

How to use *explore*

Issue 106

The 91 daily readings in this issue of *Explore* are designed to help you understand and apply the Bible as you read it each day.

It's serious!

We suggest that you allow 15 minutes each day to work through the Bible passage with the notes. It should be a meal, not a snack! Readings from other parts of the Bible can throw valuable light on the study passage. These cross-references can be skipped if you are already feeling full up, but will expand your grasp of the Bible. *Explore* uses the NIV2011 Bible translation, but you can also use it with the NIV1984 or ESV translations.

Sometimes a prayer box will encourage you to stop and pray through the lessons—but it is always important to allow time to pray for God's Spirit to bring his word to life, and to shape the way we think and live through it.

We're serious!

All of us who work on *Explore* share a passion for getting the Bible into people's lives.

We fiercely hold to the Bible as God's word—to honour and follow, not to explain away.

1

Find a time you can read the Bible each day

2

Find a place where you can be quiet and think

3

Ask God to help you understand

4

Carefully read through the Bible passage for today

5

Study the verses with *Explore*, taking time to think

6

Pray about what you have read


the good book
COMPANY

BIBLICAL | RELEVANT | ACCESSIBLE

Welcome to *explore*

Being a Christian isn't a skill you learn, nor is it a lifestyle choice. It's about having a real relationship with the living God through his Son, Jesus Christ. The Bible tells us that this relationship is like a marriage.

It's important to start with this, because it is easy to view the practice of daily Bible reading as a Christian duty, or a hard discipline that is just one more thing to get done in our busy lives.

But the Bible is God speaking to us: opening his mind to us on how he thinks, what he wants for us and what his plans are for the world. And most importantly, it tells us what he has done for us in sending his Son, Jesus Christ, into the world. It's the way that the Spirit shows Jesus to us, and changes us as we behold his glory.

Here are a few suggestions for making your time with God more of a joy than a burden:

- ☑ *Time*: Find a time when you will not be disturbed. Many people have found that the morning is the best time as it sets you up for the day. But whatever works for you is right for you.
- ☑ *Place*: Jesus says that we are not to make a great show of our religion (*see Matthew 6:5-6*), but rather, to pray with the door to our room shut. Some people plan to get to work a few minutes earlier and get their Bible out in an office or some other quiet corner.
- ☑ *Prayer*: Although *Explore* helps with specific prayer ideas from the passage, do try to develop your own lists to pray through. Use the flap inside the back

cover to help with this. And allow what you read in the Scriptures to shape what you pray for yourself, the world and others.

- ☑ *Feast*: You can use the "Bible in a year" line at the bottom of each page to help guide you through the entire Scriptures throughout 2024. This year, the passages each day are linked, showing how God makes and keeps his promises. We're grateful to Katherine Fedor of treasureinthebible.com for her permission to use this Bible-reading plan. You'll find passages to read six days a week—Sunday is a "day off", or a day to catch up!
- ☑ *Share*: As the saying goes, *expression deepens impression*. So try to cultivate the habit of sharing with others what you have learned. Why not join our Facebook group to share your encouragements, questions and prayer requests? Search for *Explore: For your daily walk with God*.

And enjoy it! As you read God's word and God's Spirit works in your mind and your heart, you are going to see Jesus, and appreciate more of his love for you and his promises to you. That's amazing!



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PHILIPPIANS: Confident

Welcome to Philippians: an intensely personal, joy-producing, gospel-focused, doctrinally-rich, prayer-inclining, holiness-growing, eternity-gazing book!

Writer and recipients

Read Philippians 1:1-2

- ❓ *How does Paul describe himself and Timothy (v 1)?*
- ❓ *How does he describe his recipients (v 1)?*

The word Paul uses to describe himself is literally “slave”. He sees himself as a slave, bought by a master to be his possession. Of course, to serve such a master—the Master who died out of love for his “slaves”—is neither restrictive nor an imposition. The great paradox is that such slavery brings true freedom—from fear, futility and death.

Partners

Read Philippians 1:3-6

- ❓ *Why is Paul joyfully thanking God for the Philippian Christians?*

This word “partnership” (*koinonia*) means to share something in common with another person. Such a partnership occurs when two or more people become involved in a joint venture. This was the case with Peter, Andrew, James and John—partners in the same fishing business (Luke 5:3-11). They were, literally, in the same boat together.

This is much like what Paul shares in common with the Philippians. Though separated by many miles, they remain in partnership, being fishers of men and sharing the message of salvation with the world.

This participation in the gospel is what all believers share together. We are in the same boat, engaged in the same profession, and we have a great deal in common with our partners, no matter what the differences are in our languages, cultures and experiences.

- ❓ *What is Paul confident of (Philippians 1:6)?*
- ❓ *Why would he need to have this confidence in order to thank God for them with joy, rather than with anxiety?*

Salvation is not a matter of our working for God’s acceptance, but it is God working for us and in us. From beginning to end, salvation is entirely a divine work of grace. If God has caused you to be born again, you can be assured that he will carry on this work until “the day of Christ Jesus”. As a believer in Christ, you are as certain of heaven as though you have already been there 10,000 years. God finishes what he starts.

▼ Apply

- ❓ *How does verse 6 comfort you...*
 - *when you consider your sins?*
 - *as you think about the parts of your life that you find hard?*
 - *as you pray for Christians you know?*

▲ Pray


About whom will you “pray with joy” today, because of their partnership in the gospel with you?

Love prays

In this passage, Paul continues to tell the Philippians how he feels about them, and what he is praying for them.


Giving thanks

Read Philippians 1:7-8

-  *How does Paul feel about the members of this church, and why?*

Real, deep affection for others must mark our lives, too. We must do more than simply endure, tolerate or be nice to other believers. We must lovingly care for them. No matter how doctrinally sound we may be, if we are without love, all our Christian service is “nothing” (1 Corinthians 13:1).



Apply

-  *As you look at your own feelings and life, does this truth encourage or challenge you, or both? Why?*

Prayer requests

Read Philippians 1:9-11

Think about the stages of Paul’s prayer as he lays it out here.

-  *What do you understand by each part?*
-  *What is the end product—the chief aim—of what he is asking God to do in the Philippians?*

The greatest thing we can ask God to do for other Christians is to deepen their love for him and for others. Where love for each other grows, the church is most like heaven and becomes more attractive to the world.

“Knowledge” does not refer to the mere head knowledge of facts. It means having a heart understanding of people’s lives that perceives their deepest needs and how we can best meet those needs. Paul is not praying that the Philippians would become smarter in their understanding, but wiser in their care for one another.

“Pure” is better translated “sincere”, which comes from two words for “sun” and “to judge”. It described a piece of fine pottery that was judged in the light of the sun and found to be without cracks. In ancient times, devious merchants would conceal flaws in their expensive pottery with wax. The authenticity of valuable pottery was revealed when held up to the light of the sun.

So Paul is praying for lives of integrity—that his friends will have a love that is real, and which, when it comes into contact with the heat of a difficult situation or a person who demands sacrifice or commitment, does not melt away. It speaks of a character that does not crack under pressure.

And all this will lead to God being praised (v 11). He alone is worthy of all praise—and so the pursuit and promotion of his glory must be our all-consuming passion.

Pray

Make Paul’s prayer your prayer, both for yourself and also for members of your church.

Joy in jail

Paul is in difficult circumstances—he has been arrested and sent to Rome, has suffered shipwreck, and has been imprisoned. Yet he is rejoicing. How can this be?

Possibilities not problems

Read Philippians 1:12-14

- ❓ *What does Paul want the Philippians to know (v 12)?*
- ❓ *What two results have his “chains” had (v 13-14)?*

No matter in what hard place we may find ourselves, God can use us to advance his word in that very situation. Where is it that you feel restricted in life? Wherever you find yourself, you can see your adverse situation as an opportunity to give testimony for Christ where one might not otherwise exist. You are not where you are by accident. You are where you are by divine appointment, for the purposes of sharing the gospel.

A higher agenda

Read Philippians 1:15-18a

- ❓ *Why does Paul not mind some Christians who envy him making trouble for him by preaching the gospel (v 18)?*

This is the third time in these verses that Paul speaks of Christ being proclaimed. The priority for Paul is always the magnification of his Master. He is not preoccupied with escaping his suffering, nor with rebutting his foes. Paul has a much higher agenda.

- ❓ *Why is it liberating to live caring more about our Redeemer than our own reputation?*

Confidence

Read Philippians 1:18b-20

- ❓ *What does Paul:*
 - *know (v 19)?*
 - *expect (v 20)?*
- ❓ *How can this give him confidence as he faces his trial before Caesar?*

He will soon be released from this imprisonment and trial one way or another, either by death or by dismissal. Paul believes that his life is held in the hands of the sovereign God. It is this conviction in the overruling authority of God that gives him great joy. He would be filled with fear if he did not trust in this powerful truth. He would have no joy if he thought that his circumstances were governed by mere random chance. Paul lays his head on the pillow of the sovereignty of God each night—and he sleeps well on it.

▼ Apply




- ❓ *How has Paul's perspective on life in these verses...*
 - *comforted you?*
 - *changed your own perspective?*
 - *motivated you to share the gospel today?*
- ❓ *What will it look like for you to lay your head on the “pillow” of the sovereignty of God tonight?*

To live is...

No one is ready to live until they are ready to die. The end of your life must be secure before the present can be stable.

Read Philippians 1:21-26

The focus

-  *What is Paul's preoccupying focus in life (v 21)?*
-  *What is Paul's attitude towards death (v 21)?*
-  *Why does he view the end of his earthly life in this way (v 23)?*

Paul's life is, in a sense, flashing before his eyes. In such a sobering situation, Paul sums up what that life is really all about. Everything in his life is bound up in Christ. The passionate pursuit of his whole being is to know and glorify Christ. The sum and substance of his present state is confined in Christ. Every moment of every day is lived for Christ.



This is what it means to be a Christian. It involves living primarily and pre-eminently for Christ. Everything else in life is secondary.

Paul is only able to live this way because of his view of his death. For him, to die is a far greater gain than living. Why? Because the grave will graduate him to glory. It will not be a tragedy but a triumph—and that is the secret to living confidently as a Christian. As the Puritan Richard Sibbes wrote:




What greater encouragement can a man have to fight against his enemy than when he is sure of the victory before he fights?

Notice that what is most important in heaven is not the streets of gold, nor the gates of pearl. The greatest gain of being in heaven is not even to be reunited with loved ones. The greatest profit will be to stand before Christ and behold him as he is (v 23). The glory of heaven is found in Jesus Christ himself. Death will bring Paul to the Lord Jesus Christ. What greater gain can there be than this?

The dilemma

-  *What is Paul's dilemma (v 22-23)?*
-  *What does he decide, and why (v 24-26)?*

Apply

-  *What would change in your life if you saw it as Paul saw his—all about Christ, with death as a greater gain?*
-  *Which verse from this section would be most helpful for you to commit to memory, and when do you think you will most need to recall it and live it out?*
-  *Are you ready to die?*

Pray

Lord, thank you that, by faith in your Son, when I die I shall see him face to face. Please would my heart cry be, "To live is Christ; to die is gain". Please would my purpose for being alive today be to live completely for him. Amen.

Good, not easy, news

Here is a reminder of the price every believer must pay if they are to walk in a manner worthy of their calling. The gospel is good news; but it is never easy news.

Read Philippians 1:27-30

- ❓ *What will the Christian life look like, according to Paul's words here?*

Consistent Christianity

“Conduct yourselves” (v 27) means to live as the citizen of a country in a law-abiding manner. We must live consistently with what we believe; otherwise we will be a walking contradiction in terms. “Whatever happens” in your life, this command is for you.

Standing together

- ❓ *What report about the Philippian church does Paul want to hear (v 27)?*
- ❓ *What will this be a sign of—for them, and for their opponents (v 28)?*

The opponents of the Philippian Christians are the false teachers who have infiltrated the church with their corrupt teaching (3:1-2). If the believers in this church were not truly converted, they would give in instead of standing firm. The opposition demonstrates to the world the differences between what the true Christians and the Judaizers teach. (Judaizers thought the Old Testament Levitical law should still apply to all Christians.)

Suffering and salvation

- ❓ *What two things have been “granted”, or given, to these Christians by God (1:29)?*

- ❓ *How should this shape our view of going through hardships in order to obey or proclaim the gospel?*

All who receive the former gift in verse 29 also receive the latter. These two are a package deal. All the believers in Philippi had been granted saving faith, as well as the privilege of suffering for the gospel. Paul wrote elsewhere, “Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Timothy 3:12). Peter said we should rejoice in our sufferings and are blessed when we suffer for Jesus’ sake (1 Peter 4:13-14). Suffering because of our salvation is to be expected and accepted.

Apply

Notice that all these things—standing, striving and suffering—are to be done “together” (Philippians 1:27).

- ❓ *How can you contribute to your church living in this way?*
- ❓ *How will you view suffering for Christ today?*

Pray

Thank God for the gift of faith through believing the gospel. Thank him for the gift of suffering for the cause of the gospel. Pray that whatever happens today, you would conduct yourself in a manner that is pleasing to Christ.


He exalts the humble

Perhaps the greatest apparent contradiction of the Christian life is before us in this chapter of Philippians: we must humble ourselves if we are to be exalted.


“Humility” is a word that means we think of or judge ourselves with lowliness. The idea is this: “do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment” (Romans 12:3). True humility is a central tenet of the Christian faith. No one struts through the narrow gate that leads into the kingdom. We are sheep, not peacocks; servants, not sovereigns.

The call to humility

Read Philippians 2:1-4

-  *What does it mean to live with Christian humility?* • v 2 • v 3 • v 4

The word “if” in verse 1 can also be translated as “since” or “because”.



-  *What is the link between the truth of what we enjoy (v 1) and the lifestyle Paul commands in verses 2-4?*

The supreme example

Where do we look to see humility worked out in life? Supremely, in the life of the Lord Jesus...

Read Philippians 2:5-8


Paul writes that Christ “humbled himself” (v 8).

-  *Where did Christ begin, and what downward steps did he take (v 6-8)?*
 *What are we to do (v 5)?*

If the Son of God lowered himself humbly in order to serve others, how can you and I not be willing? We must make whatever sacrifice is necessary for the good of others. None of us will ever surpass the humility of Christ. None of us may ever say, “Enough. I deserve better, so I will stop here.”




What God does

Read Philippians 2:9-11

-  *After the humiliation of Christ, what happened next (v 9-11)?*

The point is that no one ever truly humbles themselves before God without being exalted by God, whether in this life or in the life to come. True humility will never be forgotten by God. God will see it, God will note it, and God will reward it. It is one thing to be exalted by man, but it is something else entirely, and eternally, to be exalted by God. This is the essence of true humility—to accept that it is our status before God which is of ultimate importance.

Apply

-  *How have these verses challenged you about your own attitude to yourself, and to others?*
 *How have they motivated you to live humbly?*
 *What do you need to pray about right now?*

What is man?

John Calvin said that we cannot know ourselves if we do not know God, and cannot know God if we do not know ourselves. This psalm enables us to know both.

Read Psalm 8

- ❓ *What impression of God does David want us to have (v 1, 9)?*

Who is he?

- ❓ *Where can God's glory be heard, or seen?*

• v 1b • v 2 • v 3

When we consider the greatness of God and the vastness of his creation, we must start to feel our own smallness. The question of verse 4 comes to all our lips from time to time: why would God be bothered about us? Who are we, tiny specks in the grand cosmos, that the Creator should care for us?

Who are we?

- ❓ *What position did God give us (v 5)?*
- ❓ *What purpose did God give us (v 6-8)?*

Humans were not an afterthought or a random addition in the great creating works of God. **Read Genesis 1:26-29.** We are not mere specks; we are cared-for creatures, given the privileged position of knowing God, and the privileged purpose of caring for his creation. The tragedy is that, because we do not like to be dependent upon or subject to anyone, we reject our created-ness—relegating ourselves to mere matter, which does not matter much. It is only if we realise how small we are in God's creation that we realise how valued we are in God's sight.

Who shall we be?

Read Hebrews 2:5-10

The writer of Hebrews, writing to 1st-century Christians, quotes Psalm 8 to them.

- ❓ *What does he say God did (middle v 8)?*
- ❓ *But what do we not see (end v 8)?*

In trying to rule the world without God, we as humanity forfeited our ability to rule the world under God. There is a great mismatch between what Psalm 8 says about the earth, and what we see on the earth—humans are not perfectly ruling God's creation...

- ❓ *But what do we "see" (Hebrews 2:9)?*

There is a perfect human, who came from heaven and was made lower than the angels, who died for his people to restore them to relationship with God, and who was crowned with glory and honour. Jesus will rule "the world to come"—and will restore us, God's "sons and daughters", to the people we were created to be, ruling alongside him in his recreated world.

Apply

- ❓ *How does Psalm 8:4-8 teach us to see ourselves with humble dignity?*
- ❓ *How do verses 6-8 help you to go to work with purpose today or tomorrow?*
- ❓ *How does Hebrews 2 prompt you to look forward to the world to come with excitement?*



From now till heaven

What takes place in my life after being saved and before going to heaven? In two verses, Paul has much to teach us about the nature of the Christian life.

Read Philippians 2:12-13


Paul begins this section, “Therefore, my dear friends” (v 12). This is addressed exclusively to Christians. If we miss this point, it will lead us to falsely see these verses as teaching that someone must work to earn their salvation. Paul is speaking to those already saved by faith in Christ.


Working it out

 *What does he tell Christians to do (v 12)?*

They were not to work for their salvation, but to work out their salvation. They were to work out what God had already worked in. Being a believer who is saved by God’s grace does not negate your responsibility to keep God’s moral law, outlined in his word. A firm, uncompromising commitment to obeying the word, accompanied by true, obsequious repentance when you fail, are two marks of a true believer who has been born again (1 John 2:3-6).

Joyful awe


 *What attitude should Christians have as they work out their salvation (end Philippians 2:12)?*

 *Why (v 13)?*

The end of verse 12 describes a wholesome, healthy, reverential awe for God and a sober realisation of the need to take him seriously.


Note that this “fear and trembling” is recorded in a letter that continually emphasises joy in Christian living. The gladness that believers experience in the Lord grows out of the fertile soil of fearing God with reverential awe. God is not a kindly spiritual grandfather, sitting in the sky. God is not a kitten. God is a lion who loves us, but his love does not mean we are at liberty to domesticate him. Because of this, we are called to tremble joyfully in our walk with God.


The workers

 *Who is at work to grow the Philippians in holiness (v 12-13)?*

The idea is that God’s will takes the initiative and is acting upon their will. The divine work in them is what is causing them to work in sanctification. The soul of each believer is the field of labour of this sanctifying work. It is God who is working in them, bringing a gracious force to bear upon their wills.

Apply

 *In which areas do you need to work particularly hard on applying your salvation to your life?*

 *How will this cause you to pray for God to be at work in you?*

Shine

Building upon his foundational teaching on growing in holiness and obedience (v 12-13), Paul now gives us some specific application for daily living.

Everything without...

Read Philippians 2:14

❓ *Why is “everything” a challenging word?*

“Grumbling” means murmuring or muttering. It refers to private complaining under your breath. “Arguing” speaks of a contentious spirit that feels the need to be continually questioning what is done in the church.

▼ Apply

- ❓ *About what do you find it easiest to grumble and/or argue?*
- ❓ *Are you going to stop?*

So you may become...

Read Philippians 2:15

❓ *Why is it important not to grumble or argue?*

“Blameless” here means that no accusation can be brought against us when it comes to grumbling or arguing.

❓ *How will living this way, as “children of God”, mean we are different to the world around us?*

▼ Apply

❓ *In what ways do you find it most tempting to blend in with the darkness of your generation? What would change*

if you saw those areas of temptation as opportunities to stand out and shine more brightly?

The word of life

Read Philippians 2:16-18

“Hold firmly to” more correctly carries the idea of “hold forth”. The idea is not merely that we would have a tenacious grip on the gospel, but would also extend the gospel to others.

A drink offering (v 17) was a sacrifice that was poured on top of an animal sacrifice (Exodus 29:38-41). The steam from the liquid symbolised the rising of the sacrificial offering to God. So Paul’s life is being poured out in order that the Philippians’ lives might be offered in sacrifice to God.

❓ *How will Paul feel as he hears of the Philippian Christians shining like stars and holding to / holding forth the “word of life” (Philippians 2:16-18)?*

▼ Apply

Our distinctive lives provide the platform for us to testify with our mouths.

- ❓ *With whom will you actively seek to share the gospel this week?*
- ❓ *How have verses 14-18 encouraged and challenged you about how you are working out your salvation in your life?*

