



# PHILIPPIANS DISCIPLESHIP MANUAL

## **Introduction for Journey Leaders**

The Philippians Discipleship Manual is a resource designed to help followers of Christ to better understand the journey of faith with Jesus and take steps toward greater faithfulness and maturity. Instead of the more usual way of doing a Bible book study (going from beginning to end), this is a thematic study of Paul's letter to the Philippians, focusing on six themes that cut across this letter and are significant to our lives as Jesus' disciples. In this regard, if you don't mind marking up your paper Bible or have Bible software like Logos, I encourage you to go through the assigned readings and highlight them in Philippians according to theme.

What you'll find over the course of these weeks is that we are going to cover just about every verse in Philippians, some several times as the same Scripture speaks to more than one theme of the faith journey. For example, the Apostle introduces every theme except "imitation" in the first eight verses of the letter, so the opening Scripture will become especially familiar to the reader.

## Resource Overview

The six discipleship themes are:

**Journey of Transformation**

**Journey of Grace**

**Journey in Community**

**Journey of Imitation**

**Journey of Missional Partnership**

**Journey of Joy**

This manual includes three elements:

1) **Teaching** on the six journey themes. For solo travelers, this could be part of their weekly study. The teaching could also be used to introduce the themes in a class or group. For pastors, the teaching could be used as sermon starters for a six week message series on discipleship. I've received the suggestion that I video this teaching and plan to do it early March 2024 and make it available to you.

2) 7 weeks of **Personal Bible Reading and Reflection** (5 readings per week). The first six focus on the discipleship themes. The final week is for review, application, and next steps in the journey. For me this is the heart of the manual as people engage with God's Word. It could be used as a stand-alone devotional resource. But I recommend using it in connection with a group/class and/or a sermon series. I've had a men's group do the readings followed by discussion next week. Increasingly I find repetition to be of great benefit as this Discipleship Manual allows us to live in this portion of God's Word so that we can live it out.

Most of the Scripture quotations come from the NIV84 translation. But, of course, I would encourage using a couple of your favorite translations as you do your own reading and reflection.

3) **A Group Study and Discussion Guide** which includes most of the same Scriptures and questions that were provided in the personal Bible reading, with some additions and parallel Scripture passages. Again, this could be used as a stand-alone resource for groups but I strongly encourage group members who are willing to do a little homework to do their own individual reading of the Word.

In terms of the ideal audience for this discipleship manual, I wrote it especially for two groups: 1) newer Christians who have confessed faith in Jesus and are asking "Now what?" and 2) Christians who have been attending worship with some regularity perhaps for years but know that Jesus has more in mind for their relationship with him. More mature Christians may also find the discipleship lens to be a fruitful way of reading Philippians.

We are currently at work making this available in a number of formats.  
PDF and Word version of entire Manual  
PDF of Personal Bible Reading and Reflection  
PDF of Group Study and Discussion Guide  
Web version by theme

Find the link at <https://www.mypeacechurch.com/getting-started-discover>

## **Theological Perspective**

Just a quick theological perspective on this study, especially for church leaders. In line with the content of Paul's letter to the Philippians, the emphasis here is on sanctification, the Holy Spirit's ongoing work of bringing spiritual transformation into our lives. While there is nothing especially controversial in this, I find in some Lutheran circles resistance to the notion that we can become more like Jesus in character, attitudes, and actions. Author Dallas Willard refers to this resistance as "poor, miserable sinner theology." I call it "Lutheran pessimism." My conviction is that we can both recognize the ongoing reality of sin in our lives and our need for forgiveness while at the same time by the Holy Spirit's power experience greater freedom over sin in our earthly lives and the joy of embodying more of Christ's character.

The both/and of the Gospel is that justification and sanctification are both good news as God works for us and in us. If you want a handle on this approach, it's a rejection of what I refer to as a current form of "Gospel reductionism". Back in the 1970's, Gospel reductionism was a phrase used to describe biblical scholarship that viewed the Bible as only God's Word when it was referencing the Gospel of God's saving work. This perspective was rightly rejected. Today's version of Gospel reductionism is reducing of Jesus' saving work to only justification and not including sanctification. This study affirms that "Yes, we have been declared "not guilty" through Jesus' saving work. (Romans 3:22-24) And yes, we "are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory" through Jesus saving work.'" (2 Corinthians 3:18)

Don't underestimate the importance and challenge of communicating this both/and in American church culture flowing out of the Reformation. We have so emphasized getting people into the church (baptism, confessing Christ, etc.) and not so much moving people on in their relationship with Christ. Dr. Steven Porter writes, "Persons need to know that becoming like Christ is a real and reliable opportunity. They need to know what to do when they find themselves struggling to make progress. Christian pastors and leaders need to know what they are doing when they implement spiritual formation. Spiritual formation is not a technique or a program or even a set of tried-and-true practices. It is a transformational way of life with Jesus. Understanding his way of life needs to be biblically grounded, theologically framed, and intelligently held forth as the center of Christian salvation and the primary purpose of Christian community. --- Steve Porter <https://conversatio.org/the-spiritual-formation-movement-whats-next/> More on the sanctification journey in the teaching section of week 1, The Journey of Transformation.

One additional observation. It is my conviction that the American church has lost a good measure of its “saltiness,” its spiritual influence, because our lives as Christians often look little different than those of non-Christians around us. Instead of becoming more like Jesus, we have become more like the surrounding culture. As my church put it in its most recent vision statement, spiritual growth and missional influence go hand in hand: “We understand and embrace the idea that only by being transformed can we effectively represent Christ, fulfill God’s will in our families, serve our community, and influence others with the love and truth of Jesus. Community members will notice that people who go to Peace Church are joyful, hopeful, accepting of others, and willing to extend themselves to serve others. People on a journey of change through the power of the Holy Spirit will attract non-Christians and Christians alike into relationship through which we can guide them toward Jesus, our True North.”

## **Open Source**

This is an open source resource to be shared, used, and adapted according to the needs of your ministry. I have no doubt that you can make the manual better (please share your ideas). The only thing I ask is that you would include my name and contact information with copies that you make because I am interested in conversations with others who share my passion for a transformative faith journey.

God’s blessings on your journey with Jesus!

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# Week 1 Journey of Transformation

**Teaching** (this teaching is far longer than the ones that follow because it provides the Biblical teaching that underlies the whole notion of journey with Jesus leading to life change ... for pastors, this could be starters for several sermons!)

## Rock and Journey

One of the most common ways of picturing life is that of a journey ... that of traveling from birth through childhood on into adulthood and finally if God so grants, the road of seniorhood. Even people who do little or no physical travel in their lives, who rarely stray from home, such people still use journey language to speak of life's "travels". We say things like, "Look how far we've come" or "We're at a crossroads" or "We're stuck" or "We're at a dead-end" ... all phrases that can be used while literally traveling but are also used by people who aren't on any journey at all ... except to travel through life.

Such "journey" language can be used to describe the great adventure of following Jesus. It has ...

- a beginning of new birth by the Holy Spirit
- it travels a path of walking in God's ways
- it is going somewhere as we become more like Jesus with a final destination of eternal life with God
- we have travel companions to help and encourage us
- and there is much joy and beauty along the way.

It might be helpful to compare the two complementary "poles" of the Christian faith: rock and journey. "Rock" emphasizes the spiritual security we have in the completed work of Christ and the solid foundation of his Word. "Rock" centers on justification by faith: we are justified by God, declared "not guilty," and made right with God through the sacrificial death of Jesus. "Rock" theology sees the faithful Christian standing firm upon the unchanging foundation of Christ and his Word. With our lives founded on the Rock (the person and work of Jesus), we are able to live with confidence and security. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we remain immovable in our Christian convictions. God's Word teaches: *"Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone."* (Ephesians 2:19–20, NIV84)

In contrast, "Journey" emphasizes the ongoing change in the Christian experience as we are led by God's Spirit through the Word. "Journey" theology sees Christian faith and life as a "walk" with God: with change, discovery, and spiritual growth being the norm. Instead of remaining in one place, the Christian is on the move with the Lord. Such change is vital because life this side of heaven remains deeply affected by sin. This means that while we "now" experience many spiritual blessings in Christ, there is much that is "not yet" present individually and corporately. The disciple's life then is an experience of growth as we become what we are--we grow into our status as saints as the

Spirit empowers us to obey the Word and develops in us a more Christ-like character. It is the work of the Holy Spirit in which we fully participate (see the section on the Way). This is the emphasis in Paul's letter to the Philippians: *"Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus."* (Philippians 3:12–14, NIV84)

### **A Journey involves Movement**

The most obvious characteristic of a journey is that there is movement. In the Scriptures, we find frequent use of movement metaphors in the verbs "to walk" and "to run." In the Old Testament, the verb is *halakh* (walk). Two examples from the Psalms: *"for your love is ever before me, and I walk continually in your truth."* (Psalm 26:3, NIV84) *"Teach me your way, O LORD, and I will walk in your truth; give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name."* (Psalm 86:11, NIV84) So it is that in Judaism the totality of God's laws that direct life are referred to as the Halakhah ... following the Lord is a way to walk.

The New Testament writers like the Apostle John, steeped in the Hebrew Scriptures, use similar language: *"But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin."* (1 John 1:7, NIV84) *"Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did."* (1 John 2:6, NIV84)

The Apostle Paul, seizing on the Greco-Roman obsession with athletics and perhaps reflecting his own level of missional intensity, also uses the verb "to run." *"Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize."* (1 Corinthians 9:24, NIV84) *"You were running a good race. Who cut in on you and kept you from obeying the truth?"* (Galatians 5:7, NIV84)

The movement language speaks to a life of progress toward spiritual, intellectual, emotional, relational, moral, and vocational wholeness in Christ. In fact, there is a kind of competitive intensity to the athletic language of the Apostle Paul. Having been given eternal life by Jesus, Paul now wants to compete all out for Jesus against the forces of sin and unbelief that continue to be at work in the world despite their defeat on Good Friday and Easter. And Paul wants the same for his readers: *"Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling,"* (Philippians 2:12, NIV84)

Martin Luther certainly put the greater emphasis on "rock" Christianity. But he also recognized the journey. In commenting on the twelfth chapter of Romans, Luther writes: *"... here the apostle speaks of progress, for he is speaking to those who have now begun to be Christians. Their life is not a static matter (in quiescere), but is in motion (in moveri) from good to better, just as a sick man is in movement from sickness to health ..."* (Martin Luther, Luther's Works (vol. 21): 300, quoted in Heino Kadai ed., Accents in Luther's Theology, 116.)

## The Journey Forms Us

The New Testament speaks of this inner movement of heart, mind, and soul toward Jesus as being “formed” by the power of the Holy Spirit. All of us are being formed in both healthy and unhealthy ways 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 52 weeks a year ... even when we are asleep. New neural connections are made and reinforced and old ones discarded, habits are strengthened or weakened, knowledge gained or forgotten, selfless love expands or contracts. The question is not whether we’re being formed, the question is what factors and forces have the greatest influence on our formation. If for you it’s family, you will be formed in the direction of your family’s values, positive or negative. If peers, it will be toward the prevailing lifestyle of your group. If it’s TV news, it could well be that you are being formed to be angry and cynical. Many a pastor’s work email forms them to be information junkies. Many an American’s email and text streams forms us to be discontented consumers looking for the next deal. We will all be impacted in varying degrees by different elements of the culture around us. But to follow Jesus well, it’s pretty much obvious that the Holy Spirit through God’s Word must be the greatest influence on our lives. And quite frankly, survey data indicates that this statement is not true for most American Christians. How true is it for you?

To move toward our destination is to be formed in the likeness of Jesus ... to take on more of his trust in God the Father, his thought processes, character, perspective, motivation, wisdom, habits, etc. This language of spiritual formation is not some sort of trendy buzzword coming from a New Age source. “Formation” comes directly out of New Testament word group of **morph - form** which includes three verbs. The Apostle Paul writes, “*My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed (morphed) in you ...*” (Galatians 4:19, NIV84) John Ortberg comments on this passage: “Paul said that they (his readers)--like us--are in a kind of spiritual gestation process. We are pregnant with possibilities of spiritual growth and moral beauty so great that they cannot be adequately described as anything less than the formation of Christ in our lives.” (John Ortberg, *The Life You’ve Always Wanted*, p. 25) To a society like ours that so prioritizes physical beauty, Jesus offers the incomparable beauty of the spirit and soul, of love and service. Arguably this is part of the Good News of the Gospel ... we are forgiven by Jesus and we are changed by Jesus to live a more good and beautiful life.

A second related word is **summorph, conform** ... meaning “to take on the same form as another.” Americans react instinctively against “conforming” because we are formed by our culture to assert our individuality, to be our own person. But for the Christ-follower, growth means something better than our individual mediocrity and self-centeredness. It means taking on the “forms” of Jesus: a similar devotion to God, similar compassion for people, a similar commitment to fulfill God’s mission of bringing his love to lost people, etc. Just as an athletic team will tend to take on the personality of its coach, so God’s plan is that we will take on, conform ourselves to, the very Person of Jesus.

The third word which also shows up in English is **metamorph – transform**. Paul writes in Romans 12:2, “*Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be*



*transformed (metamorphed) by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will.*" (Romans 12:2, NIV84) The New Testament perspective is that our lives should never really be the "same old, same old." As much as we tend to resist change, God's desire is for ongoing change, transformation, to be more like Jesus. To simply be content with a spiritual, moral, and vocational status quo is a form of acedia ... a laziness of the soul that by church tradition is one of the seven deadly sins. Acedia that characterizes Lutherans sounds like, "Since I'm going to heaven by grace, why bother growing? Why seek God in his Word, why develop relationships with other Christians? Isn't same old, same old, easier?" Perhaps easier, but not better, not as rich, not as flourishing, not as influential.

One men's group in using the group study guide began a list of the kinds of transformation that the Holy Spirit can bring about in our lives:

- Less unnecessary anxiety
- Love of others
- Knowledge of God's Word
- Less self-centeredness
- Depth of relationship
- Sensitivity to God's leading
- More consistent sense of his presence

What aspects of transformation come to your mind?

### **A Journey follows a Way**

Physical journeys follow some kind of route, road, or path. They provide a way to travel from where you are to where you want to go. The words for "way" throughout the Scriptures are frequently used not just for physical paths, but for a way of life, especially life with God. Here are just two of many examples.

*"Walk in all the way that the LORD your God has commanded you, so that you may live and prosper and prolong your days in the land that you will possess."*

(Deuteronomy 5:33, NIV84)

*"For this reason I am sending to you Timothy, my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church."* (1 Corinthians 4:17, NIV84)

There are so many aspects to the Jesus' **way**. Most importantly, Jesus himself is the "way" (John 14:6) as it is only through his saving work on the cross that we can be reconciled with God. Secondly, faith in Jesus is the way we receive the gift of salvation and continue in a relationship with him (Hebrews 11:6). Thirdly, God's way is one of exclusive devotion to him (Judges 2:17) It is obedience to his commands (Deuteronomy 5:33). It is a way of love (2 John 6). It is a way of fruitfulness as we remain connected to him (Colossians 1:10).

What is deserving of particular focus, however, are the practices of the life of faith that are a key part of the "walk" and lead to greater spiritual fitness for the journey. We draw on more athletic language from the Apostle Paul as he speaks of training. He told a young pastor named Timothy, "... train yourself to be godly. For physical training is of



*some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.*“ (1 Timothy 4:7-8, NIV84) He told the ancient church in Corinth, *“Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.”* (1 Corinthians. 9:25, NIV84) His readers would have known exactly what he was talking about because the Isthmian Games outside Corinth were second only to the Olympic Games in their fame and importance in Greece. The ancient Greeks celebrated athletic discipline and success at a level unrivaled by other civilizations that era. They realized that excellence could be achieved only through training. And now Paul was adapting this understanding to following Jesus Christ. He was calling his readers and us to make the same kind of commitment to excellence as we pursue spiritual training.

Training has been defined as doing what we can do to bring about that which we cannot now do. Perhaps right now you could not walk or run 10 miles (without a lot of suffering). However, unless you have a disability, likely you could begin to train and gain the necessary fitness. In physical training, the athlete cannot directly increase his/her cardiovascular capacity or muscle mass. But what the athlete can do is to put regular stress on the body by way of aerobic and weight workouts. And the way God has designed the body is that it responds to the training practices with changes going on at the cellular level. With training consistency and patience, we gain fitness.

By analogy, we can't take on the mind of Christ, grow in deeper faith, and become a person of sacrificial love by wishing it so. But by engaging in spiritual training centered on God's Word, we trust that God will be at work at a soul level transforming every aspect of our lives. We challenge our minds by engaging in the practices of study and reflection on God's Word and over time the Holy Spirit enables us to think differently. We connect more significantly with other Christians and the Holy Spirit gives us a deeper experience of his love and increases our vision for a Christ-like life. We invest time and energy in service and witness and the Holy Spirit changes our character to be more generous and sacrificial. John Ortberg uses the catch phrase that it's all about training, not trying.

Further, just as getting physical exercise once a week is likely not sufficient to gain greater fitness, so spiritual training must go beyond a once a week worship service. It is a daily engagement with Jesus.

In the author's church, we speak of three areas of training.

Discover: Experience in a fresh way the love and truth of God as received through Jesus in His Word.

Grow: Walk in genuine community and build up the body of Christ.

Go: Take the gift of God's love to others through witness and service.

You can check out more on this at <https://www.mypeacechurch.com/faith-journey>

### **Finally, a journey involves a destination.**

Of course, the ultimate destination is heaven (Philippians 3:20-21). The intermediate destinations, perhaps we could use the word “waypoints,” are lives that reflect more of

Jesus. It is such a life toward which Paul “presses on” (Philippians 3:12-14). It is a life growing into Christ (Ephesians 4:15).

## Personal Bible Reading and Reflection

<b>Week 1</b>	<b>Journey of Transformation</b>
Week 2	Journey of Grace
Week 3	Journey in Community
Week 4	Journey of Imitation
Week 5	Journey of Missional Partnership
Week 6	Journey of Joy
Week 7	Journey Review

### **Philippians 1:3-6, 9-11**

Paul speaks of his assurance that God will complete the work that he started in the lives of the Philippian believers. What was the ultimate basis for such assurance (see 2:6-11)? What was the evidence that God was at work in their lives (1:5)? What can sometimes discourage you in your journey of faith? Where do you find encouragement? In verses 9-11, what does Paul see as being one of the goals of the journey? Dr. Cohick writes, “*He wants their love to grow to overflowing. In so doing, the Philippians will gain a more godly view of the world and a better discernment on how to live in a way that honors God. Paul connects love and intellect, a combination that is worth exploring a bit, since we tend not to make such connections today ... Paul believes that as the Philippians’ love grows more and more, they will think differently about God and the world.*” (Lynn H. Cohick, *Philippians*, 36–37). How does God’s love change the way we see ourselves and the world?

### **Philippians 1:19-26**

Paul’s faith journey has led him to be imprisoned (most likely in Rome, see 4:22). He is uncertain as to the outcome, although he thinks that most likely he’ll be released. In whatever turns his journey takes, what does he fervently desire (v.20)? How has faith in Christ helped you deal with negative, even painful experiences in your journey? What opportunities did you have in those tough times to “exalt” or “honor” Christ (v.20)? How do you understand the phrase “for me to live is Christ” for your own journey (v.21)? What does progress (or being “formed” as mentioned in this week’s Teaching) in the Christian life look like to you (v.25)?

### **Philippians 2:12-13, 16**

This passage can at first glance seem a bit troublesome to Lutheran and other Protestant Christians because it speaks of our effort in living out our salvation. Be sure, we don’t earn a relationship with God by our good works (see Ephesians 2:8-9). But we can live out our faith with commitment and fruitfulness. One writer comments, “Paul has in mind a ‘continuous, sustained, strenuous effort’, which is elsewhere described under the imagery of a pursuit, a following after, a pressing on, a contest, a fight, or a race (Phil. 3:12; cf. Rom. 14:19; 1 Cor. 9:24–27; 1 Tim. 6:12).” (Peter Thomas O’Brien, *The Epistle*

to the *Philippians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, 279.) React to author Dallas Willard's statement "Grace is opposed to earning, it is not opposed to effort." Agree or disagree? What for you has been the hardest part of "working out" your salvation? How have you seen God at work in you "to will and to work for his good pleasure"?

### **Philippians 3:12-14**

Paul picks up again the theme of running the race for Jesus. Mark Keown comments, "... Paul is picturing himself as an athlete, obeying the call of his "owner, manager, coach, and mentor" Jesus, full of his energizing Spirit, still racing toward the finish line (death or the return of Christ). It is at this point of gaining the prize that he will be raised from the dead (3:10–11), experience the fullness of bodily transformation (3:20–21), and enter the complete experience of eternal life. He will also enter into the totality of personal and real relationship with the incarnate Christ, be found in him, and know him completely (3:8–9)—he will, in fact, be with Christ (1:23)." (Mark J. Keown, *Philippians*, 194.) In this life, we are always a work in progress. How do you want to "press on" in your faith journey in this season of your life? What do you hope and pray that God will do in your life this year?

### **Philippians 3:20-21**

The idea of kingdom "citizenship" is central to Paul's letter to the Philippians. The people of Philippi were very proud of their Roman citizenship after having been established as a Roman colony in 42 BC, a bit of official Italian soil in geographically northern Greece. But Paul states that far more important is their heavenly citizenship. They carry a Jesus passport on their journey. What perks and protection come with that passport? What calling and expectations? What does it mean to you to serve as an ambassador of heaven on earth? What is the final transformation that we can expect on our journey?

## **Group Study and Discussion Guide**

1) What has been one of your favorite trips that you've made? What made it special?

### **Philippians 1:3-6, 9-11**

2) Paul speaks of his assurance that God will complete the work that he started in the lives of the Philippian believers. What was the evidence that God was at work in their lives (1:5; Epaphroditus)?

3) What can sometimes discourage us in our journey of faith?

One group responded:

- If you think you're alone
- Resistance ... to your faith, skepticism
- Unanswered prayers
- Losing someone you love

- Looking out at the world
  - Distractions
  - Same old battles ... with the sinful nature
  - Uncertainty
- 4) Where do you find encouragement?
- Encouragement
  - Grace
  - Promises
  - Scripture
  - Mentors
  - Answered prayers
  - Patience
  - “You’re a different person”
  - No promise of earthly heaven ... “In this world you will have trouble” - Jesus
- 5) In verses 9-11, how does Paul describe goals of the journey?

### **Philippians 1:18b-26**

- 6) Paul’s faith journey has led him to be imprisoned (most likely in Rome, see 4:22). He is uncertain as to the outcome, although he thinks that most likely he’ll be released. In whatever turns his journey takes, what does he fervently desire (v.20)?
- 7) How has faith in Christ helped you deal with negative, even painful experiences in your journey? How have those painful experiences helped develop your faith?
- 8) What does progress in the Christian life look like to you (v.25)?

### **Philippians 2:12–16**

This passage can at first glance seem a bit troublesome to Lutheran Christians because it speaks of our effort in living out our salvation. Be sure, we don’t earn a relationship with God by our good works (see Ephesians 2:8-9). But we can live out our faith with commitment and fruitfulness. One writer comments, “Paul has in mind a ‘continuous, sustained, strenuous effort’, which is elsewhere described under the imagery of a pursuit, a following after, a pressing on, a contest, a fight, or a race (Phil. 3:12; cf. Rom. 14:19; 1 Cor. 9:24–27; 1 Tim. 6:12).” (Peter Thomas O’Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, 279.)

- 9) React to author Dallas Willard's statement "Grace is opposed to earning, it is not opposed to effort." Agree or disagree?
- 10) What for you has been a difficult part of "working out" your salvation?
- 11) How have you seen God at work in you "to will and to work for his good pleasure"?

### **Philippians 3:12–14**

Paul picks up again this theme of running the race for Jesus. Mark Keown comments, "... Paul is picturing himself as an athlete, obeying the call of his "owner, manager, coach, and mentor" Jesus, full of his energizing Spirit, still racing toward the finish line (death or the return of Christ)." (Mark J. Keown, *Philippians*, 194.)

- 12) In this life, we are always a work in progress. How do you want to "press on" in your life of faith this year?
- 13) What do you hope and pray that God will do in your life this year?

### **Philippians 3:20–21**

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- 14) What perks and protection come with that passport?
- 15) What calling and expectations?
- 16) What is the final transformation of the Christian journey?
- 17) What is your biggest takeaway from this focus on the Christian life as a journey of transformation?

## Week 2 Journey of Grace

### Teaching

The word "grace" is one of those "churchy" sounding words that especially Lutheran preachers like to toss around even though at least some listeners misunderstand what they're talking about. "Grace" is what you say before meals, right? Or "grace" is that which possesses beauty and elegance of movement or design. Or to grace an event is to give it the honor of your presence.

Still, despite its many other meanings, the word "grace" is such a powerful Biblical word that it is worth holding onto, even if that means having to continually define it for people. **In the theological sense, grace is God's attitude of unconditional love and mercy toward sinful, undeserving humankind. Instead of dealing with us according to His justice, He sees us through the lenses of grace because of the suffering and death of Jesus Christ.** That means that as God looks down upon us, he is no longer keeping score in his logbook - counting up all the good and bad things we have done to determine if we belong in heaven. *"For by grace you have been saved through faith . . ."* (Ephesians 2:8, NIV84) the Bible tells us. Salvation, a right relationship with God, is not our doing - not because of our good works. It is God's doing in Jesus Christ.

Many people (including Christians!) have a tough time with grace. That's illustrated by the stunning turn of events back in 1989 when the Berlin Wall fell and East and West Germany were reunited. What many were not aware of at the time was the role the church, particularly Lutheran churches, played in what was a relatively peaceful revolution. East Germans began gathering on Monday evenings in churches where they could honestly speak their mind about the future of their country. These support groups became prayer services filling the churches and cathedrals. In large measure, it was these prayer services that determined the peacefulness and purposefulness of the protest that followed.

So Lutheran churches and pastors became heroes in East Germany, right? Well, not exactly. For you see the same power of grace that pushed the drive for freedom continued to show itself through the church. In particular, one Lutheran pastor who was a significant leader in the political revolution took the ailing and alienated Eric Honecker into his home for a couple months. It is an amazing irony that the former leader of the anti-Christian East German government was sheltered in the home of a devout Christian. And you might guess, many East Germans couldn't understand that. Why would a pastor take his former enemy into his home? Why? - by amazing grace. Grace is not giving people what they deserve, its giving them what they need. Many East Germans wanted Honecker to suffer. This pastor has chosen the path of loving his enemy.

That may well seem outrageous. And it is. Grace is outrageous. It disturbs our normal sense of justice that people should get what they deserve. To quote Robert Capon as he uses the analogy of playing cards to describe our discomfort with God's grace:

“Restore to us, Preacher, the comfort of merit and demerit. Prove for us that there is at least something we can do, that we are still, at whatever dim recess of our nature, the masters of our relationships. Tell us, Prophet, that in spite of all our nights of losing, there will yet be one redeeming card of our very own to fill the inside straight we have so long and so earnestly tried to draw to. But do not preach us grace. It will not do to split the pot evenly at four in the morning and break out the Chivas Regal. We insist on being reckoned with. Give us something, anything; but spare us the indignity of this indiscriminate acceptance.” (Robert Farrar Capon, *Between Noon & Three: Romance, Law & the Outrage of Grace*)

The human spirit rebels at the outrageous idea that God simply accepts us for Jesus' sake. We want to make ourselves worthy. We like laws, lists of do's and don'ts. But the Lord comes to us and says - "Not necessary for a relationship with me. I accept and forgive you without condition. Receive the gift of my outrageous love."

It is this love of Jesus that transforms us. It's not God's laws - although laws can certainly change outward behavior. The most powerful change agent of what's inside - the heart, the spirit, the attitudes, the character - is God's outrageous grace. Only such undeserved love can take the "chip" off the person's shoulders who feels life hasn't been fair; only such love brings peace and freedom to the driven person trying to prove himself; only such love convinces the person who feels an outsider that she is accepted; only such love lifts the guilt from the sinner; only such love gives new hope and fresh start to those who feel like failures; only such love can bring fulfillment to those who feel empty; only such love can crack the defenses of the hardened cynic and feel the spirit with lasting joy.

One of the most amazing examples of amazing grace in the Scriptures is that of the Apostle Paul himself. In his own words, *“For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.”* (1 Corinthians 15:9–10, NIV84) Paul's life was transformed by Jesus on the road to Damascus and what seems to have been the Holy Spirit's personal discipling that followed (Galatians 1:15-18). He did a 180 on Jesus and came to realize just how precious is the grace and forgiveness offered through him.

This is why Paul in Philippians 3:7-9 speaks of his willingness to leave behind the status and achievements that were his as a devout Pharisee. They were rubbish in comparison to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ. Grace changes lives!

Our entire journey with Jesus is powered by God's grace, his “gift love” offered to us through the saving work of Jesus. Daily we need his forgiveness, his sustaining strength to resist temptation, and his empowerment to fulfill our calling. One thing you'll notice beginning this week is that sections of Philippians will occasionally be repeated as we look at them from different angles of the discipleship journey.



## Personal Bible Reading and Reflection

Week 1	Journey of Transformation
<b>Week 2</b>	<b>Journey of Grace</b>
Week 3	Journey in Community
Week 4	Journey of Imitation
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Week 6	Journey of Joy
Week 7	Journey Review

### **Philippians 1:2,7**

“Grace to you and peace” seems like such a familiar greeting that readers can quickly rush by these words and move on to the rest of the letter. But the standard Greek beginning to such letter would be “Greetings and good health.” It was not common to include the divine. But Paul knows that the basis for his relationship with them is in God’s grace and peace given through Christ Jesus and his prayer is that they would experience the full measure of that grace and peace in their daily lives. Mark Keown writes, “The greeting, then, is not paying lip service, but is a prayer for them to receive ... salvation, perseverance under pressure, ministry, protection, provision, generosity, harmony and unity, joy, hope, love, and eternal life.” (Mark J. Keown, *Philippians*, vol. 1, 111.) What does it mean to you to receive God’s grace? Which of the benefits Keown lists above do you most treasure?

### **Philippians 2:5-11**

Philippians is not a detailed theological presentation like Paul’s letter to the Romans. It does, however, contain one of the most beautiful statements in Scripture of Jesus’ mission in what many scholars think was an early Christian hymn. It describes the greatest act of gracious service as Jesus sets aside divine honor to become a human being and go to the cross for us. Lynn Cohick comments: “The point of this passage, then, is to show the character of God. From our human wisdom vantage point, we might think Christ would seek his own power, yet Christ shows that God does not grasp; rather, God gives himself. In this reading, the verb “emptied” or “made himself nothing” (2:7) is understood as further explaining what “being in the form of God” entails. It is both a rejection of taking advantage of his equality with God and an acceptance of or embracing of servanthood.” (Lynn Cohick, *Philippians*, p.117). React to the idea of God being a humble servant. How has Jesus served you through his life and death? How does God serve you every day?

### **Philippians 3:2-11**

In this passage, Paul is countering the message of the so-called Judaizers who want the Christians of Philippi to keep following Jewish traditions like circumcision. Paul states that so powerful is the draw of God’s grace in Jesus, that he has left his Jewish attainments behind. For he knows that his righteousness, his becoming right with God, comes not by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ. What do you think the old Paul (before his conversion) would have been like? How had God’s grace in Jesus changed him? How has it changed you?

### **Philippians 3:20-21**

Paul looks forward to his eternal destination but is also challenging us to live as citizens of heaven now. NT Wright comments: “ ‘We are citizens of heaven,’ Paul declares in verse 20. At once many modern Christians misunderstand what he means. We naturally suppose he means ‘and so we’re waiting until we can go and live in heaven where we belong’. But that’s not what he says, and it’s certainly not what he means. If someone in Philippi said, ‘We are citizens of Rome,’ they certainly wouldn’t mean ‘so we’re looking forward to going to live there’. Being a colony works the other way round. The last thing the emperors wanted was a whole lot of colonists coming back to Rome. The capital was already overcrowded and underemployed. No: the task of the Roman citizen in a place like Philippi was to bring Roman culture and rule to northern Greece, to expand Roman influence there (Tom Wright, *Paul for Everyone: The Prison Letters: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon*, 126.) Why is having heavenly citizenship such good news? What responsibilities does it include? How do you experience your earthly body being “lowly” or “weak” (depending on the translation)? What do you imagine your heavenly body being like?

### **Philippians 4:6-7**

Living in God’s grace, we can experience far less anxiety and far more of the peace that Paul describes as “surpassing all understanding.” In what ways would this “peace” have been so important to Paul as he was in prison (see 1:19ff)? In what ways would this “peace” have been so important to his readers as they faced persecution and uncertainty in Philippi? How is this “peace” important to you in your current life situation? What’s the relationship between grace and peace?

## **Group Study and Discussion Guide**

- 1) How would you define “grace” as a Christian?
- 2) What was an experience in which someone showed you grace?

### **Philippians 1:2, 7–8**

Mark Keown writes, “The greeting, then, is not paying lip service, but is a prayer for them to receive ... salvation, perseverance under pressure, ministry, protection, provision, generosity, harmony and unity, joy, hope, love, and eternal life.” (Mark J. Keown, *Philippians*, vol. 1, 111.)

- 3) What does it mean to you to receive God’s grace?
- 4) Which of the benefits Keown lists above do you most treasure?

### **Philippians 2:5–11**

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greatest act of gracious service as Jesus sets aside divine honor to become a human being and go to the cross for us.

- 5) React to the idea of God being a humble servant.
- 6) How has Jesus served you through his life and death? How does God serve you every day?

### **Philippians 3:2–11**

In this passage, Paul is countering the message of the so-called Judaizers who want the Christians of Philippi to keep following Jewish traditions like circumcision. Paul states that so powerful is the draw of God's grace in Jesus, that he has left his Jewish attainments behind. For he knows that his righteousness, his becoming right with God, comes not by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ.

- 7) How had God's grace in Jesus changed Paul?
- 8) How has it changed you?

### **Philippians 3:20–21**

Paul looks forward to his eternal destination but is also challenging us to live as citizens of heaven now.

- 9) Why is having heavenly citizenship such good news?
- 10) What responsibilities does it include?

### **Philippians 4:6–7**

Living in God's grace, we can experience far less anxiety and far more of the peace that Paul describes as "surpassing all understanding."

- 11) In what ways would this "peace" have been so important to Paul and his readers as he was in prison and they dealt with persecution (see 1:19ff)?
- 12) How is this "peace" important to you in your current life situation? Describe the connection between this peace and receiving God's grace.
- 13) What is your biggest takeaway from this focus on the Christian life as a journey of grace?

# Week 3 Journey of Community

## Teaching

It is by God's design that followers of Jesus be a part of life-changing faith community called the church. The idea of a "Lone Ranger" Christian is really an oxymoron. Or to use a sports metaphor, following Jesus is a "TEAM game." Here are four ways that the power of community in Jesus is unleashed.

## Growth

The picture the Bible gives of the transforming faith journey is usually not of lone individuals becoming more like Jesus but of the body of Christians growing together. In Ephesians 4, the Apostle Paul writes, *"Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work."* The point is that we're connected in community and we will influence one another – creating a church culture that either fosters or hinders spiritual growth. We will influence each other by the example we set (positive or negative), by the kind of encouragement and support we provide, by whether or not we are praying for each other, and by our ability to speak to each other God's truth. Taken together, the sum total of our mutual influence is used by the Holy Spirit to create a church culture. To the degree that the culture of your church is spiritually healthy, you will experience Jesus' love more fully and will be moved to respond to Jesus with greater devotion. To the degree that it is unhealthy, you will tend to go through the motions of mere institutional religion and be content with an apathetic level of Christian commitment.

Further, we need each other's positive influence. For trying to follow Jesus alone will result in at best a mediocre Christian life. Here is an analogy in physical training. Running has typically been viewed as the ultimate individual pursuit and many runners do put lots of miles in alone. But the experience of many runners from recreational to the pros is that having a running partner has helped move them to the next level of fitness. You'll see that dynamic going on with high school or college cross-country teams as the combination of team camaraderie and mutual competition push runners to get better.

The author was a physics/math person in college and even as an undergrad began reading academic theology with great enjoyment. If you're thinking "nerd" ... that would be accurate. Yet his faith story was as much or more relational as intellectual. It began as for many children in their own families with parents who loved him and worshipped regularly and were involved in serving the church. A season of more adult commitment began between his junior and senior year of high school at what is now called Concordia-Chicago during a six week summer science program. He and a few other students began having faith conversations with a couple dorm assistants and God used those relationships to begin a new work within him. That was followed by joining the youth group back at church that fall. It continued at University of Wisconsin-

Madison, becoming part of a small group of young adults from several different churches who studied the Bible and did life together.

The importance of that relational network to his own spiritual formation became especially clear in retrospect when he left to go to seminary. Now you would think that going to study theology would result in accelerated development as a Jesus' follower. But that wasn't really the case. Most seminary students were super busy with classwork, part-time jobs, field work at their church assignments, and some with young families, and they just didn't make time for spiritual friendships. He didn't it was necessary since we were getting a truckload of theological teaching in the classroom along with chapel every day. Wasn't that enough of Jesus? Well, it was more than enough information, but the relational nurturing was largely missing. That first fall on the way back to St. Louis after a weekend visit in Madison, he wept on the train, not realizing it yet on an intellectual level but definitely emotionally what he had lost. It would be years later before he would re-engage with anyone other than his wife in discussing personal faith struggles and faith progress. Lutheran pastors in their meetings do little of that as it is far more comfortable to talk about doctrine than to have conversations about the state of our own souls. We so need other Christians to fan the flame of our faith.

### **Attraction**

Secondly, genuine community is a powerfully attractive force. It changed the life of a young woman named Chris. The author tells of finding a head high section of barbed wire fence on the UW-Madison campus and instead of going roller skating with a group of friends, ended up in the emergency room with a significant cut above his eye. These friends followed him to the hospital and while he was being sutured up, they prayed for his wellbeing. This demonstration of concern so impressed Chris that she began asking questions as to what exactly was going on here. The friends had an opportunity to tell her about how Jesus had given them the greatest gift of love and they were just trying to reflect a little of it by praying for a friend. That night Chris came to trust in Jesus as her Savior. You see, Christian community is powerfully attractive force, opening people's minds and hearts to learn of the basis for that community: the work of God in Christ.

We see the magnetic attraction of the first church: people saw the love and mutual service of those first Christians, they came to hear their message, and "... the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved." In Acts 5 we read: "*No one else dared join them, even though they were highly regarded by the people. Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number.*" (Acts 5:12-14, NIV84) Already, the religious leaders had come down against the church as being renegade Jews. But despite the threat of ostracism and persecution, this faith community was so attractive that people kept coming anyway. In what ways could your church grow as a magnetic community?

### **Mission**

Pursuing mission is a team game (which is the emphasis of week 5 on missional partnership). The first person to climb Mount Everest was Sir Edmund Hillary. Many might have the picture in their mind of a lone climber tackling the incredible challenges with heroic courage. Yes, Hillary was bold and courageous, but he was hardly

alone. First of all, he reached the top with a Sherpa climber named Tenzing Norgay – himself one of the most extraordinary climbers in history. Further, they were part of a British expedition led by Colonel John Hunt which had ten high altitude climbers. In addition to the climbers, Tenzing was charged with organizing a group of two to three hundred people who would carry the two and a half tons of supplies needed by the expedition to base camp. An elite group of 40 Sherpa porters would then carry those supplies needed to the advanced camps. The climb itself required great teamwork as two person teams would exhaust themselves cutting a route, spending themselves so that the next team could go higher.

Ultimately two pairs of climbers were given the opportunity to summit. The first failed in exhaustion. The second, Tenzing and Hillary triumphed. Tenzing wrote, *“For where would Hillary and I have been without the others? Without the climbers who had made the route and the Sherpas who had carried the loads? Without Bourdillon and Evans, Hunt and Du Namgyal, who had cleared the way ahead? Without Lowe and Gregory, Ang Hyima, Ang Tempra, and Penba, who were there only to help us? It was only because of the work and sacrifice of all of them that we were to have our chance at the top.”* Tenzing understood that what he called the “mountain way” was very much a team effort.

This “mountain way,” is really God’s way. As the writer of Ecclesiastes states: *“Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work.”* (Ecclesiastes 4:9, NIV84) The Lone Ranger approach doesn’t cut it anymore in church life nor in many other areas of human endeavor. From business to non-profit organizations, from software companies to medicine, individual performance is important but great products are made, great service is rendered, and great goals are reached by teams of people pursuing a common vision. To the extent that yours is a great church, it is because there is synergy of God-given abilities, God-inspired passion, and God-sustained sacrifice found in staff, lay leaders, and the many volunteer servants who come together so that you can fulfill your mission of making disciples. You need them. They need you.

### **Energy**

Life wears you out. Work, family life, church and community service all can be draining. We need relationships which energize us. Again Ecclesiastes: *“Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone?”* (Ecclesiastes 4:11 NIV84) Now the picture is from ancient Israel of a bunch of shepherds, living before the advent of down sleeping bags, huddling together on a cold night in the Judean hills so they don’t freeze to death. Our picture is of people living in an often cold cruel world who need the warmth and energy of others to stay on fire for Jesus.

You take a coal away from the fire, it goes out. Apart from the fire of other Christians, our faith begins to lose energy. We lose our awareness of God’s love and our motivation to be a part of his mission. We become discouraged by life and wonder whether God has forgotten about us. We need each other’s encouragement, energy, and passion. We need to experience the empowering presence of Jesus embodied in the network of

relationships called the church. If your own inner light seems to be dimming, it could be that you have been trying to live life on your own battery power. You need God's power given through this imperfect and yet incredible thing called the church, God's powerful community.

## Personal Bible Reading and Reflection

Week 1	Journey of Transformation
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Week 6	Journey of Joy
Week 7	Journey Review

Many commentators on this letter to the Philippians believe that Paul's concern for unity in the church community is a central reason for writing this letter. As evidenced in 4:1, Paul has special affection for these believers. They are important to him and they are important to one another. Thus Paul celebrates his partnership with the Philippians community and urges them to overcome their differences so that they can stand strong together.

### **Philippians 1:3-5, 7-8**

The key word in these verses is *koinania*. It's the Greek word for a close sharing together of life and service. It is often translated as fellowship or communion, here as partnership or a sharing in Gospel mission and life in Christ. Paul uses the word to describe the close bond with the Christians in Philippi who partnered with him by sending Epaphroditus to support Paul while he was in prison. More than that, together they sought to bear witness to Jesus no matter opposition or persecution. Who are your partners in following Jesus? Who do you have in your heart and they have you in their hearts (v.7)? How can you develop life-giving partnerships in this season of life?

### **Philippians 1:27-30**

Although often translations of v.27 hide the underlying language, here we run across again the importance of living as citizens of Jesus' eternal kingdom. The New Living Translation captures it: *"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."* (Philippians 1:27, NLT) Lynn Cohick explains the verb used only this once in Paul's writings and another time in one of his speech's in Acts: "We turn now to analyze *politeuesthe*. The root of the term is related to polis, the Greek term for "city." The verb signals a person's actions in the polis, namely, being a citizen. Combining these elements, it suggests living one's life especially as it relates to public or civic affairs. This verb also occurs in Acts 23:1 in Paul's defense of his behavior: *"I have fulfilled my duty to God in all good conscience."* The related noun *politeia*, used in Acts 22:28 and



Ephesians 2:12, indicates citizenship, the body politic, or civil polity. A second noun, *politeuma*, used in Philippians 3:20, has the sense of commonwealth status and often describes a group of foreigners within a city. It also can indicate the business of government.”

Dr. Cohick continues ... By this Paul is likely calling his readers either to stand firm against the non-Christian leaders in Philippi or against those within the church calling for circumcision (see Philippians 3:2-11). “Paul could be suggesting a dual allegiance, where Philippians carry out their civic duties, but set their hearts beyond the kingdom of Rome to the kingdom of God.” (Lynn H. Cohick, *Philippians*, 69.) In any case, they can accomplish this only by “standing together with one spirit and one purpose.” (v.27 NLT)

Why was it so crucial for those first Christians to stand together? In what ways do we still need each other in today’s American church? What are a good number of professing Christians missing when they think they don’t need Christian community?

### **Philippians 2:1-4**

But standing together isn’t always easy. We suspect that the Christians in Philippi had various conflicts including one Paul speaks to directly (see tomorrow’s reading). What motivates and empowers unity (2:1)? What is the goal of that unity (2:2)? How do we live to develop and maintain unity (2:3-4)? Given that we are all individuals with different opinions, what does it mean for the people of your church to be of “one mind”?

### **Philippians 4:1-3**

Here Paul specifically addresses conflict between two women, Euodia and Syntyche. We aren’t told what the issue was but Paul urges them to be of the “same mind.” The fact that they are mentioned by name suggests that they were important servant-leaders in the Philippian church. It could be, for example, that they represented different house churches meeting in the city. Why is it especially important for church leaders to be of one mind? What are typical areas of disagreement within churches? How can churches and individual Christians best deal with differences and pursue unity?

### **Philippians 4:21-23**

Unity is difficult enough in an individual church. But Paul sees a bond that connected those first generations of Christians across great distances and ethnic divides. As evidenced by his reference to the “emperor’s household,” likely Paul was in prison in Rome. This was typically a 4-6 week journey from Philippi (at best). But they were all saints together in Jesus, partners in the Gospel! What does it mean that you and fellow Christians are saints? What is our bond (if any) between saints in your city or region and saints in Africa or Asia? How can we live out our partnership in the Gospel on a regional and global basis?

## Group Study and Discussion Guide

Many commentators on this letter to the Philippians believe that Paul's concern for unity in the church community is a central reason for writing this letter. As evidenced in 4:1, Paul has special affection for these believers. They are important to him and they are important to one another. Thus Paul celebrates his partnership with the Philippians community and urges them to overcome their differences so that they can stand strong together.

1) In what setting have you found the most supportive community? (family, school, sports team, work, church, etc.)

### Philippians 1:3–8

The key word in these verses is *koinania*. It's the Greek word for a close sharing together of life and service. It is often translated as fellowship or communion, here as partnership or a sharing in Gospel mission and life in Christ. Paul uses the word to describe the close bond with the Christians in Philippi who partnered with him by sending Epaphroditus to support Paul while he was in prison. More than that, together they sought to bear witness to Jesus no matter opposition or persecution.

2) As you look back on various seasons of your life, who have been your most important partners in following Jesus?

3) How can this group be more supportive partners for each other?

### Philippians 1:27–30

Although often translations of v.27 hide the underlying language, the New Living Translation captures it: "Above all, you must live as citizens of heaven ..." Dr. Lynn Cohick notes, "Paul could be suggesting a dual allegiance, where Philippians carry out their civic duties, but set their hearts beyond the kingdom of Rome to the kingdom of God." (Lynn H. Cohick, *Philippians*, 69.) In any case, they can accomplish this only by "standing together with one spirit and one purpose." (v.27)

4) What difference does it make when we our citizenship in heaven takes precedence over any earthly citizenship?

5) Why was it so crucial for those first Christians to stand together as fellow citizens of Jesus' kingdom? In what ways do we still need each other in today's American church?

### Philippians 2:1–4 (NIV84)

But standing together isn't always easy. We suspect that the Christians in Philippi had various conflicts including one Paul speaks to directly (see tomorrow's reading).

6) What motivates and empowers unity (2:1)?

- 7) What is the goal of that unity (2:2)?
- 8) How do we live to develop and maintain unity (2:3-4)?
- 9) Given that we are all individuals with different opinions, what does it mean for the people of your church to be of “one mind”?

### **Philippians 4:1–3**

Here Paul specifically addresses conflict between two women, Euodia and Syntyche. We aren't told what the issue was but Paul urges them to be of the “same mind.”

- 10) Why is it especially important for church leaders to be of one mind?
- 11) What are typical areas of disagreement within churches? How are differences best handled in the pursuit of unity?

### **Philippians 4:21–23 (NIV84)**

Unity is difficult enough in an individual church. But Paul sees a bond that connected those first generations of Christians across great distances and ethnic divides.

- 12) What does it mean that you and fellow Christians have the status of saints?
- 13) What is our bond (if any) between saints in your area and saints on other continents?
- 14) How can we best live out our partnership in the Gospel on a regional and global basis?
- 15) What is your biggest takeaway from this focus on the Christian life as a journey of community?

## Week 4 Journey of Imitation

### Teaching

How is it that we are “formed” to be more faithful followers of Jesus? How is that we as followers “make disciples” by influencing others. The Reveal study done by Willowcreek Church with analysis of hundreds of congregations, points to the fact that while organized church ministries like worship services are important, much growth in faith maturity happens outside of formal church programming. More often it happens “life on life,” in individual and small group discipling, mentoring, and coaching relationships, and personal conversations.

This how Jesus trained his followers. Rabbis taught by words and then by how they lived. Lois Tverberg notes the way Jesus taught his disciples was in line with the tradition of Judaism. *“Jesus didn’t hand his disciples a textbook or give them a course syllabus. He asked each one of them to follow him—literally, to “walk after” him. He invited them to trek the byways at his side, living life beside him to learn from him as they journeyed. His disciples would engage in life’s activities along with him, observing his responses and imitating how he lived by God’s Word. You should follow so closely behind him as he traveled from town to town teaching that billows of sandy granules would cling to your clothes. As you walked after your rabbi, your heart would change.”* (Lois Tverberg. *Walking in the Dust of Rabbi Jesus: How the Jewish Words of Jesus Can Change Your Life* . Zondervan. Kindle Edition.)

Disciples took imitation of their rabbi very, very seriously. This is so much the case that the Jewish Talmud records one rabbi as saying, “Once I went in after R. Joshua to a privy, and I learned from him three things. I learned that one does not sit east and west but north and south; I learned that one evacuates not standing but sitting; and I learned it is proper to wipe with the left hand and not with the right.” (David Instone-Brewer, NT390 Jesus as Rabbi: The Jewish Context of the Life of Jesus, Logos Mobile Education (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016). Too much information! Another hid under his rabbi’s bed to learn how he made love with his wife. By the way, don’t do that or you’ll be arrested! The fact that these over the top examples are recorded in Jewish literature points to how important it was for disciples to model themselves after their rabbi.

Obviously we are not first century disciples following a first century rabbi. Jesus’ life was in so many ways different than ours. But we can see him in the Gospels: living out a life of obedience to his heavenly Father, carrying out his work as a rabbi, loving people, and sharing the Gospel of the Kingdom. We can then do the work of translating what this means for our 21<sup>st</sup> century lives of faith and obedience. We imitate Jesus as we seek to live like him and love him.

Part of the way we do this is by imitating other Christians and serving as a model for them. Since much of the disciple-making process is life on life, the work of the Holy Spirit in and through us matters. We should not overly spiritualize the process of life change as if it’s simply a matter of God’s Word being communicated with our role as messengers being irrelevant. Whether clergy or lay person, you as a unique ambassador

of Jesus matter to the Spirit's work; your relationships with both Christians and non-Christians are vital to the Spirit's work through you; and your Spirit-enabled influence will arise from the kind of life you lead as well as the divine Word you speak.

The Apostle Paul emphasizes this kind of person-to-person spiritual influence. He wrote to those first Christians, *"Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you."* (Philippians 4:9, NIV84) In a similar vein: *"Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ."* (1 Corinthians 11:1, ESV) Now if you take these verses completely out of context, it would appear that Paul was some kind of ego-maniac establishing a cult following. And to be honest, most church leaders today can't imagine themselves saying in so many words, "Imitate me ..." A humble recognition of our own sinfulness and our focus on Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit keep us from so overtly telling others to follow us.

But here's what Paul knew ... Christianity is a "Way" ... it is a journey with Jesus which includes not only gaining information about him and believing the right things, but also growing in our experience and living out of Jesus' love and truth. Put in another way, being a Christian is not just a "head trip" that you learn from a book but a fully embodied "walk" learned in community with others. We learn the "Way" not only through our personal engagement with God's Word, but also through other bodies ... through people. We see the Word taking flesh in others' lives, we experience Jesus' love and truth through our relationships with others, and we follow others who are leading us on the Way.

This relational learning isn't unique to the Jesus' Way. How do children learn the American Way (in whatever regional expression), or the Chinese Way, or the Nigerian Way? Those of us who love to read may find it hard to admit it, but they don't primarily learn it from a book. They "absorb it" from their parents, siblings, teachers, classmates, neighbors, media, etc. They watch, listen, and learn to walk a way of life. Spend time around toddlers and preschool children and you will see them repeating words you say and imitating behavior of adults and other children. It is a process of enculturation that goes on through God's remarkable gifts of the mind and the senses whether we are consciously aware of it or not.

So even for individualistic Americans who think we are self-made people doing it our own way, each of us will be deeply shaped by others around us. Paul knew that that first generation of Christians would be following somebody. Even though he wasn't perfect, it was best that they were imitating him. In his teaching, character, relationships, and actions, others would see the Jesus' Way embodied, and having experienced it through Paul, they would walk it themselves and in turn influence others. At the author's church, the language used is that each of us is being guided and in turn is called to guide others in our walk of faith.

Which is therefore to say that just as the Apostle Paul's life mattered in accomplishing the Spirit's work, so does yours and that of every Christ-follower. You may or may not have a formal teaching role in your church. But a smaller group with whom you regularly rub shoulders could gain a heart knowledge of God's forgiveness and patience

as they experience these from you. Others may learn the grand story of God's love from their pastors, but life on life, the people you invest your energy in will see how that story is changing your story ... indeed, how your life and theirs are being swept up into God's grand story of salvation.

Again, this sort of mutual shaping of lives goes on whether we are aware of it or not. But Scriptural teaching on imitation points to becoming more intentional on both the receiving and giving sides of the spiritual influence. We can be more intentional about who we are imitating by way of seeking out relationships with mature Christians, reading authors and listening to teachers who we have come to respect, and taking care in filtering the messages from celebrities and social media influencers. We can be more intentional about providing spiritual influence as we invest the time in building relationships and take risks in having spiritual conversations.

## **Personal Bible Reading and Reflection**

Week 1	Journey of Transformation
Week 2	Journey of Grace
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<b>Week 4</b>	<b>Journey of Imitation</b>
Week 5	Journey of Missional Partnership
Week 6	Journey of Joy
Week 7	Journey Review

### **Philippians 1:12-18**

Here Paul speaks of the surprising advancement of the Gospel during his lengthy stay in prison. Lynn Cohick comments: "From Paul's statement that the whole Praetorian guard (NIV "palace guard") is now aware of the gospel, we can safely assume that Paul has in mind the numerical increase of those who have heard the gospel. But since he also speaks of many believers emboldened to speak, we can also understand this progress to indicate that within the church itself, there is growth as many believers take steps of faith, trusting God as they tell his story of redemption. Advancement of the gospel for Paul, then, is both the increased number of people hearing that message and the increased number of believers sharing it." (Lynn H. Cohick, *Philippians*, 44) Evidently, at least a share of those believers have been inspired by Paul's courage to bear witness to Jesus even in prison; and perhaps even more importantly, they are greatly encouraged by God's faithfulness in working through Paul, imprisoned or not. Who has inspired you by their courage in following Jesus? Is there a particular hero from church history who has spurred you on to bear witness of Jesus? In who or what have you found great motivation to share the Gospel message?

### **Philippians 2:3-8**

Paul turns now from his own example to that of Jesus, from missional motivation to a character of humility. We are to imitate Jesus' humility. How did Jesus demonstrate divine/human humility? How do we "practice" humility? What does it mean to you to

imitate Jesus especially with regard to humility? In a journey of imitating Jesus, how can you avoid just giving up because his standard of holiness is so far beyond us?

### **Philippians 3:4-9**

Paul points to his own example of “Gospel humility” in comparison to the Judaizers. Because of the surpassing worth of Jesus, he is more than willing to leave behind his status as a faithful Jew and blameless follower of the Law. His spiritual confidence is no longer found in his ethnic status, education, or spiritual attainments. His confidence is in Jesus alone. What might it have meant for Paul’s readers to follow his example, regarding their past achievements and identity as “rubbish” (v. 8)? What does it mean for you? Following Paul’s lead, how do you now define your identity ... your confidence?

### **Philippians 3:17-21**

The author supposes that if Jesus appeared to him on the road to Minneapolis, that perhaps he would have such boldness. But he can’t imagine saying as Paul did, “Imitate me.” Nevertheless, others are watching us. They are looking to see if our “walk matches our talk.” To varying degrees depending on their openness (and the working of the Holy Spirit!), our lives will have influence. Others will imitate us, realizing it or not. From what you have already learned in Philippians, in what ways did Paul desire that his readers would imitate him? How would you like others to imitate you? How can you increase your level of influence in the life of someone who is far from Jesus or who you desire to more closely follow Jesus?

### **Philippians 4:8-9**

Here the Apostle lifts up a series of virtues from the Greco-Roman world and (without directly saying it) indicates that this was the kind of life that he was teaching and living. Ben Witherington comments, “Paul then doesn’t limit himself to Christian models of excellence but indicates that one should affirm and embrace whatever is true and honorable wherever one finds it, as long as it is consistent with one’s faith in, knowledge of, and pattern of judgments and behavior seen in Christ ... As Fee puts it, Paul is saying “read this list through the lens of what you have learned from me and seen in me.” Paul then once more offers his own life as a litmus test or a screening room ... for his disciples.” (Ben Witherington III, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, 256–257). Which of the qualities listed in v.8 are especially attractive to you? Who in your life has provided an influential example of this and other virtues? Who (if anyone) are you seeking to imitate?

## **Group Study and Discussion**

1) Who was particularly influential in your life growing up? What qualities/achievements did you want to emulate?

### **Philippians 1:12–18**

Here Paul speaks of the surprising advancement of the Gospel during his lengthy stay in prison. Evidently, at least a share of those believers have been inspired by Paul’s courage as he continued to bear witness to Jesus despite prison limitation. Likely also,



those who learned of Paul were greatly encouraged by God's faithfulness in working through Paul, imprisoned or not.

2) It was Tertullian, one of the Early Church Fathers of the second century, who coined the term "the blood of martyrs is the seed of the Church." Why do you think that persecution could have in any way inspired the growth of the church?

3) Who has inspired you by their courage in following Jesus, either from church history or your own relationships?

### **Philippians 2:3–8**

Paul turns now from his own example to that of Jesus, from missional motivation to a character of humility. As noted in week 2 of this study, some scholars think that the self-sacrificing humility described here is not just shown when Jesus became a human being, but is a God-sized virtue God the Son then demonstrated in his earthly mission.

4) Give examples of how Jesus demonstrated divine/human humility.

5) What does it mean to you to imitate Jesus especially with regard to humility?

### **Philippians 3:4–9**

Paul points to his own example of "Gospel humility" in comparison to the Judaizers. Because of the surpassing worth of Jesus, he is more than willing to leave behind his status as a faithful Jew and blameless follower of the Law. His spiritual confidence is no longer found in his ethnic status, education, or spiritual attainments. His confidence is in Jesus alone.

6) What might it have meant for Paul's readers to follow his example and to regard their past achievements and identity as "rubbish" (v. 8)? What does it mean for you to possess a "Gospel humility"?

7) Following Paul's lead, how do you now define your identity ... your confidence?

### **Philippians 3:17–21**

This study's author supposes that if Jesus appeared to him on the road from Eau Claire to Minneapolis, then perhaps he would have the Apostle Paul's boldness. But he can't imagine saying as Paul did, "Imitate me." That seems less than humble! Nevertheless, others are watching us. They are looking to see if our "walk matches our talk." To varying degrees depending on their openness (and the working of the Holy Spirit!) our lives will have influence. Others will imitate us, realizing it or not.

8) From what you have already learned in Philippians, in what ways did Paul desire that his readers would imitate him?

- 9) How would you like others to imitate you? (it's not boastful!)
- 10) How could you more intentionally seek to be imitated by others? Who could you more intentionally imitate?

### **Philippians 4:8–9**

Here the Apostle lifts up a series of virtues from the Greco-Roman world and (without directly saying it) indicates that this was the kind of life that he was teaching and living. Ben Witherington comments, “Paul then doesn’t limit himself to Christian models of excellence but indicates that one should affirm and embrace whatever is true and honorable wherever one finds it, as long as it is consistent with one’s faith in, knowledge of, and pattern of judgments and behavior seen in Christ ... As Fee puts it, Paul is saying “read this list through the lens of what you have learned from me and seen in me.” Paul then once more offers his own life as a litmus test or a screening room ... for his disciples.” (Ben Witherington III, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, 256–257).

One word that stands out here is the word translated as "excellent" ... arete ... this verse being the only time the Apostle Paul uses the word in all of his writings. Arete was one of the central virtues in the Greco-Roman world. Most think Paul didn't use the word often because in general the pagan world saw it as a kind of mastery that humans could achieve on their own. And for Paul even the excellence that we should strive for is made possible only by God's working in our lives (see Philippians 1:6). Yet again, Paul holds himself up as earthly model to be imitated.

- 11) Which of the qualities listed in v.8 are especially attractive to you?
- 12) Who could you imitate with regard to these virtues?
- 13) What is your biggest takeaway from this focus on the Christian life as a journey of imitation?

# Week 5 Journey of Missional Partnership

## Teaching

The church follows the lead of Jesus in that we do not exist just for ourselves. Yes, part of the Great Commission of making disciples is to provide ministries which bring about greater transformation for those that are already “insiders.”. But we do so always with one eye on the mission that Jesus given us toward those who are outside the church. As famous Swiss theologian Emil Brunner once wrote, *“The Church exists by mission, just as a fire exists by burning.”* We bring the Gospel and Jesus’ healing presence to a world in desperate need. Paul the missionary saw his relationship with the Christians in Philippi as having an impact that went beyond their own mutual support. It was a partnership in the Gospel that would by the Spirit’s power grow the church in Rome, in Philippi, and on into the Roman Empire.

The missional life begins with the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Faith, love, and service generated by the Spirit are in part an end in themselves as our lives more fully honor God. They are also a means to an end as the Spirit sends us out as changed people to love and serve the world.

All Christ-followers share a number of aspects of the missional life. We have individual gifting and responsibility but we are also part of a team of believers. As partners we support one another and we work together to make a greater difference for Jesus. The following are the top five of the missional life and partnership.

- **Service**
- **Witness**
- **Spiritual Gifting**
- **Generosity**
- **Calling**

**Service** All disciples are “drafted” by the Holy Spirit into a life of service. God places us into families, other relationships, work, churches, and community settings into which we are to bring God’s goodness, his shalom (prosperity, welfare, peace). You can think of it as citizens of heaven bringing a taste of heaven into our often messed up world. We’ll look later at the idea of missional calling, but no matter what God has especially gifted and called you to do, all Christ followers are commissioned to be servants to the people God has placed in their lives. Your friends, family, and community matter! Likewise, you may find a special volunteer calling through an organization other than the church, but as part of a local body of Christ, you are also commissioned to be a servant within that faith community. Even those who are shut-ins and no longer have the physical ability to serve in the church building are still to serve their church through their prayers. Your church matters!

**Witness** Secondly, we are all called to give witness of our faith, because people who aren’t yet following Jesus matter! You may not consider your primary calling to be an

evangelist, but you are still the Spirit's tool to bear witness to others of Jesus. What then is a witness? One definition is that a Christian witness is someone who has experienced the life-changing love of Christ. You can't be a witness unless you have seen or heard something. Likely, you won't be subpoenaed as a witness in a bank robbery case if you were across town when it happened. But if you were in the bank at the time, you would be asked to tell what you experienced, what you had seen and heard.

A Christian is a witness because she or he has tasted of the love and forgiveness of Jesus. As a witness you don't make things up, but you tell what you know of Jesus and about what He has done for you. Jesus told his disciples, ". . . *and you will be my witnesses.*" (Acts 1:8, NIV84) They were witnesses because they had walked with Jesus, heard his preaching, watched him die, and then seen him resurrected. They could tell firsthand what they had seen and heard. In one sense, our witness is second hand in that we are telling what those in the Bible witnessed in person. But we are able to tell from firsthand experience the difference Jesus has made in our lives. We can tell of the help we received in time of trouble. We can tell what it means to have forgiveness and the assurance of eternal life. We can tell how satisfying life is when it is lived with purpose and meaning. All Christians have the privilege and responsibility of sharing in the missional life of witnessing. In the Apostle's words in Philippians, we can "*shine like stars.*" (Philippians 2:15, NIV84)

**Spiritual Gifts** Thirdly, we are all gifted by the Holy Spirit in particular ways to serve the entire church, what the New Testament calls the "body of Christ." It is an important way that we live out our partnership in the Gospel. The Apostle Paul writes of spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12. "*There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord.*" (1 Corinthians 12:4-5, NIV84) We skip to verse 7: "*Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.*" (1 Corinthians 12:7, NIV84) Then to verse 11: "*All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.*" (1 Corinthians 12:11, NIV84)

We note three core teachings on this idea of spiritual gifts.

1. Given by the grace of God. The word translated as "gifts" is "charismata" (from which we, of course, get the notion of being a "charismatic" Christian – emphasizing the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.) The root word of "charismata" is "charis" which is the word for grace ... God's undeserved love and goodness. Spiritual gifts are one element in God's gracious work in our lives as he pours out what could be called "divine capabilities" in us.

2. Gifts are given to each individual Christians as determined by the Holy Spirit. Everyone who has been made new in Christ through faith, is given a manifestation of, a demonstration of, a gifting by the Holy Spirit. So if you as a Christian are wondering whether or not you have a spiritual gift, wonder no more. Through baptism and faith, the Spirit has made possible a relationship with God and with this comes at least one if not several spiritual gifts to be used in service.

3. Gifts are to be used for the good of the entire church and its mission. Paul speaks of the “common good” which includes building up fellow Christians as well as reaching out with God’s grace to touch the lives of those who do not yet know Jesus. Spiritual gifts are individual in the sense that we each have our own unique set of gifts but they are designed for the corporate good of the entire church. Use of our gifts is an important part of our missional partnership.

I think that the categories as given by Pastor Dean Nadasdy as drawn from the New Testament lists can help us consider our own individual giftings.

Administrative Gifts – abilities to provide leadership, organize events, and develop programming for ministry.

Relational gifts – abilities to build relationships well and to care for others’ physical, spiritual and emotional well-being.

Communication gifts – abilities to teach and preach, to share the truth of God’s word in creative ways.

Insight gifts -- Knowledge of Scripture and its truths, the ability to apply those truths in wisdom, to discern things that are of God and others that are not.

Support gifts – Abilities to work behind the scenes, to make sure the tasks get done, and to support the work of others.

Miraculous or sign gifts – while we tend not to emphasize these in Lutheran settings, neither do we deny that God can gift people in ways that seem particularly supernatural. These include speaking in other languages including a heavenly prayer language, interpreting those speaking in tongues, healing, and other miraculous signs.

Again, these lists are not exhaustive. We read elsewhere in the Bible of the Holy Spirit empowering craftspeople, builders, musicians, and even warriors. The point is not to put either yourself or the Holy Spirit into a nice neat system, but rather to emphasize the range of abilities that God gives to his people to accomplish his purposes. And you’re a part of that. You’ll often find in the church a kind of unhealthy modesty that says, “Well, God didn’t make me anything special.” This is actually a direct rejection of the clear New Testament teaching that we are God’s “workmanship” ... an expression of his artistic work (Ephesians 2:10) ... and is a failure to believe to “*Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.*” (1 Corinthians 12:7, NIV84) Each one! ... you are partner in the Gospel as the Spirit gifts you!

**Generosity** A fourth aspect of missional partnership is to be financially generous with your church and other Christian ministries. This allows you to extend your influence and impact beyond your own individual calling. One church member put it this way in commenting on Philippians 4:10-20: “One possible answer to the question about what joy the Philippian Christians received by giving to Paul, is they may have felt like partners in something bigger than themselves. Not everyone is called or bold enough to

spread the gospel in foreign places. Even though the Philippians themselves didn't preach with Paul, their financial support gave him more latitude to spread the word.” Your financial support allows your pastor and other church staff to pursue their callings and to serve you and others on a full or part-time basis. Financial giving is an important way that we become missional partners with others bringing Jesus into the world.

**Calling** Finally, there is a particular calling or focused area of service that the Holy Spirit has gifted you to carry out in this season of your life. This is the “place” you are able to make your greatest contribution to Jesus’ work in the world. A Christian’s primary calling can be paid employment, family service like being a stay-at-home mom or dad, volunteer work, a ministry vision that you believe God is leading you to pursue for the building of his kingdom, or some combination of the above.

Examples: the Apostle Paul's calling was to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles - non-Jews. This doesn't mean Paul wasn't concerned about his fellow Jews, but his special calling was to reach those of other ethnicities who were far from God. His evangelistic calling is emphasized in the letter to the Philippians. Your pastor has a particular calling to serve your church, but he might also have another ministry in which he also invests his energy and effort. For an African-American named Bryan Stevenson, following Christ meant giving up the huge salary given to minority graduates of Harvard Law School. Instead, living in a one room apartment he has pursued his calling of practicing law among poor people in Montgomery, Alabama who often received less than equal justice. He continues to serve as the Executive Director of the Equal Justice Initiative. One committed Christ-follower named Lynn Bebeau lost her first husband who as a policeman was killed intervening in a domestic dispute. Lynn has pursued a calling of helping crime victims and loved ones of fallen officers.

There are several helpful resources available through the organization *Leader Breakthrough* if you want to explore and clarify your calling in this season of your life. Tools entitled Focused Living, Apex, and Resonance help you to engage in a process of seeking God’s direction and discovering how you can make a greater contribution. <https://leaderbreakthru.com>

## Personal Bible Reading and Reflection

Week 1	Journey of Transformation
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Week 3	Journey in Community
Week 4	Journey of Imitation
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Week 6	Journey of Joy
Week 7	Journey Review

The church follows the lead of Jesus in that we do not exist just for ourselves. Yes, we are to make disciples which means ministries that bring about greater transformation for those who are already “insiders”. But we do so always with one eye on the mission

that Jesus gives to those who are outside the church. As famous Swiss theologian Emil Brunner once wrote, “The Church exists by mission, just as a fire exists by burning.” We bring the Gospel and Jesus’ healing presence to a world in desperate need. Paul the missionary saw his relationship with the Christians in Philippi as having an impact that went beyond their own mutual support. It was a partnership in the Gospel that would by the Spirit’s power grow the church in Rome, in Philippi, and on into the Roman Empire.

### **Philippians 1:3-7, 19**

We begin this week with what is by now very familiar Scripture as in the first verses of his letter, Paul introduces yet another important theme: missional partnership between himself and the church in Philippi. They were together in their “partnership in the Gospel.” (v.5) As we focused on a couple weeks back, this speaks to their communion in Christ. It also includes their partnership in the Gospel mission of bringing the love of Jesus to Philippi, Rome, and the Empire. And part of the “good work” that God will bring to completion in their lives (v. 6) is that of service and witness that the Spirit will use to bring people to Jesus. How do you see yourself in partnership with the leaders and fellow members of your church? What are the biggest contributions that you can make to your Gospel work together? What are your abilities and strengths through which you see God at work?

### **Philippians 2:14-16**

The term “apologetics” is used to refer to defense of the Christian faith. This includes answering objections to the Christian message and giving evidence for faith in Jesus, his resurrection, and the truth of his Word. Arguably the most influential evidence for the Christian faith is the transformed lives of believers. In these verses, Paul weaves in language from the wilderness experiences of Israel in which they too often were “crooked and depraved” (see Deuteronomy 32:5) and frequently complained. They were often like everyone else in their world. In contrast, as God worked in them, followers of Jesus were to be blameless and pure before a watching world. In so doing, they would “shine like stars.” How does sin undermine the witness of the Gospel? In what ways is God enabling us to be different from other ordinary Americans? What particular virtues could be especially influential in our witness to Jesus in contemporary America?

### **Philippians 2:19-30**

Here Paul speaks of personal mission partnerships with Timothy and Epaphroditus. How does Paul commend Timothy? Timothy was for Paul both a co-worker and a protégé. Can you identify individuals who fill those roles in your life? If so, what are their contributions to your life of service? Lynn Cohick comments on Epaphroditus: “Paul describes Epaphroditus in glowing terms: my “brother, co-worker ... fellow soldier,” “your messenger,” one sent “to take care of my needs.” “Brother” is a generic term Paul uses to speak of other believers in the Lord. But to add “my” is distinctive and suggests affection and personal commendation.” But now Epaphroditus is being sent back to Philippi. “A possible scenario of Epaphroditus’s situation could look like this. The Philippian church set apart Epaphroditus to serve alongside Paul long term, and they contributed much financially toward Paul’s ministry, including Epaphroditus’s participation. But the rigors of this life ultimately prevented Epaphroditus from fulfilling that mission. Paul decides to send him back. Mission accomplished? No.

However, was Christ honored? Yes, and that is the point Paul drives home in requesting the Philippians to honor Epaphroditus.” (Lynn H. Cohick, *Philippians*, 155, 157)  
How does Paul’s handling of this situation provide a model for how we deal with people when they can’t fulfill (or even don’t want to fulfill) the service they had committed to alongside us?

### **Philippians 4:2-3**

We go back to Euodia and Syntyche who Paul describes as those “who have labored side by side with me ....” The metaphor here is of the women being like a pair of oxen pulling a heavy burden of ministry along with Paul (nothing derogatory here!). We can’t be sure about their role in the Philippian church, but it was significant enough that their reconciliation with one another mattered! Why is it so crucial to have others pulling alongside us as we serve Christ? Even as he is admonishing them to reconcile, how is Paul commending them? Who is on your team when it comes to service in your church?

### **Philippians 4:10-20**

Those in Roman prisons had to provide for their own physical needs. The Philippians had generously come alongside prisoner Paul by sending a servant (Epaphroditus) and financial resources to provide for him. What joy do you think the Philippian Christians received by being able to give to Paul? In what ways are your financial giving to your church and other ministries an important part of your partnership in the Gospel? How do you think that the leaders of your church should talk about money and financial giving?

## **Group Study and Discussion**

1) Describe a mission that you’ve had in your life (academic, athletic, relational, work, or spiritual). How did that mission motivate you?

### **Philippians 1:3–6, 19**

2) What are the important ways in which you are (or would like to be) in partnership with the leaders and fellow members of your church to bring God’s love to your community and out into the world?

3) What particular abilities and resources has God given you to contribute to his Kingdom work, especially in connection with your church?

4) How does your church (and this group) help you in living out your calling to serve Christ?

### **Philippians 2:14–16**

The term “apologetics” is used to refer to defense of the Christian faith. This includes answering objections to the Christian message and giving evidence for faith in Jesus, his resurrection, and the truth of his Word. Arguably the most influential evidence for the



Christian faith is the transformed lives of believers. In these verses, Paul weaves in language from the wilderness experiences of Israel in which they too often were “crooked and depraved” (see Deuteronomy 32:5) and frequently complained. They were often like everyone else in their world. In contrast, as God worked in them, followers of Jesus were to be blameless and pure before a watching world. In so doing, they would “shine like stars.”

- 5) How does sin within the church undermine the witness of the Gospel?
- 6) What leads to a spirit of complaining and arguing among Christians?
- 7) What particular virtues could lead us to “shine like stars” ... to become more influential in our witness to Jesus in contemporary America?
- 8) How does your church currently shine like a star in your community? How could it shine more brightly?

### **Philippians 2:19-30**

Here Paul speaks of personal mission partnerships with Timothy and Epaphroditus.

- 9) Timothy was for Paul both a co-worker and a protégé. Can you identify individuals who fill those roles in your life? If so, what are their contributions to your life of service?
- 10) How does Paul’s handling of this situation with Epaphroditus provide a model for how we deal with people when they can’t fulfill (or even don’t want to fulfill) the service they had committed to alongside us?

### **Philippians 4:2-3**

We go back to Euodia and Syntyche who Paul describes as those “who have labored side by side with me ....” The metaphor here is of the women being like a pair of oxen pulling a heavy burden of ministry along with Paul (nothing derogatory here!). We can’t be sure about their role in the Philippian church, but it was significant enough that their reconciliation with one another mattered!

- 11) Why is it so crucial to have others pulling alongside us as we serve Christ?
- 12) Even as he is admonishing them to reconcile, how is Paul commending them? Who on your team at your church could you thank or commend for their service?

### **Philippians 4:10-20**

Those in Roman prisons had to provide for their own physical needs. The Philippians had generously come alongside prisoner Paul by sending a servant (Epaphroditus) and financial resources to provide for him.

13) What joy do you think the Philippians Christians received by being able to give to Paul?

14) In what ways are your financial giving to your church and other ministries an important part of your partnership in the Gospel?

15) What is your biggest takeaway from the “Journey of Missional Partnership” week of study?

## Week 6 Journey of Joy

### Teaching

What is the joy of Jesus? Well, often in daily parlance, if we use term “joy” at all, we basically mean the same thing as happiness. We feel good. But while you might suppose the emotions are similar, what happiness and joy are based on is completely different. Happiness depends upon human happenings. It comes from the word “hap” which means “luck”; you feel good because you are fortunate - things are going well. Christian joy, on the other hand, is the gladness you feel from knowing and trusting God, regardless of what’s going on around you. Happiness is based on circumstances and when they change, you’re not happy anymore; joy is based on Christ who does not change. Happiness is based on chance; joy is based on God’s choosing you as his daughter or son. And in any given situation, you can choose to focus on the circumstances and experience the up and downs of happiness; or you can focus on the reality of God’s love and experience consistent joy. Paul’s letter to the Philippians written while in prison speaks repeatedly of this kind of joy. It was overflowing in Paul despite his circumstances because it was founded on Jesus and experienced through his partnership with his readers.

Daniel Denk in his book, *Invitation to Joy*, gives this description: “Joy, on the contrary, is a steady disposition about life, very much connected to peace and hope. We might say that joy is a hopeful and peaceful outlook on life, a deep-seated sense of well-being.” (Denk, Daniel J.. *An Invitation to Joy: The Divine Journey to Human Flourishing* (p. 17). Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.. Kindle Edition.) You can feel good because you know that you are good in Christ. You have peace in Jesus because you know that you are reconciled with God through Jesus’ sacrifice and are secure in his love. You have hope in Jesus even at life’s darkest moments, even with the approach of death, trusting that because of Easter the best is yet to come.

Now some might question this whole emphasis on being joyful, especially given the reputation of the Bible and that of Christians as being serious, nose to grindstone, kill-joys in which the emphasis is on “Thou shalt not ...” But one recurring Old Testament theme is that of celebration as Israel regularly gathered to remember the great saving acts of God. God speaks through the prophet Jeremiah: “*Hear the word of the LORD, O nations; proclaim it in distant coastlands: ‘He who scattered Israel will gather them and will watch over his flock like a shepherd.’ For the LORD will ransom Jacob and redeem them from the hand of those stronger than they. They will come and shout for joy on the heights of Zion; they will rejoice in the bounty of the LORD— the grain, the new wine and the oil, the young of the flocks and herds. They will be like a well-watered garden, and they will sorrow no more. Then maidens will dance and be glad, young men and old as well. I will turn their mourning into gladness; I will give them comfort and joy instead of sorrow. I will satisfy the priests with abundance, and my people will be filled with my bounty,*” declares the LORD.” (Jeremiah 31:10–14, NIV84)

The language here overflows with abundant joy. The people redeemed by God will offer up a “shout for joy.” They will enjoy God’s abundant provision, “the grain, the new

wine, and the oil” (catch the connection with Pentecost with believers thought to be drunk because they were too joyful too early in the morning). There will be dancing and mourning will be turned to gladness. This is what happens when God pours out his love and Spirit on people. It’s time to party! No human reasons for celebration can compare.

Joy is what Jesus wants for us. It’s what he makes possible for us. Jesus taught, “*I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.*” (John 15:11, NIV84) The problem with human beings, according to Jesus, is not that we have too much gladness and that God wants us to become more serious. It’s that we are not yet glad enough, and God wants us to get into his joy. You were made for joy, and to miss out on joy is to miss out on a central reason for your existence. C. S. Lewis put it like this: “Joy is the serious business of heaven.”

There are so many forces in a sin-broken world which strip us of our joy. Yet joy can become a more abundant fruit as the Holy Spirit moves us to ...

### **Seek the Face of a Loving and Joyful God**

Often in the Old Testament God’s face is used as a metaphor to indicate his presence, and when God shows his face, it brings joy and peace. (Psalm 16:11) This is illustrated in the Aaronic blessing: “*The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace.*” (Numbers 6:24–27, NIV84)

Dr. Alan Schore of UCLA makes a fascinating connection noted in the book *The Other Half of Church*. He teaches about the significance of joy for healthy brain development. He defines joy relationally, as “someone is glad to be with me” and describes it as being “the sparkle in someone’s eye.” In other words, joy is found in the face of someone that cares about you! Someone who is happy to have you in their presence. (Wilder, Jim; Hendricks, Michel. *The Other Half of Church: Christian Community, Brain Science, and Overcoming Spiritual Stagnation* (p. 55). Moody Publishers. Kindle Edition.)

Pastor David Forke writes, “I ... remember when my kids were little and how happy they would be when I would come home. I still have a clear mental picture of coming home from evening meetings and seeing their little heads pop up over the back of the couch in our front room window—They would smile and shout ‘Dad’s home!’ and run to the door. What joy that brought to me.”

In Jesus, God is saying to us, “I am so happy to have you in my presence. I rejoice over you.” He does make his face to shine on us, and we see his face in Jesus who died and rose again so that we can find joy in his presence for all eternity. The prophet Zephaniah told his people, “*The LORD your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing.*” (Zephaniah 3:17, NIV84) We seek the face of God in his Word, in worship at the Lord’s table, in prayer, in relationships within the body of Christ, and even in the beauty of his creation. And God does not disappoint us! Especially in chapter 2 of Philippians, Paul seeks the face of God and finds the humility and sacrifice of Jesus. It is his greatest source of joy.

### **Connect with joyful people**

We read in Proverbs: “*A cheerful look brings joy to the heart, and good news gives health to the bones.*” (Proverbs 15:30, NIV84) Why not jot down a few names right now of people who bring you joy and then set up a time to meet with them?

### **Practice gratitude (Psalm 28:7)**

In *Invitation to Joy*, Daniel Denk has a chapter entitled “Friends of Joy” which is worth the book’s purchase. One of those “friends” is regularly, even daily, giving thanks for all of what God has provided. He writes, “*It is imperative that we come to the place of understanding that all of life is a gift—my breath, my mind, my body, and all the wonders of this marvelous creation.*” (Denk, p.98) Instead of an attitude of entitlement or “What have you done for me lately, God?” we recognize God’s abundance and in the process experience joy. Make giving thanks a daily joy practice.

### **Practice Sabbath (Isaiah 58:13-14)**

Again from the chapter “Friends of Joy” Denk writes of taking a day away from work, as much as possible, for rest, reflection, and re-creation. Sabbath is for time with God, but it is also for the re-energizing of our bodies and minds and the re-igniting of joy. (Denk, p.91ff)

Our joy in Jesus can hold to the end in the face of death itself. From a Nazi death camp, a young Lutheran pastor named Hermann Lange wrote a letter to his parents the day he died. Be moved by these extraordinary excerpts:

*When this letter comes into your hands I shall no longer be among the living. The thing that has occupied our thoughts constantly for many months ... is now about to happen. If you ask me what state I am in I can only answer: I am, first, in a joyous mood and, second, filled with a great anticipation. ‘God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes.’ What consolation, what marvelous strength emanates from Christ. I am amazed. In Christ I have put my faith, and precisely today I have faith in him more firmly than ever.*

*My parents, look up the following passages: 1 Corinthians 15 and Romans 14:8. Look anywhere you want in the Bible, and everywhere I find jubilation over the grace that makes us children of God. ... For me, believing will become seeing; hope will become possession, and I shall forever share in Him who is love. Should I not, then, be filled with anticipation? ... And so, until we meet again above, in the presence of the Father of light. Your joyful, Hermann.*

## **Personal Bible Reading and Reflection**

Week 1	Journey of Transformation
Week 2	Journey of Grace
Week 3	Journey in Community
Week 4	Journey of Imitation
Week 5	Journey of Missional Partnership

**Week 6      Journey of Joy**  
Week 7      Journey Review

The journey of the Jesus' follower is not always easy and does involve our effort of "pressing on." But that it is not say that it is a dreary march through life. In his letter to the Philippians, Paul repeatedly emphasizes the joy that is ours in Jesus. This is especially striking in that he was writing from prison.

Often in daily parlance, if we use the term "joy" at all, we basically mean the same thing as happiness. We feel good. But while I suppose the emotions are similar, what happiness and joy are based on is completely different. Happiness depends upon human happenings. It comes from the word "hap" which means "luck"; you feel good because you are fortunate - things are going well. Christian joy, on the other hand, is the gladness you feel from knowing and trusting God, regardless of what's going on around you.

**Philippians 1:3-8**

What are reasons the Apostle Paul had for joy from these verses and elsewhere in Philippians 1? Why did Paul find so much joy in Jesus (see also 1 Corinthians 15:3-11)? Why did Paul find joy in his partnership in the Gospel with the Philippian Christians? What are your reasons for joy in Jesus?

**Philippians 1:12-26**

Despite Paul's imprisonment, he had witnessed the advance of the Gospel. In what way do you see joy connected to a person's God-given calling? How would you describe your own calling and how it has led to greater joy in your life? How do either of the alternatives Paul mentions in v. 21 lead to joy?

**Philippians 2:17-18, 3:1**

In this verse Paul compares his own life and the service of the Philippian Christians with the typical worship at the altar of either the true God or even pagan deities. His life is like a "drink offering" and their service a sacrifice offered up to God. Paul may be anticipating his own martyrdom; but more likely he is referencing a life that being spent on behalf of God and the Gospel, including all the suffering that he experienced on the way. How could and did a life of all out devotion to Jesus bring him joy? How could Paul's life bring joy to the Philippian Christians? Where is the joy in suffering for Jesus (see also 1 Peter 4:12-14)?

**Philippians 4:4-8**

What are the practices of joy mentioned in this passage and others in the New Testament? How does prayer reinforce joy? How does thanksgiving reinforce joy? How does reflecting on what is good, beautiful, and excellent reinforce joy? What are your current joy practices? What practice(s) could lead to a greater experience of Jesus' joy?

### **Philippians 4:10-19**

One of the reasons for this letter is Paul's desire to thank the Philippian Christians for their support of his ministry through Epaphroditus and by way of their financial gifts. Perhaps his reason for joy in receiving this support is obvious enough. Yet he doesn't stop there. How would his being "content whatever the circumstances" also lead to greater joy? What were the results of their generosity (vs.17-18) for the Philippians themselves and for Paul? What would be their enduring joy (see v.19)? How have you found joy from being on both the giving and the receiving end of other's generosity?

### **Group Study and Discussion**

The journey of the Jesus' follower is not always easy and does involve our effort of "pressing on." But that it is not say that it is a dreary march through life. In his letter to the Philippians, Paul repeatedly emphasizes the joy that is ours in Jesus. This is especially striking in that he was currently imprisoned.

- 1) What does the word "joy" bring to your mind?
- 2) Describe a particularly joyful experience or season in your life.

### **Philippians 1:3-8**

- 3) What are reasons the Apostle Paul had for joy from these verses and elsewhere in chapter 1?
- 4) Why did Paul find so much joy in Jesus (see also 1 Corinthians 15:3-11)? What are your reasons for joy in your Savior?

### **Philippians 1:12-26**

Despite Paul's imprisonment, he had witnessed the advance of the Gospel.

- 5) How would you describe Paul's calling?
- 6) In what ways did that calling lead to pain and struggle and in what ways to joy and fulfillment?
- 7) How would you describe your own calling and how it has led to greater joy in your life?

### **Philippians 2:17-18, 3:1 (NIV84)**

In this verse Paul compares his own life and the service of the Philippian Christians with the typical worship at the altar of either the true God or even pagan deities. His life is like a "drink offering" and their service a sacrifice offered up to God. Paul may be

anticipating his own martyrdom; but more likely he is referencing a life that being spent on behalf of God and the Gospel, including all the suffering that he experienced on the way.

- 8) How could and did a life of all out devotion to Jesus bring him joy?
- 9) Where is the joy in suffering for Jesus (see also 1 Peter 4:12-14)?

### **Philippians 4:4–8 (NIV84)**

- 10) What are the practices of joy mentioned in this passage and others in the New Testament?
- 11) How does prayer reinforce joy?
- 12) How does thanksgiving reinforce joy?
- 13) How does reflecting on what is good, beautiful, and excellent (and not on the news!) reinforce joy?
- 14) What are your current joy practices? What practice(s) could lead to a greater experience of Jesus' joy?

### **Philippians 4:10–19 (NIV84)**

One of the reasons for this letter is Paul's desire to thank the Philippian Christians for their support of his ministry through Epaphroditus and by way of their financial gifts. Perhaps his reason for joy in receiving this support is obvious enough. Yet he doesn't stop there ...

- 15) How would Paul's being "*content whatever the circumstances*" also lead to greater joy?
- 16) How have you found joy from being on both the giving and the receiving end of other's generosity?
- 17) How does this group bring you joy?
- 18) What is your biggest takeaway from the "Journey of Joy" week of study?



# Week 7 Journey Review

## Personal Bible Reading and Reflection

Week 1	Journey of Transformation
Week 2	Journey of Grace
Week 3	Journey in Community
Week 4	Journey of Imitation
Week 5	Journey of Missional Partnership
Week 6	Journey of Joy
<b>Week 7</b>	<b>Journey Review</b>

We hope that these past six weeks have imprinted in your mind and spirit the core themes of following Jesus as emphasized in Paul's letter to the Philippians. In this seventh week, we are going to review the six themes and include Scripture from other books of the Bible which reinforce and develop them. The focus of the reflection questions is on your takeaways for your own journey with Jesus.

### Journey of Transformation

**Philippians 3:12-14; 1 Corinthians 9:24-25; Romans 12:1-2**

We are on the move with Jesus, pressing into the life that is ours because Jesus has taken hold of us. It is a life of ongoing change as the Holy Spirit empowers us to overcome sin, develop Christ-like character, and produce much fruit of service and witness.

Where would you like to go with Jesus this next season?

- Knowledge of the Bible and Christian teaching
- Assurance of God's love and forgiveness
- Develop a particular spiritual practice
- Supportive relationships with other Christians, especially with ...
- Clearer sense of calling and personal mission
- Freedom from particular sin bondage
- Character change especially regarding ...
- Produce more of \_\_\_\_\_ fruit

Pick one or more areas. Allow the Scriptures and questions the rest of the week to give further direction to your journey. Have a conversation with a Christian leader or friend to help you develop your own journey plan toward that destination.

### Journey of Grace

**Philippians 3:7-11; Romans 3:21-26; Ephesians 2:1-10**

Philippians does not offer the same depth teaching on God's gift of grace through Jesus that you'll find in letters like Galatians or Romans. But for Paul it was always God's liberating love that is the foundation and power for the life of discipleship.

What spiritual practices, experiences, and relationships does God especially use to communicate His faithful love to you? Be sure to include at least one of these (what author Gary Thomas calls *Sacred Pathways*) into your journey plan.

### **Journey of Community**

**Philippians 3:1-8; Romans 12:9-13; Ephesians 4:1-6, 11-16**

The New Testament is full of “one another” statements reflecting God’s plan that we follow Jesus in close community (*koinania*) with other believers.

What is your experience of relationships with other Christians? What are the benefits? What are the challenges?

Name five people (if you can) with whom you share significant mutual love and encouragement. How will you sustain and develop those relationships in coming months? Add this to your journey plan.

### **Journey of Imitation**

**Philippians 2:3-8, 3:17; 1 Corinthians 10:32-11:1**

From the disciples who sought to learn the way of Rabbi Jesus to the first Christians who were challenged to imitate the Apostle Paul, followers of Jesus from the beginning have sought to imitate their Savior and godly leaders.

What qualities of Jesus do you desire to imitate? What qualities of your faith heroes do you desire to imitate? Incorporate these into the spiritual plan you started on Monday.

### **Journey of Missional Partnership**

**Philippians 1:5-8, 4:10-19; 1 Corinthians 12:12-27**

The New Testament witness is that God’s people within local churches and across the global church are in partnership with each other to bring the saving Gospel of Jesus to the world.

How do you participate in the missional partnership in your own church? In your church body and/or parachurch organizations? What would be one step in increasing your contribution in terms of teaching, witness, service, relationships, and finances? Include that step in your journey plan.

### **(Bonus Day) Journey of Joy**

**Philippians 2:25-3:1, 4:4-8; John 15:10-11**

Remarkably, despite Philippians being a “prison letter,” it exudes Paul’s joy in Jesus and joy in his partnership with God’s people.

How would you currently rank “joy” in your life? Along the lines of receiving grace from Tuesday’s reflection, what spiritual practices, experiences, and relationships does God

especially use to bring joy into your life? Be sure to add one “joy” element to your journey plan.

## **What are your most important takeaways from the letter to the Philippians with regard to your life as Jesus’ disciple?**

### **Group Study and Discussion**

In this seventh week, we are going to review the six themes and include Scripture from other books of the Bible which reinforce and develop them. In this group discussion, we’ll look at both individual and group takeaways.

#### **Journey of Transformation**

##### **Philippians 3:12-14; 1 Corinthians 9:24-25; Romans 12:1-2**

We are on the move with Jesus, pressing into the life that is ours because Jesus has taken hold of us. It is a life of ongoing change as the Holy Spirit empowers us to overcome sin, develop Christ-like character, and produce much fruit of service and witness.

- 1) Where would you like to go with Jesus this next season?
  - Knowledge of the Bible and Christian teaching
  - Assurance of God’s love and forgiveness
  - Develop a particular spiritual practice
  - Supportive relationships with other Christians, especially with ...
  - Clearer sense of calling and personal mission
  - Freedom from particular sin bondage
  - Character change especially regarding ...
  - Produce more of \_\_\_\_\_ fruit

Pick one or more areas.

- 2) Assuming you will continue meeting, how can this group support your journey with Jesus?

#### **Journey of Grace**

##### **Philippians 3:7-11; Romans 3:21-26; Ephesians 2:1-10**

Philippians does not offer the same depth teaching on God’s gift of grace through Jesus that you’ll find in letters like Galatians or Romans. But for Paul it was always God’s liberating love that is the foundation and power for the life of discipleship.

- 3) What spiritual practices, experiences, and relationships does God especially use to communicate His faithful love to you? Be sure to include at least one of these (what author Gary Thomas calls *Sacred Pathways*) into your journey plan.

- 4) How does this group serve as a channel of God's grace, helping you feel loved by God?

### **Journey of Community**

**Philippians 3:1-8; Romans 12:9-13; Ephesians 4:1-6, 11-16**

The New Testament is full of "one another" statements reflecting God's plan that we follow Jesus in close community (*koinania*) with other believers.

- 5) What is your experience of relationships with other Christians? What are the benefits? What are the challenges?
- 6) How can this group grow in the depth of *koinania* in Christ?

### **Journey of Imitation**

**Philippians 2:3-8, 3:17; 1 Corinthians 10:32-11:1**

From the disciples who sought to learn the way of Rabbi Jesus to the first Christians who were challenged to imitate the Apostle Paul, followers of Jesus from the beginning have sought to imitate their Savior and godly leaders.

- 7) What qualities of Jesus do you desire to imitate? What qualities of your faith heroes do you desire to imitate? Incorporate these into the spiritual plan you started on Monday.

### **Journey of Missional Partnership**

**Philippians 1:5-8, 4:10-19; 1 Corinthians 12:12-27**

The New Testament witness is that God's people within local churches and across the global church are in partnership with each other to bring the saving Gospel of Jesus to the world.

- 8) How do you participate in the missional partnership in your own church?
- 9) What would be one step in increasing your contribution in terms of teaching, witness, service, relationships, and finances?
- 10) How might this group serve your church together?

### **(Bonus Day) Journey of Joy**

**Philippians 2:25-3:1, 4:4-8; John 15:10-11**

Remarkably, despite Philippians being a "prison letter," it exudes Paul's joy in Jesus and joy in his partnership with God's people.

- 11) How does this group bring you joy?

12) What might be a joy practice that could be added to the group's usual agenda?

**13) What are your most important takeaways from the letter to the Philippians with regard to your individual life as Jesus' disciple and your life together as a group?**