

Introductory Notes

Sources and Resources:

Some of the questions in these discussions are taken from, or inspired by:
Philippians Bible Study, Keith and Kathy Cooper
<http://www.intervarsity.org/mx/item/3826/>

The cover page, and survey were taken from:
Philippians_Fall_2005_-_IBS.pdf at
http://collegelife.grace-bible.org/html/bible_study_archives.htm

Here are some online commentaries for your further study and enrichment:
<http://bible.crosswalk.com/Commentaries/JamiesonFaussetBrown/>
<http://www.allanturner.com/phil.html>

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Some notes, instructions, and reminders:

- 1) Each discussion comes with goals based on the themes of the passage, and notes regarding the passage and/or leading the discussion. Please read the text on your own, and make your own list of themes, etc... before reading the goals and notes provided. This is good Bible study practice. You want to seek God's truth with the help of the Spirit, first, before seeking outside resources. The resources are meant to help guide and refine, not be substitutes for real study and investment. The text is included in the document so you have lots of space to underline, make notes, and so forth.
- 2) None of the discussion guides have icebreakers with them. However, don't neglect icebreakers. Get a list of creative icebreaker ideas, or come up with your own with the help of others in your group for each discussion.
- 3) Finally, as you prepare each discussion, keep your group, prayerfully, in mind. How will this discussion reach your group? Where might there be trouble spots of understanding, disagreement, etc...? Also, how long will it take for your group to progress through the questions you decide to use? Do you need to shorten the list of questions? Do you need to narrow the focus more? You don't want to make a practice of 45-60min discussions. You always want time for prayer, for socializing, for icebreakers and announcements... Remember that Satellite is not just a Bible study, but a community of faith in action: faith*community*action!

Discussion 1: Introduction, and Paul's Greeting (1:1-11)

Text:

1 Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons: 2 Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

3 I thank my God every time I remember you. 4 In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy 5 because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, 6 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.

7 It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart; for whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me. 8 God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.

9 And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, 10 so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, 11 filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ--to the glory and praise of God.

Goals:

- introduce the letter: background historical and cultural information, Paul's occasion for writing,...
- explore Paul's relationship with the Philippian church
- discuss Christian maturity: what does it look like? how do we get there?

Notes:

This discussion is more experiential than interpretive. The text is highly relational, rather than didactic or theological, so our discussion should follow that tone. This is probably good for opening the year, as it encourages honest personal sharing rather than intellectual sparring.

Questions:

1. What is your impression of the tone of Paul's greetings and introduction? What kinds of feelings does Paul communicate?

Do you usually associate this kind of emoting with the Apostle Paul? With Christians in general? Why or why not?

2. What are some experiences that Paul and his readers have shared that would contribute to these feelings?

[If you like, you could do the introductory information here, rather than as a monologue before beginning. Some things to note here: the beginning of the church at Philippi in Acts 16, the sharing and partnering Paul mentions here – the occasion for the letter: thank you for the gift through Epaphroditus.]

3. What kind of greeting is “grace and peace to you”?
Have you ever had grace and peace extended to you, or how you extended it to others? What does that look like?
4. In verse 7, Paul says, “all of you share in God’s grace with me.” What kind of relationship does Paul express through this statement?
Have you shared in God’s grace with someone before? What is that like?
5. What, if anything, would hold us back from sharing this kind of affection for one another?
How would we overcome these challenges?
6. Reread Paul’s prayer in verses 9-11. Ask each present to meditate on it for a minute or two, and then to write their own paraphrase of it with their own understanding and imagery.

Ask two volunteers to pray their version over the group.
7. What kind of life does Paul want for the Christians at Philippi?
8. Do you ever despair of becoming the kind of person you long to be, that God wants you to be?
Do you feel unsure of how to make the best decisions?

[This is a question for stories.]
9. Reread verse 6. What is Paul saying, and what does that mean for you? For us?

Conclusion:

It might be too early in the semester to do individual prayer and requests along the lines of question 8, but if your group is ready, that could be a great way to finish. Another, less vulnerable, option would be for you to pray for the group according to the promise of verse 6, and then ask one more person to pray their version of Paul’s prayer over the group to close.

Discussion 2: Paul's Chains and Paul's Joy (1:12-30)

Text:

12 Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. 13 As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. 14 Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly. 15 It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. 16 The latter do so in love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. 17 The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. 18 But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice. Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, 19 for I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance. 20 I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.

21 For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. 22 If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! 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.

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.

Goals:

- investigate Paul's deepest desire: to see the Gospel advance
- explore the centrality and inevitability of suffering with/for Jesus
- discuss the source of Paul's joy and courage in the midst of very difficult circumstances
- explore the role of community in advancing the Gospel, and in growing mature in Christ

Notes:

This passage covers a lot of ground in a short amount of time. It might be difficult to adequately address all four goals without taking way too much time. The first two goals cover what seem to be the primary foci of Paul's thoughts, while joy and community are slightly secondary. If you need to, for time and/or focus, eliminate questions specifically addressing joy and community – they will still come into the conversation.

Questions:

1. What has happened to Paul?
2. How do you imagine the Philippians felt regarding Paul's imprisonment?
Put yourself in their shoes: your small group leader, pastor, friend... is in prison for speaking about Jesus. How do you feel?

[Frightened for your own safety?]

3. How does Paul feel about his situation in prison?
What is he so happy about?

[The Gospel is advancing!]

4. How would you feel if someone started sharing the Christian message on your floor/in your building/on your street.. with impure motives. (to make you look stupid, to impress the opposite sex, to parade self-righteousness, to gain status...ask for the group to make this list)

What could be dangerous about this situation?

How can Paul be unconcerned regarding the motives of those proclaiming the Gospel?

[Ultimately, nothing is bigger than Jesus. Persecution, imprisonment, bad motives all are not enough to stop Jesus. Even the best motivated among us have mixed motives in our best moments. Thankfully, God is sovereign, and can make good out of our worst and best messes.]

Reread verses 18b-26 (starting at "Yes, and I will continue...")

5. What are the potential outcomes of Paul's imprisonment? [acquittal or execution]

What outcomes does Paul expect in his current situation? How?

[deliverance; Christ exalted in his body; fruitful labor; living to bring progress and joy to the Philippians' faith. by the prayers of the Philippians and the help of the Holy Spirit]

6. Why does Paul choose continued life here and now as preferable to dying and going to be with Christ ("which is better by far")?

7. What are some important decisions we make in life?
8. Recall Paul's prayer from last week (1:9). Think about some of the decisions you make every day, and some of the 'big' decisions looming on your horizon. How does Paul's prayer and example affect your considerations?
[This can be for discussion and/or for personal reflection.]
9. Tell us about a time when you experienced an increase in joy and progress due to another's help/presence.
For reflection or discussion: How can you help members of this group progress with joy? How can you open yourself to receive this kind of help from some in this group?
10. Reread verses 27-30. What does Paul want the Philippians to do?
[pinnacle point: contend for the faith of the Gospel]
11. Paul's language (granted) expresses suffering for Christ as inevitable, and as a gift. How does that make you feel?
In a nation with religious liberty, does Paul's statement still have merit? How so? Have you or someone you know suffered for the sake of the Gospel? Please share.
12. Paul repeats a few ideas throughout this section: advancing the Gospel, suffering for Christ, rejoicing in all circumstances. Which of these impacts you the most today, and how?

Conclusion:

Pray for one another along the lines of your answers to question 12.

Discussion 3: Unity and Humility in Christ (2:1-30)

Text:

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. 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.

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. 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. 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. 25 But I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger, whom you sent to take care of my needs. 26 For he longs for all of you and is distressed because you heard he was ill. 27 Indeed he was ill, and almost died. But God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, to spare me sorrow upon sorrow. 28 Therefore I am all the more eager to send him, so that when you see him again you may be glad and I may have less anxiety. 29 Welcome him in the

Lord with great joy, and honor men like him, 30 because he almost died for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up for the help you could not give me.

Goals:

- consider the example of Jesus' life of obedience and suffering
- explore the result of Jesus' obedience for the world, and for us
- consider the proper response to Jesus: faith and obedience

Notes:

This passage could be broken into smaller pieces, or focused in a few different directions. I have taken the liberty of focusing in on the topic of discipleship: what does it look like to turn to Jesus for salvation and continue on that road? What kind of lifestyle and priorities does Jesus call us to?

The other primary themes are addressed in the questions below, but not in depth. If the Spirit leads you, be free to pursue other directions in this chapter, or even to break it up into two parts.

Questions:

1. Reread verses 1 & 2. What kind of response does Paul's questioning in verse 1 elicit from you?
2. Paul calls for unity in verse 2. What purpose should the Philippians be united in? [Look back to chapter 1 where Paul repeatedly returns to the task of contending for the Gospel.]
3. What are the results of division and disunity?
4. Selfish ambition is often presented to us as a good thing. Have you experienced that? How so?
What is wrong with this kind of ambition?
How can we discern and reject this subtle temptation?
[Look to the interests of others. Also, look at verse 14.]
5. Reread verses 6-11. Take a few minutes to meditate on this passage.
What impacts you most about it?
[I recommend taking some time to point out the importance of verses 9-11: salvation comes through Christ, and he will be Lord over all, in the end.]
6. Paraphrase verses 12b (beginning at 'continue') - 13.
What is Paul saying here?
[Paul makes a paradoxical statement regarding who is responsible for our advance in the life of faith. Ultimately, God is doing the work, but we must be

- reverently engaged in the process. Salvation, is not a one time experience, but a life of following the Way of Jesus.]
7. Why do we complain and argue?
How do we move away from that?
[humility, looking out for others, and joy/thankful contentedness]
 8. How do you feel about Paul's imagery in verse 15?
Do you shine like a star? Why or why not? [holding out the word of life]
Whose light is shining in your life?
[God's light makes us shine. The follow-up questions here, could go in either order. I can't decide which is better. Also, this is another opportunity to reflect on the life of Christ within the believer. We do not make ourselves shine, but step into God's light through faith and repentance, and then His light fills us and shines through us.]
 9. What is Paul getting at with the drink offering imagery?
[The possibility of his death for the sake of the Gospel. The Philippians have made themselves a living sacrifice to God through love and helping Paul. Paul may become the libation splashed over top the sacrifice by execution.]
 10. Review the setting around Epaphroditus: his coming from Philippi with support for Paul, his illness, etc...
How do Timothy and Epaphroditus as examples for the lifestyle Paul has been exhorting the Philippians toward?

Conclusion:

- a. Begin a discussion regarding salvation. What is it? What does it look like? How does one enter into saving relationship with God through Jesus? Etc...
Make an opportunity for others to ask questions, or even respond to the Holy Spirit calling them.
- b. What kind of status are we trying to grasp?
How does it feel to be a servant, to give status away to others?
Is the Holy Spirit asking you to humble yourself before your friends, family, roommate, professors...in a way that might even feel like dying?
What are some practical ways in which we can humble ourselves in order to look out for the interests of others?

Discussion 4: That I May Gain Christ (3:1-14)

Text:

1 Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you. 2 Watch out for those dogs, those men who do evil, those mutilators of the flesh. 3 For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh--4 though I myself have reasons for such confidence. If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: 5 circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; 6 as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless. 7 But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. 8 What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ--the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. 10 I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. 12 Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. 13 Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

Goals:

- explore Paul's theology of grace; i.e., "no confidence in the flesh"
- explore Paul's longing to know Christ
- consider the devastating power of pride in religion

Notes:

I've written the questions in this guide in such a way that the scary "dogs" comment does not get a lot of airplay. I would recommend avoiding a long rabbit trail on that, but it will be necessary to know what Paul was writing about. Here's a little to get you going:

The Christian movement began among the Jewish people of Palestine. The Jewish people were different from the surrounding Roman world in many ways. Yet, in some ways, they were quite similar. One way they reflected the surrounding culture was their ethnocentrism. They often called non-Jewish people or Gentiles, "dogs". This was a highly derogatory term.

As the Christian movement began advancing into the Gentile world, the Apostles (all Jewish) had some interesting questions to wrestle through (see Acts 11 & 15). Some Jewish Christians disagreed with, or reneged on the decision of the Apostles regarding Gentile converts to Christ, and began teaching that Gentiles must first become Jews (signified by circumcision and obedience to Moses' law) before becoming Christians. Some Gentiles also picked up this "false gospel", and began to spread it. Paul deals most extensively with this heretical teaching in his letter to the Galatians.

In this passage, Paul turns the "dogs" epithet back on these deceitful teachers drawing attention to the danger and division and disease they carried. Their gospel was not good news, but another attempt to accomplish right relationship with God apart from faith in the cross and resurrection of Christ. Paul's language is strong, but he dared not go easy on teaching and teachers that would lead his beloved Philippians to destruction.

Paul seems to lose his place and leave behind the "mutilators of the flesh", but his subsequent focus is a direct response to their teaching. Paul will put no confidence in the flesh, and calls the Philippians, and us to do the same by renouncing all self-initiated attempts toward righteousness for the sake of knowing Christ, which is eternal life (John 17:3).

Questions:

Introduction: Be sure to explain what and whom Paul is speaking about in verse 2. If you have some (more than one) Bible nerds in your group, you can try asking a question or two to get some info out there before sharing what you think is pertinent for a good discussion.

1. What is on Paul's religious resume?
What might be on your religious resume?
2. Why does Paul talk about his resume in this way? Why does he tell us about how great he was?
[to shame the "dogs", and accentuate the grace of God: not even the most religiously astute person you know is good enough to make his/herself right with God.]
3. Paul gets a bit repetitive in verses 7&8. What does he keep repeating? What is he trying to communicate?
4. Reread verses 7-11. Note the tone.
What is Paul's overwhelming passion?
What is he willing to go through to attain his desire?
[He is willing to toss his whole religious resume, all reason for self-congratulation. He is ready to suffer the loss of all things, and die to his own accomplishments, or even die at the hands of a Roman executioner.]

5. In Paul's view, what is the primary hindrance in pursuing and attaining to eternal life?
[taking confidence in the flesh, legalistic righteousness]
What is the solution?
6. What, if anything, about Paul's lifestyle demonstrates his primary focus?
What kind of life did he try to live?
7. Reread verses 12-14. Again, note the tone.
Who began the pursuit in Paul's life?
What is Paul's response?
[It might be worth referring back to 1:6 where Paul remarks that he is confident that God who began the work would faithfully complete it.]
8. What might it look like for you to pursue Christ as the sole focus of your life?
9. Paul writes of pressing on, straining toward the goal he has not yet arrived at.
What are some things you need to press through?
Are there times and/or situations when it is more difficult for you to keep pressing on? Why is that?
What might it mean to press on toward the goal?

The following questions setup the conclusion prayer time. Be sensitive to your group as you plan how to ask these kinds of questions. Should you ask for group response, quiet individual response, or break into smaller units for shared response?

10. Is there past hurt, failure, guilt, shame that you need to release to God? Do you need to accept God's free forgiveness? Do you need to forgive yourself? Do you need to forgive someone else?
11. Are you holding on to some part(s) of your resume? Do you need to die to yourself and release these so that you might look more like Christ? [Reread 2:5-8]
What might it look like to release these things?

Conclusion:

Pray for one another along the lines of questions 10 and 11 as a group, in pairs, or some other set of smaller groups. If you choose to pray all together plan on going well past your usual ending time, as this will need a chunk of time, and let the group know ahead of time that you are excited about this week's discussion which will take a little longer than usual to fully experience.

Discussion 5: The Peace of God (3:15-4:9)

Text:

15 All of us who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. 16 Only let us live up to what we have already attained.

17 Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you. 18 For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. 19 Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things. 20 But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

4:1 Therefore, my brothers, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, that is how you should stand firm in the Lord, dear friends! 2 I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord. 3 Yes, and I ask you, loyal yokefellow, help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life. 4 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! 5 Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. 6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. 8 Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy--think about such things. 9 Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me--put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

Goals:

- consider the dangerous ramifications of a life without Christ with compassion
- consider the results of a life of faith in Christ, and explore what life looks like as a citizen of heaven
- explore God's peace in the midst of external conflict and internal anxiety

Notes:

Review the introductory notes regarding Philippi and their pride in their Roman citizenship.

This passage is not easily divided from 3:1-14. Be sure to review that passage before diving into preparation on this discussion noting the connections.

Paul's favorite word for the letter, rejoice, shows up big here. Take some time to meditate on what it might mean to rejoice in the Lord as you study his Word.

Finally, 4:1-9 is a bit of list of responses to Paul's whole letter. He does this in all his letters as he nears the end. He greets the people, then he makes some theological arguments followed by a list of practical responses his readers should make, and then he concludes with personal notes.

Questions:

1. Can you put verses 15-16 in your own words? What is Paul getting at?
2. What good does it serve to "take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you?"
3. What does it mean to be an enemy of the cross of Christ?
[Primarily, it means to put confidence in human ability to achieve right standing with God. Paul call's that "putting confidence in the flesh." It could also mean an aversion of righteous suffering, a focus on temporary comforts and pleasures rather than pressing on to know Christ, and more ... see 3:19.]
4. What are some of the emotions Paul communicates in 3:18-4:2?
5. What are some ramifications of the idea that "our citizenship is in heaven?"
[Don't forget to note what Paul writes in 3:20-21.]
6. Apply the idea of heavenly citizenship to interpersonal conflict. What are the results?
7. Paul's letter was to be read to the whole congregation. He has made the strife between Euodia and Syntyche very public. What does Paul communicate about the Biblical teaching on interpersonal conflict by doing this?
8. How is this different than our own attempts to resolve conflict?
9. Apply the idea of heavenly citizenship to internal anxiety and stress. What are the results?
[4:4-7]
10. Is it possible to live totally free of anxiety? Why or why not?
Does anyone have a story of anxiety producing a good result for you? [should be zero]
How about a story of God's peace in the midst of anxiety?

11. Apply the idea of heavenly citizenship to our internal thoughts. What are the results?
[3:20; 4:8]
12. What kinds of circumstances or attitudes hinder us from living in God's joy and peace within our relationships, emotions, and thoughts?

Conclusion:

Paul's exhortations to prayer and right thinking are not meant to be religious duties, but are the pathway of Jesus, the way of joy and peace. If we attempt to deal with conflict, stress, or anxiety with our own resources (the flesh), we will never know peace. If we turn our hearts and minds toward Christ, we will be filled with peace in the midst of the most impossible circumstances.

Make time for confession, reflection, and prayer as you see (quiet reflection, group prayer, pairs, etc...). Give the group opportunity to make peace with one another (if necessary), to pray regarding stressful situations, and to release negative and sinful thought patterns in favor of the heavenly thinking Paul teaches.

Discussion 6: Giving, Receiving, Contentment (4:10-23)

Text:

10 I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you have been concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. 11 I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. 12 I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. 13 I can do everything through him who gives me strength. 14 Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles. 15 Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; 16 for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid again and again when I was in need. 17 Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account. 18 I have received full payment and even more; I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. 19 And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus. 20 To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen. 21 Greet all the saints in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me send greetings. 22 All the saints send you greetings, especially those who belong to Caesar's household. 23 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.

Purposes:

- explore Paul's experiences of giving and receiving
- explore Paul's experience of contentment
- explore our own experiences of giving, receiving, and contentment or the lack thereof

Notes:

In this concluding passage, Paul fills us in on the occasion for writing this letter. The Philippians already knew, of course, but without this section we would be somewhat in the dark as to why Paul wrote at all, as well as why he wrote what he did.

One thing to note is the way that prisoners received their food in the pre-modern world: prisoners, usually, had to provide their own food. Basically, this meant that family and friends would bring food or they wouldn't eat. Epaphroditus brought a gift for Paul so that his physical needs would be met while languishing in his chains.

This discussion is shorter than those previous, so you'll have time to do some creative things during your meeting.

Questions:

1. How do you usually respond to others when they express concern for you?
How does Paul respond?
2. Why is Paul so glad that the Philippians gave and looked out for his needs?
[He does not see giving as "your loss = my gain", but as mutual gain for both giver and receiver]
3. Paul has been quite affectionate toward the Philippians throughout this letter.
What do you see in this passage that might explain some of the feeling of intimacy and affection?
4. Can you tell of a time when giving was both beneficial to the receiver and the giver?
How has giving and receiving affected your relationships in the past?
5. Paul, in prison, is still rejoicing, and is content in the most trying of circumstances and states of need. What is his secret to contentment?
[Reference back to 4:6-9, as well as verses 13 & 19.]
6. What circumstances most control or undo contentment?
What would it be like to practice and know contentment even when life is hard?
7. Paul knew what it meant to be in need. Would you share about a time when you experienced neediness? What was the result?

Conclusion:

Be sensitive to feelings that might have arisen from past needs that were not met. Do healing and/or forgiveness need to take place?

Are there needs within the group today?

Pray over them, and explore whether the group might be able to help meet those needs.
Or, is there another need you all know of that you can help meet?

Just Do It