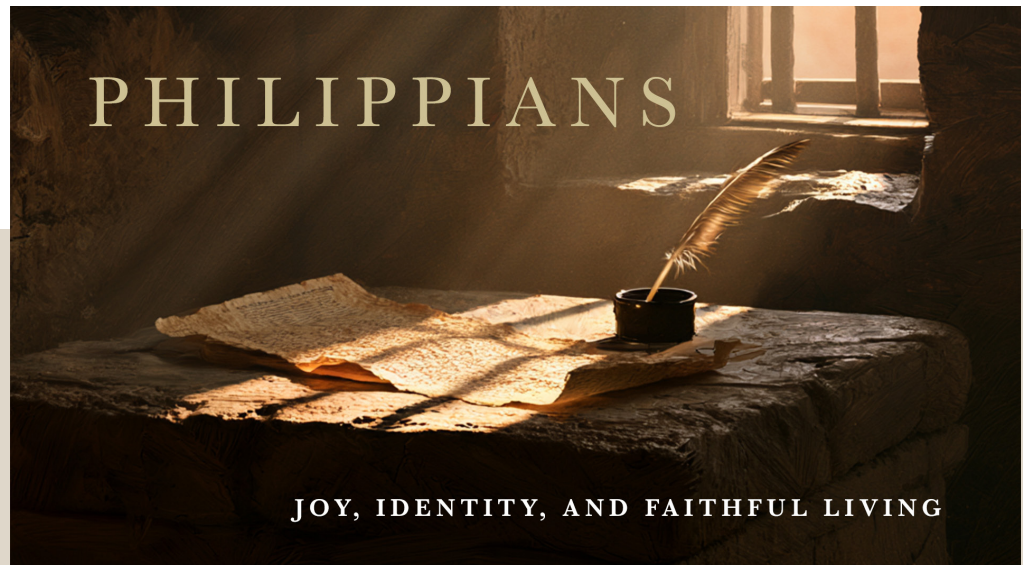




ST. ANDREW



FOUR-WEEK COURSE, LED BY REV. KIM MEYERS

Week 1 | Partnership in the Gospel (Philippians 1:1-11)

Theme | Joy begins with shared identity and purpose

Big Question | Who are we becoming together?

Big Idea | The Christian life is not an individual journey we happen to take alongside other people. God forms us through participation in a community gathered around the Gospel.

WELCOME AND OPENING QUESTION

Begin with: When you hear the word “church,” what is the first thing you picture?

- We often think about a building, worship service, pastor, program, or denomination.
- But Paul begins Philippians with something much more relational.
- For Paul, church is a people participating together in the Gospel.

OPENING PRAYER

God, open our hearts and minds as we study your Word. Help us see not only what you were saying to the church in Philippi, but what you are saying to us. Form us into people who know Christ deeply, love one another faithfully, and participate joyfully in your work. Amen.

SETTING THE STAGE: PHILIPPI

Philippi was a significant city in Macedonia and a Roman colony.

- Roman identity mattered.
- Citizenship mattered.
- Status mattered.
- Loyalty to Rome mattered.
- Achievement and honor mattered.
- That context becomes increasingly important as Paul begins talking about citizenship, humility, servanthood, and lordship.

Turn briefly to Acts 16. Consider the people we meet as the church begins:

- Lydia: a successful businesswoman who responds to Paul's preaching.
- The enslaved girl: someone exploited economically by others until Paul intervenes.
- The jailer: part of the Roman system who encounters Paul and Silas after the earthquake.

Ask: What do you notice about these three people?

- They come from remarkably different places socially and economically.

Then ask: What kind of church emerges when Lydia, the formerly enslaved woman, and the Roman jailer all come to the same table?

- This is the beginning of the Philippian church.
- The Gospel isn't simply creating individual believers.
- The Gospel is creating a new community.

READ PHILIPPIANS 1:1-11

Before reading, ask the group to listen for words that describe how Paul feels about these people.

Afterward, ask what they heard.

- Thanksgiving.
- Joy.
- Partnership.
- Affection.
- Love.
- Prayer.
- Paul clearly loves this congregation.

KOINONIA: MORE THAN FELLOWSHIP

Focus on Philippians 1:3-5. "I thank my God every time I remember you..." Paul connects joy to people.

The Greek word translated "partnership" is koinonia. It is sometimes translated "fellowship," but it carries a much deeper meaning:

- Sharing.
- Participation.
- Partnership.
- Common life.
- Sometimes we reduce fellowship to enjoying one another.
- Paul's understanding is much stronger.
- Attendance: I show up.
- Involvement: I help.
- Partnership: I have joined my life to this mission.

Ask: Which of those best describes how most Americans understand church?

Then: What would change if we understood church primarily as participation rather than attendance?

GOD ISN'T FINISHED

Move to Philippians 1:6: "He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion..."

Ask: How have you normally heard this verse interpreted?

- Usually individually: "God isn't finished with me yet." And that is true. But Paul is writing to a congregation. The "you" is plural. Paul believes God is doing something among them.
- God is working in me.
- And: God is working among us.

- Christian formation is both personal and communal.
- It also gives us patience.
- I am unfinished.
- You are unfinished.
- Our church is unfinished.
- Yet God remains faithful.

DISCUSSION

- Where have you seen God change you over time?
- Where have you seen God change a community over time?
- How does trusting God to finish the work change the pressure we place on ourselves?

LOVE THAT LEARNS

Move to Paul's prayer in verses 9–11. Paul prays: "That your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight..."

Ask: Why would love need knowledge?

- Christian love isn't simply being nice.
- Sometimes love comforts.
- Sometimes love confronts.
- Sometimes love waits.
- Sometimes love speaks.
- Sometimes love says yes.
- Sometimes love says no.
- Mature love requires discernment.
- This connects beautifully with the Wesleyan emphasis on holy love.
- God's grace doesn't simply forgive us.
- God's grace forms us into people increasingly capable of loving God and neighbor.

PERSONAL APPLICATION

Consider:

- Where am I merely attending when God is inviting me to participate?
- Who has God placed in my life as a partner in the Gospel?
- Where is God still doing unfinished work in me?

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

Every day this week, choose one person in your faith community.

Pray: "God, thank you for _____."

- Before asking God to change them or do something for them, simply thank God for them.

Remember: The God who began the work is still doing the work.

Week 2 | Joy in All Circumstances (Philippians 1:12–30)

Theme | Perspective reshapes reality.

Big Question | What determines how I see my circumstances?

Big Idea | Christian joy doesn't require us to deny difficult circumstances. It teaches us to see those circumstances within the larger story of what God is doing.

OPENING QUESTION

Have you ever had something go completely differently than you planned, only to discover later that something good came from it?

- Paul has every reason not to be joyful.
- He is imprisoned.
- His future is uncertain.
- Other preachers are criticizing him.
- He doesn't know whether he will live.
- And this is the man teaching us about joy.

READ PHILIPPIANS 1:12–18

Ask: What does Paul notice that someone else might have missed?

- “What has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel.”
- Paul doesn't call imprisonment good.
- He recognizes that God is still working in it.
- Christian perspective is not positive thinking.
- Faith doesn't require pretending painful things aren't painful.

The question is not: “How can I convince myself this is good?” The questions become:

- “God, where are you in this?”
- “How can I be faithful here?”

CIRCUMSTANCES VERSUS CALLING

Consider what Paul cannot control:

- His imprisonment.
- Other people's motives.
- Caesar.
- His release.
- Whether he lives.

Now consider what Paul can control:

- His faithfulness.
- His witness.
- His response.
- His trust.
- His focus on Christ.

Ask: How much of our anxiety comes from trying to control things that were never ours to control? The principle: I cannot always choose my circumstances. I can choose faithfulness within them. “TO LIVE IS...”

READ PHILIPPIANS 1:19-26.

Focus on verse 21: "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain."

Complete the sentence: For me, to live is _____. Don't immediately give the church answer.

What actually fills the blank?

- Success?
- Family?
- Security?
- Approval?
- Career?
- Achievement?
- Comfort?

Ask: How would you know what really fills your blank?

- What do I fear losing most?
- What occupies my thoughts?
- What determines whether I think I'm doing well?
- Where do I look for worth?

Paul isn't saying Christ is an important part of his life. Christ has become the organizing center of his life.

CITIZENSHIP

Move to Philippians 1:27.

- Philippi was a Roman colony.
- Roman citizenship carried identity, privilege, responsibility, and allegiance.
- Paul deliberately uses citizenship language.

He is essentially asking: Which kingdom ultimately defines you? What competes for our deepest allegiance today?

- Political identity?
- Career?
- Success?
- Family?
- Nationality?
- Social approval?
- Comfort?

Following Jesus doesn't eliminate our other identities. It orders them. Christ comes first.

DISCUSSION

- Where do you feel stuck right now?
- What part of that circumstance can you control?
- What part do you need to entrust to God?
- What might faithfulness look like even if the circumstance doesn't change?

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

Write:

I cannot control _____.

I can faithfully _____.

God, help me trust you with _____.

Week 3 | The Mind of Christ (Philippians 2:1-18)

Theme | Humility and unity shape Christian community.

Big Question | What does Christlike power look like?

Big Idea | Jesus doesn't merely teach humility. Jesus reveals that self-giving love lies at the heart of God's character.

OPENING QUESTION

When you hear the word "power," what comes to mind?

- Influence?
- Money?
- Position?
- Authority?
- Control?
- Recognition?

Philippians 2 gives us a radically different picture of power.

THE PROBLEM OF SELFISH AMBITION

Read Philippians 2:1-4. Focus on: "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit."

- Pride isn't always loud.
- Sometimes pride sounds like:
- Why wasn't I recognized?
- Why wasn't I asked?
- Why did they get the opportunity?
- Why doesn't anyone appreciate what I do?
- Christian humility does not mean thinking you are worthless.

Humility isn't thinking less of yourself. It is becoming less consumed with yourself.

Ask: Where does comparison quietly enter our lives?

THE CHRIST HYMN

Read Philippians 2:5-11 slowly. Notice the movement:

- Christ possesses divine status.
- Christ does not exploit it.
- Christ empties himself.
- Christ becomes servant.
- Christ becomes human.
- Christ becomes obedient.
- Christ accepts the cross.
- God exalts him.
- Every knee bows.
- Every tongue confesses: Jesus Christ is Lord.
- The movement is downward before it is upward.
- This isn't merely an example of Jesus being nice.
- This is a theological statement about who God is.
- Jesus reveals God's character.
- And God's power looks like self-giving love.

KENOSIS

The word “kenosis” comes from the language of Christ “emptying himself.” Paul isn’t saying Jesus stopped being divine. The text describes his self-emptying through taking the form of a servant. Jesus doesn’t use divine status for self-advantage. Instead, he gives himself.

Ask: What happens when this becomes our definition of leadership? Leadership stops being: “How much authority do I have?” and becomes: “How can I use what I have for the flourishing of others?”

Consider the implications for:

- Work.
- Marriage.
- Parenting.
- Church.
- Friendship.
- Leadership.

WORK OUT YOUR SALVATION

Read Philippians 2:12–13. “Work out your salvation...for it is God who works in you...”

- Which is it?
- Do we work?
- Or does God work?

Paul’s answer is: Yes. This is an important connection to Wesleyan theology. Grace always comes first.

- God initiates.
- God calls.
- God forgives.
- God empowers.
- God transforms.
- And we respond.
- This is sanctification.

God’s grace continues working in us, forming us into the likeness of Christ. Grace doesn’t eliminate effort. Grace makes faithful response possible. Spiritual disciplines don’t earn God’s love. They allow us to participate intentionally in God’s transforming grace.

DISCUSSION

- Where is pride most subtle in your life?
- Where are you tempted to grasp for recognition or control?
- What would taking the form of a servant look like there?
- How do effort and grace work together in your spiritual life?

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE | HIDDEN SERVICE

Perform one intentional act of service this week that nobody needs to know about.

- No recognition.
- No credit.
- No post.
- Simply serve.

Pray: Jesus, give us your mind. Teach us to use whatever influence, authority, resources, and gifts we have for the sake of others. Form us into people who look more like you. Amen.

Week 4 | What is Enough? (Philippians 3:1-4:13)

Theme | Joy flows from identity rather than achievement.

Big Question | What is enough?

Big Idea | Christian contentment isn't getting everything we want. It is learning that our deepest identity and security are found in Christ.

OPENING QUESTION

What does our culture tell us will finally make us feel like we have enough?

- More money?
- Better house?
- Successful children?
- Retirement?
- Recognition?
- Achievement?
- Security?

Then ask: Does “enough” ever arrive? This is one of the central spiritual problems of modern life.

PAUL'S RÉSUMÉ

Read Philippians 3:4-11. Paul essentially gives his résumé. He has:

- Heritage.
- Credentials.
- Religious achievement.
- Education.
- Zeal.
- Status.

And then he says none of it compares with knowing Christ. Paul isn't saying achievement is bad. He's saying achievement is a terrible foundation for identity. Good things become dangerous when they become identity things.

Ask: If your career disappeared tomorrow, who would you be?

- If your title disappeared?
- If your accomplishments were forgotten?
- If your financial situation changed?
- Would you still know who you are?
- Our deepest identity cannot rest on something we can lose.

PRESSING ON

Read Philippians 3:12-14. Paul says: “Not that I have already obtained all this...” That's remarkable. Paul himself says: I'm not finished.

Then: “I press on...” Christian maturity isn't arrival. It is direction. This protects us from two mistakes.

Pride: “I've arrived.”

And despair: “I should be farther along.”

The better question is: “Am I moving toward Christ?”

Ask: Where can you see evidence that God has changed you over the last five or ten years?

REJOICE AND PRAY

Move to Philippians 4:4-7. “Rejoice in the Lord always.” Notice Paul doesn’t say: “Rejoice in your circumstances.” He says: “Rejoice in the Lord.”

- Joy can coexist with sadness.
- Joy can coexist with grief.
- Joy can coexist with uncertainty.

Then consider: “Do not be anxious about anything...” This verse shouldn’t be used to shame people for experiencing anxiety. Instead, notice what Paul gives them:

- Prayer.
- Petition.
- Thanksgiving.
- God’s peace.

Prayer gives us somewhere to take what we are carrying. The promise isn’t that the situation immediately disappears. The promise is: “The peace of God...will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”

“I CAN DO ALL THINGS”

Read Philippians 4:10-13.

Ask: Where have you seen Philippians 4:13 used?

- Sports.
- Graduations.
- Motivational posters.
- Goals.

Then look at the context. Paul has experienced abundance. Paul has experienced need.

- He has been well-fed.
- He has been hungry.
- He has had plenty.
- He has had little.

And he says: “I have learned the secret of being content...” That changes how we hear 4:13. Paul isn’t saying: Jesus will help me accomplish anything I decide to do. Paul is saying: Whatever my circumstances, Christ will sustain me. That may actually be a much greater promise.

CONTENTMENT IS LEARNED

Notice Paul’s language: “I have learned to be content.” Contentment isn’t automatic. It isn’t pretending we don’t want things. It isn’t settling for a mediocre life. Contentment is learned through repeated experiences of discovering: Christ is enough.

Ask: What has life taught you about the difference between having what you want and having what you need?

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

Practice this three-part prayer:

REJOICE | Name something about God for which you are grateful.

RELEASE | Name what you are carrying. “God, I release _____ to you.”

RECEIVE | Sit quietly. “God, help me receive your peace.”

BRINGING PHILIPPIANS TOGETHER

Four weeks. Four questions.

Week 1: Who are we becoming together? *Partnership*.

Week 2: What determines how I see my circumstances? *Perspective*.

Week 3: What does Christlike power look like? *Humility*.

Week 4: What is enough? *Contentment*.

And beneath all four: *Christ*.

Paul's joy isn't rooted in getting the life he wanted.

His joy isn't rooted in comfort.

It isn't rooted in success.

It isn't rooted in recognition.

It isn't even rooted in freedom.

His joy is rooted in Christ.

So perhaps Philippians leaves us with a different question than the one our culture usually asks. Not:

"How can I become happier?" But: "What happens when my entire life becomes rooted in Christ?"

- My relationships change.
- My circumstances no longer define me.
- My understanding of power changes.
- My achievements no longer determine my worth.
- My anxiety has somewhere to go.

And slowly, through the grace of God, I learn: Christ is enough.

The God who began the work is still doing the work. Thanks be to God.

Amen.