



# Philippians

Adult Bible lessons from the book of Philippians

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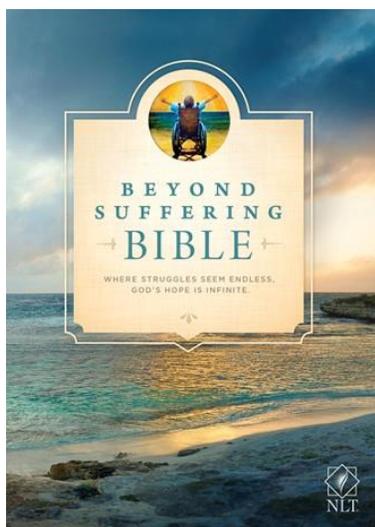


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Dedicated to:

Dr. Merrill C. Tenney under whom I (Jeff) did my first study of Philippians  
at Wheaton College in 1977.



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## **Introduction to teaching adults with disabilities**

Welcome to this curriculum on teaching Philippians. This is the fourth curriculum in what we hope to develop as a series. The first installment was the book of Psalms, the second Romans and the third Hebrews. We have used this approach in teaching the Bible and things of the Lord to adults with various disabilities. Each lesson was developed, taught, revised, taught again and then revised again prior to finding its way into this book. This curriculum is written from my, Jeff's, perspective. Kathi has added significant content as well. I recognize that when one teaches something, they bring a lot of themselves to the instructional approach. However, it is our hope that there is sufficient direction with each of the lessons that a teacher could pick up this book and teach.

As you will see from the following introduction, we have some very firm ideas about adults with disabilities being treated with respect and in an age-appropriate manner. This is evidenced in our efforts to interact with them in the same manner that we would interact with any other adult. Additionally, we see integration into the social environment of the church as a critical aspect of any ministry that focuses on persons with disabilities. It is interesting how you can determine what ministry leaders think about adults with disabilities by the way they design ministry for them. We want to communicate that people with disabilities are just people.

### **Our approach**

When teaching, the topics covered are the same as they would be for any adult Sunday School class. As you will see from the lessons, we talk about sin, salvation, Godly living, forgiveness and other areas relevant to adults. Ideas are presented simply, but they are not simple. Vocabulary is used that is accessible but it is not talking down to class members. Any adult could attend our class and be challenged by what is taught, while not feeling the presentation is juvenile in the manner in which it is taught. This is referred to as being age-appropriate. As you consider the activities, the conversation, the questions, you should ask yourself, "How would any adult react to this presentation?"

Another critical issue is segregated ministries. We consistently are working toward more integration. That is, although we participate in the regular worship service, provide opportunities for service in various ministries of the church and so forth, we have our Light and Power class which is largely adults with various disabilities. Although we continue to move toward being as integrated into the social network of the church as much as is possible, we also have come to recognize that we offer something that other ministries don't, at least for the moment. On a typical Sunday, we may have 75 people in attendance, up to a third of whom are individuals without disabilities. So, there is integration that way. Many of the adults have expressed that they are finally in a place where they are able to understand the scriptures. We attend the regular worship service even though typical sermons can be a bit too intellectual. So, to be in an integrated setting where complex ideas and deep spiritual truth are taught in an understandable manner is something that people have expressed that they have long desired.

Over the years, we have also tried many ways of customizing lessons to the various intellectual levels of those in attendance. But what we have come to, is that people are at various levels of faith development. Additionally, intellectual disability in particular may preclude people from some levels of faith development. There are those who will be able to understand the plan of salvation. Those people should be taught that and encouraged to respond to it. There

are others, perhaps those with severe disabilities who are nonverbal, who will not be able to respond in that way.

At the same time, as I have been thinking about faith development as it relates to people with intellectual disabilities, particularly severe disabilities, I have wondered about what the research literature sometimes refers to as the structures of faith. Faith development research often uses these structures to measure faith development. Let's put aside, for a moment, that these structures are somewhat generic which in and of itself may be problematic as they may imply that the content of faith is somehow less important in faith development than the structures are. Obviously for the Christian, nothing could be further from the truth. But what if you really were unable to comprehend the content of your faith or your faith group? How might one develop faith in these people?

As I have thought through this, I think that I have come to the position that I will work to develop faith structures as the focus of faith development for these individuals. What are these structures? Things like loving other people, participating in traditions, being a member/a part of a larger group, and receiving love and acceptance from people within the group. These things which are related to faith might provide the best evidence of whether one is growing. I will admit that one might grow in these areas independent of the content of one's faith. I will also admit that I trust God in the lives of persons with severe disabilities, and I try to understand the lesson of *Luke 5:20's* statement about Jesus seeing "their" faith and the impact of the faith of those around the disabled man on his own life. Perhaps in some way, the faith of the body impacts the development of the faith of the intellectually disabled person and vice versa although it might only be measurable in faith structures.

The result in terms of lessons, is that I teach lessons aimed at a particular level of most group members. At times I will discuss areas at what might be thought of as a higher intellectual level (Why does God allow suffering in the world? a question once asked by a class member). At other times I will also do things below that level. This was to engage those with more severe intellectual disabilities. For example, prayer, which we will address a bit later in this introduction. Although most in the group are able to pray in more "sophisticated" ways (regarding language, content, etc.). I teach and model the prayer "Help me." This prayer, though very basic, can be the basis for prayer development in those with severe disabilities while also providing an entrance for those with greater abilities who have not practiced prayer, and the opportunity to teach those with more ability some key principles about prayer.

I also try to keep in mind where people might be in their faith development in order to reinforce where they currently are while simultaneously trying to facilitate development to the degree I am able. This is not a scientific determination, but more of a general effort to know people where they are. So the actual Sunday School lesson is not exclusively how we facilitate faith development.

### **What is disability?**

A short while back, I wrote an article about the application of the field of disability studies to disability ministry. I began the article in the following way.

"A good starting point in the development of disability ministry would be a solid understanding of disability. Contrary to what the reader might think, this is actually not a simple question. There have been thousands of pages written devoted to defining and understanding the concept of disability. So-called models of disability abound. Nonetheless, many researchers in the variety of disciplines intersecting with disability studies think disability can be understood

through a combination of what have become known as the medical model and the social model. Let us think about each of these briefly to help us in our understanding of what disability ministry might be.

The medical model considers disability as a characteristic of individuals. In order to address issues related to disability one therefore focuses on individuals. The idea of the medical model comes from the way that medical services are typically provided. Yet one should not be confused by thinking this model is just about doctors or medical procedures. It is also the basis for education, rehabilitation, and physical therapy, among other good interventions in the lives of persons with impairments. For example, through special education, people with difficulty learning to read can learn to read. Through physical therapy, people who have difficulty with movement can be assisted to develop movement. These interventions are in no way wrong within themselves. The problem comes when they are the sole way in which to understand disability. One can attempt to improve someone's skills with all the education or rehabilitation possible and still not achieve significant enough changes to cause one to become "typical" in their performance (assuming one wants to be or act in a typical fashion). Also, one could wrongly think that disability is exclusively a characteristic of individuals that only needs to be prevented, corrected, or ameliorated. Barnes has observed, "In most developed societies, it is now widely recognized that the severe economic and social deprivations encountered by disabled people cannot be explained simply with reference to individually-based functional limitations." Thus, there is a second part to understanding the definition of disability.

The second component has developed under the heading of the social model of disability. This perspective basically says that disability is discrimination by those in the social environment and the environment itself. That is, one has this characteristic called "impairment" and as a result of having this characteristic, one experiences all kinds of mostly negative social consequences. Some limitations actually may be due to the impairment- for example, physical and communication barriers. Many barriers, and probably most, however, result from how one has come to be seen by the society, i.e., attitudes and stereotypes. As Tremain states, "Disability is then a form of social disadvantage, which is imposed on top of physiological impairment." Societies develop an understanding of disability that may or may not be based upon reality. This is referred to as a social construction, i.e., society has constructed it rather than its being inherent in a physical characteristic itself. Thus, disability, as understood by a culture, is constructed in a particular way. Depending on how it is constructed, an impairment elicits positive and/or negative behaviors from the environment towards the person with that characteristic. As a result, one's life experience cannot be explained solely on the basis of the functional impairments that one's bodily impairments produce. Rather, one's experience is at least partly due to the social consequences of being a person with a disability.

Once one comprehends this understanding of disability, it is easy to see how ministry efforts can no longer focus solely on individuals with disabilities through the lens of a medical model. Of course we develop training programs that assist in teaching individuals about the Bible, prayer, Christian behavior, and so forth (medical model types of approaches in that they seek to improve the individual). But we must also develop programs that address the discrimination and social consequences of disability projected by social environments (social model), including the Christian church. There are a variety of ways this might be implemented.

Wolf Wolfensberger, easily one of the leading social scientists on disability in the last half of the twentieth century, spoke about this two-pronged approach as competency enhancement and image enhancement, as critical aspects of his social role valorization theory (SRV). Generally

speaking, this theory describes the potential benefits to devalued individuals when they are provided the opportunity to take on socially valued roles (e.g. friend, worker, leader, etc.). In another article, Marc Tumeinski and I took Wolfensberger's SRV ideas and applied them to ministry. Asking "What would be better?" we challenged the church on both medical and social model understandings of disability. This might be done through the development of what we have called "social ramps." Social ramps refer to developing personal skills while concurrently preparing, educating, and coaching the social environment so that the environment becomes more understanding, more inclusive and, hopefully, less discriminatory" (McNair, 2016, p. 159-161).

This understanding of disability causes us to change our approach to include both individuals and environments. If we segregate people such that there are no demands made on the larger congregation to change, then we are not fully addressing disability. Too many ministries are silos where people with disabilities are separated from the larger congregation. This is not how disability ministry should be. Ministries which exist in silos like this encourage the negative social consequences of disability that people with impairments experience. It is not easy, but cultural change that comes when we attempt to facilitate environmental change is exactly the place where we want to lead the church.

Barnes

McNair, J. (2016). Disability studies applied to disability ministry. *Review and Expositor*, 113(2), 159-166.

Tumeinski, M. & McNair, J. (2012). What would be better? Social role valorization and the development of ministry to persons affected by disability. *Journal of the Christian Institute on Disability* 1(1), 11-22.

### **What is disability ministry?**

A while back, I was a part of a team which endeavored to define disability ministry. Obviously, this is not the final word on this, but it provides a starting point for thinking about what ministry might be. Here is what we came up with.

### **Disability Ministry**

Disability ministry is the label given to efforts to address disability in the Christian community.

Ministries first endeavor to create greater confidence in Jesus Christ among persons affected by disability by discipling Christian individuals...

1. Such that they understand what the Bible says. For those with intellectual impairments, that they comprehend at their level of understanding that through Christ, they can be made right with God (Romans 3:22).
2. By teaching and modeling Christian behavior so that people can produce Christian behavior (including worship, prayer, evangelism, service, and discipleship).
3. By facilitating people's understanding and expression of their individual gifting in loving service.

Disability ministry also influences Christian environments...

1. To appropriately repent for the ways that historically the Church has not loved its neighbors with impairments.

2. To see all people as who the Bible teaches they are.
3. To actively facilitate the expression of each person's gifting.
4. To assume persons with disabilities are to be fully included in all Church-related social environments and then to work towards that inclusion.

This definition has the potential to lead to significant cultural change in the church. That is something that needs to be understood. We are not about some type of segregated or silo ministry which functions apart from everything else the church is doing. We are endeavoring to create equality, keeping what is relevant about people's characteristics relevant and what is irrelevant, irrelevant. If I am riding a horse, the fact that I wear glasses is irrelevant. If I am talking to a friend about whether he should or should not get bifocals, the fact that I wear glasses is very relevant. If I am meeting a friend at a restaurant, the fact that she uses a wheelchair is irrelevant (or at least should be, and generally speaking in the US it is irrelevant). However, if I am asking her to discuss how her disability has impacted her ability to find employment, that she uses a wheelchair is very relevant. The key is to keep the relevant relevant and the irrelevant irrelevant. If I have an intellectual disability and as a result I am segregated, that is making what should be irrelevant, relevant. If I use a wheelchair and because of that I cannot find a job, that is making what should be irrelevant, relevant.

It is critical for people to look on their neighbors wisely. If something is considered relevant for some reason, it should be logical and defensible. So much of the discrimination people face is the basis of making irrelevant things, things like ethnicity or disability, relevant to judgments about people when it should not be so. This definition leads to specific outcomes which we feel should be embraced by local churches.

### **The Bible**

We ensure that all class members get the same Bible and we use page numbers and tabs for the book or books we are studying. We have been able to provide all our class members a copy of the Beyond Suffering Bible (New Living Translation) published by Tyndale House in cooperation with the Joni and Friends Organization. Information about the Bible is available at this website <http://www.joniandfriends.org/bible/>. Class members can bring any Bible they choose, however, we encourage them to use the one we are using as a class. When a teacher teaches, they also teach from the version we have selected.

As indicated, we have had good luck with the New Living Translation, particularly the Beyond Suffering Bible. At times, we will use other versions if the way the verse is stated is particularly helpful or more familiar. Whatever the Bible is that you choose to use, it cannot be juvenile appearing on the outside or inside. If one is using a picture Bible of some kind, it is best to use one that is as adult in the pictures presented as is possible. If the cover of the Bible is not age appropriate, even if the inside is pretty good, you can put a cover on the Bible, or even paint it so it looks like a regular Bible, not something that would stigmatize an adult because it looks childish.

I periodically chide members to bring their Bibles to class with them. All of them have one. I know because we gave them each a Bible. My expectation is the same as it would be for any adult class where we are studying a particular book. You need to bring the materials we are studying. For those who cannot read, they can still be taken to the page we are discussing which they appreciate. They can carry the Bible to church which projects membership, through carrying the book that everyone else carries.

We can also assist those with limited reading skills by highlighting verses they may know, so they could then find them and read them on their own. This can also help to facilitate both memorization of scripture and a bit of reading skill development, which is something that we find is a lifelong desire for those who struggle with reading.

### **The use of metaphor**

Often in the Bible, authors will use metaphors to teach. For example there are the stories of the house built on the sand or running a race or fruit on a tree. Folks with many types of disabilities do not understand this kind of nuance. In particular, people with autism/Asperger's Syndrome or intellectual disabilities struggle with this. In the same way, they will often not understand jokes. I have a friend with Asperger's syndrome who was telling me how hard he was working at his job. I made the comment, "That job is really kicking your tail!" He looked at me strangely and then said "I know Jeff that you don't really mean that someone at work is kicking me. You mean that my job is very hard and I am working hard."

We have therefore come up with a way to introduce metaphor when it is going to be presented in a Biblical account. I will tell them that this story is a metaphor. "If I were to tell you 'It's raining cats and dogs' you would not think that cats and dogs were falling out of the sky." Their response is "Of course not. It just means that it is raining hard." "You are right, of course not. Well this is the same type of thing. When we talk about how you can tell a tree by its fruit, we are not talking about growing trees, we are talking about how you can tell whether a person is a good person or a bad person by the things that they do." This introduction of metaphor helps students to grasp the meaning of parables or other metaphorical teachings.

Another aspect of this is the use of drama, or skits. We used to do this often, but many of the folks became confused about what we were doing. This is not to say that one should never use drama or skits, but as teacher you must be sure that the use of this technique accomplishes the goal you are after. We have moved away from it. If you do use this strategy, just be sure to check for understanding and realize that not everyone will understand.

### **People with Asperger's syndrome**

In teaching persons with Asperger's syndrome, be sure to be very direct. We do very little nuanced instruction. Regarding Bible instruction, as I say, it must be very literal and very direct. If not they will not understand. So we don't use nuanced subtleties. I will tell them, these are the specific good things you can do to help another person. Perhaps we would even facilitate a time where someone would practice them in an age appropriate fashion. We do the same for inappropriate behaviors. So for example, when the Bible says do not use the Lord's name in vain, it means you should not say things like \*\*\* or \*\*\* which are considered sins. Those in the group who understand will be shocked, but I prepare them by saying, "Because some people will not understand, I need to say the specific words or language that someone should not use." In other areas like sharing about the 10 commandments, I am very specific about what adultery, or stealing or honoring your parents means.

Another critical part about the inclusion of persons who do not understand social skills or nuanced language is that those in the group must also be very direct. I remember a funny but a little sad story of when I was teaching a church college group about persons with Asperger's syndrome. One young woman came up to me afterwards and said that a young man was always bothering her, thinking she was his girlfriend. I asked if she had ever told him very directly that she was not his girlfriend and that he should not talk about her that way. She in trying to be kind

to him gave him a variety of social cues that most people would pick up on, but he, because of his disability did not. So I told her she needed to be direct. It would feel cruel, but it would be the only way he would understand. Later that evening, one of the guys from the college group with Asperger's syndrome who is a friend of mine, walked out to my car with me. I asked him, "How are you doing?" He responded, "Not so good. My girlfriend just broke up with me!" Well I kind of smiled, but realized that I had helped them both by teaching about the direct language that is required for someone to understand. The direct language in this case was, "I am not your girlfriend. I am not interested in going out on dates with you or holding your hand. But I will be your friend. That means that I am happy to talk with you about things you are doing and to sometimes sit next to you when we are at the college group together. I know that can be confusing for you sometimes but I will try to help you."

### **Prayer**

In assisting adults with intellectual disabilities to grow in their faith, one thing we have desired to do is to teach them to pray. Too often the prayers we hear from people are full of words, full of directions, as if God isn't really sure what to do so He needs us to tell Him what to do. **Romans 8:26** even states we don't know what God wants us to pray for.

There have been times in my life that I have been so desperate, the only words I could pray were "Help me!" But you know, that is all that is necessary. **Matthew 6:7 & 8** says, *When you pray, don't babble on and on as the Gentiles do. They think their prayers are answered merely by repeating their words again and again. Don't be like them, for your Father knows exactly what you need even before you ask him!*

So what might be a starting point to assist people to learn to pray? Teach them to say to the Lord, "Help me!" Teach them to pray for others saying, "Help Jeff" or "Help Mary"

God not only knows what your heart is praying for in praying those prayers, but He also knows what the individual being prayed for needs. This is a good starting point in understanding prayer. People can be intimidated by the prayers they hear as well. "I can't do that" they may think. So teaching accessible prayers and modeling accessible praying provides encouragement for people to pray.

Perhaps consider instituting a prayer session sponsored by the persons with disabilities in your church. It gives teeth to the lesson that we really are all equal at the foot of the cross. It also should raise the esteem of persons with disabilities in the eyes of other members of the church. There are people who will literally not be prayed for if not for the prayers of persons with disabilities. We had a class member who passed away who would ask every week that his bus driver and his teacher would be prayed for. These were two very important people in his life. So we prayed for those people every week. We have no idea who they were or the ramification of those prayers, however, one has to believe that they made a difference.

Teaching persons with severe intellectual disabilities to pray is very powerful. In my work, I do a lot of international travel. I used to ask our class members in a general announcement to pray for me. One day after such an announcement, a woman named Amber came up to me and said, "I pray for you Jeff." So I sat down before her as she placed her hands on my head. She prayed, "Help Jeff. Help Jeff" several times. She then closed by saying, "I'm trying to be a good girl." What an incredible prayer. Since that time I always ask her to pray for me when I travel. When I am facing challenging times in my life I will also ask her to pray.

A couple of last comments about prayer. First, when I humble myself before Amber, I honor her and provide her the opportunity to express her gifting of praying for me. Her prayers for me

are real and valued by me. But I also demonstrate her gifting to those who are observing. Forgive me, but at times I deliberately ask her to pray for me in locations when there are other people around. I want them to see how I value her prayer. Perhaps it will cause them to reflect on who she is in God's sight as well.

### **Crafts**

The only time we do crafts related to our ministry is our women's retreat where ladies will make jewelry under the direction of an artist. Occasionally we will also prepare materials for the church's children's program. Otherwise we do not do crafts because other adult Sunday School classes at our church do not do crafts.

### **Age appropriateness**

It has been alluded to above already, but our desire is always to treat people in our ministry, whatever their personal characteristics according to their chronological age. This has to do with everything from music, to lessons, to activities, to simple social interactions. We have found that if people are treated as adults, they will respond as adults and grow to see themselves in more of an adult fashion. If adults are treated as children, they may accept it, but they may also resent it. Especially if they have been treated age appropriately in other social situations.

### **Integration**

One of the most if not the very most important aspect of any disability ministry is the degree to which the ministry is integrated. People will talk about models of ministry where there is partial integration or no integration. These are not acceptable approaches. People with impairments need to be integrated for both their benefit and the benefit of those with whom they are being integrated. Biblical passages such as *Exodus 4* or *Psalms 139* or *1 Corinthians 12* all indicate a purpose in the way people are created by God. Our understanding of God's sovereignty should tell us that there is purpose in the way individuals are for themselves but there is also purpose for the larger body in the way that they are. If we segregate these individuals, we do not allow their larger purpose to be evidenced within the Body.

When people do ministry, they often focus exclusively on doing ministry to someone. However, there is also the important notion of doing ministry with others. But an aspect of ministry too often overlooked is receiving ministry from others. We need to receive ministry from individuals with impairments. How can we possibly receive their gifting if we segregate them from ourselves?

Another aspect of this, is that integration of persons with impairments will cause the larger group to change. If we once again consider their purpose in people being the way they are, we recognize that the changes that will occur when people are integrated are a form of corrective to the way we currently are. Paul points to this in *1 Corinthians 12* when he says (quoting the NIV version) that ***On the contrary*** (not what you think perhaps or have been doing), ***those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable***. This passage continues saying, ***and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor***. This indispensable character and need to show special honor are things that can only be evidenced if those parts of the body, actually those individuals are present. Ministries that segregate people frustrate the design of the Body of Christ by breaking off a part and removing it from the larger body. I unpacked this

indispensable nature in an article (see *The Power of Those who Seem Weaker*, available on the internet).

Can there be activities outside of the church that are somewhat segregated like a weekly Bible study or some sort of recreational program? Of course there can be these types of activities. However, if the only time one experiences “church” is segregated from the larger congregation in some type of homogeneous setting only with persons with disabilities and those who are care providers, we are doing something that is wrong.

### **Political correctness**

There are people today who are more worried about political correctness than spiritual leadership for those they are leading. In a lesson I presented once, I told our group that they may see statues of other gods in places like restaurants. Even though other people may worship those statues, we are not to do so. The Bible is very clear about this using phrases like, *Exodus 34:14 You must worship no other gods, for the Lord, whose very name is Jealous, is a god who is jealous about his relationship with you.* A person in attendance at our group once said that we don’t want to make the people who own the restaurant feel bad. Well, our greatest commandments, once again, are to love God and to love our neighbor, however, I’d much prefer that someone’s feathers get a bit ruffled than that someone whose faith I am trying to develop is confused about who God is.

In teaching your students, you need to be specific and direct as much as possible. One cannot be as nuanced as they might be with other groups. Although I can totally trust God to show grace to those with intellectual impairments, I can also be sure that I am as clear as possible in explaining things to those same people.

I have heard it said that the message might be offensive but the messenger does not need to be offensive. Jesus himself said in *John 14:6, Jesus told him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me.”* Jesus describes himself as the only, exclusive way to God. This is offensive those who would choose to follow a different way. But it is a Biblical truth, nonetheless, so I share it as such. There are other things in Romans that people will find offensive. We need to share what the Bible says clearly, but we try to share it with humility. God’s word then, can convict people about who they are. We share that. People can then consider who they are in the light of that truth and decide how they will respond. I am responsible for what I do, explaining the Bible as clearly as I can. They are responsible for they do in their response. We are responsible for sharing what the Bible says. If the culture does not agree, we help people to understand that. But we do not back away from clearly explaining what the Bible actually says.

### **One final comment on your vision for ministry**

In the same article mentioned above in the section on “What is disability?” I ended with the following paragraph.

“How does an understanding of disability impact the development of ministry? It broadens the focus of efforts to individuals and the environments they inhabit. It facilitates changes in the same. It focuses on helping people love their neighbors. Loving one’s neighbor does not lead to segregation. It gives people the special honor we have been commanded to give. We are probably commanded to love our neighbors because we would not do it otherwise. It is often not easy, and that is true for everyone. I would not choose to treat someone with special honor as better than myself, or even as an equal. The change that can be brought by the presence of

persons with disabilities when they are integrated throughout a congregation is a change toward obedience. This process leads to what might be called maturity in ministry. A variety of criteria have been suggested for thinking through ministry maturity. Facilitating increased integration, providing opportunities for the expression of gifting of those who typically are not present at church, loosening up social skill demands such that people feel more welcomed, changing the way biblical knowledge is taught and expressed, and broadening opportunities for service are all practices that will move a church toward ministry maturity. These and other criteria can assist the ministry leader to envision goals for a particular ministry leading to the development of next steps to move toward the vision” (p 166).

Disability ministry puts demands on all church members to love all of their neighbors.

## Links to writing by Jeff McNair

disabledChristianity weblog

<http://disabledchristianity.blogspot.com>

### **Jeffmcnair.com articles**

**A Christian model of disability**

<http://www.jeffmcnair.com/wp-content/uploads/Christian-Model-final-1.pdf>

**What would be better?**

<http://whatwouldbebetter.com>

[http://www.jeffmcnair.com/wp-content/uploads/JCID\\_What\\_Would\\_Be\\_Better.pdf](http://www.jeffmcnair.com/wp-content/uploads/JCID_What_Would_Be_Better.pdf)

**Social ramps**

<http://socialramps.com>

[http://www.jeffmcnair.com/wp-content/uploads/social\\_ramps.pdf](http://www.jeffmcnair.com/wp-content/uploads/social_ramps.pdf)

**The power of those who seem weaker**

[http://www.jeffmcnair.com/wp-](http://www.jeffmcnair.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/JCID_3.1_McNair_The_Power_of_Those_Who_Seem-Weaker.pdf)

[content/uploads/2015/01/JCID\\_3.1\\_McNair\\_The\\_Power\\_of\\_Those\\_Who\\_Seem-Weaker.pdf](http://www.jeffmcnair.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/JCID_3.1_McNair_The_Power_of_Those_Who_Seem-Weaker.pdf)

**Faith Formation for Adults with Disabilities**

<http://www.jeffmcnair.com/wp-content/uploads/12a-Faith-Formation-for-Adults-with-Disability.pdf>

### **Books by Jeff McNair**

Church & Disability <https://www.createpace.com/3398398>

This book includes postings from Jeff's weblog, disabled Christianity from 2004-2009.

Church & Disability 2 <https://www.createpace.com/5606826>

This book includes postings from Jeff's weblog, disabled Christianity from 2009-2014.

*Meowoof* <https://www.createpace.com/6367733> or on Amazon.com

This is juvenile fiction about the experience of being different. It would make a great book for discussion in a church group interested in disability. It might also be a fun book to read with your ministry staff!

### **Video Links**

In the future, be watching for links to videos where you will be able to see Jeff teaching several of the lessons. The links will be provided at [jeffmcnair.com](http://jeffmcnair.com) or

<http://disabledchristianity.blogspot.com>



## Teaching the Plan of Salvation

It is helpful to have a specific approach for the plan of salvation that is often repeated. We know from the field of special education, that students with disabilities will benefit from verbal prompts being delivered in the same manner over time. That is because their disability can effect their understanding of language. In a similar way, we want to have a concise and consistent way for sharing the plan of salvation so that it is somewhat clear the first time people hear it, and then becomes familiar as they hear it repeated over time. The main part of the plan that becomes familiar is that connected with the picture below. Students will get to the point where they can reproduce the drawing and it also prompts their ability to share the plan.

### The plan of salvation

**Romans 1:16-17** (p. 1276)

***V16 For I am not ashamed of the Good news about Christ***

***It is the power of God at work, saving everyone who believes – the Jew first and also the Gentile.***

What is he not ashamed of? Why would he be ashamed of the Good News? Why is he not ashamed? It is the power of God saving everyone who believes.

***V17 This good news tells us how God makes us right in his sight. This is accomplished from start to finish by faith. As the Scriptures say, “It is through faith that a righteous person has life.” (Habakkuk 2:4)***

Without this, we are NOT right with God, in fact we are WRONG with God.

***V17 this is accomplished start to finish through faith***

We are saved by faith. But if we do something wrong, are we less saved?

If I am married, can I be more married if I do something good or less married if I do something wrong or make a mistake?

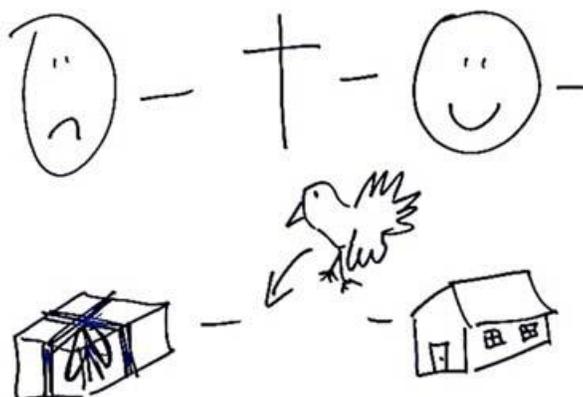
***Habakkuk 2:4 It is through faith that a righteous person has life.***

The answer is no. It is the same with our faith, our good behaviors don't save us and our bad behaviors don't cause us to lose our salvation. Why? Because our salvation is all based on faith, not on being perfect. No one is or can be perfect. Our only hope to be made right with God is through faith.

***Romans 3:22 We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. And this is true for everyone who believes no matter who we are.***

God's plan for making us right with him can be illustrated or explained with a few pictures. It is a good way to remember God's plan. You might draw the pictures below on a white board.

You can use the verses that follow to explain as you are drawing or just use them after you finish.



-First picture of sad face shows that we are all sinners, we all do bad things. We are NOT right with God.

**Romans 3:10-12** *As the Scriptures say, “No one is righteous – not even one. No one is truly wise; no one is seeking God. All have turned away; all have become useless. No one does good, not a single one.”*

-Picture of cross – but Jesus died on the cross for our sins.

**Romans 3:22** *We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ.*

-Smiling face and gift – If we place our faith in Jesus we are forgiven. Our forgiveness is a free gift.

**Romans 6:23** *For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord.*

I will sometimes say at this point, “You know, if we work real hard and try to do what is right, then God will give us a pay check of forgiveness and life with Him in heaven, right?” They have come to expect this joke and will respond, “No Jeff, it is not a paycheck it is a free gift.” Which I will affirm. “Yes! It is a free gift we get if we believe in Jesus.”

-Picture of the dove – God then gives us his Holy Spirit to guide us.

**Romans 5:5** *And this hope will not lead to disappointment. For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love.*

**Romans 8:26** *And the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness.*

-Picture of the house – Someday we will be with the Lord in Heaven because of our faith.

**John 14:1-3** *“Don’t let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust also in me. There is more than enough room in my father’s home. If there were not so, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you.*

**2 Corinthians 5:8** *Yes, we are fully confident, and we would rather be away from these earthly bodies, for then we will be at home with the Lord.*

I always ask our group, “What will you say when you go to the place that Jesus has prepared for you?” They respond, “I am home!”

You might ask if people in your group believe this. If it is for the first time, you can pray with them. We have actually used this picture as a way that people can explain their faith such that they can be baptized and join the church.



## **Lesson 1: Philippians 1:1-2 (p 1353)**

### **Paul, the author of Philippians**

***V1 This letter is from Paul and Timothy, slaves of Christ Jesus. I am writing to all of God's holy people in Philippi who belong to Christ Jesus, including the church leaders and deacons.***

***V2 May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace.***

This is a letter written by Paul to the people in Philippi. I told our group think of Fill-up-pie. This book begins by saying it is a letter written by Paul and Timothy. Let's start by asking, "Who is Paul?" Paul tells us a little about himself later in this letter. Here is how he talks about himself.

### **Chapter 3**

***V5 I was circumcised when I was eight days old. I am a pure-blooded citizen of Israel and a member of the tribe of Benjamin – a real Hebrew if there ever was one! I was a member of the Pharisees, who demand the strictest obedience to the Jewish law.***

***V6 I was so zealous that I harshly persecuted the church. And as for righteousness, I obeyed the law without fault.***

He sounds like a really great guy, until the end.

But we learn more about who Paul was in the book of *Acts*. Listen to how he was talked about. ***Acts 9:1 Meanwhile, Saul was uttering threats with every breath and was eager to kill the Lord's followers.***

Later when the Lord tells Ananias to help Paul, he says, ***Acts 9:13 "But Lord," exclaimed Ananias, "I've heard many people talk about the terrible things this man has done to the believers in Jerusalem. And he is authorized by the leading priests to arrest everyone who calls upon your name."***

So Paul was someone to be afraid of if you were a Christian.

After his conversion, Paul goes back to Jerusalem, but...

***V26 When Saul arrived in Jerusalem, he tried to meet with the believers, but they were all afraid of him.***

I wondered how Paul could be this way? He was an expert in what Moses had written.

It is interesting that in the book of *Leviticus* the Lord is giving directions to Moses for how people should live. He says,

***Leviticus 19:18 "Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against a fellow Israelite, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord."***

How could Paul be so mean to people who were Christians but were also Jews when he was such an expert in religious law, in what the Old Testament of the Bible says? As I thought about that verse, it made me think of the story of the Good Samaritan. If you remember,

**Luke 10**

**V25 One day an expert in religious law (like Paul) stood up to test Jesus by asking him this question: “Teacher, what should I do to inherit eternal life?”**

**V26 Jesus replied, “What does the law of Moses say? How do you read it?”**

**V27 The man answered, “‘You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind.’ And, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”**

He is probably remembering the Leviticus verse I just read.

**V28 “Right!” Jesus told him. “Do this and you will live!”**

**The man wanted to justify his actions, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”**

This could have been the same question that Paul would have asked. He didn't really see anyone but true, Jewish people as his neighbor. Paul didn't think of the people who were Christians as his neighbors. He thought he was doing what was right by hurting and scaring them and talking badly about them. We need to be careful about how we talk about people. You might think you are doing the right thing when you really are not. If you were a Christian living back then, you would think that Paul would be the last person that God would use to build the Christian church. But something amazing happened to Paul. Back to **Acts 9**.

**Read Acts 9:1-14**

In verse 4 Jesus himself says to Paul,

**V4 “Saul! Saul! Why are you persecuting me?”**

Paul thought he was doing what was right. But he describes himself as insolent which means defiant. He was dead wrong to the point that Jesus himself stopped him and got him to stop what he was doing.

So, Paul is now blind but God sends Ananias to help him. As we saw, Ananias was afraid to meet with him.

**V15 But the Lord said, “Go, for Saul is my chosen instrument to take my message to the Gentiles and to Kings, as well as to the people of Israel.**

Really! I never would have chosen Paul but God did. In the Bible, there are basically 2 types of people described. Jewish people or Jews and people who aren't Jews called Gentiles.

**V16 And I will show him how much he must suffer for my name's sake.”**

**V17 So Ananias went and found Saul. He laid his hands on him and said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road, has sent me so that you might regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.”**

**V18 Instantly, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he got up and was baptized.**

Paul was baptized. Stop and think about that for a minute Think of the last person in the world you would ever think would be baptized. Now imagine them changing their ways and being baptized. That is what happened with Paul. He was actually killing people and putting them in jail because they were Christians. About a week later, he gets baptized.

In a letter Paul wrote to his helper, Timothy, he talks about himself like this.

*Timothy 1*

*V12 He considered me trustworthy and appointed me to serve him,*

*V13 even though I used to blaspheme the name of Christ. In my insolence, I persecuted his people. But God had mercy on me because I did it in ignorance and unbelief.*

*V14 Oh, how generous and gracious our Lord was! He filled me with the faith and love that come from Christ Jesus.*

*V15 This is a trustworthy saying, and everyone should accept it: “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” – and I am the worst of them all.*

*V16 But God had mercy on me so that Christ Jesus could use me as a prime example of his great patience with even the worst sinners. Then others will realize that they too, can believe in him and receive eternal life.*

I never really thought about this verse till I was preparing this lesson. God takes a really bad person and turns him around so people can see that they are never too bad for God not to save them.

It is interesting that in *Acts 9:20* it says *and immediately he began preaching about Jesus in the synagogues, saying, “He is indeed the Son of God.”*

Paul was a smart Bible expert but would not believe in Jesus. But he knew the truth even if he wouldn't believe it. Once he was changed by Jesus, he immediately began to tell people about his experience and what he understood.

What could you tell people about from your experience and what you understand about who Jesus is?

First, “What do you understand?” I asked the group for Bible verses they have memorized.

*John 3:16* and *Romans 3:22* immediately came to mind for them.

I then asked them about some experiences they have had that helped them to believe in Jesus. They talked about being saved from illness or injury or even anger and receiving comfort from the hope that God gives of being with him after they die.





## Lesson 2: Philippians 1:1-7 (p. 1353) Remembering our brothers and sisters in Christ

In the Bible, God is often called our father. If you and I have the same father, then we are brothers and sisters. The Bible also says we are adopted sons and daughters.

It says in **Romans 8:15**. *So you have not received a spirit that makes you fearful slaves. Instead, you received God's Spirit when he adopted you as his own children. Now we call him, "Abba, Father."* Like **Romans 3:22** says about being made right with God, *this is true for everyone who believes, no matter who we are*. We can all become brothers and sisters, with God as our father. Jesus is God's only son who was not adopted, but we can become his brothers and sisters, with God as our father, when we put out faith in Jesus.

**V1** *This letter is from Paul and Timothy, slaves of Christ Jesus. I am writing to all of God's holy people in Philippi who belong to Christ Jesus, including the church leaders and deacons.* This letter could have just as easily come to our church as it could have to the church in Philippi. That is the cool thing about Bible books. They are meant for everyone!

**V2** *May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace.*

Jesus speaks of "our" father. So his father and ours. And he asks our father to give us two things, grace and peace.

If you look in the dictionary, it says grace means help from God. Help for anything and everything. When you pray the "help me" prayer, it can be used for anything. Paul ask God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ to help you in your life. In the book of **2 Corinthians** which was written before Paul wrote **Philippians**, he says in verses 8-9, *Three different times I begged the Lord to take it away. Each time he said, "My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness." So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me.* This lesson about God's grace being enough is something he had learned through the "thorn" he had to deal with.

Peace can mean a lot of things. But here I think it means the good feeling you have when you are trusting God. That you won't get stuck on bad emotions or thoughts that would bother you. It is easy to have things in life take away your peace. It is like the verse later in this letter, **Philippians 4:6-7**, that says, *Don't worry about anything; instead pray about everything. Tell God what you need and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.* Do you hear that? Hearts and minds. Hearts, which is probably talking about our feelings, our emotions, and minds which is talking about our thoughts. One of the reasons we pray is to have peace. Trusting in God, helps us to have peace. Both peace of heart and peace of mind.

**V3** *Every time I think of you, I give thanks to my God.*

Now Paul didn't know us, but every time he thinks of people who are following the Lord, he says that he gives thanks to God for those people. It is like he prays a thank-you prayer for people he knows are following the Lord. That is a good thing to do! Let's do that now. Look at the people around you in class. Then close your eyes and pray, "Thank you Lord that Patricia is following you!" or "Thank you Lord that Eric is following you!" Let's all do that now for two people. That is a good thing to remember to do during the week too as you think of your brothers and sisters in Christ.

***V4 Whenever I pray, I make my requests for all of you with joy...***

***V5 ...for you have been my partners in spreading the Good News about Christ from the time you first heard it until now.***

Have you ever thought about that? We should pray happily for one another because we are not just brothers and sisters, but partners. It's like we are on the same football team trying to win the game. What are we doing when we are partners? We are trying to win the hearts of people. If you look ahead to verse 7, it says ***in defending and confirming the truth of the Good News.*** Defending is telling people that the Gospel is true. Confirming is showing that it is true by the things that we do. We want them to love God like we do. One of the best ways to be partners, confirming the Good News, is to love each other. It is like that song that says, "They will know we are Christians by our love." That love starts with us loving each other.

It's also funny that that love for each other shows that we love God. It is like John wrote.

***1 John 4:20 If someone says, "I love God," but hates a fellow believer, that person is a liar; for if we don't love people we can see, how can we love God, whom we cannot see?***

We can't say we love God if we don't love our neighbors. John says we are a liar if we do that. Then we are not showing/confirming the truth of the Good News.

***V6 And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns.***

This is a very encouraging verse. It says that God is working within us. He keeps on working in us until the day when we are with the Lord, when he will not need to work on us anymore. But until then, we will continue to grow and change and God does good work in us.

***V7 So it is right that I should feel as I do about all of you, for you have a special place in my heart. You share with me the special favor of God, both in my imprisonment and in defending and confirming the truth of the Good News.***

Paul says that we are like him. Why? Because we share the special favor of God! It is kind of a miracle that the Lord found us and saved us from our sins.

One other thing to notice. Where is Paul? Do you see he talks about "imprisonment" which means he is like in jail. Why is he in jail? Because he was telling people about Jesus. Now think back to what Paul was telling us about God's grace and God's peace. Even though Paul is in jail, he feels like he has God helping him, that he has God's grace. The same grace, again, that he relied on with the "thorn" in his flesh. That is not an easy thing to believe. You could think that God had forgotten him. But he says he still has God's grace. He also has God's peace. Peace of heart, emotions, and peace of mind, thoughts. That is how powerful God can be in our lives if we believe in him.



### **Lesson 3: Philippians 1:9-11 (p. 1353)**

#### **What to pray for?**

Sometimes we can't think of things to pray for, for others. Or maybe you just want to pray about something different for those who are closest to you. In these Bible verses, Paul tells us the kinds of things he prays. Let's look at what he says.

Earlier in verse eight, Paul says this.

***V8 God knows how much I love you and long for you with the tender compassion of Christ Jesus.***

These are people who are very dear to Paul like your best friends or members of your family. How does he pray for these people? First he says,

***V9 I pray that your love will overflow more and more...***

He just says love, but probably he means love for God and love for each other. Those are the two most important things that the Bible says we need to do. So Paul starts by praying that God will help them to do the most important things.

Then,

***V9 ...and that you will keep on growing in knowledge and understanding***

Knowledge and understanding are two different things. Knowledge means that you know something. I know that if I put the key in my car and turn it, it should start. I know the four books of the Bible that are called the Gospels. I know how to make scrambled eggs. That is what knowledge or knowing something is.

Understanding is very different. I know that I can start my car with the key, but I don't understand how that works. If my car doesn't work, I have to take it to somebody who understands how it works so that they can fix it. But there are things that I do understand. I understand that I am made right with God by placing my faith in Jesus (***Romans 3:22***). Paul prays that those close to him will grow in the things they know and the things they understand. This is a good prayer for other people but not always something that you would think about to pray for others.

***V10 For I want you to understand what really matters, so that you may live pure and blameless lives until the day of Christ's return.***

What a good thing to pray about for other people! We can all get confused about what is important and what is not important. Paul wants his friends to understand this so they can live pure and blameless lives. Why might you be blessed? Because you think things are important when they really aren't? Or you might think something is not important when it really is. Those are things that could get you into trouble and you could be blamed for thinking that way. You might talk about what is important versus what is not important. Ask for examples of each and talk about why the things really matter or not.

***V11 May you always be filled with the fruit of your salvation – the righteous character produced in your life by Jesus Christ – for this will bring much glory and praise to God.***

The fruit of your salvation might be the same things that are called the fruit of the Spirit. Paul says this about the fruit of the Spirit.

***Galatians 5:22-23 But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things!***

You could pray for others to have each of these things in their lives. Pick out someone in your group and pray for them. “Here is how you would do this. I pray that Eric has joy and peace in his life. I pray that Jeff is kind and patient with others” (I could definitely use that prayer!). But going back to verse 10, about what really matters, Paul says what really matters in verse 11 when he says, ***for this will bring much glory and praise to God.*** That is something that really matters. When people see the fruits of the spirit in you, it causes them to praise the Lord.

But you might say, “It is hard sometimes to be filled with these fruits of the Spirit.” Paul understands that. Remember that Paul is writing this letter from jail. He is in jail because he was telling people about Jesus and the leaders didn’t like that. So to try to stop him and also discourage him, they threw him in jail. But he is not discouraged. Listen to what he says.

***V12 And I want you to know, my dear brothers and sisters, that everything that has happened to me here has helped to spread the Good News.***

***V13 For everyone here, including the whole palace guard, knows that I am in chains because of Christ.***

***V14 And because of my imprisonment, most of the believers here have gained confidence and boldly speak God’s message without fear.***

If Paul can have things like joy, peace patience and kindness while he is in jail for a bad reason, that really shows the other people in the jail, other prisoners and the guards, that God can help you even if bad things happen to you. You have probably known people who kept on trusting God even when they were having a really hard time. It is one thing to talk about trusting God, it is quite another when you continue to trust God when you are going through a very hard time.

So these are some really good things that you can remember to pray about for yourself and for others.



#### **Lesson 4: Philippians 1:20-27 (p. 1353)** **Living for Christ**

It is interesting when reading a passage of scripture, to note how many times a particular word might be repeated. If the writer says something over and over, it probably means they are wanting you to notice that. We see that in this passage with the word “life” or “live” or “living.” You will see that it is used seven times in the seven verses. But what is he saying about living?

***V20 For I fully expect and hope that I will never be ashamed, but that I will continue to be bold for Christ, as I have been in the past. And I trust that my life will bring honor to Christ, whether I live or die.***

Life is about bringing honor to Christ, to God through the things that we do. We are not saved by the good things we do. Some people think that if we do more good things than bad things that that is what will save us. But we know that that has nothing to do with being made right with God (**Romans 3:22**). At the same time, we are expected to show our faith by doing good things that will bring honor to Christ.

It is as **James 2:14-26** says.

***V14 What good is it, dear brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but don't show it by your actions? Can that kind of faith save anyone?***

***V15 Suppose you see a brother or sister who has no food or clothing,***

***V16 and you say, “Good-bye and have a good day; stay warm and eat well”—but then you don't give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do?***

***V17 So you see, faith by itself isn't enough. Unless it produces good deeds, it is dead and useless.***

***V18 Now someone may argue, “Some people have faith; others have good deeds.” But I say, “How can you show me your faith if you don't have good deeds? I will show you my faith by my good deeds.”***

We show our faith by the things that we do and if we don't do anything, we can question whether we really have faith. When Paul talks about things like living for Christ, he means doing for Christ. Serving Christ means doing things for him.

Imagine you came to my house for dinner. You would expect me to make something to eat. You would expect to sit at the table and have me serve you. If I said to you, “I invited you over for dinner, but I'm not getting off the couch, and you might find something here to eat, but I don't know if there is anything to eat, and I'm not going to fix it for you.” You would think, “This is not what being invited for dinner is supposed to be. You are supposed to serve me!”

That is what Paul is saying. Living for Christ means that we are doing things that honor Christ.

***V21 For to me, living means living for Christ, and dying is even better.***

When he says *living for Christ*, how do we do that? So the reason that I am alive is to live for Christ, to work for Christ, to do things for Christ. That is what living is for. But listen to what he says next. Dying is even better! That sounds like a crazy thing to say. Why would he say that? Because you would keep on living in heaven. Your “life” would not be over. It would just keep on going in a very different way.

***V22 But if I live, I can do more fruitful work for Christ. So I really don't know which is better.***

***V23 I'm torn between two desires: I long to go and be with Christ, which would be far better for me.***

***V24 But for your sakes, it is better that I continue to live.***

If I am doing what I am supposed to be doing, living for Christ, serving Christ, doing things for Christ, then it is especially good that I am still alive. All of us should be doing this. Can you think of some examples, once again, of how you are, could be, and should be living for Christ? But the best thing that could happen to me is to go and be with Christ someday when I die. Paul is trying to teach us about what is important while we are still alive. But he also wants us to not be afraid of dying. Living means to serve God. Dying means to go and be with the God I have been serving while I was alive.

Because Paul knows that he is helping others by serving God as he does, he says that he is convinced that he will be alive for a while longer. Convinced means that you have thought about something long and hard and based on that thinking, you have decided about something. I guess Paul thought about the work he was doing with and for the Philippians and decided that God would keep him alive so he could keep on helping them to grow in their faith.

***V25 Knowing this, I am convinced that I will remain alive so I can continue to help all of you grow and experience the joy of your faith.***

***V26 And when I come to you again, you will have even more reason to take pride in Christ Jesus because of what he is doing through me.***

Did Paul die? Of course he did. But he saw the time that he was alive as time to serve God. Paul really understood the truth that...

Living means to serve God. Dying means to go and be with the God I have been serving while I was alive.



**Lesson 5: Philippians 1:27-30 (p. 1354)**  
**Standing, Fighting and Struggling Together**

In this section, Paul talks a bit about how to respond to the kinds of things he experienced when he was in Philippi and what he is also facing when he wrote the letter to the Philippians. Let's read *Acts 16:16-40* to hear about what happened to Paul and Silas when they were in Philippi.

**Read Acts 16:16-40**

The people in Philippi would remember that story. Maybe that is how the church got started there. Paul also mentions this hard time in his letter to the Thessalonians, the city he had gone to after he was in Philippi. He says in

***Thessalonians 2:2, You know how badly we had been treated at Philippi just before we came to you and how much we suffered there. Yet our God gave us the courage to declare his Good News to you boldly, in spite of great opposition.***

The Thessalonians probably know how badly he and Silas has been hurt because of the injuries they were probably dealing with. This is important to remember when we are reading what Paul says. He knows what it means to stand, fight and struggle together for our faith in God.

Now we will go back to our Philippians passage.

***V27 Above all, you must live as citizens of heaven, conducting yourselves in a manner worthy of the Good News about Christ. Then, whether I come and see you again or only hear about you, I will know that you are standing together with one spirit and one purpose, fighting together for the faith, which is the good news.***

How do we stand together?

How do we fight together for the faith? Are we punching people? Of course not!

What word do you notice in both of these things that we are to do? That's right we do them together. We do together what we know is right to do. We stand by doing our best to obey God's commands, like the 10 commandments. We fight together once again by being unafraid to tell people about Jesus and how they can be saved. When we fight, we fight with love and prayer.

***V28 Don't be intimidated in any way by your enemies. This will be a sign to them that they are going to be destroyed, but that you are going to be saved, even by God himself.***

What does the word "intimidated" mean? One definition talks about being held back by feelings of fear. It would be like someone saying, "If you don't do what I tell you, I will do this bad thing to you!" People who would say or do that are trying to make you afraid. If you then do what they say because you are afraid, you have been intimidated. Paul says we shouldn't be intimidated or afraid when we are telling people about Jesus. Instead, we should be bold! A good example of people being bold when others are trying to intimidate them is the story of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego (see *Daniel 3*).

When we are not intimidated and do what is right, it is a sign to them. In other parts of the Bible, it talks about us being kind doing right to people who treat us badly. We are to love our enemies. ***Proverbs 25:22 You will heap burning coals of shame on their heads, and the LORD will reward you.***

***Romans 12:20 If your enemies are hungry, feed them. If they are thirsty, give them something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals of shame on their heads.***

The Romans verse was also written by Paul. We see what happened to him in Philippi but he was both unafraid (not intimidated) and good in response to the people who were bad to him. When people see you act like that, in response to them treating you badly, you are an example to them. You can also make them feel ashamed for what they did to you. That is good, because it can cause them to think about the bad things they are doing, be ashamed of themselves, maybe ask God for forgiveness, and stop doing bad things.

***V29 For you have been given not only the privilege of trusting in Christ but also the privilege of suffering for him.***

This verse says you have been given the privilege of doing two things. Privilege means that you are being treated in a special, very good way. The first privilege that God gives us is that we can trust in Jesus. Instead of being intimidated, we should trust Christ. It is like our ***Proverbs 3:5*** verse. ***Trust in the Lord with all your heart, don't lean on your own understanding.*** Can you see that you have been given something special by knowing about Jesus and how he has saved you? You might wonder why God is letting people be mean to you, but what you need to do is trust in the Lord. That we can trust God all the time is a special gift from God.

Then he says something that is hard. We have been given the privilege of suffering for Christ. That doesn't seem like a special, good way of being treated. But when we do what is right even when people treat us badly for doing right, God is proud of us. So, we are given the chance to show God how much we love him, when we do what is right even when we are treated badly.

But we also see that God can accomplish his purposes through our suffering. Look back at ***Acts 16:29-34*** to see what happened as a result of Paul and Barnabas suffering in Philippi. People were saved and baptized and a church was set up there. It reminds us of the verse in ***1 Peter 3:13-22.***

***V30 We are in this struggle together. You have seen my struggle in the past, and you know that I am still in the midst of it.***

If you are struggling to do what is right, or to not be bad to people who are bad to you, understand that that is hard but not unusual. We are all in this struggle together. Listen to what Paul says about himself.

***We are in this struggle together*** (with Christians everywhere)

***You have seen my struggle in the past*** (Paul has struggled in the past like in Philippi)

***...I am still in the midst of it*** (Paul is struggling now because he is in jail)

Understand that this struggle is something that you will have to face your whole life. Sometimes it is harder to face than other times but if you are living as a Christian, you will probably have to face it your whole life. This once again helps us to remember to pray for others, that God would give them success in their struggle to do right. Also, whether or not you are struggling now, pray

for those who are in places like China and other places in the world where the government can make it hard to be a Christian.

But one last thing about our struggle which is important to remember. In another letter that Paul wrote to the Ephesians, he says this.

***Ephesians 6:12 For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places.***

Have you ever thought about that? People can just be the face of what is controlling them.

Hopefully we are the face of Jesus to people in the world. But there are others who are the face of Satan to the world in the things that they do. So our struggle is not against them, but against the evil that is controlling them. When we pray for those people, we should pray that they will break free from that evil and instead have Jesus be the one who is controlling them.





## Lesson 6: Philippians 2:1-4 (p. 1354)

### Things to remember for ourselves and others

Begin by reading this full passage. There are 4 questions Paul asks, each having the answer “Yes!”

***VI Is there any encouragement from belonging to Christ?***

Is there... ***Any comfort from his love?***

Is there... ***Any fellowship together in the Spirit?***

***Are your hearts tender and compassionate?***

I then asked our group those questions.

***Is there any encouragement from belonging to Christ?*** They said “Yes.”

What does it mean that you belong to Christ?

How are you encouraged or made to feel better, from belonging to Christ?

Is there... ***Any comfort from his love?***

How are you comforted by his love? We talked about what comfort means, in that it causes you to relax and maybe not worry so much.

Is there... ***Any fellowship together in the Spirit?***

What does it mean when it says fellowship together in the Spirit? Even though we are each very different, we have something in common. The Bible says that we all have God’s Spirit in us.

***Are your hearts tender and compassionate?***

As a result of the answers to the first 3 questions, in what ways are your hearts tender and compassionate? I began by talking about what it means to have a tender heart, and what compassionate means. You can talk about the difference between having a tender heart and an hard heart. An example of a hard heart is the story of Moses. It says in ***Exodus 8:15***, ***But when Pharaoh saw that relief had come, he became stubborn...*** In a very simple way, a person with a hard heart will not listen to the Lord. People will hear about the truth that the Bible talks about but won’t listen. That is an example of what it means to have a hard heart. Paul used to have a hard heart. But a tender heart listens to what the Lord says and tries to love others even when it isn’t easy.

We also talked about how these verses talk about ourselves and others. We made two columns on the whiteboard and did a comparison

Ourselves

***VI Encouragement from belonging to Christ***  
***Any comfort from his love***

Others

***Fellowship together in the spirit***  
***Hearts tender and compassionate***

One of our group members said that she had heard it said that encouragement means to “give courage.” That is a good way to think about it. How does belonging to Christ give courage? Thinking about comfort, we talked about how it feels to sit in a very comfortable chair. How does Christ’s love give us comfort?

In thinking about what it means to be compassionate, we want to understand what someone else is feeling, understanding what their life experience is like. We talked about the idea of “walking a mile in their shoes.” Maybe this would help us to be more tender and compassionate towards others.

***V2 Agreeing wholeheartedly with each other***

***Loving one another***

***Working together with one mind and purpose***

***V3 Don’t be selfish***

***Be humble yourselves***

***Don’t try to impress others***

***Think of others as better than***

***V4 Don’t look out only for your own interests but take an interest in others too***

Interests are things that people need. Your interests are having enough to eat, having a place to stay, having the things you need to live. He is saying that we shouldn’t just look out for what we need, but what other people need too.



**Lesson 7: Philippians 2:5-11** (p. 1354)  
**Have this mind in you**

Read the passage for this week. Start with **V3** where Paul sets up how Jesus showed us how he did what he wants us to do.

In preparing this lesson, I did a bit of an inductive Bible study. That is, you just draw conclusions from what you see in the passage without bringing anything else to it. You will see how it works as we go through it.

***V5 You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had***

Christ Jesus had an attitude about something

We must have the same attitude we are told, which seems to be a command.

***V6 Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to.***

Jesus was God, he was equal with God. He thought about equality with God. He could be equal with God or not based upon his choice and he decided not to cling to equality.

***V7 Instead, he gave up his divine privileges: he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form,***

We also see this in V4 where it says, he looked out for what was good for others.

Before he was the man, Jesus, he was God, but with what name?

Instead of clinging to, he

***Gave up his divine privileges***, divinity has privileges. Privileges are something you deserve as was stated by one of the members of our group. I told them, suppose I came down to the place where you work. If I walked into the employees break room, people would say, “Who are you? What are you doing in here?” Because they work there, they have the privilege of using the break room, but I don’t because I don’t work there.

***Took a humble position, that of a slave***, a slave is a humble position.

Was born in human form, can be a slave in spiritual realm

***He appeared in human form***, so people saw him. That is they saw God. There was also a specific time “when” that he appeared to people.

***V8 he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal’s death on a cross.***

Humbled himself, means that all of what we just said was not forced on him. He did it to himself in “obedience” to God, to himself as God. God has the ability to do that. God wanted him to do this and he was obedient to what God wanted.

He died a criminal's death on a cross. Criminals are put to death on crosses. People thought he was a criminal and so he was killed in that way. Part of Jesus' obedience was to die on a cross. Because he was God, we know that to die that way was not right and should not have happened to him.

***V9 Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor and gave him the name above all other names,***

God raised him up/elevated him, back to life? Gave him the place of highest honor, there are levels of honor. God gave him a name that is above all other names, so names have different value or worth.

I joked with our group, "Is the name Scott (one of our members) better than Jeff?" They all know of my fun, teasing relationship with Scott so many said "Yes his name is better!" Of course, I became very upset for a minute, adding to the fun. But then I responded, "Well, that is not exactly what this verse is talking about. It is more about what the name of Jesus represents. The name "Jesus" reminds us of how God became a person, came and lived with us, died on the cross for our sins, rose from the dead, and is in heaven supporting us. That is why his name is so very special.

***V10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,***

This hasn't happened yet, but some day at the name of Jesus, every person will kneel in 3 places; in heaven, on earth, under the earth. Those are the 3 places where people will be.

***V11 and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.***

Every mouth/tongue will say that Jesus Christ is Lord in all three places. Jesus Christ is Lord is a different name from God the Father. But saying Jesus Christ is Lord gives glory to God the Father.

So, when it says to have Jesus' attitude...

What did he do?

**V4** He cared about the interests of others

**V7** Appeared as God to people

**V8** Died a criminal death on a cross

**V9** Was elevated by God

Why did Jesus do what he did?

**V11** To bring glory to God the Father

How does this bring glory to God the Father?

**V10** Every knee will bow

**V11** Every tongue confess, that Jesus Christ is Lord

One last thing, what is "glory"?

Brilliance

Preeminence – superior to all others

Lordship – authority, control, power

But go back to what we studied last time in V1-4. Jesus attitude was given as an example of what we should do. It is like Paul is saying, “I want you to do these things and Jesus showed you how to do them.” God didn’t say, “Do what I say, not what I do.”

When God sent Jesus to us, it was like he was saying, “I will show you what it looks like to follow me as you should. But I also know that you won’t be able to do it. So, while I am showing you what it looks like to be obedient, I will also make a way for you to be made right with me (*Romans 3:22*). Then you will be able to be with me in heaven.”

,  
Read V3&4 again.





**Lesson 8: Philippians 2:12-18** (p. 1354 & 1356)  
**Jesus knows what it is like to be you**

**V5 And furthermore, it is not angels who will control the future world we are talking about.**

The first thing to notice about this verse is that it is talking about the difference between Jesus and the angels. So when it says they angels don't control the future, it means that Jesus controls the future. That is why as it says in the first four verses of this chapter that we shouldn't drift away from Jesus. But the verse then goes on to talk about people, about us.

The author then quotes the Old Testament.

***V6 For in one place the Scriptures say, "What are mere mortals that you should think about them, or a son of man that you should care for him?"***

This is from *Deuteronomy 12:43*. Ask your group, "Why does God care about people?" I got responses like, he loves us, he created us and that he was one of us. Even though there are so many people, why would he care about each of us? Perhaps in part because he was one of us. Sometimes when you experience something, it can make you more sensitive to it. For example when you have friends who have disabilities, it gives you a better idea of what they experience and what their lives are like. God knows everything. He didn't need to become a man to know what it is like to be a person. But the fact that I know that he was a person somehow makes me even more confident that he knows what is like to be me and face the things in life that I face.

***V7 Yet for a little while you made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honor.***

This is from *Psalms 104:4*. So let's think about this. He says that people are lower than the angels for a little while. That means that while we are people, we are lower than the angels, but we will not always be that way. Some day we will be higher than the angels.

It is like a baby who is dependent on her parents. She is "below" them for a while. But maybe as she grows, she might be able to do more than they were ever able to do.

Remember as we learned in chapter 1 verse 14, ***Therefore the angels are only servants – spirits sent to care for people who will inherit salvation.*** They are wonderful and powerful, but people are served by them and one day people will be greater than the angels. But it is also important to notice once again that angels especially care ***for people who will inherit salvation***, those who believe Jesus is Lord and rose from the dead to save us from our sins.

***V8 You gave them authority over all things."***

This is from *Psalms 45:6-7*. That is he put people in charge of everything. What things are people in charge of? I got responses like schools, banks, our pets, etc. How do you think people are doing being in charge of all things? Our group didn't think people were doing very well because of things like pollution and wars.

***V8 Now when it says “all things,” it means nothing is left out. But we have not yet seen all things put under their authority.***

What do you think “all things” means? It means everything, all of it. But there are a lot of things that people are not in control of. I wonder if these things will be controlled in the future. Things like the weather. Jesus is in control over all things as we already learned in verse 2 of chapter 1.

***V9 What we do see is Jesus, who for a little while was given a position “a little lower than the angels”; and because he suffered death for us, he is now “crowned with glory and honor.”***

Because Jesus was a person, he was also a little lower than the angels for a little while. As we know, Jesus was both a man and God which is really hard to understand. But as it says here, like us, for a little while he was lower than the angels too. You might want to mention that Jesus was a person for 33 years. Someone in our group asked that.

You might also look at our Hebrews lessons where we explain how the author clearly shows the difference between Jesus and angels.

***V9 Yes by God’s grace, Jesus tasted death for everyone.***

Jesus knows what it is like to be a person in every way. In what ways was Jesus like any other person? He grew up in a family. He lived in poverty. He had friends. He had a job. He went to church and learned about the Bible. He prayed. In the end he also died. He was just like us. He lived through everything that we live through. Once again, maybe that is why he is willing to forgive you. Yes it is because God loves us, but he also knows how hard it is to be us and do what is right. Later in this chapter it says, ***V16 Since he himself has gone through suffering and testing, he is able to help us when we are being tested.***

This is really good news because he knows what it is like to be you. When you pray to him and tell him about the things you are going through, he can say “Yes I remember what that was like. I remember how I was concerned about my family.” When he was on the cross he told John to take care of his mother. He says in ***John 19:6 And he said to this disciple, “Here is your mother.” And from then on this disciple took her into his home.*** He also knew what it was like to have friends and lose friends. He cried when his friend Lazarus died. In ***John 11:34-35*** it says ***“Where have you put him” he asked them. They told him, “Lord, come and see.” Then Jesus wept. The people who were nearby said, “See how much he loved him!”*** He knew what it was like to be in a relationship with someone who abandoned him or betrayed him. In ***Matthew 26:34*** Jesus says to Peter, ***“I tell you the truth, Peter – this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny three times that you even know me.”*** Later in ***Matthew 26:49*** we read, ***So Judas came straight to Jesus. “Greetings Rabbi!” he exclaimed and gave him the kiss.*** Judas was a man who lived with Jesus and worked side by side with him for 3 years. So Jesus also knew what it was like to be have people be horrible to him in his time of most need. When you pray, you can pray with confidence to Jesus who knows what it is like to be you and go through the good and bad things you go through.

For a little while, he was like us. He was less than the angels. But he is now at the right hand of God, and we, who are also for a little while less than the angels, will be with him someday.

Take some time to allow individuals to pray, filling in these blanks.

Jesus, thank you that you know how it feels to be \_\_\_\_\_.

You could fill in the blank with words like, lonely, scared, hungry, sad, tired, discouraged, etc.





## **Lesson 9: Philippians 2:19-30 (p. 1356)**

### **Trusted friends**

Read the passage. Paul is telling the Philippians about two of his most trusted friends and helpers. Note several of the ways he talks about these two guys.

Paul starts by talking about Timothy

***V19 cheer me up by telling me how you are getting along***

Timothy has the ability to cheer Paul up, in part by the stories he tells. Stories especially about how the believers are doing well.

***V20 I have no one else like Timothy who genuinely cares about your welfare.***

***V21 All the others care only for themselves and not what matters to Jesus Christ.***

Paul says he has nobody else like Timothy. He is really special to Paul and to how he is trying to build the church. What a great compliment too, to say that someone cares about the welfare of others and what matters to Jesus rather than just thinking about themselves all the time.

He then moves to his other friend Epaphroditus. Listen to how he talks about him.

***V25 He is a true brother, coworker, and fellow soldier***

You can tell that Paul really feels close to Epaphroditus.

***V27 God had mercy on him and me so I wouldn't have one sorrow after another.***

Paul is talking about how very sad he would have been if his friend had died of his sickness. Paul is already having a hard time in jail. He must have really been praying for God to heal Epaphroditus and when his prayers were answered, he felt like God had protected him from what have been a huge blow to lose his close friend.

Then listen to Paul talk about the confidence he has in him.

***V28 So I am all the more anxious to send him back to you, for I know you will be glad to see him, and then I will not be so worried about you.***

If Paul's brother, coworker and fellow soldier is with the Philippians, he doesn't have to worry about them!

***V30 For he risked his life for the work of Christ, and he was at the point of death while doing for me what you couldn't do from far away.***

Epaphroditus must have been really helping Paul even though he was really sick. Paul will not soon forget that about his friend.

Thinking about Paul and his two friends, I want us to think about our friends. We organized groups of people around tables. I then gave instructions for what groups were to do and joined a table myself. Here are the instructions.

1. Think about two of your best friends. Have their names in mind and think about them a bit.

We then took turns in our groups sharing the answers to the questions one person at a time. So each person answered question 3. Then each person answered question 4 and so on.

2. Now think about friend #1.
3. Why is this person your friend?
4. What do you like to do with this person?
5. What does this person like about you?

We then moved to the second person we thought about and answered the questions about that person in the same way. It was interesting in our groups that the question that people had the hardest time with was the last one, "What does this person like about you?" I then tried to tie it back to the things Paul said about why his two friends were so special to him.

Overall, we had a good discussion about friendship. We also had a good discussion about how Paul was just a person like any of us who had close friends that he loved, who helped him, and who he at times worried about.



**Lesson 10: Philippians 3:1-9 (p. 1356)**  
**Only faith in Jesus**

What is it that we need to do to be saved, to be made right with God? Back in Paul's time, people got confused about the answer to this question. There were some people who thought that you had to believe in Jesus, but also do other things in order to be saved. But Paul wants them to understand what is important and what is not important. It is funny, because we can also think some of the wrong things that people thought back in Paul's time. Read the passage and we will then go back and look more closely at it.

The thing we really need to understand is that...

***V3 We rely on what Christ Jesus has done for us. We put no confidence in human effort.***

We have a problem in thinking we could be good enough if we just try really hard. We could never be good enough. God understands that, so he had to create a way, other than us being good, for us to be made right with him.

***V9 For God's way of making us right with himself depends on faith.***

That verse sounds like other verses we have memorized over the years.

***Romans 3:22 We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ.***

Also,

***Hebrews 11:6 And it is impossible to please God without faith.***

Can you see that God's plan is a way to be made right that just about anyone can do? He says

But Paul wants to make this really clear for the people reading this letter. He says it is only and all about faith. He lists all the things people around him would think are the most important in his life.

- Circumcised when 8 days old
- Pure blooded Jew – Tribe of Benjamin
- Expert in Jewish law
- Obeyed the law without fault

***V7 I once thought these things were valuable, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done.***

***V8 Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.***

***For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ and become one with him.***

I have heard one pastor say, he is basically saying what we do is worth about as much as the stuff you find in a dirty diaper.

***I no longer count on my own righteousness through obeying the law; rather I become righteous through faith in Christ.***

He is basically saying, “I don’t care what anyone else thinks is important. I know what is important and it is to have faith in Jesus!”

Now he is not saying we shouldn’t work hard, or try to do our best or even do important things like being kind to others. These are all really good things to do. He is just trying to help us to really understand what the most important thing is.

We have had members of our group win worker of the month awards or be celebrated in different ways. If someone would come to me and show me their plaque that they won for worker of the month, should I say “I don’t care about that. That isn’t important.” Of course not! He is just trying to help us understand what is really important. Especially when it comes to being made right with God. It is not faith in God and the worker of the month award that is needed. No it is just faith in God.

Back to the verses above

***V9 For God’s way of making us right with himself depends on faith.***

It is funny how the Bible keeps telling us over and over and over and over that we are made right with God only by faith in Jesus. I think the Bible does that because we can’t believe it. That seems way too easy. It has to be harder than that. Being saved should be hard to do we think. We can think that because we know that we are sinners. How could God want to have anything to do with us?

We think...

It must be based on us doing good things not based on what Jesus did.

There is a song where the singer can’t believe God would love him or forgive him. He says, “Do you know who I am have you seen what I have done?” In the song, Jesus’ response is, “Do you know who I am have you seen what I have done?”

It can’t be just because of what Jesus did.

It can’t be just because I believe, have faith in what Jesus did. That seems too easy.

It can’t be a free gift.

It must be something that I earn by working at being good, like a paycheck.

It can’t be that easy.

But actually it wasn’t easy at all. When we understand what Jesus did, dying on the cross, we see how it was really one of the hardest things anyone has ever done. It was hard for the Lord Jesus. But because of what he did, it becomes easy for us. Making it easy to respond in faith takes away the excuse that people might say, “I wasn’t made right with God because it was too hard.” No one can say that because all you have to do is have faith in Jesus.

Understanding this should make us be grateful and praise God for his way to make us right with him. If it wasn’t for what Jesus had done, we would have NO hope of ever being right with God.



### **Lesson 11: Philippians 3:10-16 (p. 1358)**

#### **Now what? Faith and what do you do next?**

Build off of V8-9

***For God's way of making us right with himself depends on faith***

Through faith, I am "right" with God.

I am made right with God, so now what?

***V12 I don't mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection.***

***V13 No, dear brothers and sisters I have not achieved it***

Back to

***V12 I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me***

How?

***V13 Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead***

What lies ahead?

***V14 I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Jesus Christ, is calling us***

Press on means to do something in a determined way, even though something is hard, you fight through to get it done. Imagine you needed to go to the store because you were out of something that you need. You get ready to go and you find that a huge rain storm has started up. It is pouring! But you have to get the things you need so you "press on" walking through the storm so you can get the things you need at the store. That is a small example of what this verse is talking about.

After you have expressed your faith in Jesus you press on in several ways. You press on through the things you think and the things you do.

**Things you think** – In *Philippians 4:8* Paul says the following.

***And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise.***

This is the first thing we can try to do. And it requires us to really press on because the world tries to fill our minds with things that are just the opposite. We will often fail in this area but we need to press on!

**Things you doo** – In *James 2:14-17* it says,

***What good is it, dear brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but don't show it by your actions? Can that kind of faith save anyone? Suppose you see a brother or sister who has no food or clothing, and you say, "Good-bye and have a good day; stay warm and eat well"—but then you don't give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do? So you see, faith by itself isn't enough. Unless it produces good deeds, it is dead and useless.***

Another thing we can do is pray. Paul also says later in ***Philippians 4:6, Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done.*** Just about anyone can pray. That is something that is really important for us to do. Yes we can help others by praying, but our communication with God mostly helps us.

***Back to VI3 Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead...***

The devil will always remind you of bad things you have done. "How could God love YOU! You are not a good person!" When I talked about Paul's past, one of our class members related the story of Stephen when he was stoned to death and Paul participated in that. I suspect none of your class members have ever done anything like that. When Paul talks about his past, particularly about forgetting it, he wants you to do that too. Yes, there are things that have happened in our past that we regret. We wish we could go back and hopefully do something different.

But we don't just forget the past, we look forward to what lies ahead. What will you do now and in the future? That is the important question to ask yourself. Will you be someone different?

Picture of someone running pointing forward and holding up a talk to the hand behind them.



## Lesson 12: Philippians 3:20-21 (p. 1358)

### New Bodies

***V20 We are citizens of heaven where the Lord Jesus Christ lives.***

We are citizens which means it is our home. If you live in California, you are a citizen of California. If you live in the United States, you are a citizen of the USA.

***And we are eagerly waiting for him to return as our savior.***

He will return.

As citizens of heaven, we look forward to going home there just like we would look forward to going to our home here and sleeping in our own bed.

***V21 He will take our weak mortal bodies and change them into glorious bodies like his own using the same power with which he will bring everything under his control.***

Change is another word for transform. We are going to be using both of these words as we talk about what will happen to us, to our bodies after we die.

Let's do a comparison of these two types of bodies.

#### ***Weak mortal bodies***

#### ***Glorious bodies like his own***

What do we know about Jesus' body after he rose from the grave?

He wasn't dead anymore.

He was able to go into a room that was totally locked when the disciples were hiding after he had died.

You could touch his body as Thomas did when he doubted that Jesus had come back.

Let's look at some more verses that tell us about the difference between these two types of bodies. The one we have now and the one we will be changed

	<b><i>Weak mortal bodies</i></b>	<b><i>Glorious bodies like his own</i></b>
<b><i>2 Corinthians 5:1</i></b>	Tent	House
<b><i>1 Corinthians 15:35-38</i></b>	Seed	Plant
<b><i>1 Corinthians 15:42-44</i></b>	Broken	Glory
	Weak	Strength
	Natural human	Spiritual

He talks about natural and spiritual bodies as if it is completely obvious! Its like, "C'mon, just as there are natural bodies, there are spiritual bodies."

You can see a picture here of the pictures I drew on the board to correspond to each of the comparisons. You could just as easily use the words listed above depending upon your group.

One thing I did do, was to buy a nice flowering plant in a pot and hid it under the table. I then opened a packet of seeds. Marigold ones worked good for me. I picked up one, “This is you now.” I had some fun with it with members of our group. Grabbing a seed, “This is Patricia, this is Mark, this is Jamie!” They thought that was funny. “These are your weak mortal bodies.” I then pulled out the beautiful flowering plant. “This is your glorious body! Do you see any difference?” Of course they all expressed the huge difference.

I think Paul can hardly explain how different the two bodies are, so he gives these examples to help us to try to understand.

***1 Corinthians 15:50-58*** then goes on to tell us some more about these new bodies. It says, ***Dying bodies cannot inherit what will last forever.*** So to go on with our comparison...

Dying bodies	Bodies that will never die
Mortal	Immortal

It is easy now to see why Paul would quote the passages from ***Isaiah 25:8*** and ***Hosea 13:14***.  
***V55 Death where is your sting?***

When we are absent from the body we are present with the Lord (***2 Corinthians 5:8***). What do we have to fear then?

As Jesus says, when God says ***‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’ So he is the God of the living, not the dead (Matthew 22:32).***

Death is hard! But these verses almost give the impression that we can smile in the fact of death! We can imagine doing that as we know that what is next, is so much better and not to be feared.

As the Bless the Lord song, also know as 10,000 reasons it says,  
And on that day when my strength is failing,  
The end draws near and my time has come;  
Still my soul sings Your praise unending,  
Ten thousand years and then forevermore.

That helps us understand more about this truth of new bodies when we die.



**Lesson 13: Philippians 4:2-3 (p. 1358)**  
**Settling with others and no hard feelings**

This short passage talks about something that many of us have trouble with. We will have disagreements with others and that causes us to say and do things that we shouldn't do. This must have happened in Philippi between two people. We have had disagreements in our class where people were too proud to try to get along with others. You are not always the good guy. Sometimes it is both of you and sometimes you are the problem. Here is our brief passage.

***V2 Now I appeal to Euodia and Syntyche. Please, because you belong to the Lord, settle your disagreement***

***V3 And I ask you, my true partner to help these two women for they worked hard with me in telling others the good news. They worked along with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are written in the Book of Life.***

Two women who had worked closely with Paul had a disagreement which was setting a bad example for everyone else. They needed to settle their disagreement.

Think of a bowl of soup. You stir it up and everything is all moving around in the bowl. But when you stop, the noodles all settle to the bottom. That is kind of what this is about. Things get all stirred up between you and someone. Somehow you have to try to stop stirring the bad feeling up and allow them to settle. That means that they talk to each other and try to figure out a way to put their argument behind them and have a good relationship. They may not be great friends after they settle the problem between them, but they should at least be friendly in their interactions as they are or should be both working toward the same goal. But even if the other person won't settle with you, you need to move on and let that thing that happened between you go.

Another thing is to have no hard feelings. That is also hard to do. To get rid of those hard feelings. There is a song by the Avett brothers called *No Hard Feelings*. Talking about having hard feelings toward someone they say,

Lord knows, they haven't done much good for anyone.  
 Kept me afraid and cold.  
 With so much to have and hold.

It is a beautiful song with a great message. I played it at the end.

But it is hard for all of us to not hold hard feelings towards someone else. We hold onto them even though they haven't done much good for anyone. They don't do good for yourself and they don't do good for the person you have them about and they keep us afraid and cold. The best thing you can do is to ask the Lord to take them away and try to move on.

If it is about forgiveness of someone, there is something else you should think about. You should forgive the other person, but you may not always trust them. Especially if they have done

something really wrong to you and refuse to settle with you. You are kind, but you are careful. Those two words might be good to remember: kind and careful.

Paul himself had a big disagreement with Barnabas who was another early saint of the Christian church. He was referred to as the “Son of encouragement.” The argument was about Barnabas’s cousin Mark. Mark had been traveling with them helping with their ministry when he kind of suddenly decided to leave them and go home. For a while after that, Paul did not want anything to do with Mark for quitting them. When Barnabas insisted on taking Mark with them on their next missionary trip, I guess Paul and Barnabas couldn’t agree and they ended up going their separate ways. Paul left with Silas and Barnabas then continued with Mark.

But who was Mark? He was the same Mark that wrote one of the Gospels (earlychurchhistory.org).

Over time, Paul must have settled his disagreement with Mark at least. In *Colossians 4:10*, Paul says ***Aristarchus, who is in prison with me, sends you his greetings, and so does Mark, Barnabas’s cousin. As you were instructed before, make Mark welcome if he comes your way.*** I guess they must have worked things out. Settled their argument. Paul was able to settle with Mark and just from that little passage you can see that he had no hard feeling toward him. Later Paul asks Timothy, a young guy who was like Mark who Paul helps to develop, to bring Mark with him because of how Paul saw Mark’s ability to help.

Then later in his life, Paul writes in *2 Timothy 4:11*, ***Only Luke is with me. Bring Mark with you when you come, for he will be helpful to me in my ministry.*** Mark became someone who Paul really counted on. So something happened that changed their relationship.

Mark ended up later in life founding what is called the Coptic Church in Egypt which is the oldest Christian body of believers in the world.

Paul, Barnabas and Mark were all killed because of their faith in Jesus. They were martyrs.

We ended by playing the *No Hard Feelings* song. It was a good way to end.



## Lesson 14: Philippians 4:4-7 (p. 1358)

### A circle of joy and peace

There was a song we all sang when we were children in Sunday School. It said, “Rejoice in the Lord always and again I say rejoice” followed by a couple of claps. This song is actually the verse we are going to begin with today.

***V4 Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again - rejoice!***

Rejoice means to feel joy or feel glad about something. Here we are to feel glad about the Lord. How would you do that, ***always be full of joy in the Lord?***

What would make you feel joy about the Lord? Well, think about the things you know about the Lord. I asked that question. “What do you know about the Lord that would give you joy?” People said things like, “He loves me” or “He takes care of me” or “He wants me to be with him in heaven and someday I will.” All of these are great answers.

I then followed up by asking, “What has God done for you?” For this question, we broke into small groups and had people tell each other the answers to that question. These things are the kinds of things we need to remember and tell others about.

***V5 Let everyone see you are considerate in all you. Remember the Lord is coming back soon.***

When you think about what God has done for you, it softens you and makes you more ready to rejoice. This softening will make you think about yourself less and think more about other people. You think more about them, how they feel and what their life is like. So you change toward others.

But you will also change in thinking about yourself.

***V6 Don't worry about anything, instead: instead, pray about everything.***

This is easy to say but harder to do. If you feel like you need to worry, instead pray. Worrying is a funny thing. I don't wake up and say, “Today I am going to worry about if I have enough money! That's what I want to do today.” But you might wake up feeling that way because of things that are happening in your life. You can't help when you feel that way. But Paul says worrying is not what you should do when you feel that way. What you should do is pray.

Jesus talks about worrying in *Matthew 6:25-34*.

***V25 “That is why I tell you not to worry about everyday life—whether you have enough food and drink, or enough clothes to wear. Isn't life more than food, and your body more than clothing?”***

***V26 Look at the birds. They don't plant or harvest or store food in barns, for your heavenly Father feeds them. And aren't you far more valuable to him than they are?***

***V27 Can all your worries add a single moment to your life?***

V28 “*And why worry about your clothing? Look at the lilies of the field and how they grow. They don’t work or make their clothing,*

V29 *yet Solomon in all his glory was not dressed as beautifully as they are.*

V30 *And if God cares so wonderfully for wildflowers that are here today and thrown into the fire tomorrow, he will certainly care for you. Why do you have so little faith?*

V31 “*So don’t worry about these things, saying, ‘What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?’*

V32 *These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your heavenly Father already knows all your needs.*

V33 *Seek the Kingdom of God<sup>l</sup> above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need.*

V34 *So don’t worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today’s trouble is enough for today.*

You could spend lot of time on Jesus’ thoughts about worrying. I pretty much just read them and then went on with the *Philippians* passage. I did note verse 27 where Jesus asks, *Can all your worries add a single moment to your life?* Obviously the answer is a big NO! Worrying does nothing for us even though we so often seem to be drawn to it. But the point I made is that Paul is telling us the same thing that Jesus did.

**V6 Tell God what you need and thank him for all he has done.**

It is funny that when you talk to people, anything bad that happens to them they will blame on God. But they never thank God for the good things that happen to them. That doesn’t really make sense.

But if you do stop worrying and instead thank God,

V7 Then you will experience God’s peace which exceeds anything we can understand.

What does “God’s peace” mean? If we have peace, we are calm, we have confidence and are trusting in God.

As I was going through these verses, I drew a circle on the board with arrows in the circle. At 1 o’clock on the circle I put *be full of joy in the Lord*. When I do that, it causes me to be (at 3 o’clock) *considerate in all you do*. When I think about others then (5 o’clock), I *don’t worry about anything but pray about everything*. That causes me to (7 o’clock) *thank him for all he has done* and I (10 o’clock) *experience God’s peace*. This makes me be (1 o’clock) *full of joy in the Lord* and the circle starts around again.



**Lesson 15: Philippians 4:11-13 (p. 1358)**  
**God's peace**

Read today's passage. From last time, we ended with Paul's statement in verse 7.

***V7 Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.***

Now jump down to our passage beginning with verse 11.

***V11 Not that I was ever in need, for I have learned how to be content with whatever I have.***

That is something that is difficult for people. It seems we are taught to not be happy with what we have and to be upset if other people have more than us. We see this in TV commercials and even in politics. I am taught to be upset if everyone does not have the same thing, at least if I don't have the same as everyone else.

***Philippians 13:5-6*** tells us something very different.

***Don't love money; be satisfied with what you have, for God has said, I will never fail you I will never abandon you.***

If you remember when we studied the 10 Commandments, we also talked about the verse about coveting in a similar way. ***Exodus 20:17 You must not covet your neighbor's house, your neighbor's wife, male or female servant ox or donkey or anything else that belongs to your neighbor.*** We had some fun talking about wanting our neighbor's donkey, talking about other pets that a neighbor might have. We learned the verse about coveting as be happy with what you have. If you want more, work hard for it!

Paul then talks about the things he has learned about having or not having things.

***V12 I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything.***

At this point, I made two columns on the whiteboard. One with a plus over it and one with a minus over it. In the plus column I put "everything" and in the minus column I put "nothing."

Paul says there is a secret to living.

***V12 I have learned the secret of living in every situation.***

That's cool! There is a secret we can learn about being content with whatever we have. We will see in a moment what that is. But he goes on and I put the things into the two categories again.

***V12 Whether it is with a full stomach or empty with plenty or little.***

And then he tells us the secret. This is the famous verse that would be a good one to memorize.

***V13 For I can do everything through Christ who gives me strength.***

Some of your students might have learned the song that says, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." Just another version of the same verse, so they may know that verse already.

Now going back to last week again, once I understand this secret,  
*V7 Then you will experience God's peace which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.*



**Lesson 16: Philippians 4:15-19** (p. 1358 & 1360)  
**Acceptable and pleasing gifts**

Today's passage is just a note from Paul at the end of the letter to say how much he appreciates their gifts. But there are some interesting things about how he talks about their gifts here. See if you can pick any of them out.

*V15 As you know, you Philippians were the only ones who gave me financial help when I first brought you the Good News and then traveled on from Macedonia. No other church did this.*

*V16 Even when I was in Thessalonica you sent help more than once.*

*V17 I don't say this because I want a gift from you. Rather, I want you to receive a reward for your kindness.*

*V18 At the moment I have all I need – and more! I am generously supplied with the gifts you sent me with Epaphroditus. They are a sweet-smelling sacrifice that is acceptable and pleasing to God.*

*And this same God who takes care of me will supply all your needs from his glorious riches, which have been given to us in Christ Jesus.*

Paul talks about how much he appreciates their gifts and doesn't need anything *more at the moment*. But something happened to the gifts when they were given to Paul. They became a sweet-smelling sacrifice that is acceptable and pleasing to God. Isn't that amazing? He doesn't mean that the gifts smell good. If I gave you 5\$ would you say, "Thank you it smells so good!" It is like the raining cats and dogs example I always give. It was such a perfect gift that is was like something that smelled good, like an apple pie fresh from the oven, the smoke rising from a barbeque or a fancy perfume.

It also says that the gift is *acceptable and pleasing to God*. That is interesting. They gave help to Paul and he says God happily received it. They gave money to Paul and he said that God liked it! Don't you find that interesting? When I help you it is acceptable and pleasing to God. When you help me it is acceptable and pleasing to God. That is such a cool opportunity!

We see this idea in Jesus' teachings as well. In *Matthew 25:34-40* he says this. When he says "I" or "me" or "You" he is talking about himself

*V34 "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the creation of the world.*

*V35 For I was hungry, and you fed me. I was thirsty, and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger, and you invited me into your home.*

*V36 I was naked, and you gave me clothing. I was sick, and you cared for me. I was in prison, and you visited me.'*

*V37 “Then these righteous ones will reply, ‘Lord, when did we ever see you hungry and feed you? Or thirsty and give you something to drink?*

*V38 Or a stranger and show you hospitality? Or naked and give you clothing?*

*V39 When did we ever see you sick or in prison and visit you?’*

*V40 “And the King will say, ‘I tell you the truth, when you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it to me!’*

So, “Go out and love me through what you do for other people!” the Lord seems to be saying.

When you think about it, this is really pretty amazing. This shows how linked together God’s two greatest commands are. *Mark 12:30-31* says, *And you must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength. The second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ No other commandment is greater than these.”*

These commands are like two sides of the same coin. When you do something for someone else, you are doing it for God. You are actually loving God! That is a really important thing to try to understand.

There is another interesting thing there. They just did stuff to help Paul and he said it was *acceptable and pleasing to God*. He then says that God will supply all your needs from his glorious riches. Now God can do anything he wants, but likely those who helped Paul will be helped by other people as well. That helping from other people is just a much from God. That is often how God seems to do it.

Lets pull this altogether. When you give help to someone or receive help from someone, that is help from God who *will supply all your needs* and it is at the same time help to God that he finds *acceptable and pleasing*.



## Lesson 17: Philippians 4:8-9 (p. 1358)

### Fix your thoughts

Begin by reading our verses. I saved these till the end just because Paul prefaces this section by saying one final thing.

***V8 And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise.***

After reading this first verse, I paused and took out a roll of tape. I happened to have a water bottle and so I taped it firmly to the microphone stand. “This is what it means to fix something. You put it in a place where it can’t be moved. So when it says ***fix your thoughts*** it means to keep your thoughts in a place where they can’t be moved.”

***V9 Keep putting into practice all you learned and received from me—everything you heard from me and saw me doing. Then the God of peace will be with you.***

I remember reading a quote from C.S. Lewis. Talking about the thoughts that go through your mind, he said something to the effect “You can’t keep a bird from flying over your head, but you can keep it from building a nest in your hair.” Imagine I am going through my day and a thought comes into my head. “Bob can be really grumpy towards me sometimes.” If I just let that go, that is the bird flying over my head. But if I think, “Bob can be really grumpy towards me sometimes. I am so sick of that. I wish he would stop. Why do I even have anything to do with him? The next time I see him, I am going to tell him what I think about him. That will get him to leave me alone!” Do you see how when I keep thinking about the thought that came into my mind, it is like letting the bird build a nest in my hair. I went up to a class member and said “Imagine my hand is a bird sitting on your head, trying to nest in your hair. What would you do?” He immediately slapped my hand away and shouted “Get away from me bird!” It was great! That is what you should try to remember to do with bad thoughts.

As I was preparing this lesson, I came across a video which talked of Native American wisdom. There was one story that I particularly appreciated that relates to our study.

“One night an old Cherokee told his grandson about a battle that goes on inside of people. He said,

‘My son, the battle is between two wolves inside of us all.

‘One is evil. It is anger greed resentment, lies and pride. The other is good. It is joy, peace, hope, kindness, generosity, truth and faith.’

The grandson thought for a moment and then asked, “Which wolf will win?”

The grandfather replied ‘The one you feed.’”

This is such a powerful thought. What you feed into your mind is what will ultimately win the battle. I thought about this the other day when I was watching a television show that was quite violent. I ultimately paused it thinking to myself, “Why am I watching this?” I don’t always get things right but I haven’t turned that show on again. But that is one of the other lessons from this passage. This battle between the good and bad wolves, there aren’t really wolves inside of you, but you do battle to do what is right, will be something that you fight for your entire life. Sometimes you will lose. But by God’s grace, there is forgiveness through Jesus when we do wrong things.

I then listed the 9 words from the passage, went through them one by one and gave examples of each. I relied a lot on the dictionary, so if the definitions I provide are not the best for you, you might find something that works better from the dictionary.

***Fix your thoughts on what is***

***True*** – real, can be trusted, not fake. I immediately thought about the Bible as the example  
***Honorable*** – something to respect. I talked about the firefighters who went into the buildings on 9/11.

***Right*** – something that is not wrong. Not the greatest definition but seemed to work. We talked about doing the right thing.

***Pure*** – noting bad in it at all. I thought of pure water. I also thought about small children who have a purity about them even when they do funny things. That morning, my son had reported that his 1 year old had gotten up, grabbed the TV remote and then threw it into the toilet! There was a purity in that funny act of my little grandson.

***Lovely*** – beautiful and inspiring love. I talked about beautiful mountains, rivers or beaches.

***Admirable*** – something deserving praise. I tried to get the group to think of good things they have seen people do that would cause them to want to tell the person they did the thing well.

***Excellent*** – of highest quality, exceptionally good. On this one, my mind went to food. Each of us have a favorite food and perhaps a favorite place to get that food, be it a restaurant or someone like your mother’s home.

***Worthy of praise*** – praise is saying good things about someone or something. I immediately thought of the Lord Jesus and what he did to make us right with God.

We finished by going back to verse 9.

***V9 Keep putting into practice all you learned and received from me, everything you heard from me and saw me doing. Then the God of peace will be with you.***

I spoke of that in the context of the things we learned from Philippians. You might want to highlight a few of those things although this lesson is getting pretty long.

I concluded with these three take aways.

- 1- God will help the “good wolf” in you to win more than lose.
- 2- You will always be in this battle your whole life. It might also be encouraging to know that you are not alone. Everyone who has ever lived has fought this battle their entire lives.
- 3- When you fail, which you will do, God will also forgive you through your faith in Jesus! This is great news.