



**Theme: Freedom to Flourish – Discovering Who You Were Meant to Be**  
**“EASTER WAS WOW! Now What?”**

**Weekly Memory Verse:**

**<sup>5</sup> You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. <sup>6</sup> Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. – Philippians 2:5-6**

**Monday, April 25** – Read Philippians 2:1-4. Paul didn’t write to the Philippians about unity as an abstract idea. As we will find in chapters 3 and 4, there were tensions and disputes among the Christians in Philippi. Paul urged Jesus’ followers there to find unity in love. That, he said, would make his joy complete. The behaviors Paul encouraged in verses 1 and 2 are good guides for any relationships. Our starting point always needs to be humility, considering others before ourselves as an extension of who we are as Christ followers.



Paul longed for Jesus’ followers to think the same way and agree with each other. Today’s culture values independence of thought. Is Paul’s vision possible in the 21st century? Can “unity” and “agreement” take on different forms? Might there be a different way of thinking about those qualities that does not require us all to be identical to one another?




We encourage people to have good self-esteem based on understanding who they are in Christ’s love for them. Does thinking of others as better than yourself detract from your self-esteem or self-care? Was Paul asking people to become self-destructive martyrs? What does humility look like when relating to others, notably those you care about? What does humility look like with strangers?


**Prayer:** *Eternal God, put me in my proper place. I recognize that you are God, and I am not.*

*Based on that, help me to think of others as better than myself as I seek unity and agreement with all your children. Amen.*

**Tuesday, April 26** – Read Philippians 2:5-8. History says the city of Philippi was full of retired Roman military men. Ask them who was a great leader and they’d have named Alexander the Great, the Greek leader who conquered nearly all the known world, or the Roman Emperor Augustus who forcibly ended a civil war in the empire. Yet Paul urged the Philippians to be like


Jesus (the Christ = anointed one), a vastly different kind of king. Instead of using his position to gain things for himself, Christ used it to give to others.


 Jesus “did not consider being equal with God something to exploit” (verse 6). Scholar N. T. Wright wrote in *Paul for Everyone*, “Who arrogantly grasped at the chance to be ‘like God, knowing good and evil’? Why, Adam in Genesis 3.” Jesus, who was God, showed “what it really meant to be divine...the true meaning of who God is. He is the God of self-giving love.” Paul urged the Philippians to “adopt the attitude that was in Christ Jesus.” Are you willing to even think about adopting that attitude?

 Verse 7 then said Jesus “emptied himself.” In Greek grammar, the “himself” meant “he was glad to, or he was willing to give up all he had.” “Emptied” didn’t mean Jesus stopped being God (see also 2 Corinthians 5:18-19). As God, he didn’t have an ego need for any rank of dignity and glory. He took the form of a slave and died on a cross. Would you admire Jesus more if he’d strutted around jeering, “Do you know who I am?” and seeking applause? Why or why not?

**Prayer:** *Lord Jesus, I call you Lord, not despite your humble, serving life and death, but because of it. As I worship you, send your Spirit to grow more of your self-giving love in my heart. Amen.*


**Wednesday, April 27** – Read Philippians 2:9-11. This might seem a confusing turnabout. Was Jesus’ “humility” that we read about yesterday just a ruse to get honor and glory after all? No. Scholar William Barclay wrote in his commentary on Philippians, “Jesus won the hearts of [people], not by blasting them with power, but by showing them a love they could not resist...Worship is founded, not on fear, but on love.” The king we serve wore a crown of thorns and leads from the cross.

 These verses aren’t isolated. They illustrated Paul’s call to, “with humility think of others as better than yourselves” in 2:3. He was calling the Philippians to live more like Jesus. The “honor” grew out of Jesus’ self-giving on the cross. This is a God who is known most clearly when he abandons his rights for the sake of the world. Yes, says Paul; and that’s “the mind of Christ.” Do you shape your picture of God more around “powerful” earthly leaders or around Jesus’ self-giving?

 In verses 10-11, Paul adapted the wording of Isaiah 45:22-24 (which he also quoted in Romans 14:11). Long before any church council, he said Jesus embodied the same one God Israel had always served and was worthy of the same honor and praise. He may well have known that Jesus said that too, as we read in John 14:9. When you read a text about “God,” do you remember it’s also about “Jesus”? That texts about Jesus are about God?

**Prayer:** *Lord Jesus, you are “Lord,” the ruler of the entire universe. And that honor is yours because you lived out the divine power of self-giving love. I bow before you in wonder and worship. Amen.*

**Thursday, April 28** – Read Philippians 2:12-18. Be glad with me! Verses 5-11 carried us deep into the wonder and mystery of Jesus as God living as one of us. But Paul’s practical concerns were never far away, so verse 12 started with “therefore.” It’s as though he said, “Why did I tell you all this? Because. . .” And the “because” was “do everything without grumbling and arguing so that you may be blameless and pure.” If they would just allow God to shape them to live that way, Paul would be glad—so “glad” that he repeated the word 4 times!

 Verses 12-13 were closely related. Verse 12 didn’t mean “save yourself by good deeds,” as some might think. “The word he uses for “carry out” is *katergazesthai*, which always has the idea of bringing to completion. The word Paul uses in verse 13 is the verb *energein*.

It is always used of the action of God, and it is always used of effective action. Paul couldn't be with them; God still was (see Philippians 1:6). When have you had a sense of God's energy at work in your life?



Again, Paul used the Hebrew Scriptures, which he always carried in his head. The idea that if the Philippians lived out their life of faith without arguing they would "shine like stars in the world" came from Daniel 12:3. This may speak to us in a contentious world divided politically on everything from financial policies to the pandemic. How can you live a joy-filled life that shines like a star in a world darkened by name-calling and angry words?

**Prayer:** *Lord Jesus, I thank you that your divine energy is always at work in me, moving my salvation toward its completion. Make me a beacon of your joy and light to all those who know me. Amen.*

**Friday, April 29** – Read Philippians 2:19-24. The apostle Paul never had a son, as far as we know. Timothy came remarkably close to filling that place in his life, as verse 22 indicated. Acts 16:1-3 told of Paul meeting Timothy and choosing him to join his traveling party, and shortly after that came Paul's first visit to Philippi. The Philippian Christians already knew Timothy, but Paul included this glowing note of recommendation as he planned to send his younger associate to see to their physical and spiritual well-being in person.



Scholar N. T. Wright wrote in *Paul for Everyone*, "It is interesting that he doesn't say 'Timothy is a wonderful teacher', or even 'Timothy is a very devout and holy man', but 'Timothy will genuinely care about you'. The definition Paul seems to be adopting for a good pastor...has more to do with sheer unselfish love." It seems Paul would agree with the saying that "People don't care what you know until they know that you care." How have you seen this play out in church, in workplaces, schools and families?



Verses 23 and 24 remind us, again, that Paul was in prison, and that he was not certain what the outcome would be. The emotional backdrop of Paul's fourfold repetition of "glad" in yesterday's reading (see Philippians 2:17-18) was, "I might be set free, or I might be executed." How can you use Paul's example to help you deal with uncertain situations (which we all face right now)?

**Prayer:** *Lord Jesus, your whole story reflected that God genuinely cares about my well-being. Timothy learned to live out your attitude toward others. Keep growing my capacity to do that, too. Amen.*

**Saturday, April 30** – Read Philippians 2:25-30. Timothy got to be famous—two New Testament letters sent to him, his name in the book of Acts 6 times and in 10 of Paul's letters. Epaphroditus? His name appeared one more time in Philippians, and that was it. But he mattered. When people were put in prison in Paul's world, they were not normally given food by their captors; they had to rely on friends helping them. When the church in Philippi heard Paul was in prison, they chose Epaphroditus to take something—money? warm blankets? scrolls to read? baked goods? maybe all of these? – to Paul, likely in distant Rome. Not as a quick drop-off, but to stay and serve the apostle—"your representative who serves my needs." But he got so sick he nearly died, and Paul sent him home, carrying this letter. Paul, that great apostle, was not a solo act. He was part of "the body of Christ" he wrote about, and many members of that body, like Epaphroditus, supported and sustained him.



In the middle of this letter of joy, Paul said something about Epaphroditus' illness we might not expect: "his death would have caused me great sorrow." Paul's honesty showed a key way in which joy and happiness differ. Pastor/scholar Eugene Peterson wrote: "One

of the most interesting and remarkable things Christians learn is that laughter does not exclude weeping. Christian joy is not an escape from sorrow. Pain and hardship still come...The joy comes because God knows how to wipe away tears and in his resurrection work, create the smile of new life. Joy is what God gives, not what we work up.” God used the caring Epaphroditus brought to sustain Paul’s joy even in a dreary prison cell. Who has God used to help bring you joy even in painful times? For whom can you be a channel of God’s work in creating new life?

**Prayer:** *Lord Jesus, when I’m tempted to feel that I don’t matter, remind me of brave Epaphroditus. He couldn’t have written Philippians, but without him we wouldn’t have this letter. Help me play my role as a faithful member of your body. Amen.*