



COFFEE
WITH THE
PASTOR

MIKE HILSON



The Book of Philippians

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MIKE HILSON

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Thank you also to my family at New Life Wesleyan Church for giving me the freedom to grow as a leader and as a follower of Christ.

Most importantly, I want to thank and praise God!

About This Book

People sometimes ask why I would take the time to write a book. The answer is twofold. First, it's an opportunity to speak with my children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren about this wonderful gospel that I have had the honor of working for all of my life. I want them to see the joy and power of living a life guided and protected by God's Word, God's Spirit, and God's commands. In doing so, I hope to establish many generations of my family in the wonderful grace of our Lord. So I write as a father.

I also write as a pastor. New Life Wesleyan Church has become a rather large body of believers meeting in multiple services and multiple locations across multiple states. While this is a

huge reason to praise God and more of a blessing than any of us who work here could ever have hoped for, it creates its own set of challenges. It has become impossible for me to sit down individually with folks in the church like I once did and have deeper conversations about the power of God's Word and how it can be applied in their lives. And so, this is the reason for a series of books called *Coffee with the Pastor*.

While I am neither a theologian nor a scholar, as a pastor, it is my job to help people read and better understand the Word of God. His Word is powerful and life changing. If you read and understand it, you can see the God of heaven through the blood of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit—and that will change your life. Therefore, the goal of this series of books is not theological, but a practical application of life-changing, biblical truth. That is the purpose of my ministry and the ultimate goal of my life.

So, grab a cup of coffee, open up your Bible, and let us think about what God can do in your life.

Introduction

Somewhere between AD 53–55, the apostle Paul found himself under house arrest in Rome. There, confined to his own rented house, the apostle had to find new ways to reach out and give instruction and encouragement to the infant movement of Christianity. So, he began to write letters. Today we call these letters epistles. In the epistle to the church in Philippi, which we call Philippians, the apostle repeatedly called for joy. From confinement, he called for joy! Joy in struggle, joy in hardship, joy in persecution, joy in Christ, joy in everything!

His call for joy came at just the right moment and to just the right people. Christians in this day were declaring a new way to peace and salvation and a new hope for holiness

and an eternity to come. This message was delivered into a culture that one commentator describes in this way: "The epistle to the Philippians was written about thirty years after the ascension, about ten years after the first preaching of the gospel by St. Paul at Philippi. Christianity was still young, in all the freshness of its first youth. It had come suddenly into the world. The world seemed growing old: the old religions had lost whatever power they once possessed; the old philosophies were worn out; the energies of political life had been weakened or suppressed by the all-pervading despotism of Rome. Avarice, uncleanness, cruelty, were rampant in the earth. There was little faith in God, in goodness, in morality. 'What is truth?' was the despairing question of the age."¹ Into this reality, the apostle Paul wrote, "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!" (Phil. 4:4). Hope was born anew in a world dying of its own self-created hopelessness. That hope came in the form of a Jewish rabbi named Saul who was then renamed Paul, and he spent his life declaring the greatness and mercy of a Jewish carpenter turned rabbi named Jesus. Grace brought by Jesus opened the door to peace with God and mankind. The apostle Paul gave all he had to declare that grace to everyone he could find!

Fast forward to our time, and we can easily relate to, "The world seemed growing old: the old religions had lost whatever power they once possessed; the old philosophies were worn out; the energies of political life had been weakened or suppressed by the all-pervading despotism of"²

Culture today seems filled with anxiety, stress, exhaustion, anger, and despotism of whatever group has the ear of our media at the moment. It is our honor and calling to proclaim to that culture the same joy that the apostle Paul presented 2,000 years ago. Into the darkness of our day, we declare, "Yes, and [we] will continue to rejoice, for [we] know that through your prayers and God's provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ what has happened to [us] will turn out for [our] deliverance" (Phil. 1:18–19).

So, grab a cup of coffee, and get ready to find a life-changing joy! Let's get started!



PHILIPPIANS 1



The Kingdom of Joy

Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all God's holy people in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart and, whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me. God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus. And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.

—Philippians 1:1–11

Grace and Peace

In all his letters, the apostle Paul began with some form of the phrase “grace and peace.” I cannot help but comment every time. This greeting is actually a prescription written in a particular order. Grace always precedes peace. Peace is

not possible without grace first paving the way. The grace of Christ is what Paul first offered to the Philippians upon his arrival there. Once they received that grace, the peace of God could take hold in their hearts.

Forgiveness that comes from grace is the only way to find peace between people who have been at odds with one another for years, even centuries. When peace is demanded without grace (kindness), it only ends in deepening anger and mistrust. When grace (forgiveness) is demanded without a hope of peace, it only ends with deepening anger and resentment. But when grace (forgiveness) is extended and followed up with a continuation of grace (kindness), all acted out in Christlike love, peace will be the natural result. That peace firmly grounded these first-century Christians in the gospel that would soon overtake the ancient gods of the Greco-Roman world. That peace found through grace would also hold them closely to the heart of the apostle.

As the apostle Paul continues, it quickly becomes clear that he has a deep connection to these people. This is no letter to mere acquaintances or to a place that he happened to pass through. No, this is a letter to friends and supporters. We know from other references that the Philippians were his greatest source of support, likely both financial and moral, during his ministry. When everyone else forgot him, the Philippians came through. Because of this, Paul said, "I thank my God every time I remember you" (Phil. 1:3). He also said, "God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus"

(v. 8). Reading this, one can almost feel the yearning of the apostle's heart to go back to Philippi and spend some time with his closest friends and biggest supporters. They loved him deeply, and he loved them just as much.

This kind of mutually submissive love for one another is the very foundation of God's kingdom. It should be the very foundation of every church and a clear character trait of every Jesus follower. In John 13:35, Jesus said, "'By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.'" The apostle John then wrote in one of his letters to the church, "Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God" (1 John 4:7). We are clearly and repeatedly commanded to show love toward one another constantly. The kingdom of God finds its greatest strength and success when its foundation is firmly planted in the love that is given to us and commanded from us by Jesus. That love will give meaning and purpose in ways and places that we cannot even imagine.

A Deeper Community

For the apostle Paul, the love that existed between himself and the Philippians gave him a community where he could find support, strength, and encouragement. Anyone who has served in a place of authority, especially in a public role, can relate to the constant demands of people who want something from them. Many of these people are only there to get something, advance their own agenda, or cause trouble. When this is the reality that an influencer lives in, great comfort and

strength can be found in a loving community of people who only want to form a partnership and help accomplish the mission that God has given his people. For the apostle Paul, the Philippians represented just that kind of community. I can imagine that when things seemed darkest in Rome, the apostle longed to go to Philippi and spend some safe and quiet time with people who, by the grace of God, loved him.

A Bigger Mission

For the Philippians, there was also an unintended benefit. The influencer they had bought into was spreading the gospel of Jesus around the entire known world. He had tried to go into Asia but was instead sent toward Macedonia, and they had likely been his first stop on that westward journey. Their support for him both emotionally and financially was so important that the apostle took care to point out that “all of you share in God’s grace with me” (Phil. 1:7). Though most of them would never leave Philippi, they were each responsible for the gospel reaching all the way into Rome and beyond. Their support allowed the apostle to endure through these tough times and funded his movements from place to place. Their relationship with and support of the apostle Paul made them some of the great heroes of the Christian faith. Though we don’t know many of their names, we owe them a debt of gratitude for holding strong to the one who would bring the gospel to us all!

So, let me suggest two simple questions:

- Do you have a deep community of faith that will love and support you?
- Are you investing in a mission that is bigger than your desires?

If the answer to either of these is no, begin today finding deeper community and a bigger mission, and let God make you a hero in someone's story!



The Prisoner of Joy

Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel. As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. And because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear.

—Philippians 1:12–14

As the apostle languished in an undeserved confinement, the story of Jesus marched on. In fact, Paul's hardship pressed the gospel forward even faster. When a leader is willing to sacrifice and endure pain, especially unfair pain, those who are following or working alongside that leader are inspired. Sacrificial leaders are the stuff of legends. Their mission and commitment inspire the courage and strength that are required to bring about change when needed and revolution when required.

Hardship Exposes

It has been said that if you want to know what a glass is full of, you need only to shake it and see what spills out. This is a great illustration of what hardship does in the lives of leaders. Remember that multiple groups of leaders were involved in Paul's imprisonment. Also remember that each of them exposed their motivations and the purity of their hearts. For the apostle, it became obvious to everyone around that he was in chains solely because of his faith. It was his religion that was being held against him and not wrongdoing on his part. He was there because some people in power did not like what he was doing.

These people were exposed as power hungry, resistant to change, and fearful of the future. Whenever people get the sense that leaders are exhibiting any of these traits, they get nervous and begin to lose confidence. Leaders who are holding to the past in fear of the future or who are simply resistant to change because they prefer the status quo are extremely shortsighted. They stifle progress and leave the organizations they lead vulnerable to changes in culture and marketplace that otherwise would have been foreseen so adjustments could be made. Therefore, followers who see these traits in their leaders become less confident in the ability of the organization—or, in this case, the Jewish religion and Roman government—to survive and thrive in the long term. Leaders who emit a sense of being power hungry actually strike fear into the hearts of those who follow. These types of leaders exhibit little concern

for the best of their followers and will often quickly toss out people in order to secure a better or stronger position for themselves. No one trusts a leader like that!

Integrity Inspires

On the contrary, when leaders display true integrity and commitment to the cause they represent and the followers they lead, inspiration is virtually inevitable. As Paul sat in confinement, he did not stew in his anger or wallow in his misfortune. Instead, he thought about those who were striving to live out this Christian life he had given his life to promote. He looked for ways to actively encourage his followers and forward his cause. Even in a situation that was far from ideal, the apostle expressed hope, love, concern for others, and joy.

Furthermore, it is obvious from his words that these expressions were not mere words meant to accomplish a task; they were sincere. The hope he expressed was real hope. It resided in his heart and was based in the reality of a God and Savior who was greater than this situation. His love and concern for the Philippians was real and from the depths of his heart. His joy was born from an ever-growing sense of honor and thankfulness for the role he had been allowed to play in the movement of Jesus followers. His integrity clearly shone through and was highlighted by its contrast to the leaders who had confined him.

Endurance Wins

In the end, victory goes to the survivor. In this case, what was at stake was not the life of the apostle Paul. No, here the thing at stake was truth, grace, and a God who desired a relationship with creation. This was a battle of ideas. Up to this point, both in Jewish religious culture and Greco-Roman religious culture, God and gods had been all-powerful entities that demanded allegiance and adherence to their preferences. Even the God of the Bible was, in the Old Testament, a God of rules, punishment, and judgment. The Greco-Roman gods were the same while being less predictable and relatable. These gods did not concern themselves with the welfare of mere humans. Humans were a bother to these gods.

The apostle Paul presented the possibility of a God who is more than just a harsh, capricious demander of his own way. Paul presented the possibility of a God who actually loved and cared for the creatures of his creation. He presented a God who not only looked with concern to the people of the planet but also chose to intervene on their behalf. He chose to intervene *sacrificially*! This view of God was entirely opposite of any other theology of the day. The idea that there could be a God who loved us was a powerful, new concept!

So, the battle was only partly for the life of the individual known as the apostle Paul. The battle is also for the hearts and minds of anyone who wishes to follow, trust, and know a God who loves them and gave his own life for them. This powerful idea, this powerful reality of Jesus our Savior, God

our Father, and the Holy Spirit our Sustainer, would survive the mistreatment it received in this first-century setting. In fact, only a few centuries from this moment, followers of Christ would overtake the leadership of Rome and then continue their transformative journey around the globe. This sacrifice, this love, this grace, this joy . . . endures.