



Intro to Philippians

JUNE 6, 1944, 4:15 AM—With storms over the English Channel forecast to dissipate, **General Dwight D. Eisenhower**, Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces in Europe, gives the go-ahead to launch Operation Overlord.

“You are about to embark upon a great crusade,” Eisenhower tells his men. “You will bring about the elimination of Nazi tyranny over the oppressed peoples of Europe and security for ourselves in a free world.” With these few words, 5,000 ships, 13,000 aircraft and 160,000 troops start to move.

D-day has finally arrived. Within 24 hours, Allied soldiers reach the coasts of Normandy and with great difficulty establish a beachhead. In ten weeks, they liberate France and, within a year, force Germany to unconditionally surrender. France and England celebrate. People are dancing in the streets.

As an expression of thanks from a grateful nation, French President Charles De Gaulle sends Eisenhower a message, letting him know that he will be receiving France’s most prestigious award, the Order of the Liberation.

Eisenhower, flattered by this lofty honor, responds to de Gaulle with a thank-you note of his own: “I am deeply grateful for your fine message and for the wonderful honor which you have bestowed on me... With assurance of my continued regard and admiration, Dwight D. Eisenhower.”

In Acts 16, the Bible records a similar invasion, slightly smaller in scale yet equally important. Paul, Silas, Timothy and Luke are about to embark on a great crusade to bring about the elimination of spiritual tyranny over the oppressed peoples of Europe and provide for their eternal security.

Their first stop is Philippi. Through Paul’s preaching, a number of local residents are liberated from their sins, and a church is born. People are dancing in the streets. As an expression of thanks from a grateful flock, the new believers, though poor, financially support Paul’s ministry—for years.

Some ten years later, during the time that Paul is in prison in Rome, a messenger from Philippi arrives with yet another financial gift. Paul, flattered by this lofty honor, responds with a grateful acknowledgement. He begins, “I thank my God upon every remembrance of you... making request for you all with joy.”

Welcome to Philippians—Paul’s thank-you note.

Philippians

Writer	Paul
Date written	AD 63
Place written	Rome—during Paul's 1 st imprisonment
Recipients	Church in Philippi
Theme	Joy, joy, joy

Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again—rejoice.
—Philippians 4:4

Paul's letter to the Philippians is unique among his New Testament writings. There are no crises for him to mediate. There are no serious issues for him to resolve. There are neither deep teachings nor lofty revelations for him to pass along to his readers.

Rather, the letter is a joy-fest, each page exuding more joy than the last. In Rome, Paul rejoices in the Lord in spite of his chains. In Philippi, the church members rejoice in the Lord in spite of their sufferings. And each party rejoices all the more when it hears that the other party is rejoicing.

Like giddy newlyweds on their honeymoon, joy is sloshing out all over the place. Face it—Paul and the Philippians are crazy in love. It's obvious. Of all the churches Paul has planted, the church in Philippi is hands down his favorite. She is the apple of his eye. But why?

Some say it's because Philippi is the first church Paul founded in Europe—a significant accomplishment, a meaningful milestone for him. Others think it's because the Philippians are such a generous and loving people, who with hearts the size of Texas demonstrate their fierce loyalty to Paul by rallying to support him financially.

Others suggest it's because the church had remained issue-free, sheltered from outside religious attacks that had plagued other Christian congregations. For whatever reason, the fact is that Paul and this particular group of spiritual children share an especially close, loving relationship.

The result is blatant, unabashed, unmitigated happiness.
In short—joy, joy, joy.

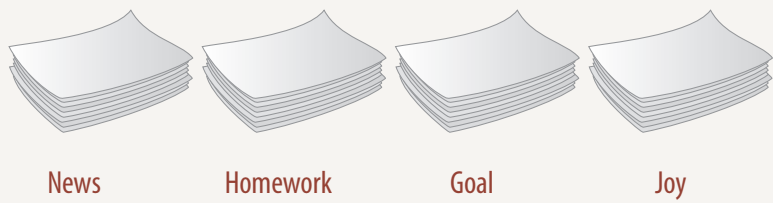


Philippians' theme:
Joy, joy, joy

A brief outline of the letter

Philippians can also be thought of as a letter written by a traveling father to his loving children back home. He has recently received a surprise gift from them and eagerly sends his reply. To ease their minds, he first opens a conversation about how he’s doing. Then, he thinks of them and suggests a few practical things they should take care of in the household. Next, he reminds them to keep things moving forward during his absence. And finally, he thanks them for being his joy and sends them his love.

	Chapters
News —things are going fine with me in Rome	1
Homework —keep your oneness, serve humbly	2
Goal —keep going, press on, gain Christ	3
Joy —Rejoice in the Lord always!	4



Verses that rejoice

Paul expresses joy, gladness and rejoicing more in this short letter than in all of his other writings combined. Here are some examples:

Whenever I pray, I make my requests for all of you with joy. **Philippians 1:4**

So I rejoice. And I will continue to rejoice. **1:18**

I will remain alive... to help all of you...experience the joy of your faith. **1:25**

Make me truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other. **2:2**

But I will rejoice even if I lose my life. **2:17**

I want all of you to share that joy. **2:17**

Yes, you should rejoice, and I will share your joy. **2:18**

Welcome him with Christian love and with great joy. **2:29**

Whatever happens, my dear brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord. **3:1**

Dear friends... you are my joy and the crown I receive for my work. **4:1**

Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again—rejoice. **4:4**

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. **4:23**

How to navigate Philippians

1. Meet two Philippians

Read the story of Paul’s first visit to Philippi in Acts 16:11-40. Shortly after Paul’s team arrives in town, two characters appear on stage. The first is Lydia, a businesswoman who sells purple fabrics. She is Paul’s first European convert. The second is a Roman jailor, brought to faith following an earthquake. Both, in turn, bring their family members to faith.

2. Pay attention to *you* and *me*

Philippians is by far the most informal and intimate of Paul’s letters. His writing style is easy and comfortable, and he uses personal pronouns a lot. Here’s an exercise: take out a pen and as you read this short letter start to finish, count how many times Paul says, *I* and *me* (hint: more than 100). He also says *you* and *yours* over 70 times. This is intimacy.

3. Study the “Christ Hymn”

A critical section of this letter is Philippians 2:5-11, known as the “Christ Hymn” since it was written in poetic form. Here, in one of the earliest statements of the Christian faith, Paul makes crystal clear: 1) that Christ is God, 2) that he humbled himself, became a man and died to save us from our sins and 3) that he is now reigning over everything as Lord of all.

4. Read Paul’s autobiography

In Philippians 3:2-15, Paul lists his impressive accomplishments and credentials. Then, he says that all of these former things are rubbish compared to his new life’s work: serving Christ and getting to know him.

Unique things about Philippians

Did you know...

Caesar’s bodyguards and household heard the Gospel

During his first imprisonment in Rome, Paul was under the constant care of Caesar’s Imperial Guard, crack troops who took turns guarding him by handcuffing him to themselves. Imagine what fun Paul had talking about Jesus to these guys, one at a time. Talk about a captive audience. Over time, they all heard the Good News. Paul says that during this time, a large number of people from Caesar’s household became Christians (Philippians 1:12-14).

Paul preached for free

Paul wasn’t a paid preacher. He received no regular wages from any of the many local churches he had founded. Rather, he worked as a tent-maker to provide for his own needs. At times, however, he did honor the Philippians’ love for him by graciously receiving and acknowledging their financial support.

Two feuding ladies

Women of substance played prominent roles in the church in Philippi. In this letter, Paul calls our attention to two of them. Unfortunately, these lovely ladies are feuding. And their names, Euodia and Syntyche, sound strangely symbolic. The first: *you odious*—she’s bent out of shape about something. And the other: *soon touchy*. Need we say more? (Philippians 4:2)

Don’t worry, be happy

Paul reveals two secrets of true happiness and passes them along to the Philippians. One is that worrying about things doesn’t help. What *does* help is to tell God what you’re worried about, sharing your concerns with him. Another is that in whatever circumstances you find yourself, whether in riches or poverty, you can find contentment in Christ.



Recap

- Philippians is Paul's casual and intimate thank-you note.
- He and the church in Philippi have a joyful thing going. He is their doting father, and they are his loving children.
- The letter is like correspondence from a traveling dad: here's what's happening with me, I love you and I look forward to seeing you soon.

Read it!

- Read Philippians now. At a casual reading pace, it will take you 12 minutes.

Self-study / Group discussion questions

- Philippians is about thankfulness. How do you express your thanks to other people? What makes saying "Thank you," so powerful to both parties? What can we do to become more thankful people?
- Is joy a part of your daily experience? If not, why not? How can we live more buoyant, joyful lives?
- Paul suggests that we can be freed from anxiety by inviting God to join us in our circumstances. Is this a common practice among people you know? If not, why not?

Insights that we can apply today

Forgetting the past... I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize. —Philippians 3:13-14

The Christian life is a marathon—a long race towards the goal of being all that we can be for God and of experiencing all that he has for us. As with running, we do best when we keep our eyes focused straight ahead on Christ and our thoughts in the present. Agonizing over the past is a waste of time. We learn from our experiences and move on. Happy running.

