A FIELD JOURNAL

FOURTEEN WEEKS

PHILIPPIANS

CITIZENS OF HEAVEN

A city of heaven planted inside a city of Rome.



I · THE PLACE
41.013° N / 24.286° E



"A leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony." ACTS 16:12

PHILIPPI

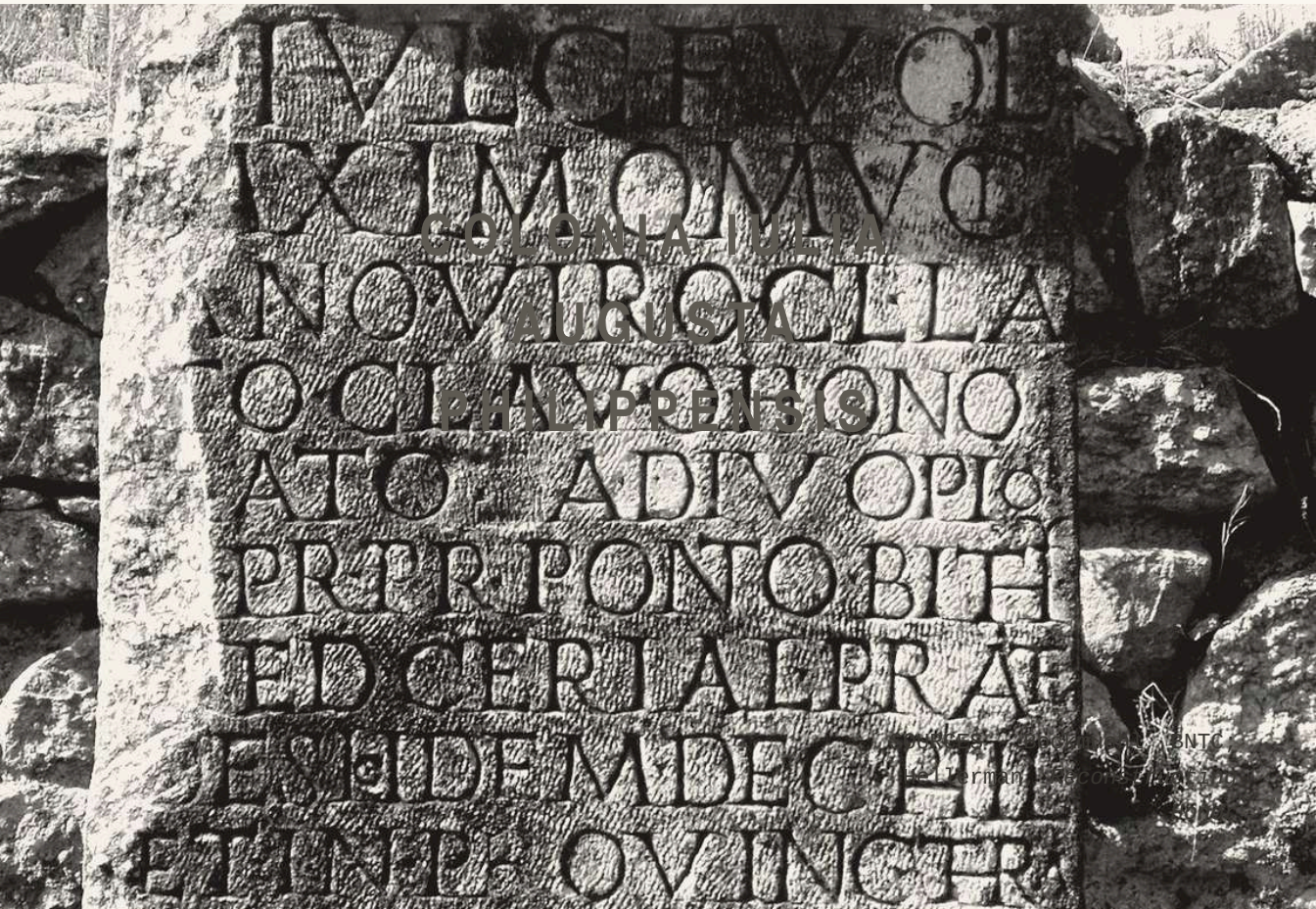
II · THE CITY

ROME, REBUILT IN MACEDONIA

Philippi stood on the Via Egnatia in eastern Macedonia, and Roman law governed it. After the battle on its plain in 42 BC, Antony and Octavian settled discharged veterans here. After Actium in 31 BC, Octavian refounded the city as a Roman colony and granted it the *ius Italicum*, which gave its soil the legal standing of Italian ground.

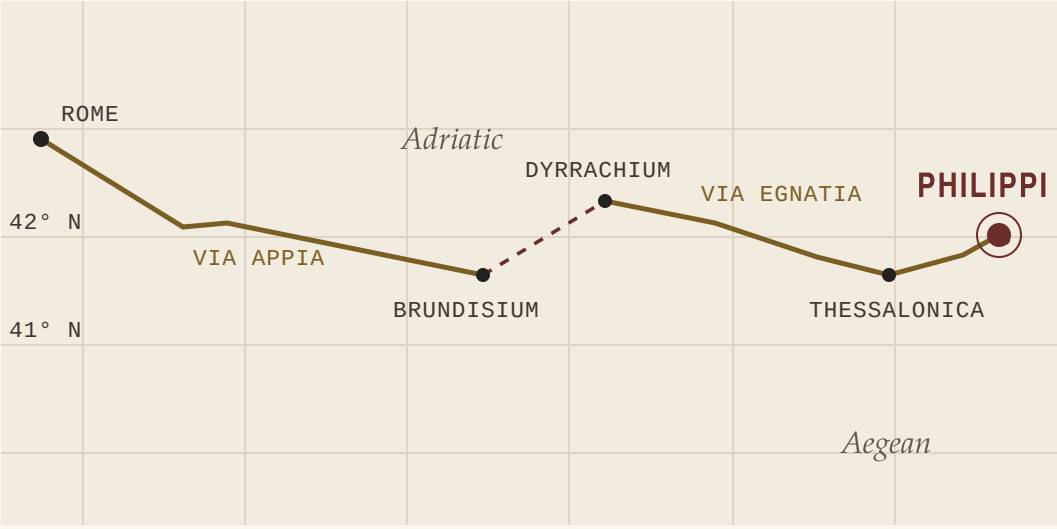
Public inscriptions were in Latin, and Roman magistrates governed the city. Its leading men listed their offices in the fixed order of the *cursus honorum*, the ladder of public honor, and Philippi's elite pursued that ladder with unusual zeal.

The church would hear Paul's letter in a city that measured people by rank.



III · THE ROAD

THE ROAD RAN THROUGH IT



MAP 00 · Rome to Philippi: the Via Appia, the Adriatic crossing, the Via Egnatia. Positions plotted by coordinate; coastlines omitted.

Rome built the Via Egnatia in the second century BC to move its people and power east. The road ran from the Adriatic coast over the mountains of Macedonia to the Aegean and passed through Philippi. Soldiers, officials, merchants, and couriers traveled it, and Paul followed it into Macedonia.

From Rome a traveler took the Via Appia south to Brundisium, crossed the Adriatic, and walked the Egnatia east, a trip of some eight hundred miles and several weeks. Epaphroditus made that trip for the Philippians and nearly died on it (2:25–30). He likely carried this letter home along the same road.



PLATE

IV · THE PEOPLE

UNDER ROME, NOT OF IT

The colony's citizens were Roman, but most members of the church probably were not. Peter Oakes's study of Philippi's population suggests a congregation drawn largely from Greek non-citizens, slaves, and colonists of modest means. They lived under Roman privilege without fully sharing it.

The church met in Lydia's house. Some members worked for people who hailed Caesar as lord and savior. Confessing Jesus as Lord could cost them business, standing, and sometimes safety (1:29–30).

PAUL ADDRESSES THEM AS CITIZENS OF HEAVEN.

SOURCE · Oakes, *Philippians: From People to Letter*

V · THE LETTER

WRITTEN UNDER GUARD

Paul wrote Philippians in chains, probably in Rome, around AD 60–62, about a decade after the church began. The Philippians had sent him money and one of their own, Epaphroditus, to care for him. This letter is his reply: thanks for a gift, news from custody, a warning, a plea for unity, and a great deal of joy.

Paul writes as a friend and partner. He names people, reports how he is doing, and asks two women by name to agree in the Lord. At the center of the letter he places a hymn about Christ, who humbled himself to the cross before God exalted him.

TIMELINE

42 BC
Battle on the plain. Veterans settled.

31 BC
Refounded as a Roman colony.

c. AD 49
Paul at the river. The church begins (Acts 16).

c. AD 60–62
Paul writes from custody.

1:27

POLITEUESTHE

Live as citizens.

Paul usually calls the Christian life a "walk." In 1:27 he uses the citizen's verb instead, the only time it appears in his letters. Readers in a Roman colony would have noticed the choice.



2:6–11 · Between the two passages stands the hymn. Christ descends the ladder of honor, rung by rung, to a slave's cross, and God exalts him. The hymn reverses Philippi's *cursus honorum*.

3:20

POLITEUMA

Our citizenship is in heaven.

The word could name a community living abroad under the laws of its home city. That is what Philippi was for Rome, and what the church is for heaven. A colony is planted to extend the life of its home city. Heaven's citizens hold their ground here and wait for the Savior who will come from there.

SOURCES · Fee, NICNT; Hellerman, EGGNT; Bockmuehl, BNTC; Hellerman, *Reconstructing Honor*; Wright, *Paul for Everyone*

WELCOME

Philippians is a letter to a city of heaven planted inside a city of Rome. Philippi was a little Rome in Greece, proud of its citizenship. Paul wrote to tell a small church there that they belonged to another commonwealth: "our citizenship is in heaven" (3:20). So he calls them to live as citizens worthy of the gospel of Christ (1:27).

For fourteen weeks we will read the letter together and learn what that citizenship means where God has stationed us. We will also see why Paul's joy held steady in hard circumstances.

HOW THIS JOURNAL WORKS

FIELD CONTEXT

The world behind the passage, so you hear it as the first readers did.

THE TEXT

A reflection on what the passage means and how it speaks now.

FIELD NOTES

Short notes on words, places and details worth keeping.

DISCUSSION

Questions for your group, from what the text says to what it asks.

ON THE GROUND

Questions to carry into the week ahead.

PRAYER

A prayer to pray together before you go.

BEFORE YOUR GROUP MEETS

Read the passage at least twice, in more than one translation if you can. Read the field context and the text. Write answers to a few questions, and mark what puzzled or encouraged you. Each page leaves room for your notes.

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FOUR THREADS

WATCH FOR THEM EACH WEEK

01

CITIZENSHIP

POLITEUOMAI · POLITEUMA

The main thread. The church is a colony of heaven that lives under its King wherever it serves.

1:27 · 3:20

02

JOY

CHARA · CHAIRŌ

“Joy” and “rejoice” appear again and again, usually written from a hard place.

1:4 · 2:17–18 · 4:4

03

MINDSET

PHRONEŌ

To set the mind. Paul returns often to how a church thinks together.

2:2 · 2:5 · 3:15 · 4:2

04

COUNTING

HĒGEOMAI · LOGIZOMAI

The language of accounts: what we count as gain, what we count as loss, and what God credits to us.

2:3 · 2:6 · 3:7–8 · 4:8

FOURTEEN WEEKS

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PLATE 01



VIA EGNATIA
PHILIPPI / MACEDONIA
41.013° N / 24.286° E

TWO ADDRESSES

In Christ, at Philippi

Paul addresses this church in two places: in Christ and at Philippi. The rest of the letter teaches them to live in Philippi under the rule of Christ.

PHILIPPI / MACEDONIA
41.013° N / 24.286° E
CHURCH FOUNDED c. AD 49



THE READING

PHILIPPIANS 1:1–8

1 Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus
who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons: 2 Grace to you and peace
from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 3 I thank my God in all my
remembrance of you, 4 always in every prayer of mine for you all making my
prayer with joy, 5 because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day
until now. 6 And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will
bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. 7 It is right for me to feel this
way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers
with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and
confirmation of the gospel. 8 For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all
with the affection of Christ Jesus.

TO ALL THE SAINTS · 1:1

ADDRESS 01 · WHERE THEY BELONG

IN CHRIST JESUS

ADDRESS 02 · WHERE THEY LIVE

AT PHILIPPI

SCRIPTURE: ESV

FIELD CONTEXT

A CITY THAT CARRIED ROME

Philippi sat on the Via Egnatia, the road Rome built across Macedonia from the Adriatic to the Aegean. Two battles shaped the city. After the first, fought on the plain below the city in 42 BC, Antony and Octavian settled veterans here. After the second, at Actium in 31 BC, Octavian refounded the city as a colony and gave its land the legal standing of Italian soil. Its monuments were inscribed in Latin, Roman law governed its citizens, and leading men carved their offices into stone in order of rank.

Philippi lived by Roman law hundreds of miles from Rome.

About a decade after the church began, Paul wrote to it under guard, most likely in Rome. The believers had sent money, and a man named Epaphroditus to care for him. He wrote back to thank them, to steady them, and to call them to one mind.



MAP 01 · The Via Egnatia, and Paul’s crossing from Troas by Samothrace to Neapolis (Acts 16:11–12). Positions plotted by coordinate; coastlines omitted.



ACTS 16 · OUTSIDE THE GATE

Around AD 49 Paul landed at Neapolis and walked the road inland. On the Sabbath he went out through the city gate to the river, where people gathered to pray. The church in Philippi began on that riverbank.

LYDIA

A dealer in purple cloth from Thyatira. The Lord opened her heart.

16:14–15

A SLAVE GIRL

Owned for profit. Freed from a spirit in the name of Jesus.

16:16–18

THE JAILER

Fastened Paul's feet in the stocks. That same night his household was baptized.

16:23–34

The first believers were a merchant, a slave girl, and a jailer.

THE TEXT · 1:1–4

THE LOWEST TITLE IN THE ROOM

Paul addresses the believers in two places: “saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi” (1:1). Philippi was where they lived, and Christ Jesus was where they belonged. The rest of the letter teaches them to live in Philippi under the rule of Christ.

Paul introduces himself with the lowest title available. He could have written “apostle,” as he does in other letters. Instead he writes “servants,” literally slaves, of Christ Jesus, and places Timothy beside him under the same word. In a city that ranked everyone, the choice was deliberate. Paul took his standing from his King.

Then he prays, and joy enters the letter for the first time. It is attached to people: “I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy” (1:3–4). Paul wrote this in custody with his case undecided. His joy came from the people he prayed for and from God’s work among them.



KEY VERSE · 1:6

“He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.”

The reason for Paul’s joy is partnership: “because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now” (1:5). The word is *koinōnia*. English readers often hear “fellowship” and think of time together after a service. Paul means a shared stake in a mission. The Philippians had prayed for him, sent money when no other church did, and sent one of their own to serve him in custody.

The partnership began on “the first day,” at the river outside the gate, when the Lord opened Lydia’s heart. By the time of this letter it had lasted more than a decade across hundreds of miles. Many of us have built friendships and then received orders to move. Partnership in the gospel continues after a change of station.

Then comes one of the most hopeful sentences in the Bible: “I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ” (1:6). Paul’s confidence rests on God, who began the work and will finish it. The Philippians’ record does not enter the sentence. The “you” is plural, so the work in view is a whole people that God is building.

This is good news for anyone who feels unfinished or doubts they will finish well. Paul's confidence rests on God's faithfulness to complete what he started, and Paul is sure of it. A believer's citizenship rests on God's work.

The section closes with affection: "I hold you in my heart … I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus" (1:7–8). The word "all" keeps returning. Paul holds every one of them, including the two women who will later need help ending a quarrel (4:2).

Before Paul tells this church how to live as citizens, he reminds them who they are and to whom they belong. Each of us has a street address, on post or in town. Our first address is in Christ Jesus, where we have a faithful King, a people to stand with, and a joy that does not depend on where we are stationed.

FIELD NOTES

FOUR WORDS IN 1:1–8

DOULOI · 1:1
"Servants," literally slaves. Paul's first word about himself in this letter, written to a city that prized rank.

KOINŌNIA · 1:5
"Partnership." A shared stake in a common work. It includes friendship and goes beyond it.

"YOU" · 1:6
Plural. The good work God began is a people, and he finishes what he starts.

"ALL" · 1:4, 7, 8
Paul repeats it so that everyone in the church is included in his prayer.

DISCUSSION

GETTING STARTED

01 Of all the places you have lived, which felt most like home? What made it home?

THE PASSAGE

02 Read Acts 16:11–40. What kinds of people stand at the beginning of the church in Philippi? What does that suggest about the gospel?

03 Paul calls himself a servant, literally a slave, rather than an apostle (1:1). Why might that matter in a city that prized rank and titles?

04 What is the reason for Paul's joy in 1:3–5? How is it different from what usually makes us happy?

05 In 1:6, who begins the good work, and who completes it? Why does that matter?

ON THE GROUND

06 Paul writes to saints “in Christ Jesus” who are “at Philippi” (1:1). How should your first address, in Christ, shape the way you live at your street address this week?

07 Is there an area of your life where you have doubted that God will finish what he started? How does 1:6 speak to it?

08 Paul held “all” of the Philippians in his heart. Who in your church or community is hard for you to love? What would it look like to hold them in your heart this week?



PRAYER

Thank God for the people who have been partners with you in the faith. Ask him to finish the work he began in your group and in this church.

LOVE FIT FOR THE DAY OF CHRIST

KEY VERSE · 1:9

“And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment.”



DOKIMAZŌ

To test a coin and see whether it is genuine.

FIELD CONTEXT

A PRAYER INSTEAD OF A GREETING

Ancient letters often opened with a prayer for the reader's health. Paul expands the custom into a prayer for a church's growth.

The Philippians were already a loving church. They had given to Paul when no other church did and sent one of their own to care for him in custody. The letter also shows strain, including rivalry, pride, and a painful disagreement between two leaders (2:3; 4:2). Their love was real, and Paul prays for it to grow wiser.

One of Paul's key words comes from the market. *Dokimazō* meant to test a coin or a piece of metal to see whether it was genuine. Money changers did it every day in Philippi. Paul uses it for testing choices to find what has real value.

OBSERVATIONS · READ 1:9–11 TWICE What leads to what?

LOVE THAT CAN TELL THE DIFFERENCE

Citizens who live far from their home city have to think in two directions at once. Philippi's colonists kept Roman law in a Greek province, and every day they judged which customs belonged to Rome and which did not. Paul prays for that same skill in the citizens of heaven. His request is for their love to grow wiser.

"It is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment" (1:9). Paul assumes the love is there. He wants it to overflow, and to grow in a particular direction.

Many people treat love as a feeling and knowledge as a set of facts. Paul keeps them together. Love without knowledge can be sincere and still do damage when it agrees to everything, shields people from consequences they need, or avoids a hard conversation. The word "discernment" means moral perception, the ability to see what is right in a real situation.

PLATE



Paul gives the purpose: “so that you may approve what is excellent” (1:10). The phrase means “the things that differ,” or “the things that really matter.” Paul is mostly concerned here with choosing what matters most among many good options.

That skill is difficult to learn. Most of our hard choices are between good things that compete for limited time and strength: work, family, church, training, friendships, and rest. Mature love learns to tell the good from the best.

GOOD AND BEST

Then the prayer looks to the finish line: “so that you may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ” (1:10). That day is the King’s arrival, the moment this city of heaven is waiting for (3:20). It sets the standard for every decision. Asking what will matter when Christ comes helps us sort a crowded calendar.

Paul prays that they will be “filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God” (1:11). The fruit comes through Christ and grows as we stay joined to him, the way a branch draws life from the vine. Love, wisdom, choices, and character all lead to God’s glory.

The prayer gives us a pattern. Pray Paul’s words for your spouse, your children, your friends, and your unit. Pray that their love grows wise, that they choose what matters most, that they are ready for the King’s arrival, and that their lives bear fruit only Jesus can grow. Praying this way applies heaven’s standards to the places where we are stationed.

FIELD NOTES

THE CHAIN OF 1:9–11

01 · LOVE ABOUNDS	“Abound” means overflow, run over the brim (1:9).
02 · DISCERNMENT	Moral perception, trained by use (1:9).
03 · APPROVE	*Dokimazō*: test it like a coin. Keep what is genuine (1:10).
04 · THE DAY	The King’s arrival sets the standard for every choice (1:10).
05 · THE FRUIT	Grown through Christ, for the glory of God (1:11).

DISCUSSION

GETTING STARTED

01 Think of a time you moved somewhere new. What did you have to learn to tell apart about how things worked there?

THE PASSAGE

02 Trace the chain in 1:9–11. What leads to what? Where does the prayer end?

03 Why does love need knowledge and discernment? Can you think of an example of love that lacked wisdom?

04 What is the difference between choosing right over wrong and choosing "what is excellent" (1:10)?

05 Where does the "fruit of righteousness" come from (1:11)? Why does that matter?

ON THE GROUND

06 What good things are competing for your time and energy right now? How might the King's arrival, "the day of Christ," help you decide what matters most?

07 Where could your love grow in discernment: in your family, your friendships, or your work?

08 Choose one person to pray for this week, using Paul's prayer as a model. Write their name here.



PRAYER

Pray Philippians 1:9–11 for one another, using each person's name.



THE GOSPEL IN CAESAR'S GUARD

ROME · 41.89° N / 12.49° E · c. AD 60–62

KEY VERSE · 1:12

“I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel.”

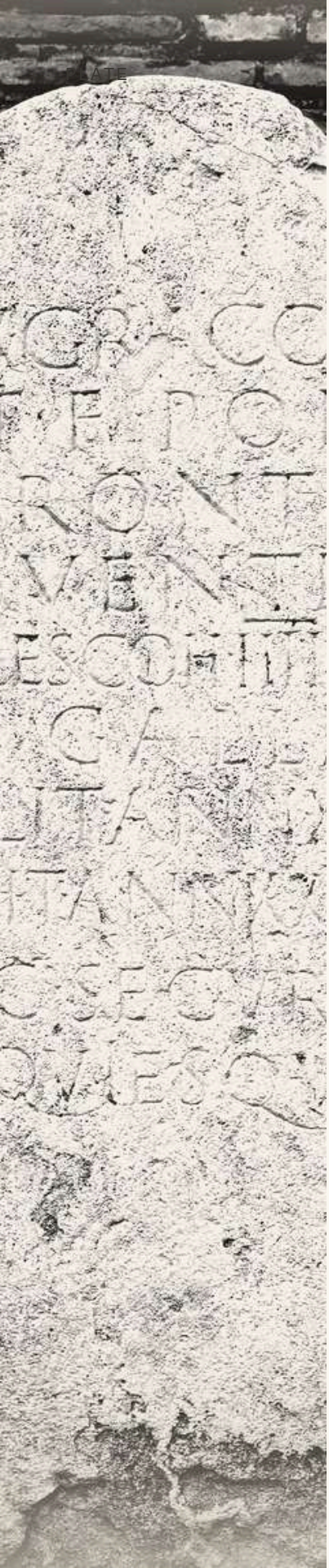
FIELD CONTEXT

CHAINED TO A SOLDIER

Roman prisoners were not always kept in cells. Some, like Paul in Rome, lived under house arrest, chained to a soldier around the clock (Acts 28:16, 30). Prisoners depended on friends for food and care. That is one reason the Philippians’ gift mattered so much.

If Paul was in Rome, his guards likely came from the Praetorian Guard, the emperor’s elite unit of several thousand men. Guards rotated in shifts. Over months, many of them spent hours chained to Paul, listening to his prayers, his visitors, and the letters he dictated.

Imprisonment also brought shame, and a prisoner’s friends might keep their distance to protect their own name. To an outside observer, Paul’s mission appeared to have stalled.



THE TEXT · 1:12–13

CHAINS THAT MOVED THE MISSION

When friends hear that someone they love is in trouble, they usually ask how that person is doing. The Philippians likely asked Paul the same thing. His answer says little about his health, his quarters, or his court date. He reports on the gospel.

"What has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel" (1:12). "Advance" pictures forward progress, a road cut through rough country. Paul says his imprisonment moved the mission forward.

First, among outsiders: "It has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ" (1:13). These were Caesar's own soldiers, Rome's most trusted men. The men chained to Paul learned that he was imprisoned for his allegiance to Christ, and over many shifts they heard the gospel from the prisoner they guarded.

PAUL PREACHED FROM HIS CHAINS.

Second, among insiders: “Most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear” (1:14). Paul’s arrest could have frightened other believers into silence. His faithfulness gave them courage to speak.

Then Paul admits something painful. Not everyone preaching Christ in Rome had clean motives. “Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry” (1:15). Some seemed to welcome his absence and hoped to make his imprisonment harder. Others preached out of love.

Paul answers: “What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice” (1:18). He does not approve of selfish motives. He declines to make his reputation the center of the story, and he rejoices whenever the true Christ is preached.

PLATE



This is a hard test for us. It asks whether we can rejoice when someone else receives credit, when another church grows, or when a rival does good work. Paul's joy depended on Christ being known.

Many of us end up in places we did not choose: a hard assignment, a hospital bed, a lonely season, or a job we would not have picked. We tend to treat these as interruptions. Paul's example points us to the people near us who watch how we carry hardship, and to what God may do through that place.

Not every hardship produces fruit we can see, and God is not limited by our circumstances. Rome held Paul in chains, and God used that custody to place him among Caesar's guard. By the end of the letter there are believers in "Caesar's household" itself (4:22).

Citizens of heaven serve their King wherever earthly orders place them, and the gospel moves forward even when its messengers are in chains.

FIELD NOTES

1:12–18a

PROKOPĒ · 1:12
"Advance." Forward progress through ground that resists it. The word returns in 1:25.

PRAITŌRION · 1:13
"Imperial guard." Caesar's elite troops, or the headquarters where they served.

ERITHEIA · 1:17
"Rivalry," selfish ambition. Watch for it again in 2:3.

OBSERVATIONS Who heard the gospel because Paul was in chains?

DISCUSSION

GETTING STARTED

01 Describe a time when something that looked like a setback turned out to open a door.

THE PASSAGE

02 When Paul reports on his situation, what does he focus on (1:12)? What does that reveal about his priorities?

03 How did Paul's imprisonment affect outsiders (1:13) and other believers (1:14)?

04 What were the different motives of those preaching Christ in Rome (1:15–17)?

05 Why could Paul rejoice even when some preachers had selfish motives (1:18)? Where would he draw the line (see 3:2)?

ON THE GROUND

THIS WEEK

06 Where has an assignment or circumstance placed you that you did not choose? Who there might be watching how a citizen of heaven carries it?

07 Whose faithfulness has given you courage? How might your faithfulness encourage someone else?

08 Is there an area where you struggle to rejoice when others succeed? What would Paul's "What then?" look like for you?



PRAYER

Ask God to use the hard places in each person's life to make Christ known.

TO LIVE IS CHRIST

Staying at the post

“For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”

1:21

FIELD CONTEXT

AWAITING A VERDICT

Paul wrote these verses waiting on a verdict that could end in execution. As a Roman citizen he could not be crucified, but he could be beheaded.

Greek and Roman philosophers often debated death. Some treated it as a release from life's troubles, and a few praised taking one's own life as a noble choice. Paul's view is different. He has no control over the court's decision, and when he weighs life and death, he describes what he longs for. In the end he chooses life for the sake of others.

In verse 19 Paul quotes Job, another man who suffered while trusting God to vindicate him. Paul hopes for more than release. He hopes God will prove him faithful in the end, whatever a Roman court decides.



THE TEXT · 1:18b–21

A PRISONER'S TESTIMONY

Few verses in the Bible are as bold as Philippians 1:21: "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." Paul wrote it as a Roman citizen awaiting a Roman verdict that could end in his death. His deeper citizenship decides how he faces it.

His hope is that "Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death" (1:20). Paul wants his life, and possibly his death, to show others how great Christ is.

FINISH THE SENTENCE · HONESTLY

FOR TO ME, TO LIVE IS _____

Most of us could fill the blank with something good, such as family, career, service, health, or comfort. The second half of the verse tests the answer. If to live is my career, my family, or my comfort, then death means loss. If to live is Christ, death brings us closer to the one we live for. Only that answer makes death gain.

THE TEXT · 1:22–26

Paul is honest that he is torn. “I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better” (1:23). The word “depart” was used for soldiers breaking camp and for ships pulling up anchor. For the believer, death is moving on to be with Christ.

He adds, “To remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account” (1:24). His home is with Christ, yet he chooses to stay at his post because others need him. He wants to remain for their “progress and joy in the faith” (1:25).

Soldiers and their families live with risk and possible loss. This passage answers the fear of death with Christ, the center of life and the hope beyond it. That confidence produces courage without recklessness.

CHRIST IS OUR LIFE. DEATH BRINGS US TO HIM.

FIELD NOTES

1:18b–26

KERDOS · 1:21
“Gain.” The counting thread begins here. Watch it in 3:7–8.

ANALYSAI · 1:23
“Depart.” Strike the tents, weigh anchor, move on.

JOB 13:16 · 1:19
Paul borrows the words of another sufferer who trusted God to vindicate him.

THE TEXT · FOR THE WEARY AND THE GRIEVING

This passage also speaks to anyone who is weary of life. Paul longed to be with Christ, but he chose to stay because the people around him needed him.

IF YOU ARE STRUGGLING

If you are having thoughts of ending your life, you are needed, and help is available. Talk to a chaplain or pastor today. Call 988 and press 1 for the Military Crisis Line, or text 838255.

For those grieving someone who knew Christ, this passage offers real comfort. They are "with Christ, which is far better." Later in the letter Paul describes the day Christ will return and transform our bodies (3:20–21).

Whether we live or die, we belong to Christ. Our home with him is secure, and while we remain here, he gives us a post to hold and people to serve.

PLATE



OBSERVATIONS · 1:18b–26

Who is Paul staying for?

DISCUSSION

GETTING STARTED

01 How do people in our culture usually talk about death? How do they cope with the fear of it?

THE PASSAGE

02 What gave Paul confidence about the outcome of his situation (1:19–20)?

03 What does Paul mean by "to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (1:21)?

04 Why does Paul call being with Christ "far better" (1:23)?

05 What ultimately decides Paul's "choice" to remain (1:24–26)?

ON THE GROUND

06 Honestly, how would you finish the sentence “For to me, to live is _____”?

07 How might this passage change the way you face danger, illness, or the death of someone you love?

08 Paul stayed at his post for the “progress and joy” of others. Who needs you at your post right now, and how can you invest in their faith?



PRAYER

Ask God to make Christ the center of each person’s life. Pray for anyone in your group who is grieving or carrying a heavy burden.



LIVE AS

PHILIPPIANS 1:27–30
POLITEUESTHE · LIVE AS CITIZENS



"Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ."

KEY VERSE · 1:27

CITIZENS

FIELD CONTEXT

“NOT LAWFUL FOR US AS ROMANS”

Philippi’s citizens were proud of one thing above all: they were Romans. They lived in Macedonia, hundreds of miles from Rome, yet were governed by Roman law, enrolled as Roman citizens, and expected to show loyalty to Rome and its emperor. Many families descended from the veterans Rome had settled there.

That loyalty included honoring the city’s gods and the emperor. Christians who refused could lose business, friends, and standing. The church knew the cost from the start. When Paul first came, he and Silas were dragged before the magistrates, accused of advocating customs “not lawful for us as Romans,” beaten with rods, and thrown into prison (Acts 16:19–24). Paul reminds them of “the same conflict that you saw I had” (1:30).

So when Paul tells them to “let your manner of life be worthy,” he uses a word that means “live as citizens.” Readers in a Roman colony would have recognized it. The essay “The Citizenship” at the front of this journal follows the word through the letter.

PAUL’S USUAL WORD

PERIPATEŌ

“walk”

HIS WORD IN 1:27

POLITEUESTHE

“live as citizens”

ONLY.

Paul opens with the word “only,” which marks what follows as his main concern: “Let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ” (1:27).

“Manner of life” translates a word that means “live as citizens.” The Philippians knew what that meant. They lived far from Rome and carried themselves as Romans. Citizenship shaped their identity, their loyalties, and their conduct.

Paul says believers belong to a different commonwealth. Later he states it directly: “Our citizenship is in heaven” (3:20). The gospel now sets the standard for how they live together. They are a city of heaven planted inside a Roman colony.

Paul hopes to hear that they are “standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel” (1:27). “Stand firm” is the language of holding ground. “Striving side by side” comes from athletic contests and describes teammates contending shoulder to shoulder. Paul expects believers to face pressure together.

POLITEUESTHE

Live as citizens. The verb appears nowhere else in Paul's letters.

STĒKETE

Stand firm. Hold your ground. It returns in 4:1.

SYNATHLOUNTES

Contending side by side. Paul uses it again for Euodia and Syntyche (4:3).

PTYROMENOI

Frightened. Used of horses that spook and bolt.

ECHARISTHĒ

Granted. Built on *charis*, grace (1:29).

Paul tells them not to be "frightened in anything by your opponents" (1:28). Fear spreads quickly and can break a formation. Paul says a church that stands calmly together under pressure is a sign that God is at work saving them.

THE TEXT · 1:29–30

Paul then writes, “It has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake” (1:29). “Granted” comes from the word for grace. Paul treats suffering for Christ as a gift given alongside faith. Suffering remains painful, yet those who suffer for Christ have not been abandoned. They share in his story and in Paul’s.

Paul does not call Christians out of service to their nation. Many in this community have sworn an oath and wear a uniform. Paul reminds us that allegiance to Christ comes first and shapes how we serve everywhere else.

Believers also need each other. Isolation makes people easier to frighten, and a church that stands together under pressure shows its neighbors the worth of the gospel. Watch for “side by side” again in 4:3, where Paul uses the same word for two women who once stood with him.



DISCUSSION

GETTING STARTED

01 What does it mean to you to be a citizen of your country? How does it shape your identity?

THE PASSAGE

02 Read Acts 16:19–24. What "conflict" had the Philippians seen Paul endure (1:30)?

03 Paul uses a word that means "live as citizens" (1:27). Why would that word land with force in Philippi?

04 What three things does Paul hope to hear about the church (1:27–28)?

05 How can suffering for Christ be something "granted" to believers (1:29)?

ON THE GROUND

THIS WEEK

06 Where do you feel pressure to keep your faith quiet, or to compromise it?

07 What does it look like for our group or church to “stand firm side by side”? Who might be standing alone right now?

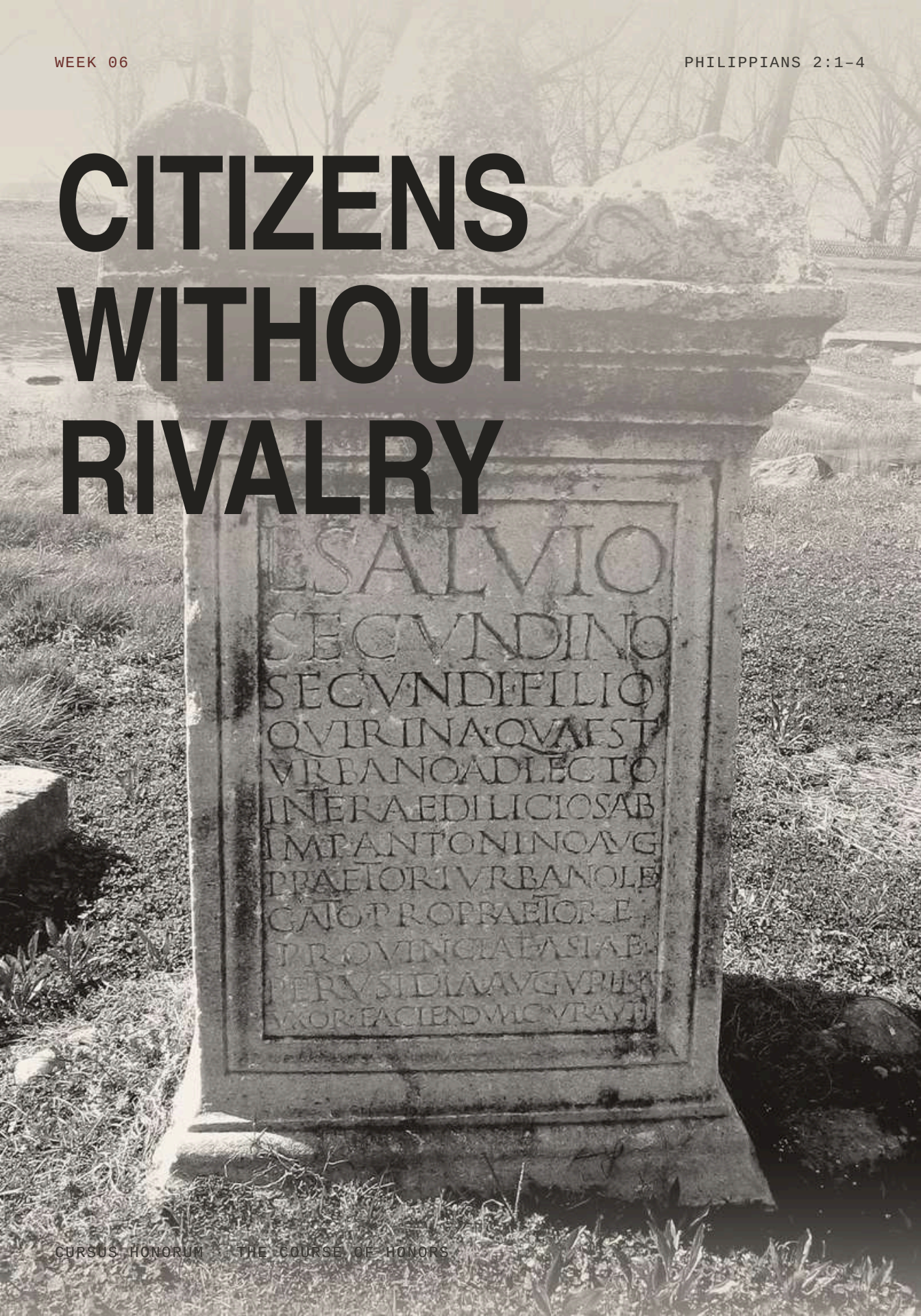
08 How does your citizenship in heaven shape the way you serve in your job, unit, or community?



PRAYER

Pray for anyone in your group facing pressure because of their faith, and for courage to stand together.

CITIZENS WITHOUT RIVALRY



CURSUS HONORUM — THE COURSE OF HONORS

KEY VERSE · 2:3

“Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.”

FIELD CONTEXT

A CITY BUILT LIKE A LADDER

Roman society was a ladder. Men climbed a set sequence of public offices called the *cursus honorum*, the course of honors, and cities like Philippi carved titles and achievements into stone for everyone to see. Your rank told people who you were and how to treat you.

Most Greek and Roman writers did not count humility as a virtue. They treated it as the posture of a slave, low and shameful, and few people sought it.

So when Paul asks the Philippians to act “in humility,” he asks them to embrace what their culture despised. Later in the letter we learn why this mattered. Two leaders in the church, Euodia and Syntyche, were at odds (4:2), and pride and rivalry threatened the church from within.

THE TEXT · 2:1–2

IF MEANS SINCE

SINCE	SINCE	SINCE	SINCE
encouragement in Christ	comfort from love	participation in the Spirit	affection and sympathy

Paul begins with four ifs: “If there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy” (2:1). In Greek they express no doubt. They mean “since.” Since you have been encouraged by Christ, known his love, shared in the Spirit, and received compassion, live in unity.

Christian unity starts with what believers already share. Christ has made us one, and our part is to live out that unity.

Then a personal appeal: “Complete my joy” (2:2). He already rejoices over them (1:4). Their unity would fill that joy: “being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.” The word “mind” appears again. Paul asks them to share one orientation of heart, which leaves room for differences of opinion.

KENODOXIA · 2:3

EMPTY GLORY

Paul names two enemies: “selfish ambition” and “conceit” (2:3). Selfish ambition is the drive to promote myself, my group, my agenda. “Conceit” means empty glory: reputation with nothing behind it. In Philippi these drove public life; the city’s race for honor ran on them. Paul will not let that race into the church, where it would turn fellow citizens into competitors.

Paul’s remedy is humility: “in humility count others more significant than yourselves.” This humility does not require pretending others are more talented or thinking poorly of yourself. It is a decision to give other people’s good priority in how you treat them.

Paul adds a balancing note: “Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others” (2:4). The words “not only” and “also” allow that your needs matter while keeping them from becoming the only thing that matters.


PLATE

THE TEXT · 2:4–5

Rank is sewn onto every uniform in this community. Paul leaves authority and structure in place, because rank and responsibility are real and necessary. He addresses the heart of the person who holds them. Good leaders put their people first.

The same is true at home. Marriages and families flourish when each person looks to the interests of the others, especially under the strain of long hours, field time, and moves.

Paul names the source of this humility in the next verse, which we study next week: “Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus” (2:5).

HEAVEN’S KING WENT DOWN THE LADDER FIRST.

FIELD NOTES

PHRONEŌ · 2:2

“Same mind,” twice in one verse. The mindset thread, tightening toward 2:5.

ERITHEIA · 2:3

Selfish ambition: faction, party spirit. The word from 1:17, now inside the church.

TAPEINOPHROSYNĒ · 2:3

Humility, a lowly mind. A slave’s word that Paul turns into a virtue.

HĒGEOMAI · 2:3

“Count.” The counting thread. Christ counts in 2:6; Paul counts in 3:7–8.

OBSERVATIONS

Where do I keep score?

DISCUSSION

GETTING STARTED

01 Philippi carved its leaders' ranks into stone. Where do you see people keeping score of status or recognition today?

THE PASSAGE

02 What four realities does Paul list in 2:1? How do they form the foundation for unity?

03 What does it mean to be "of the same mind" (2:2)? Does it mean agreeing on everything?

04 What are "selfish ambition" and "conceit" (2:3)? How do they damage a community?

05 How would you define humility from 2:3–4?

ON THE GROUND

THIS WEEK

06 Where do you notice selfish ambition, or a hunger for recognition, in your own heart?

07 How can someone in authority, whether a parent, supervisor, or leader, practice the humility Paul describes?

08 Name one person whose interests you can put first this week. What will you do?



PRAYER

Thank God for the unity we already share in Christ, and ask for the humility to put others first.

THE READING · PHILIPPIANS 2:5–11 (ESV)

5 Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,

6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,

7 but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.

8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

9 Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name,

10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

OBSERVATIONS — Mark each step down, then each step up.

FIELD CONTEXT

THE LADDER, REVERSED

Many scholars think 2:6–11 may be one of the earliest Christian hymns or confessions, sung or recited within a few decades of the resurrection. Others think Paul composed it himself in poetic form. Either way, the earliest Christians worshiped Jesus as Lord.

In Roman Philippi the road to honor went up, office by office, each step celebrated in public. This passage tells of someone who went the other way, step by step down: from equality with God, to a slave's status, to death on a cross.

Crucifixion was the most shameful death in the Roman world, used mainly for slaves and rebels. Roman citizens were generally spared it. To people proud of their citizenship, the idea that the Lord of all would die this way was shocking.

The hymn ends with words from Isaiah 45:23, where every knee bows to the one true God. Paul applies them to Jesus.

FIELD NOTES

2:5–11

HARPAGMOS · 2:6

"A thing to be grasped": something to hold onto and use for oneself.

EKENŌSEN · 2:7

"Emptied himself" by taking a servant's form. He remained fully God.

KYRIOS · 2:11

"Lord." The name for God in Israel's Scriptures, and a title Caesar claimed.

CURSUS PUDORUM

A "course of shame." Hellerman's name for the hymn: Philippi's ladder of honor, upside down.

DOWN ↓

This passage is the center of Philippians. Paul's teaching on humility and unity rests on it, and later chapters refer back to it. Here Paul shows the church the character of its King.

"Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus" (2:5). Then the story of Jesus in two movements: down, and up.

The way down starts at the top. Christ was "in the form of God" (2:6), sharing God's very nature. Yet he "did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped." He did not use his status for his own advantage. He held every right and power and used none of it to serve himself.

Instead "he emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant" (2:7). Jesus did not stop being God. He emptied himself by taking on our humanity and a slave's role, and so the King of the universe chose the lowest place.

He went lower still: "he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (2:8). The final phrase names the most shameful death in the Roman world. Jesus accepted it for us.

UP ↑

One word turns the passage: “Therefore” (2:9). Now God acts. “God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name.” That name is “Lord,” the name of God himself in the Old Testament. One day “every knee should bow … and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (2:10–11). God lifts the one who went lowest to the highest place.

The passage does two things. It is the gospel: Jesus is fully God, became fully human, died on the cross for us, and has been made Lord of all. It is also a pattern for heaven’s citizens. Paul tells this story because the Philippians were competing for status. In their city men climbed the ladder of honor and carved each rung into stone. Jesus had the highest status there is and walked down the ladder to a slave’s cross. Citizens of a King who refused to grasp have no reason to grasp for status themselves.

For anyone who holds power, including officers and NCOs, parents, pastors, and supervisors, authority is a trust to be used for others, as Jesus used his.

For anyone who carries shame, Jesus went to the place of deepest shame. He knows it from the inside, and he has overcome it.

In Philippi, “Lord” and “Savior” were titles for Caesar. Paul gives them to Jesus. One day every person will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. Citizens of heaven get to say it now, with joy.

DISCUSSION

GETTING STARTED

01 Think of a leader you admire who used their position to serve others. What did that look like?

THE PASSAGE

02 Trace the "down" movement in 2:6–8. What steps did Jesus take?

03 What does it mean that Jesus "did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped" (2:6)?

04 How did Jesus "empty himself" (2:7)? What did he add rather than lose?

05 What changes at the word "therefore" in 2:9? Who acts in 2:9–11?

ON THE GROUND

06 Why do you think Paul tells this story in a letter about unity and humility (see 2:1–4)?

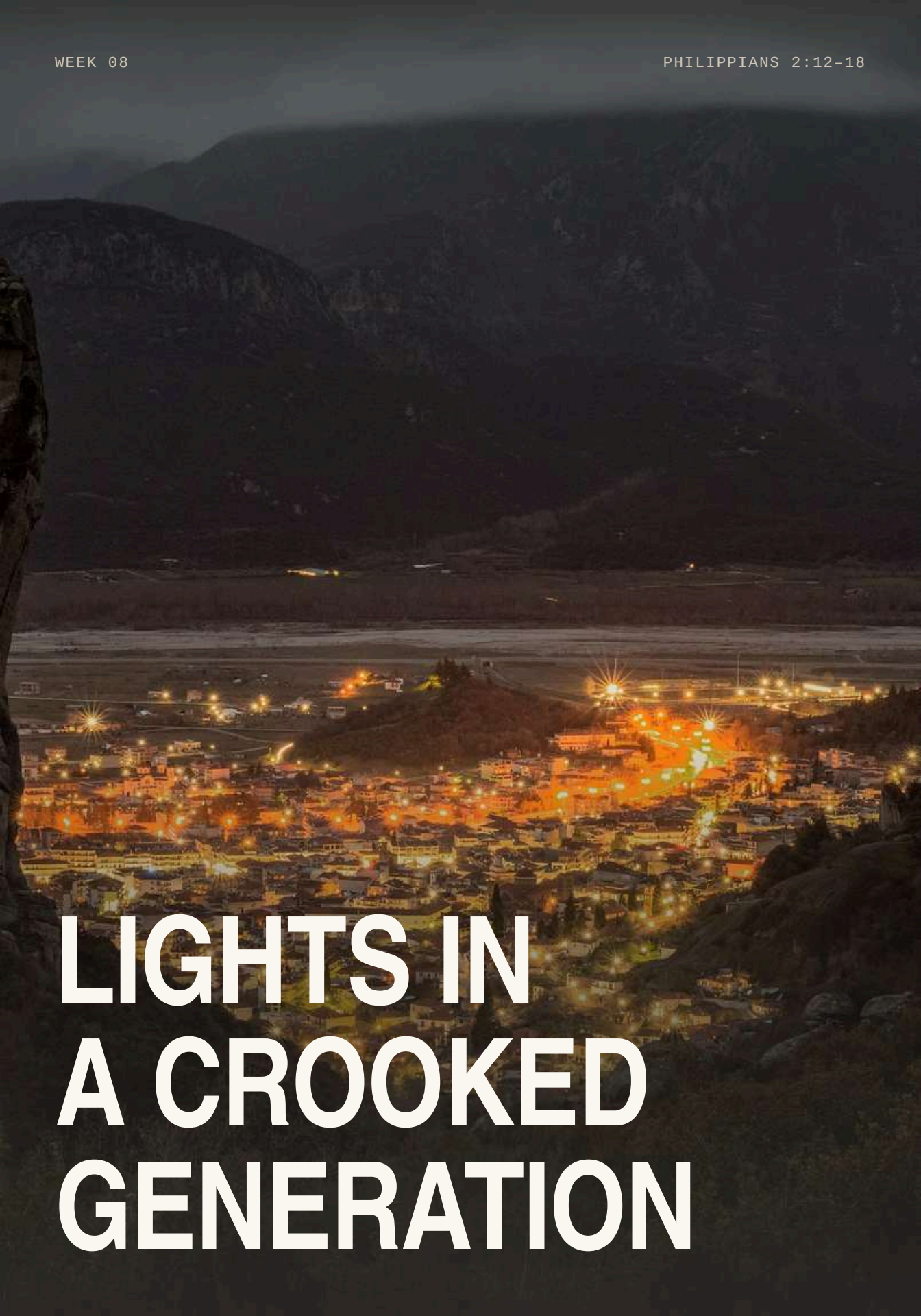
07 Where do you hold some status, power, or privilege? How could you use it for others this week?

08 What does it mean for you personally to confess "Jesus Christ is Lord"?



PRAYER

Read Philippians 2:6–11 aloud together as a prayer of worship.



LIGHTS IN A CROOKED GENERATION

KEY VERSE · 2:12–13

“Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.”

FIELD CONTEXT

IN HIS ABSENCE

Paul wrote this not knowing whether he would see the Philippians again. His absence, and the real chance of his death, put the church to the test. Would they keep growing without him?

He draws on Israel’s story. After the rescue from Egypt, the people grumbled against God and Moses in the wilderness. In his farewell song Moses called them “a crooked and twisted generation” (Deuteronomy 32:5). Paul borrows the words and turns them around. Now the church is God’s faithful people, and the culture around it is the crooked generation.

He also borrows a picture from worship. Jewish and Greco-Roman worshipers both poured out wine as a drink offering beside a sacrifice. Paul pictures his possible death that way: his life poured out over the offering of their faith.

THE COMMANDER'S INTENT

Paul begins with "Therefore" (2:12). Everything here flows from the King we met last week. Christ "became obedient" (2:8). Now Paul writes to his citizens: "as you have always obeyed … work out your own salvation with fear and trembling."

The phrase has confused many readers, but it does not teach that we earn salvation. Paul is clear that salvation is God's gift (Ephesians 2:8–9; Philippians 3:9). To work out salvation is to live it out and let what God has given take shape in ordinary life. The command is plural, so the whole church grows together.

The key is the next verse: "for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure" (2:13). We work because God is already working. He shapes both desire and action. That frees us from two mistakes: thinking it all depends on us, and thinking we have nothing to do.

They had obeyed "not only as in my presence but much more in my absence." A strong unit keeps acting on the commander's intent when the commander is away. Mature faith works the same way, because it understands the purpose.

THE TEXT · 2:14–15

Then Paul gets practical: “Do all things without grumbling or disputing” (2:14). Grumbling can seem minor, yet it marked Israel in the wilderness. It erodes trust, lowers morale, and weakens the church’s witness.

The goal is that believers “may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world” (2:15).

PAUL COMPARES BELIEVERS TO STARS IN A DARK SKY.

The word “lights” refers to stars. A colony of heaven stays in the city around it and shines there. A church that does not grumble and holds together in love stands out in a world full of complaint and division.

THE TEXT · 2:16–18

They shine by "holding fast to the word of life" (2:16). The phrase can mean holding on to the gospel or holding it out to others. Both meanings fit: believers hold on to the gospel and offer it to others.

Then Paul speaks of joy four times in two verses: "Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me" (2:17–18). Paul sees his possible death as the final pour over their faith, and he invites them to share his joy.

FIELD NOTES

2:12–18

KATERGAZESTHE · 2:12	"Work out": carry through to completion. Plural: the church together.
ENERGŌN · 2:13	God "who works." Our word energy comes from it.
GONGYSMOS · 2:14	"Grumbling." The wilderness word for Israel's complaint.
PHŌSTĒRES · 2:15	"Lights": luminaries, the heavenly lights of Genesis 1.
SPENDOMAI · 2:17	"Poured out" as a libation over a sacrifice.



POURED OUT

OBSERVATIONS · 2:12–18

Who does what: God, the church, Paul?

DISCUSSION

GETTING STARTED

01 Have you been part of a team that kept performing well when the leader was not around? What made that possible?

THE PASSAGE

02 How does “therefore” connect this passage to 2:5–11?

03 What does it mean to “work out” your salvation? What does it not mean?

04 How do 2:12 and 2:13 work together? Why do we need both?

05 Why might Paul single out grumbling and arguing (2:14)? What do they do to a community?

ON THE GROUND

THIS WEEK

06 Where are you tempted to rely only on effort, or to do nothing and wait on God? How does 2:13 correct both?

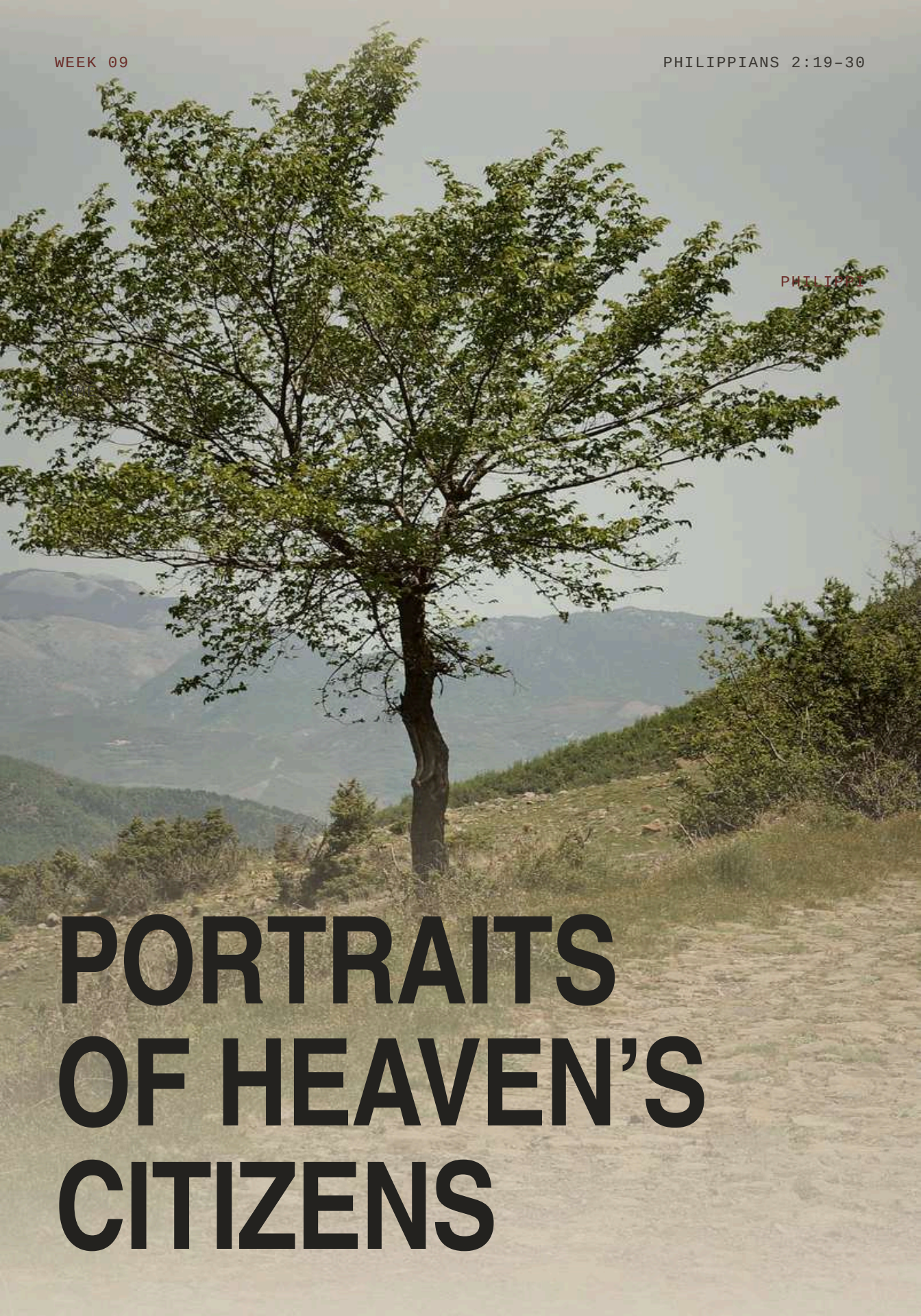
07 What does grumbling sound like in your workplace, home, or church? How could you help change that culture?

08 How can our group shine as lights in our community this month?



PRAYER

Thank God that he is at work in each of you. Ask him to make your group a light in your community.



PORTRAITS OF HEAVEN'S CITIZENS

KEY VERSE · 2:29

“So receive him in the Lord with all joy, and honor such men.”

FIELD CONTEXT

WEEKS ON THE ROAD

The trip from Philippi to Rome took weeks: across Macedonia on the Via Egnatia, over the Adriatic, then more road in Italy. Travelers faced bandits, storms, and disease.

Epaphroditus made that journey for the church, carrying their gift and staying to care for Paul (4:18). Along the way he fell so sick he nearly died. Word reached Philippi, and he was distressed that they were worried about him. His name comes from Aphrodite, which suggests he came to Christ from a pagan background.

Paul now sends him home, probably sooner than the church expected. In an honor-conscious culture some might wonder whether he had failed. Paul writes to make sure he is welcomed as a hero. Timothy, by contrast, was Paul’s long-time partner. He traveled with Paul when the church began (Acts 16) and is named as co-author of this letter (1:1).

AFTER THE HYMN, TWO MEN

Travel plans usually come at the end of Paul's letters. Here they sit in the middle, right after the passage about Christ's humility. After describing Christ, Paul describes two men who follow him. Timothy and Epaphroditus show the mind of Christ in ordinary service.

TIMOTHY

PORTRAIT 01 · 2:19–24

"I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare" (2:20). "Like him" means like-souled. Timothy shares Paul's heart. Then a sad contrast: "For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ" (2:21). Timothy is the rare one who looks to the interests of others (2:4).

Timothy's character formed over time. "You know Timothy's proven worth, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel" (2:22). "Served" shares a root with "servant" in 2:7. Timothy had been tested and found faithful over years at Paul's side. Christlike character usually forms that way, through long apprenticeship, mentoring, and shared work.

EPAPHRODITUS

01 **MY BROTHER**

02 **FELLOW WORKER**

03 **FELLOW SOLDIER**

04 **YOUR MESSENGER**

05 **MINISTER TO MY NEED**

Paul gives Epaphroditus five titles in one verse (2:25). “Fellow soldier” carried weight in a city settled by veterans.

THE TEXT · 2:25–30

Epaphroditus had nearly died. “He was ill, near to death. But God had mercy on him” (2:27). Paul does not treat recovery as automatic. He calls it mercy. And why so close to death? “He nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me” (2:30).

“Near to death” in 2:30 echoes Jesus, “obedient to the point of death” (2:8). The word for “risking” comes from gambling and means he staked his life.

So Paul says: “Receive him in the Lord with all joy, and honor such men” (2:29). Philippi carved its honors into stone for officeholders and victors. Paul tells the church whom heaven honors: people who spend themselves in faithful, sacrificial service.

In our community many people come home sick, wounded, or worn out, sometimes sooner than planned, and wonder whether they failed. Paul tells the church to receive such people with joy and to honor them.

THE CHURCH SHOULD HONOR THOSE WHO SERVE QUIETLY AND AT COST.

FIELD NOTES

2:19–30

ISOPSYCHON · 2:20

“Like him”: like-souled. One heart in two people.

SYSTRATIŌTĒS · 2:25

“Fellow soldier.” Paul’s honor for a man the church might have thought had come home early.

DOKIMĒ · 2:22

“Proven worth.” Tested like a coin and found genuine. Recall 1:10.

PARABOLEUSAMENOS · 2:30

“Risking.” A gambler’s word: he staked his life.

OBSERVATIONS

Whose portrait would you add?

DISCUSSION

GETTING STARTED

01 If you could put one person's name on a plaque for quiet, faithful service, whose would it be, and why?

THE PASSAGE

02 Why might Paul have placed these travel plans right after 2:5–11?

03 What qualities made Timothy stand out (2:20–22)?

04 List Paul's five descriptions of Epaphroditus (2:25). What does each suggest?

05 How does Epaphroditus' story echo the story of Jesus in 2:8?

ON THE GROUND

THIS WEEK

06 Who has mentored you “as a son with a father,” or a daughter with a mother? Who could you invest in?

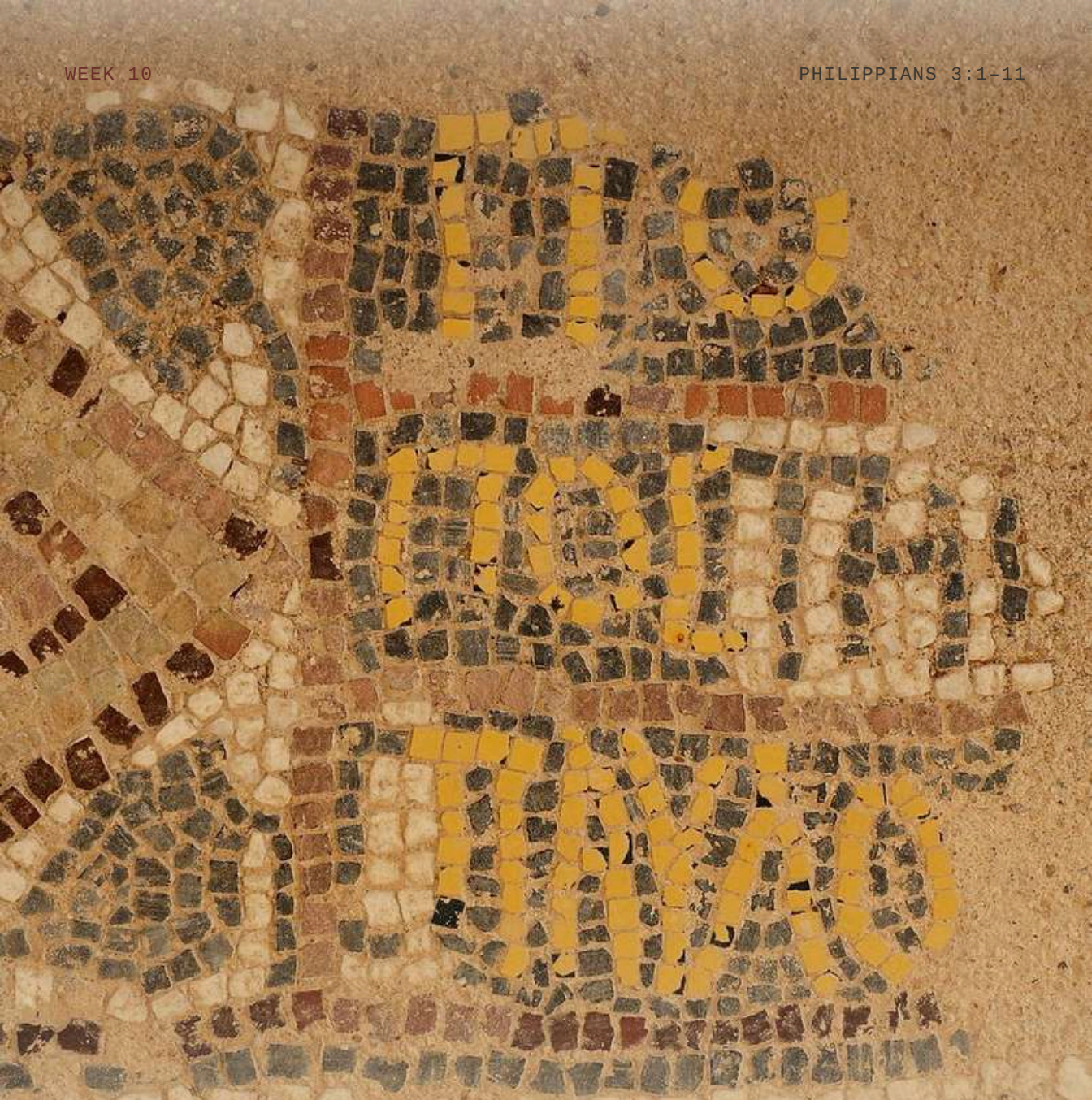
07 How can our church honor people who serve faithfully, especially those who often go unseen?

08 Do you know someone returning from a hard assignment, illness, or loss? How can you receive them with joy?



PRAYER

Thank God for the Timothys and Epaphrodituses in your life. Pray for those in your community coming home tired or wounded.



TRADING EVERY CREDENTIAL FOR CHRIST

GAIN

~~Circumcised on the eighth day~~

~~Of the people of Israel~~

~~Of the tribe of Benjamin~~

~~A Hebrew of Hebrews~~

~~As to the law, a Pharisee~~

~~As to zeal, a persecutor of the church~~

~~As to righteousness under the law, blameless~~

LOSS

All of it, moved across.

"Whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ." 3:7

SURPASSING WORTH · KEY VERSE 3:8

"Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord."

FIELD CONTEXT

BIRTH AND ACHIEVEMENT

A heated debate ran through the early church: did Gentile believers need circumcision and the Jewish law to belong fully to God's people? Some Jewish-Christian teachers said yes. Paul fought the idea fiercely, most famously in Galatians. Here he warns the Philippians against such teachers, though they may not yet have reached Philippi.

Paul's credentials in verses 5–6 would have impressed Jews and Romans alike. In Roman culture honor came from two sources: birth, meaning the family and people you came from, and achievement, meaning what you accomplished. Paul's list covers both his pedigree and his record.

And he writes in a merchant's language: gain, loss, counting. Philippi's traders kept careful accounts. Paul applies the ledger to his whole life.

THE TEXT · 3:1–3

Paul starts simply: "Rejoice in the Lord" (3:1). Then he warns against anyone who would swap that joy for confidence in something else. Every city has its credentials, the things that prove you belong. This passage asks what proves we belong to heaven.

The teachers in view told Gentile believers that faith in Christ was not enough. Paul answers that true believers "worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh" (3:3). "Flesh" here means anything human we lean on to make ourselves acceptable to God.

MOVING EVERYTHING ACROSS

Then Paul lists his own résumé. If anyone could have confidence in the flesh, Paul could (3:5–6). By the standards of his day, he was at the top.

Picture a balance sheet. Every credential sat in the gain column. Then Paul writes, “Whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ” (3:7), and moves every item to the loss column. He goes further: “I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord” (3:8). He calls his old achievements “rubbish,” a deliberately strong word.

His record could never make him right with God. He needed “not ... a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith” (3:9). This is the center of the gospel. God makes people right with himself as a gift, received through faith in Christ.

NO RECORD EARNS RIGHTEOUSNESS BEFORE GOD.

NO RECORD DISQUALIFIES THOSE WHO TRUST CHRIST.

THE TEXT · 3:10–11

Many of us carry a résumé. In a military community it is often visible: rank, schools, awards, evaluations, deployments. In church it might be years of attendance, a moral life, or a Christian family. These things are good, but none of them can be our confidence before God.

Paul's deepest desire is personal: "that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death" (3:10). Knowing Christ is more than knowing facts about him. It is a relationship that reaches every part of life, suffering included.

Paul's story follows the pattern of chapter 2. Christ let go of his status for others, and Paul let go of his to gain Christ. Citizenship in heaven comes as a gift through faith, and it is worth more than every credential we could list.

"But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord."

PHILIPPIANS 3:7–8 · ESV

FIELD NOTES

HĒGĒMAI · 3:7–8

“Counted.” The thread from 2:3 and 2:6, now in Paul’s own ledger.

ZĒMIA · 3:7

“Loss.” A business word: a write-off.

SKYBALA · 3:8

“Rubbish”: refuse, dung. Deliberately crude.

DIKAIOSYNĒ · 3:9

“Righteousness” from God, received through faith.

YOUR LEDGER · WHAT ARE YOU TEMPTED TO REST ON?

GAIN	LOSS

DISCUSSION

GETTING STARTED

01 Philippi prized pedigree and rank. What credentials or achievements does our culture admire most?

THE PASSAGE

02 What does it mean to "put no confidence in the flesh" (3:3)?

03 Look at Paul's list in 3:5–6. Which items came from his birth, and which from his achievements?

04 Why did Paul count all of it as loss (3:7–9)?

05 What is the difference between "a righteousness of my own" and "the righteousness from God" (3:9)?

ON THE GROUND

THIS WEEK

06 If you wrote your résumé before God, what would be on it? Which items are you tempted to rely on? (Use your ledger, W10 · 06.)

07 How is it good news that a bad record cannot disqualify you from God's grace?

08 What would it look like for you to value knowing Christ above everything else this week?



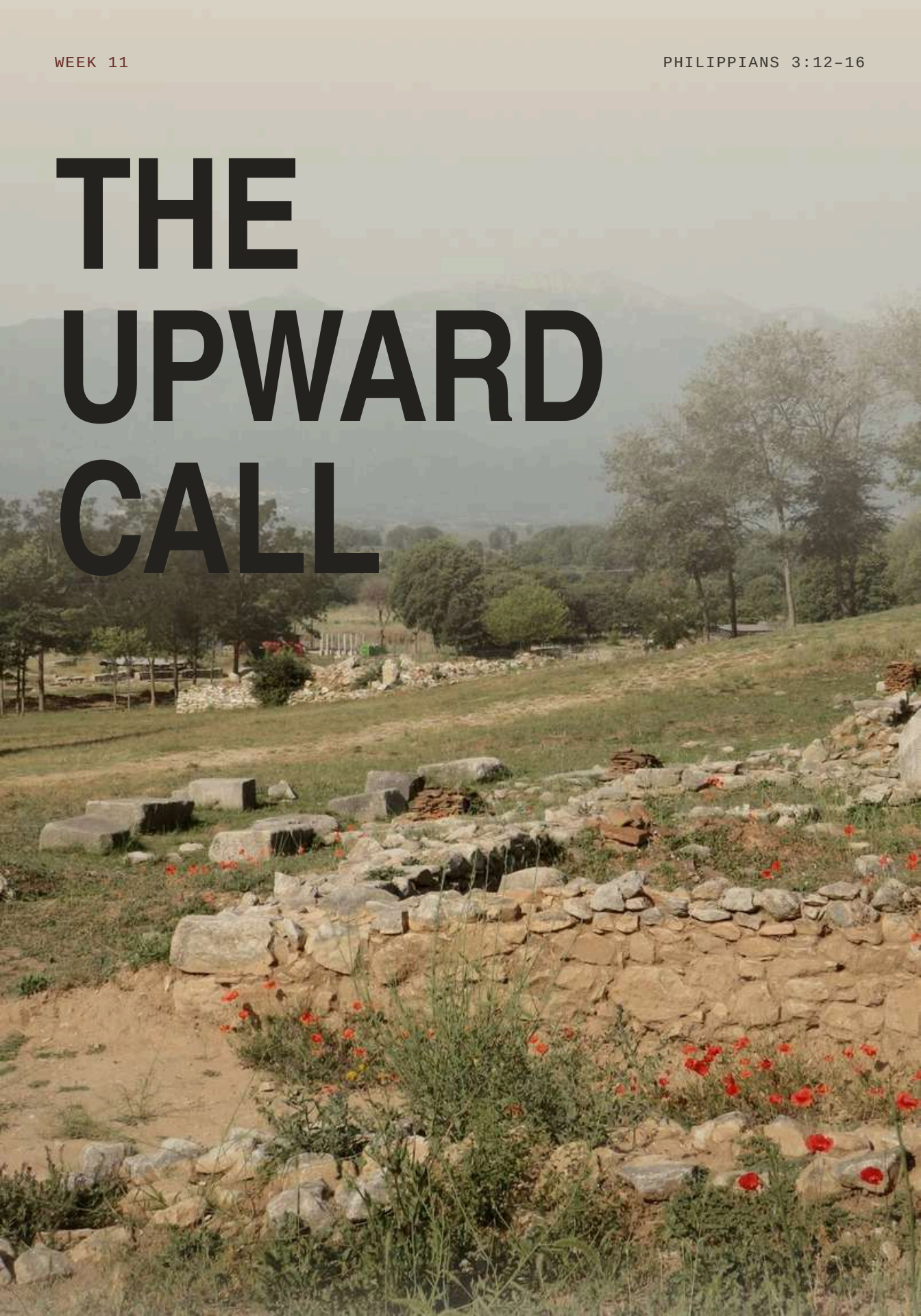
PRAYER

Thank God for the gift of righteousness through faith. Ask him to deepen your desire to know Christ.

WEEK 11

PHILIPPIANS 3:12–16

THE UPWARD CALL



KEY VERSE · 3:12

“I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.”

FIELD CONTEXT

CALLED UP TO THE PLATFORM

Athletic games were a major part of Greek and Roman life. Cities across Macedonia hosted festivals with footraces, wrestling, and other contests. Crowds gathered, and winners became local celebrities.

In a footrace, runners sprinted toward a marker post at the end of the course. When the games ended, the presiding official called the winners forward, often up to a raised platform, to receive the prize, usually a wreath of leaves.

Paul’s readers knew these scenes. Here he uses the language of the race: pressing on, straining forward, the goal, the prize of the upward call. He describes the Christian life as a race still in progress.

THE TEXT · 3:12

NOT YET ARRIVED

After his longing to know Christ, Paul adds a clarification: “Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect” (3:12). Paul says plainly that he has not arrived.

Paul’s honesty helps us. Some Christians feel pressure to appear complete, and others think long years of faith allow them to coast. Paul rejects both views. After decades of ministry he is still running.

Paul gives his reason for continuing: “I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.” Christ took hold of Paul first, on the Damascus road. Paul’s pursuit of Christ answers Christ’s pursuit of him, and grace sustains the effort.

“Press on” carries an irony. It is the word Paul used in 3:6 for persecuting the church. He once pursued Christians to destroy them. Now he pursues Christ with the same intensity.

~~PERSECUTING~~ DIŌKŌ **PRESSING ON**

ONE THING

Then his strategy: “One thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (3:13–14).

Runners who look back lose speed and may stumble. Paul refuses to let his past define him, including his impressive résumé (3:4–6) and his years as a persecutor. He acknowledges that past and keeps running forward.



THE TEXT · 3:14–16

Some of us are held back by past success, such as a leadership role or a season of closeness to God. Others are held back by past failure: a bad decision, a broken relationship, or a season before faith. Paul gives both groups the same counsel. Christ has taken hold of them, so they can keep moving forward.

The prize is "the upward call of God in Christ Jesus": the call from above, from the city where our citizenship already stands. It is the day God calls us forward to be fully with Christ, raised and made new (3:10–11, 20–21).

Paul invites the mature to "think this way" (3:15). Mature believers know they have not arrived. He adds a gentle promise: if you see it differently, "God will reveal that also to you." Meanwhile, "let us hold true to what we have attained" (3:16). The word means to walk in line and keep in step. A church grows by moving forward together on what it already knows.

The church moves forward in step, and it runs because Christ has already taken hold of it.

FIELD NOTES

DIŌKŌ · 3:12, 14	“Press on”: pursue, chase. The same verb as “persecutor” in 3:6.
KATALAMBANŌ · 3:12	“Made me his own”: seized, laid hold of. Christ moved first.
SKOPOS · 3:14	“Goal”: the marker at the end of the course.
BRABEION · 3:14	“Prize”: the victor’s award.
STOICHEIN · 3:16	“Hold true”: walk in line, keep in step.

OBSERVATIONS — What lies behind me that I need to leave there?

DISCUSSION

GETTING STARTED

01 Have you ever trained for a race or a long physical challenge? What kept you going?

THE PASSAGE

02 Why do you think Paul stresses that he has not already arrived (3:12)?

03 What is the connection between Christ taking hold of Paul and Paul pressing on (3:12)?

04 What "lies behind" that Paul is forgetting (see 3:4–6)? What does "forgetting" mean here?

05 What is the prize Paul is running toward (3:14; see also 3:10–11, 20–21)?

ON THE GROUND

06 Are you more tempted to coast on past success or to be held back by past failure? Why?

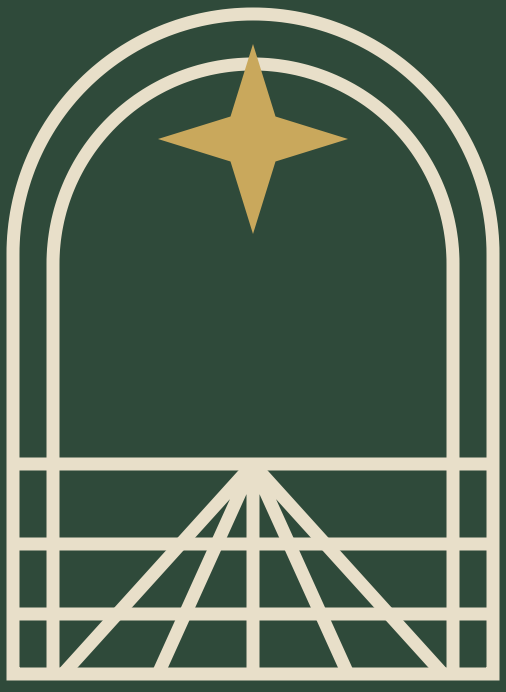
07 What is the "one thing" that needs your focus in this season?

08 How can our group help each other "keep in step" (3:16) and keep running?



PRAYER

Thank God that Christ has taken hold of each of you. Ask for perseverance to keep pressing on.



PHILIPPIANS · CITIZENS OF HEAVEN

OUR CITIZENSHIP IS IN HEAVEN

“But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.”

FIELD CONTEXT

AN OUTPOST AWAITING ITS LORD

Most of Philippi’s Roman citizens had never seen Rome. They were enrolled on its citizen lists, governed by its law, and protected by its power, though their homes were in Macedonia. Their city was an outpost of Rome.

The emperor was hailed with grand titles. People called him “lord” and “savior,” and when an emperor visited a city, its citizens went out to meet him and escort him in with ceremony.

Paul uses that language for Jesus. He says the true Lord and Savior is in heaven, and one day he will come to rescue and transform his people.

THE TEXT · 3:17–19

WITH TEARS

Paul begins with an invitation: “Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us” (3:17). Growth happens by example. We need people to follow, and we need to become people others can follow.

Not every example is good. Paul writes with tears about people who “walk as enemies of the cross of Christ” (3:18). We do not know exactly who they were. We know how they lived: “Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things” (3:19). Their appetites ruled them, they took pride in what should have shamed them, and their thinking stayed on this world.

Paul grieves as he warns, and his grief is a model for how we speak of those who reject the way of the cross.



BUT.

Paul then writes, “But our citizenship is in heaven” (3:20). Philippi’s Roman citizens lived far from Rome, so they understood living in one place and belonging to another. Rome planted Philippi to bring Roman life to Macedonia, and heaven places its people in the world for a similar purpose. Heaven’s King shapes our identity, loyalty, and conduct where he has placed us.

Picture someone stationed overseas for years: living in another country, still a citizen of home, bound by its laws, wearing its uniform, and looking toward the return. Christians live in this world in a similar way. They serve faithfully where they are stationed while their citizenship remains in heaven.

Believers also wait for a person: “From it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ” (3:20). In Philippi, people called Caesar lord and savior. Paul gives those titles to Jesus and says he is coming.

THE TEXT · 3:21–4:1

When he comes, he will "transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body" (3:21). "Lowly" shares a root with Jesus' humbling in 2:8. As Christ went from humiliation to glory, his people will too. This is real hope for anyone living in a broken body: the wounded, the chronically ill, the aging, the grieving. Our future is resurrection and transformation, by the same power that rules the universe.

So what do we do while we wait? "Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved" (4:1). "Crown" is the victor's wreath at the end of the race. "Stand firm" is the command of 1:27, repeated.

CITIZENS OF HEAVEN STAND FIRM UNTIL CHRIST RETURNS.

FIELD NOTES

3:17–4:1

POLITEUMA · 3:20

Commonwealth: a community abroad living by the laws of home.

APEKDECHOMETHA · 3:20

"We await": eager, watchful waiting.

SŌTĒR · 3:20

"Savior." A title Caesar claimed.

STĒKETE · 4:1

"Stand firm," the word of 1:27 again.

Week 1 began with two addresses. Write both again, eleven weeks on.

HERE

Where I am stationed

HOME

Where I belong

DISCUSSION

GETTING STARTED

01 If you have lived away from home, what reminded you of where you belonged?

THE PASSAGE

02 What does Paul ask the church to do in 3:17? Why are examples so important?

03 How does Paul describe the "enemies of the cross" (3:18–19)? How does he feel about them?

04 What would "our citizenship is in heaven" have meant to people in a Roman colony?

05 What will Jesus do when he comes (3:20–21)? How does this echo 2:6–11?

ON THE GROUND

06 Who has been a good example of faith for you? Who might be watching your example?

07 Where do you see “minds set on earthly things” in our culture, or in your own heart?

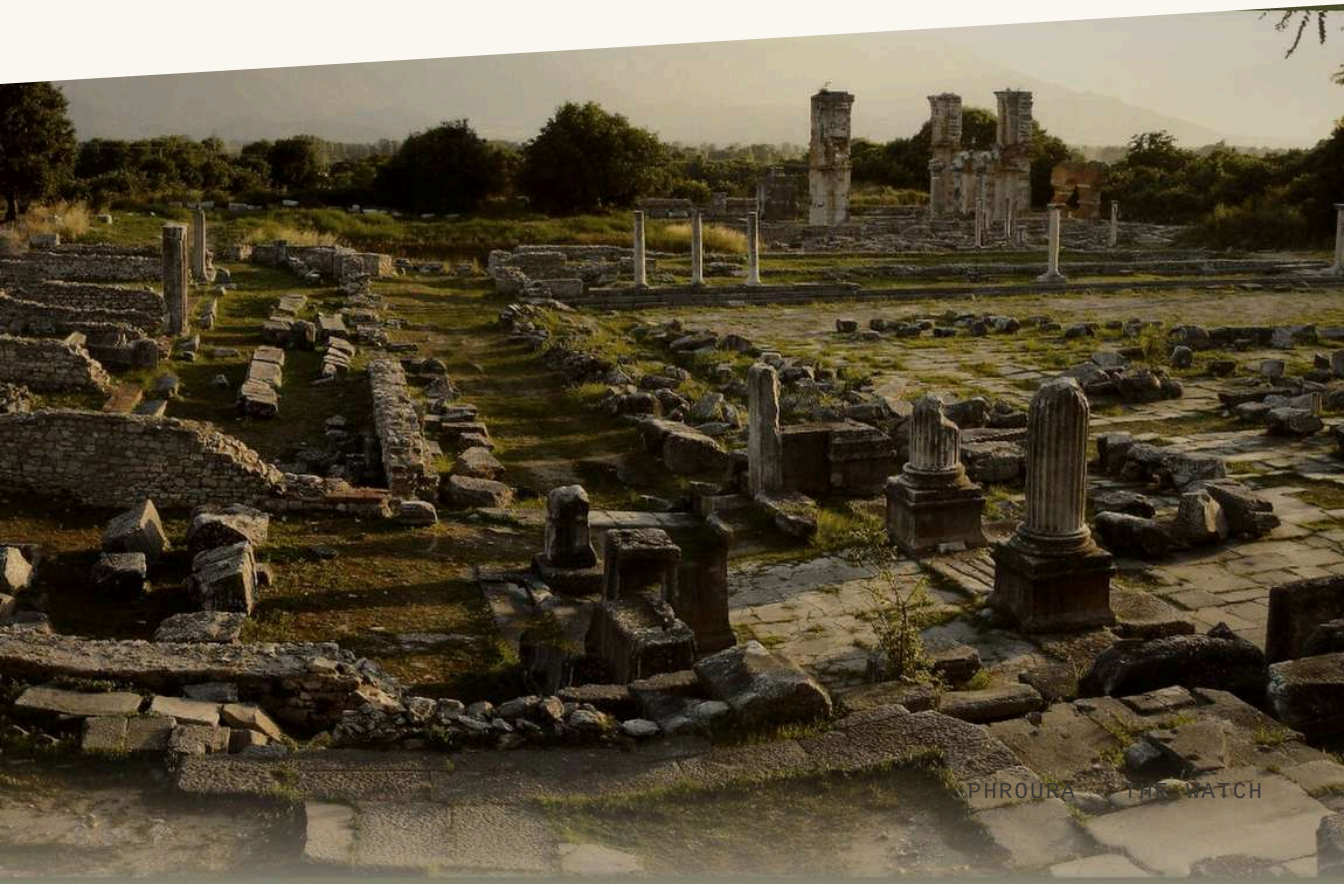
08 How does the hope of a transformed body speak to you, or to someone you love?



PRAYER

Thank God for your citizenship in heaven. Pray for those in your group living with physical weakness or pain.

THE PEACE THAT STANDS GUARD



KEY VERSE · 4:7

“And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

FIELD CONTEXT

NAMES IN A GREATER REGISTER

Women led in the Philippian church from its first day. The first convert was Lydia, whose home became the church’s meeting place (Acts 16:13–15, 40). Euodia and Syntyche, named in 4:2, were leaders who had worked side by side with Paul in the gospel. Their disagreement was serious enough that Paul named it in a letter read aloud to the whole church.

Cities kept official registers of their citizens, and Philippi’s prized their names on Rome’s lists. Paul reminds these women that their names are written in a greater register: “the book of life” (4:3).

In verse 7 Paul uses a military word. “Guard” described soldiers posted to protect a city. In a colony founded by veterans the picture was vivid: God’s peace standing watch over the heart.

NAMED ALOUD, HELD EQUAL

After all his appeals for unity, Paul names names: “I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord” (4:2). He repeats “I entreat” for each woman. He takes no side. He treats them as equals and calls both to the same thing: one mind “in the Lord.”

He honors them too. These women “labored side by side with me in the gospel” (4:3), the same word as “striving side by side” in 1:27. They had lived out that call together, and Paul wants them to do it again. Their conflict did not erase their service. Paul also asks a trusted friend in the church to help them reconcile. Healthy communities address conflict and help people work through it.

Then to the whole church: “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice” (4:4). It is a command, and it holds in every circumstance because its source is the Lord. Paul wrote it from custody.

“Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand” (4:5). Reasonableness is a gentle spirit that does not insist on its own way. “At hand” means he is coming soon, and he is near now.

THE TEXT · 4:6–7

Then one of the most loved promises in the Bible: “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (4:6–7).

Paul gives anxiety somewhere to go: into prayer. Tell God what you need. Do it with thanksgiving, remembering what he has already done. Then God’s peace takes up its post and stands watch over heart and mind.

ANXIETY → PRAYER → THANKS → PEACE ON GUARD

A WORD OF CARE

Anxiety can also be a health condition. Prayer and trust go hand in hand with getting help. Talking to a chaplain, counselor, or doctor is not a lack of faith. God often brings his peace through the people he puts around us.

TRUE
HONORABLE
JUST
PURE
LOVELY
COMMENDABLE
ANY EXCELLENCE
ANYTHING WORTHY OF PRAISE

"…think about these things." (4:8)

What we dwell on shapes who we become. Then: "What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you" (4:9).

The progression matters. The peace of God guards us (4:7), like a garrison posted over a colony. Then the God of peace is with us (4:9). Paul ties peace to God himself, who stands watch over his people.

FIELD NOTES

TO AUTO PHRONEIN · 4:2

“Agree”: think the same thing. The mindset thread, now with names on it.

SYNĒTHLĒSAN · 4:3

“Labored side by side,” the verb of 1:27.

PHROURĒSEI · 4:7

“Will guard”: keep watch, as a garrison over a city.

LOGIZESTHE · 4:8

“Think about”: reckon, take account of. The counting thread.

PRACTICE 4:6 · ONE WORRY, WITH THANKS

WHAT I NEED

WHAT HE HAS DONE

DISCUSSION

GETTING STARTED

01 What tends to make you most anxious? What do you usually do with that anxiety?

THE PASSAGE

02 How does Paul handle the conflict between Euodia and Syntyche (4:2–3)? What can we learn from his approach?

03 How can Paul command joy "always" (4:4)? What makes it possible?

04 What does Paul tell us to do instead of being anxious (4:6)? Why does thanksgiving matter?

05 What does it mean that God's peace will "guard" our hearts and minds (4:7)?

ON THE GROUND

06 Is there a relationship where you need to seek peace, or help others reconcile?

07 Take one current worry and practice 4:6 together. What would it sound like to pray about it with thanksgiving?

08 Look at the list in 4:8. What are you feeding your mind with right now? What might need to change?



PRAYER

Share one worry with the group, and pray 4:6–7 over one another.

“I have learned, in whatever situation I am, to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.”

PHILIPPIANS 4:11–13 · ESV

THE SECRET OF CONTENTMENT

Supplied from heaven’s riches

KEY VERSE · 4:13

“I can do all things through him who strengthens me.”

FIELD CONTEXT

THANKS WITHOUT STRINGS

In the Roman world, gifts came with strings attached. The receiver was expected to return the favor and often became socially indebted to the giver. A plain thank-you could signal that you now owed them. Paul handles the Philippians’ gift with care. He receives it with joy, calls it partnership in the gospel and an offering to God, and trusts God to repay them.

He also borrows a word from the philosophers. Stoic teachers said the wise man should be “content”: self-sufficient, needing nothing and no one. Paul uses the word and changes it. His contentment comes from Christ who strengthens him.

The letter closes with greetings from “Caesar’s household,” the large staff of slaves and officials who served the emperor. The gospel had reached the heart of Roman power.

THE TEXT · 4:10–13

CONTENTMENT LEARNED

Philippians 4:13 may be one of the most quoted verses in the Bible. It is printed on gym walls and athletic gear and quoted before big games: “I can do all things through him who strengthens me.” Read in context, it means something deeper than “I can achieve anything I set my mind to.”

Paul has just thanked the Philippians for their gift. Then: “Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content” (4:11). The key verb is “learned.” Contentment did not come naturally to Paul. He learned it the way we learn any hard skill, by practice in real situations.

Which situations? “I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need” (4:12). Paul had been rich and poor, full and hungry, comfortable and imprisoned. In all of it he found contentment.

BROUGHT LOW	**ABOUND**
HUNGER	**PLENTY**
NEED	**ABUNDANCE**

THE TEXT · 4:13–18

The secret: “I can do all things through him who strengthens me” (4:13). In context, “all things” means facing every circumstance, plenty or need, with faithfulness. Christ gives strength to be content when there is too little and to stay humble when there is too much.

Military life moves between seasons: a good duty station and a hard one, time together and long separations, a stretched budget and a steady one. Contentment means learning in every circumstance that Christ is enough.

PAUL LEARNED CONTENTMENT IN CUSTODY.

Paul turns to their generosity. From the beginning, “no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only” (4:15). Partnership takes us back to 1:5. Their giving was partnership in the gospel.

He calls the gift “a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God” (4:18). Paul treats gifts that advance the gospel as worship offered to God.

FROM HEAVEN'S TREASURY

Then a promise: "My God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (4:19). Paul could not repay them, so God would. The King supplies his colony from heaven's treasury. The promise covers every need, according to riches that do not run out.

The letter ends where it began: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit" (4:23; compare 1:2). Philippians starts and finishes with grace. And among the last greetings are believers from "Caesar's household" (4:22): heaven's citizens, serving faithfully in the emperor's own house.

Over fourteen weeks we have seen what it means to be citizens of heaven in a city of Rome. We belong to a King who came down to a cross and was raised to the throne. We live worthy of his gospel, side by side, wherever he stations us, waiting for him to come.

That citizenship carries a joy that circumstances cannot remove. It grows in partnership, takes the shape of Christ's mind, and rests on knowing him above everything else. Grace sustains all of it.

FIELD NOTES

4:10–23

AUTARKĒS · 4:11

“Content”: the Stoic’s self-sufficiency, re-rooted in Christ.

MEMYĒMAI · 4:12

“Learned the secret”: initiated, let in on it.

KOINŌNIA · 4:15

Partnership. The word from 1:5 closes the letter it opened.

KAISAROS OIKIA · 4:22

Caesar’s household: saints inside the imperial staff.

LOOKING BACK · FOURTEEN WEEKS

What will you carry forward?

DISCUSSION

GETTING STARTED

01 Where have you seen Philippians 4:13 used? What do people usually mean by it?

THE PASSAGE

02 What does it mean that Paul "learned" contentment (4:11–12)? How is it learned?

03 In context, what are the "all things" Paul can do through Christ (4:13)?

04 How does Paul describe the Philippians' gift (4:15–18)? Why does he call it an offering?

05 What does God promise in 4:19? What does it not promise?

ON THE GROUND

THIS WEEK, AND AFTER

06 Are you more tempted toward discontent in seasons of need, or in seasons of plenty? Why?

07 How could you practice partnership in the gospel through your giving or service?

08 Looking back over the whole series, how has being a citizen of heaven changed the way you see your life where you are stationed now?



PRAYER

Thank God for the joy he has given through this study. Pray that each person would be content in Christ in every circumstance.

"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit." 4:23

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