus taught His disciples in John 15:5, *"I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing."* Without Christ, we are hapless and helpless. But through Christ who strengthens us, we can do all things for Him!

Therefore, as we seek to be content in all things, know that the only way we can achieve that is if we turn to Christ. It is only in Him alone that we can find true fulfilment and satisfaction in this life.

THOUGHT: Even my ability to live for Christ comes from Christ.

PRAYER: Father, help me always to be humble because I know that I am able to do anything only through Christ, and not of my own strength.

MONDAY, JUNE 26

PHILIPPIANS 4:14-16

2 CORINTHIANS 11:7-9

“...ye did communicate
with my affliction.”

THANKFUL FOR EVERY PHYSICAL PROVISION

From Philippians 4:14, Paul continued to commend the Philippians for taking care of his physical needs. It had been very delicately worded, to show that although he did not covet after any material thing, yet he was by no means belittling their gift. While he had learnt to be content in all circumstances, nonetheless, it was something he greatly appreciated for it was a gift given to him during his affliction. Their gift would have gone a long way to alleviate his troubles and contribute to his Gospel work while he was imprisoned in Rome.

The word “*communicate*” comes from the Greek word *koinonia*, which has the meaning of fellowship, partnership, sharing, or communion. When they contributed the physical provisions to him, it was not just a one-way giving, but they were in a sense sharing and having fellowship together with him in his affliction. It speaks of the warm and tender relationship that he had with them, such that the act of giving was far more than just a contribution. It was a communion.

He acknowledged their generosity and highlighted how helpful they had been throughout the years of his ministry. Paul had not forgotten all the good that they had done for him, from the time that he first departed from Macedonia (where Philippi was), and while he was at Thessalonica. They were the only church that had sent financial support to him to help him in his ministry, and for that he was very grateful.

The fact of life is that we need physical provisions to survive. We must be thankful for every provision that comes our way, no matter how small and insignificant. We must never take what we have for granted or feel this sense of entitlement to have more than what we already own. For all that we have (the comforts of life, a roof over our heads, clothes on our backs, meals to nourish us), we thank God.

THOUGHT: “*Naked came I out of my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.*” (Job 1:21)

PRAYER: Father, I thank Thee for the daily bread that Thou providest for me each day without fail.

TUESDAY, JUNE 27

PHILIPPIANS 4:17-19

2 CORINTHIANS 8:1-5

“...I desire fruit that may
abound to your account.”

THANKFUL FOR SPIRITUAL FRUIT

As Paul talked about their physical gift, he shared with them that their generosity was significant for it was evidence of spiritual fruit that they were bearing for the Lord. To Paul, that was far more important – that the Philippian Christians were a generous, ministry-minded church, well-pleasing to God.

He was careful to add that he was not writing to ask for more. Instead, he wrote because he was thankful for their spiritual progress. Through this giving, they were contributing to the progress of the Gospel, and so fruit was abounding in their account. We must keep in mind that they were not a rich church. It was, in fact, *“in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality”* (2 Cor 8:2). They were very poor, yet they saw the need of Paul and the cause of the ministry as more important than their own afflictions. Such was their generosity that they gave even beyond their ability to give (2 Cor 8:3) and had to beg Paul to receive their gifts (2 Cor 8:4).

Paul then described the gift as *“an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God”* (Phil 4:18). This was his way of saying that God was much pleased by the works of the Philippian Christians. While the gift was given to Paul, they were in fact an offering to the Lord, and was like the Levitical offerings of the Old Testament, a *“sweet savour unto the LORD”* (Lev 1:17). Indeed, there was much about this church that Paul had to be thankful for, as his desire that they would bear fruit for the Lord was very much fulfilled.

Likewise, we ask ourselves: Are we thankful for the spiritual fruits borne in the lives of those around us? Or are we more concerned about their physical success? Do we rejoice more when we hear of a brother being promoted in his job or getting good grades, or when they are maturing in Christ, are serving the Lord more, and have overcome sin and temptation?

THOUGHT: What brings me more joy: spiritual fruit or physical food?

PRAYER: Father, may I be able to see and understand the spiritual significance in every act of service rendered to Thee.

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 28

PHILIPPIANS 4:19-20

PSALM 23

“...my God shall supply all your need
according to his riches in glory...”

GOD SHALL SUPPLY ALL YOUR NEED

The Psalmist declared: “*The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want*” (Ps 23:1). This is a line of divine comfort that has touched the hearts of believers through the ages. It speaks of how the Lord cares for us as a shepherd lovingly tends to his sheep. He ensures that every need is supplied, whether it is green grass, fresh water, protection from danger, comfort amid trouble, or assurance over the future. No matter what difficulty is before us, we have the presence of our loving shepherd with us.

That is the same assurance that Paul gave in Philippians 4:19 as he reflected on God’s gracious care for him through his many years of ministry. In all his times of affliction and plenty, he knew that it was the Lord who supplied his needs according to the riches in glory by Christ Jesus. He wanted the Philippians to have that same precious confidence that he had in the Lord. Although he was unable to reciprocate their friendship through a physical gift in kind, he assured them that God would certainly be able to provide for them. He wanted them to trust in the Lord, to know that no matter what difficulty they were facing, God is always the One who can supply every need.

Furthermore, God supplies our need according to His riches in glory in Christ! Can we measure the glory of God? How infinite and inexhaustible this supply is. It is a vast, immeasurable reservoir that can never be depleted. This is an assurance to us that God will always be able to supply our every need, no matter how great.

When we understand this, our natural response would be as Paul’s was, to fall upon our knees and give all praise and glory to God for ever and ever! This is especially when we realise how much God has done for us, even though we do not deserve anything at all. Do we acknowledge God and give thanks to Him as our Giver in all things, both physical and spiritual?

THOUGHT: Will the son of a rich, loving father ever suffer any lack?

PRAYER: Father, help me to live by faith daily, trusting in Thee to supply all my daily needs.

THURSDAY, JUNE 29
PHILIPPIANS 4:21-23
ROMANS 1:8-17

*“All the saints salute you, chiefly
they that are of Caesar’s household.”*

THE POWER OF GOD UNTO SALVATION

Coming to the end of this epistle, Paul made some salutations and greetings. Amid that, he made a simple but rather surprising remark: that counted among the saints who expressed good wishes to the Philippians, were those of Caesar’s household. They were numbered among the saints, meaning that they were saved, and were part of the *“brethren which are with me”* (Phil 4:21).

How did this come about? Remember that Paul was in prison in Rome. He had already previously shared how his situation had granted him the opportunity to witness to many within the palace and his situation was well known by the Praetorian guards assigned to him (Phil 1:13). It is likely that some among them were converted under Paul’s influence. They would then have witnessed to others of Caesar’s household staff, and possibly even to members of the royal family themselves.

Again, amid his afflictions, we see the hand of God guiding Paul to be an effective witness for Him, such that the Gospel was able to penetrate the very heart of pagan Rome. This would be something particularly impressive to the Roman colony of Philippi, where Caesar was held in high esteem. To know that some within the household of Caesar were now considered amongst the saints would be of great encouragement to the Christians at Philippi.

Through this, we see the power of God unto salvation. Even in the most unlikely of circumstances, the Lord is able to save. There is a purpose why God brought Paul all the way to Rome in bonds: so that he could have this unique opportunity to bring the Gospel right into Caesar’s household. There is no one that is so afar off that he cannot be saved. Because Paul was not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, he took every opportunity that presented itself to him, and preached the Gospel. Likewise for us, may we take every opportunity to witness to those around us, for salvation is of the Lord.

THOUGHT: Do I sometimes make a judgment call in my mind and think a person cannot be saved, or is not worth saving?

PRAYER: Father, may I never be ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, but have the courage to witness for Thee wherever I am.

FRIDAY, JUNE 30

PHILIPPIANS 4:23

2 CORINTHIANS 12:7-10

*“The grace of our Lord
Jesus Christ be with you all.”*

GRACE BE WITH YOU

The epistle began with Paul wishing the Philippians: *“Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ”* (Phil 1:2). Now, as he ended the epistle, he again wished them *“the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.”*

While it is true that this is a customary end to many of Paul’s epistles (Rom 16:20, 24; 1 Cor 16:23; 2 Cor 13:14; Gal 6:18; Eph 6:24; Col 4:18; etc.), we must remember that these words are all part of God’s inspired words. They are a most meaningful conclusion to a wonderful epistle and should not be simply glossed over.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is so critical in every believer’s life. It is the goodwill, lovingkindness and divine favour that He extends to us, unworthy as we may be. It is only by the grace of God that we could believe in Him and repent of our sins. By His grace, He has called us unto Himself, and enabled us to live lives that are pleasing to Him. In times of temptation, it is His grace that enables us not to sin; in times of difficulty, it is His grace that is sufficient for us, enabling us to endure and overcome the struggles we face.

It is therefore most fitting that Paul ended his epistles by wishing the grace of Christ to be with his readers. In each letter he wrote, he made many exhortations and encouragements that we need to abide by. By ourselves, we can never hope to obey such instructions, for our natural tendency is to incline towards sin.

That is why it is so important that the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with us all. It is something we ought to be praying for continually, both for ourselves and those around us. Without the grace of God, we are helpless. But with the grace of the Lord strengthening us, we can do all things for Christ!

As you reflect and meditate on all that you have learnt through the study of this epistle, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

THOUGHT: “Wonderful the matchless grace of Jesus!”

PRAYER: Father, I praise Thee for the grace that Thou hast so lovingly bestowed upon me!

Notes

Notes

To: *The RPG Ministry*

Calvary Pandan B-P Church

201 Pandan Gardens, Singapore 609 337

Tel: (65)-6560 1111 Fax: (65)-6561 1861 Email: rpg@calvarypandan.sg

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