

Discover the Secret:

Insights from Philippians for Resurrection Living

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Getting Oriented

Philippi was a significant city in Macedonia (modern Greece). The city was a Roman colony, settled by legionaries who received the land as a veterans' benefit. Paul's visit, described in Acts 16, was his first venture into Europe. The writer of Acts remembered three great stories from Paul's adventures in Philippi.

Read Acts 16:11-15

✘ Who is the key character? Which verse neatly describes this person? Pick the one element in this description that you think is most important. Why did you choose this?

✘ What did the woman do after baptism? How do you think this relates to your baptism?

✘ What title would you give this story? How does this story speak to your own life?

Read Acts 16:16-24

✘ Why would Paul want to silence the slave girl (verse 18) when it sounds like she was promoting his mission (verse 17)? (Clue: Check Luke 4:40-41)

✘ Two motives energized the charges against Paul and Silas: economic loss and anti-Semitism. Which verses reveal these motives?

✘ "We say Jesus is our Lord, but most days we really let money and economic concerns rule us." What do you think of that statement?

✘ What title would you give this story? How does this story speak to your own life?

Read Acts 16:25-34

✘ What did Paul and Silas do while in prison? After the earthquake, why do you think they didn't just get up and run?

✘ What connection do you see between verse 15 and verses 33-34?

✘ What connection do you see between verse 17 and verses 30-31?

✘ What title would you give this story? How does this story speak to your own life?

✘ *Read Acts 16:40*

What clues do you pick up from this verse about where the Christians in Philippi gathered and how they were led?

Living Context

We sometimes forget that Paul's letters are much like dialogues. That is, he normally had a congregation in mind, usually one he knew. What he wrote addressed their specific needs. Yet his words still speak profoundly to us. Many of our needs and experiences are far different from those of his audiences 2,000 years ago. Still, our deepest yearnings, our awareness of sin and longing for grace, have not changed that much. Paul's secret for living the resurrection life, shared with the folks at Philippi, speaks just as clearly to people of faith living in the 21st century.

True Peace

Getting Started

"I love mowing the lawn. The hour I spend on the rider mower is about the only peace I get all week." Where do you grab moments of peace in your busy life?

Listening to Paul

Read Philippians 4:4-7

Talk About It

✧ What do you think Paul meant by "Rejoice in the Lord"? What difference do you see between "Rejoice in the Lord" and "Rejoice no matter what comes your way"? Mark where you are on this scale and talk about why you chose that position:

In my relationship with Jesus, I find...

No joy at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 *Overwhelming joy*

✧ "Gentleness" in verse 5 represents a notoriously difficult word to translate. (Check a variety of translations to see the differences.) It means living by the rules (justice), but also being willing to bend a little in situations that call for mercy: "sweet reasonableness," in Matthew Arnold's phrase. Talk about a time when you felt called to show "gentleness." When have you benefited from someone showing you "gentleness"?

✧ What does the phrase "the Lord is near" mean to you? In what kinds of situations are you most aware that "the Lord is near"?

✧ Could Paul be serious about not worrying about *anything*? How does Mathew 6:25-34 help us to understand Paul's meaning? Where do you draw the line between "anxious worry" and "reasonable concern"?

✧ In what ways has prayer helped you deal with anxiety?

✧ "Shalom," Paul's Jewish understanding of peace, means more than absence of conflict. It describes a life that is whole, enjoying well-being and harmonious relationships with others and with God. What role do you think attitude plays in gaining such peace? How does your Christian faith shape your attitude toward life?

Take Away

✧ What, for you, is the "take home" item from this conversation?

Devotional Context

Bible passages like Philippians 4 are great to read devotionally. We can take a promise-filled phrase and turn it into a prayer. For example, in verse 5b, we can pray that we will be open to sense God's nearness, or that a friend who is desperately alone and struggling might embrace the Lord who is near. Each thought will suggest different prayers for you and for others. Reading Scripture devotionally deepens our spirituality and enriches our relationship with Jesus. Try reading Philippians 4 this way over the next days, two or three verses a day.

Only the Best

Getting Started

"I think the GIGO principle – garbage in, garbage out – applies to life as well as computers. What we read, watch, and talk about affects us. If it is mostly garbage, we end up in the garbage dump." What do you think about that statement? What, for you, constitutes "garbage"?

Listening to Paul

Read Philippians 4:8-9

Talk About It

✕ Thoughtful pagans would have agreed 100% with Paul's list of qualities to seek in one's life. These virtues were praised by Greek philosophers and thinkers. Paul urged believers to conduct themselves according to the finest norms of their society. What do you think of this statement: "Sometimes society teaches Christians about values -- right and wrong -- rather than the other way around"?

✕ In addition to the best values of our society, what other values do you think Christians should embrace? (Clue: Paul mentions some in Philippians 2:1-11, especially verse 5; what would you add? How about a four-letter word?)

✕ Talk about a book, movie, or TV program that lifted your spirits. When you feel a need for uplift, where do you turn?

✕ How would you describe the difference between "everyone does it" and "follow the highest values"?

✕ How does what Paul says in verse 9 differ from our saying, "Do as I say, not as I do"? What do you think others learn, receive, hear, and see in you?

✕ A friend confides to you, "I very seldom talk about church or Jesus at work, with friends, or even at home. I'm afraid people will think I'm a hypocrite. If people know I'm a Christian, then they'll start judging me if I'm not perfect – and I certainly am not!" How would you counsel your friend?

Take Away

✕ You go home and someone asks you, "What did you learn?" How would you answer?

Lutheran Theological Context

Luther thought of secular society as God's "left hand." It was responsible to God for maintaining the justice that God desired. It also brought a lot of joy and beauty, such as music which delighted Luther. Christians live out their vocation in the secular world. Work to improve society is as worthy of a Christian's stewardship as work within the church.

Using God's Gifts

Getting Started

Many of us get more solicitation for gifts than we can comfortably handle. How do you decide which you will support and which you will not?

Listening to Paul

Read Philippians 4:15-20

Talk About It

✕ What was different about the folks at Philippi compared to some other congregations? What do you think motivated them to support Paul's work in places far from Philippi?

✕ Some people say that sending money to meet a need lacks the punch of getting personally involved. What do you think? What advantages does "sending money" have over personal involvement? How can we do both?

✕ How would you explain Paul's meaning in verse 17?

✕ The Philippians sent one of their members, Epaphroditus, along with their gift. He brought personal support. What personal gifts do you have that can bring support and love to friends facing difficulties?

✕ Our minds, our energy, our skills are gifts from God. These gifts generate money. God calls us to use these assets wisely to meet our responsibilities for family, friends, community – and the work of the Gospel. How do you determine the share you give to the Gospel?

✕ Share your ending to this sentence: If I really, truly, absolutely, and without hesitation believed what Paul says in verse 19, I would...

Take Away

Many of us are afraid to be generous with ourselves or our means. What insight from this discussion might help you address your fears?

Literary Context

This passage is a thank-you note for the gifts sent by the church at Philippi. Interestingly, Paul never says "thank you" in so many words. He appreciates the gift, but he is content with or without the gift. He wants to highlight God rather than himself. So he says that the gift is "a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God." In other words, the gift is not to a good friend, Paul, but to God in our joint mission for the Gospel.