

Twenty-Eight Days in Philippians

Study Two: Days Eight to Fourteen

Philippians 1:22-2:24

Day Eight

- 23 I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far;
24 but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body.
25 Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith,
26 so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me.

V. 23 – Paul obviously had an intimate relationship with Jesus. He was so close that he actually eagerly anticipated his death so that He could be with Christ. I have not done much fighting, but I am told that the worst person to fight with is one who isn't protecting himself. He fights with abandon because he doesn't fear death. Perhaps that is why Paul was able to turn the world upside down and be so effective is his fight with the kingdom of darkness! He preached without fear that he would lose his life.

He didn't only say that his departure from earth was better than staying, he wrote that it was "better by far." How do you feel about death? Does this fear of death keep you from engaging your life purpose? Are you holding back what isn't yours to hold? I gave my life to Jesus on May 18, 1973. I am not going to take it back for fear that I may stop breathing.

V. 24 – Paul was willing to put aside his eagerly-awaited meeting with Jesus to stay on earth and serve the Philippians. He knew that the Church needed him. There were still letters to write, sermons to be preached, and churches to be planted. Paul knew what he was to do and you can too. If God wants you to do His will, He must show you what that will is. You can then accept or reject that will, but you must first know it. The best way I know to find God's will is to commit to obey it **before** you know what it is. That attitude represents both faith **and** surrender. After that, I count on God's ability to deliver His word and will for me clearly. Is it that simple? In my mind and experience, the answer is "yes."

V. 25 – Paul was convinced that his imprisonment would not lead to death, so he was making plans for how to affect the progress and joy of his followers. That would make a wonderful goal for spiritual leaders—the **progress** and **joy** of those with whom they labor. If you are a leader, what are you doing to help people progress and to make them joyful in their faith? With Paul, everything didn't revolve around him and his wishes. He made Jesus and the people His top priorities. Paul didn't start "Tarsus Ministries" or "Pharisees for Jesus." Paul planted churches and then labored to see them presented mature and growing to Jesus. I like Paul. He is a good, although not perfect model, to follow. Paul served three things in his life: Jesus, his purpose and the gospel message. What (and whom) are you serving?

V. 26 – Paul’s focus was always Jesus. He just didn’t want the Philippians to be happy; he wanted them happy in Christ Jesus. As I study and write this, I am constantly challenged by Paul’s absolute loyalty to and focus on Jesus. I have not been that committed over the life of my ministry and have often been more concerned about my church movement than I have about my relationship with Jesus. I am trying to correct that imbalance in my life.

Day Nine

27 Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel

28 without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved-- and that by God.

29 For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him,

30 since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.

V. 27 – Paul commanded the Philippians to conduct themselves in a manner worthy of the gospel. That was not a work of the Spirit or wishful thinking; it was within the power of the Philippians to do so or Paul would not have ordered it done. Then Paul set out what that conduct was: to stand firm in one spirit and to contend for the faith of the gospel.

How can a large group of people stand and contend as one man? That can’t be a work of man; it has to be the work of the Spirit. We cannot unite people in the body of Christ around a personality or doctrine. We have to unite them around Jesus and with the mind of Christ. I often have a picture of each believer with an electrical cord in his or her hands. They can plug that chord into their church’s doctrine, their pastor or their church’s mission. That is good. But I think we must teach people to plug their chord into a common source of power, and that is Jesus Himself. I see all the “power chords” from each church running up to heaven and that being the source of our standing as one man. We can only stand as one man when we “plug into” that one man, namely Jesus.

V. 28 – There is always opposition when you stand firm in unity. Opposition seldom is a sign that you are doing something wrong. It is more often a sign that you are doing something correctly in the will of God. Why and from whom are you receiving your greatest opposition at this point in your life? I would imagine it is because you are trying to take a stand for Jesus. Take this as a sign that you are on the right path and keep moving. Don’t be frightened that you are out of the will of God.

V. 29 – Wow! What a statement! In essence, Paul is saying that we don’t *have* to suffer for Jesus, we *get* to suffer for Jesus. Your suffering is a heavenly assignment. We were created to avoid pain. If your hand touches a hot stove, you jerk it back and that is a good thing. But now we must learn to embrace, not needless suffering, but God-appointed suffering that will connect us to Jesus in a special way. Peter told us not to

suffer for the wrong reason, but to suffer for the right one: "If you **suffer**, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. However, if you **suffer** as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name" (1 Peter 4:15-16).

Are there other passages on suffering that can help you in what you are going through? In Peter's letter, there are several more. Take the time to study and apply them:

In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to *suffer* grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith-- of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire-- may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed (1 Peter 1:6-7).

But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you *suffer* for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ *suffered* for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he *suffered*, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls (1 Peter 2:20-25).

But even if you should *suffer* for what is right, you are blessed. "Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened" (1 Peter 3:14).

It is better, if it is God's will, to *suffer* for doing good than for doing evil (1 Peter 3:17).

What do you see your response should be to suffering from the verses listed above?

Day Ten

- 1 If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion,
- 2 then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.
- 3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.
- 4 Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Vs. 1&2 – Paul reminded the Philippians of the benefits they had received in Christ—encouragement, comfort, fellowship, tenderness and compassion. Everything was always about, through, in or because of Christ for Paul. Because of these benefits, he appealed to them to be in unity. There is only one reason and incentive for a church to be united and that is Christ. We should not be united even around our mission, for pursuing our mission may take our focus off Christ. We should not unite around the personality of the leader, for Paul did not appeal for them to remember his sacrifice or labor among them. The backdrop for their unity was all that Jesus had done for them.

I am indebted to Jesus and you are, too. Therefore, if Jesus asks me to do something, I must do it. And Jesus asks me to be part of a local body, because Jesus gave His life for the church. It doesn't matter whether I've been hurt or disagree with how things are done. Because of what Jesus has done for me and given me, I must be a "church man." And I must not just be a spectator; I must allow the Spirit to join me to that church in vision and action. But I don't become a part because I like the church; I am a part because I love Jesus. Are you part of a local church?

When I had a disappointing departure from a church to which I was very close a few years ago, I never missed a Sunday service. I immediately began to go somewhere else while I processed my mistakes, pain and confusion.

V. 3 – This has been the hardest command that I have had to address in my Christian experience. There are many times that I had my own agenda in mind, and it was usually to attract attention to myself, my ministry or my "wisdom." The good news is that I haven't had to face it myself. God has helped me, but I had to ask Him for help. I was an associate pastor for 11 years and I wanted to speak. But in those 11 years, I spoke from the pulpit only twice. Twice in 11 years! God was teaching me how to be humble and how to consider others more important and better than I.

Today I don't have "preacher's itch." I don't have a driving need to speak and be up front as I once did. God has worked something into my life and I am at peace. Don't get me wrong; I still love to speak. But I think I love Jesus more and I am learning to prefer others over myself. It's been a long process and I have a ways yet to go, but I can say, "Thank you, Jesus, for the work you have done and are doing in my life."

V. 4 – Paul did not teach them to ignore their own interests. He urged them to make the interests of others equal to their own. That too requires a work of the Spirit; it cannot be contrived. Although in the absence of "feeling" like I can do this, I should do it anyway, regardless of how I feel.

One of the best ways I can take an interest in the things of others is to be a good listener. I am trying to learn how to ask good questions and let people articulate their answers, with me paying attention to what they are saying. To be a good listener, you must not talk. That has been a hard skill for me to master, but I think it has borne some fruit as I have attempted to be interested in the things of others.

Day Eleven

5 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God
something to be grasped,
7 but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made
in human likeness.
8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became
obedient to death-- even death on a cross!
9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name
that is above every name,
10 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.

V. 5 – Our attitude should be the same as Jesus. Notice again how Paul directed all attention to Jesus. Jesus was the model, the mentor, the goal, the focus and Lord above all. *“Jesus, forgive me for when I’ve made things about me and not about You. Jesus, forgive me when I didn’t direct men’s hearts to you, but rather to me or to some other topic or cause. Lord, I want to have the same attitude that You had and have.”*

Vs. 6&7 – Jesus, while being God, did not consider this something that had to be broadcast for all to hear. He emptied Himself, made Himself nothing. I can only find two people to whom Jesus directly revealed Himself—the woman at the well in John 4 and the blind man in John 9. He seemed to go out of His way to confuse the answer of who He was. Now part of that was to frustrate the self-righteous leaders of the day, but in part it was because He had emptied Himself and made Himself nothing.

Jesus assumed the role of slave and took on human form. Jesus didn’t appear to be a man; He **was** a man, like us in every way except sin. That means that Jesus got hungry, thirsty, and tired. Jesus was the model missionary. He came to the people to whom He would minister and became thoroughly immersed in who they were. He learned their culture, customs, and language. Jesus lived and worked for 30 years in obscurity for three years of ministry. When Jesus died on the cross, He encountered pain, shame and rejection. Jesus did not have any shortcuts because He was God. Jesus was and is a man! Our flesh is seated at the right hand of the Father today, interceding on our behalf. Thank you, Jesus!

V. 8 – As if becoming a man with its human limitations wasn’t enough, Jesus then chose to die the most humiliating death man has ever devised against his fellows. The Greek word that described what Jesus did to “make himself nothing” is *kenosis*, which means emptying. Jesus emptied Himself and then went to the cross as an end to the first stage of His human existence. If Jesus humbled himself and took the low position, that is what he would want us to do as well. You don’t have to wait for God to humble you, for truly if you wait for that, it may not actually be humiliating. You can humble yourself. Can you think of ways to humble yourself? Years ago someone gave me a sheet that contained ten ways to deny self. I think they would fit here as ways to humble ourselves:

1. Not being hurt or insulted when forgotten.
2. Not being angry when misunderstood.
3. Not becoming defensive when someone disregards our advice/opinion.

4. Lovingly and patiently bearing any disorder.
5. Confront insensitivity in others with love and without judgmentalism.
6. Being content with food, income, clothing, climate, service and disruptions.
7. Not always referring to ourselves in conversation.
8. Loving to be unknown and unrecognized.
9. Rejoicing in others' prosperity when your needs in that very area are more desperate than theirs.
10. Approaching life with a general focus on the well-being of others.

V. 9 – Jesus was entitled to sit at the Father's right hand because He was God's Son. But He paid the price to sit there and to have a name that is above every other name. I understand that the name Jesus was common in Jesus' day. Yet God has exalted that common name because Jesus humbled Himself and died on a cross in obedience to His Father's will. God may put you through a season of humility, but God knows how to reward His suffering saints, if not in this age, then in the one to come. The deeper the trial, the greater the blessing. Take courage from the lives of those who have suffered, for they have often taken their place of honor for generations to come. Be encouraged in your own suffering; you will overcome to rule and reign with Him.

Vs. 10&11 – There was a day when Jesus walked in obscurity, men and women disputing who He was and what He was here to do. To some extent that dynamic is still with us. But the time is coming when that day will be over! A day is coming and in some ways is here when everyone everywhere will use their entire being to acknowledge that Jesus is Lord to the glory of God the Father. Jesus will not be among those servants of God who are honored; He is and will be far above them all.

As I have said before, in this epistles, it's all about Jesus! Paul's focus was clear; ours should be too!

Day Twelve

- 12 Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed-- not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence-- continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling,
- 13 for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.
- 14 Do everything without complaining or arguing,
- 15 so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe
- 16 as you hold out the word of life-- in order that I may boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor for nothing.

V. 12 – Paul taught the Philippians that they must work out their salvation “with fear and trembling.” Let's look at what Matthew Henry's famous Bible commentary taught about this verse:

It is not for us to judge other people; we have enough to do to look to ourselves; and, though we must promote the common salvation as much as we can, yet we

must upon no account neglect our own. We are required to work out our salvation, *katergazesthe*. The word signifies working thoroughly at a thing, and taking true pains. Observe, We must be diligent in the use of all the means which conduce to our salvation. We must not only work at our salvation, by doing something now and then about it; but we must work out our salvation, by doing all that is to be done, and persevering therein to the end. Salvation is the great thing we should mind, and set our hearts upon; and we cannot attain salvation without the utmost care and diligence. He adds, "With fear and trembling," that is, with great care and circumspection: "Trembling for fear lest you miscarry and come short. Be careful to do every thing in religion in the best manner, and fear lest under all your advantages you should so much as seem to come short." Fear is a great guard and preservative from evil.

V. 13 – I like the translation in The Living Bible for this verse: "For God is at work within you, helping you want to obey him, and then helping you do what he wants." Jesus truly is the Alpha and Omega as He is described in Revelation, for it all starts and ends with Him. He begins by working on our will as we surrender it to Him and causes us to want what He wants. But He doesn't stop there. He then helps us to carry out what He gave us the will to do! Thanks be to God! There is no God like our God. He gave His Son on our behalf, but then comes to work with and through us to see us become just like His Son.

The Psalmist wrote:

Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him and he will do this: He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn, the justice of your cause like the noonday sun. Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him; do not fret when men succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes. Refrain from anger and turn from wrath; do not fret-- it leads only to evil. For evil men will be cut off, but those who hope in the LORD will inherit the land. A little while, and the wicked will be no more; though you look for them, they will not be found. But the meek will inherit the land and enjoy great peace (Psalm 37:4-11).

The Lord gives us the desire of our hearts because He put those desires there in the first place. He truly is the beginning and the end—even in my own heart.

V. 14 – Paul urged the Philippians not to grumble or complain. I wonder if that is because of what he wrote in verse 13—God is at work in our lives. If we grumble, we may be complaining against a work that God is trying to do that we don't yet understand. I am a good grumbler, having perfected the art to voice my disapproval when things don't go the way I would like them to go.

Vs. 15&16 – Paul wanted the Philippians to set an example, to shine like stars in a dark sky. People are often watching you when you go through some difficulty to see how you will respond if you are a Christian. God will use you to inform, challenge and speak to

people through your joyful attitude and actions under trials. You may be “saying” something to others that you aren’t even aware that you are saying.

It appears that we will be able to “boast” on the day of Christ. What does that mean? Does it mean that at the last judgment, we will be able to tell of what we did for Jesus? Does it mean that when we die, we can give an account and Paul’s account was to be what he did for Jesus in Philippi and the other cities? What will you boast about in the day of Christ? Paul wanted to boast about specific fruit that came from his labors, from his running for Jesus. What about your fruit? What is your claim to fame in Christ?

Day Thirteen

17 But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you.

18 So you too should be glad and rejoice with me.

V. 17 – Paul wanted something to boast about on the day of Christ. Yet now he shifted gears and said that he would be content to be a drink offering. What was a drink offering? It was a liquid offering that was poured over the body of a sacrificial animal or into the fire that consumed the animal. Regardless of how a drink offering was poured out, there was nothing left of it after it was poured. It either ran into the ground and disappeared, or made a hissing sound on a fire as it evaporated.

Paul hoped to have something to boast about on the day of Christ, but he was also content to have his labor consumed on the sacrifice and service of their faith. He knew that if that happened, then only God would know what Paul had done. If Paul was a drink offering, he would be happy and rejoice in that for God Himself would notice and reward him.

V. 16 – He asked that the Philippians join him in his joy if his labor was obscured. Paul was a happy man, even though he sat in prison as he wrote. He was able to turn his work over to God and trust God for the results and the credit that would be given to the worker.

Day Fourteen

19 I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you.

20 I have no one else like him, who takes a genuine interest in your welfare.

21 For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.

22 But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel.

23 I hope, therefore, to send him as soon as I see how things go with me.

24 And I am confident in the Lord that I myself will come soon.

Vs. 19-24 – This passage is one of my life-defining passages. I had prayed early in my ministry to be like Timothy. What I really wanted was to hitch my ministry “caboose” to someone’s ministry “locomotive,” so that the engine of his anointing could take me

farther down the “track” than I would be able to go on my own. It was a selfish, self-serving prayer.

Then one day I read this passage that described Timothy. Paul stated that he had no one else like Timothy. That amazed me, for Paul traveled with many great leaders, even fellow apostles like Barnabas and Luke. Yet Timothy stood out. Why? Because everyone else, including those great leaders, looked out for their own interests and not those of Jesus. I thought to myself: “If Paul only saw one person who was able to take a genuine interest in other’s welfare, how many would I see in my lifetime? What’s more, could I be that rare person who looked after the interests of others?”

I further saw that Timothy had proved himself, working as a son with his father. I needed to give myself to the service of someone who was furthering the gospel in such a way as to prove that my intentions were not selfish and my desire was steadfast. That is what I tried to do.

Paul wanted to send Timothy because he knew that Timothy would represent him well. But Paul made a statement of faith: he was confident that he would come soon as well. Remember, Paul was in prison at the time that he wrote this. Faith without action is dead, as James wrote. Paul had to do something with his faith, so he wrote and spoke about it. Paul wrote the Corinthians:

It is written: "I believed; therefore I have spoken." With that same spirit of faith we also believe and therefore speak, because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you in his presence. All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God. Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal (2 Corinthians 4:13-18).

Can you view your trials redemptively? Do you see what God may be doing with your struggles? If not, can you trust that He is in the midst of them, and that in time you will see and understand? In the meantime, can you be like Timothy and serve others in spite of your own pain? As we end this second study, I pray that the Spirit of Paul and Timothy will rest upon you and that you will take actions in faith, no matter how limited they may be, that will speak to your hope and trust in God.