

Philippians

Embracing Joy

Mark Batterson

SERMON OUTLINE 1

A Love Letter

Philippians 1:1-8

I. Introduction

The book of Philippians was written by Paul to the church in Philippi, but he wrote this letter from a jail cell. That is part of what makes his message so powerful. It's one thing to write about joy, it's another thing to do it while you're in prison, on trial, chained to Roman centurions.

Paul wrote this letter to a people, to a church that he was intimately acquainted with. There were memories embedded in Paul's mind, in Paul's heart. As he wrote this letter, he was seeing people's faces, he was having flashbacks to moments and miracles they shared together. The book of Acts is the backstory to most of the letters that Paul writes, including this one. You can feel the affection in verses Acts 16:3–8.

"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."

II. Teaching

- A. There is some difference of opinion as to when and where Paul writes this letter. Best guess? Paul is writing from a prison cell in Rome, somewhere around 60–62 AD.

He is not just on trial. Paul is in prison and it is life or death for him. He is living on borrowed time and he is writing this letter with a holy urgency.

- B. We know who Paul was writing to. He was writing to the church at Philippi. In 31 B.C. Philippi was conquered by the Romans. So Paul was writing to Roman citizens. They spoke the Latin language. They wore Roman dress. Their coins had Roman inscriptions. The city itself was patterned after Rome, and it sat on the Via Egnatia, which was a major military road in the Roman Empire.
- C. Acts 16 tells us Paul was on his second missionary journey, and Philippi was not on the itinerary. Philippi wasn't Plan A, it was Plan B. It wasn't a destination, it was a detour. Acts 16:6 says, "The Holy Spirit had prevented them from preaching the word in the province of Asia at that time." God closed the door to Bithynia. And at the time, it must have seemed like a setback! What we see as a detour is often a redirection. That night, Paul has a vision of a man in Macedonia pleading for him to come. Verse 10, "So we decided to leave for Macedonia at once, having concluded that God was calling us to preach the Good News there."
- D. Paul takes the gospel to Europe, and his first stop is the city of Philippi. He finds a group of Jews outside the city, praying by a river. One of them is a woman named Lydia, she became the first convert to Christianity on the continent of Europe. She was baptized, along with other members of her household. This is a tipping point, a turning point. The gospel has a foothold in Philippi.
- E. One day, as Paul was going to the place of prayer, they met a girl who is demon-possessed. She was trolling Paul and Silas, baiting them, heckling them. This went on day after day until Paul got so exasperated that he turned around and commanded the demon to come out of her. Acts 16:16 says, "She was a fortune teller who earned a lot of money for her masters." When you start messing with people's finances, things get real. The entire city ended up in an uproar. Paul and Silas were stripped and beaten and thrown into jail. They ended up in the inner dungeon with their feet clamped in stocks.
- F. Paul was writing this letter from prison, but he never lost his joy or his passion for the gospel. Acts 16:25 says, "Around midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening."

They could have thrown a pity party. Right? They were being obedient to the vision God had given them, and it landed them in jail. They could have played the victim card. But instead of complaining about their circumstances, Paul and Silas gave God the sacrifice of praise! The

hardest praise is the highest praise! It's worshipping God when you don't feel like it. It's worshipping God when things don't go your way. It's worshipping God in tough circumstances, in tough times.

Imagine the scene inside that prison. The other prisoners had to be wondering who was singing and why! They may have been a little miffed. It was midnight. But Paul and Silas shifted the atmosphere inside the prison with their praise!

The jailer ended up getting baptized in the middle of the night. Then he invited Paul and Silas over to his house for a meal. The next day, they were set free by the city officials, they met with the believers at Lydia's house, and they waved goodbye. As Paul penned this letter that we call Philippians, these were moments that fired across his synapses. These are the memories that filled his heart with hope and love and joy!

III. Application

Prophesy your praise: Gratitude is great. It's thanking God *after* He does it. But sometimes you need to exercise your faith and praise God *before* He does it. That's what Paul and Silas did and look at what happened. Their praise caused an earthquake that resulted in a jailbreak!

Don't let what's wrong with you keep you from worshipping what's right with God. Why? You never know what God may do! If you do the right thing day in and day out, God might just show up and show off.

It started with a vision—the vision of a man in Macedonia. Paul was obedient to that vision. He ended up in a prayer meeting outside of Philippi and it turned into a divine appointment that had a domino effect. Throw in an earthquake and a miraculous jailbreak.

Prophesy your praise. That's how we shift the atmosphere. That's how we change the temperature. That's how we set the tone, set the table, and set the stage for God to do what He does!

There You Are

Philippians 1:9-26

I. Introduction

Paul was not writing this letter to nameless, faceless strangers. As he wrote, he was thinking about Lydia and the prayer meeting outside of Philippi. He was thinking about the jailer and that middle-of-the-night baptism. He was thinking about all the people that he knew and loved. It was almost like Paul was saying, “*There you are!*”

II. Teaching

In Philippians 1:9 Paul wrote, “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.”

- A. *Pray like it depends on God:* Prayer is the difference between the best you can do and the best God can do. It’s the difference between letting things happen and making things happen. It’s the difference between you fighting for God, and God fighting for you.

Every prayer has to meet a two-fold litmus test. It has to be in the will of God and for the glory of God. If it isn’t, it’s a non-starter. If it does, it’s game on! Prayer is not outlining our agenda to God. It’s getting into God’s presence, getting into God’s word, and letting God outline His agenda to us. Simply put, the most powerful prayers are biblical prayers. Why? Because we are praying the Word of God and the will of God, and when you pray that way, you pray with a little more confidence!

- B. Many years ago, Batterson turned Luke 2:52 into a prayer for his children. He prayed it thousands of times: *May you grow in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and with man.* He cautions that we have to be careful that it doesn’t become an empty incantation and believes repeated prayers become more meaningful over time.

The Bible wasn’t meant to just be read. It was meant to be meditated on and prayed through. And one way to do that is to take the text and turn it into a

prayer! Now, in this case, Paul does it for us. These verses are a transcript of the prayer that Paul prayed for the Philippians and he prays for two things.

1. Paul prays that their LOVE will abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight.
 2. Paul prays for the DISCERNMENT to distinguish between good, better, and best.
- C. Mark Batterson references a German theologian from about four hundred years ago. Rupertus Meldenius said, “In the essentials, unity; in the non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity.” We will not see eye-to-eye on every issue—political, theological, intellectual. How do we navigate those divides? For starters, we stand in the gap as peace makers, grace givers, and tone setters. Batterson pushes this envelope a little bit with a little equation.

Love = Grace + Truth

Grace means “I won’t give up on you, no matter what.” It’s the opposite of cancel culture. We forgive seventy times seven. *Truth* means “I’ll be honest with you, no matter what.” Love is not agreeing with everybody about everything. That’s impossible! Sometimes, it is agreeing to disagree, but loving regardless.

Love equals grace plus truth, and it is embodied by Jesus Christ. John 1:14 says he was full of grace, full of truth. It’s not either/or. It’s both/and.

Grace minus truth is relativism. It’s a mile wide, and an inch deep. There is no backbone. There is no brainstem. Grace minus truth is weak sauce. Now flip that coin. Truth minus grace is legalism. It’s all head and no heart. Newsflash: people don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care! Truth minus grace is hot sauce.

Paul is praying that their love—*grace + truth*—would abound more and more. That word means more than enough, above and beyond, filled to the brim, and overflowing. Paul even adds “more and more.” Love is our calling card as Christ followers!

- D. When Paul prays that our love will abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight. It means *profound insight*. It means prophetic insight. It’s the flipside of self-awareness. It’s other-awareness—*there you are!*

Here's the bottom line. You can't love someone you don't know! That's the problem with social media. So much trolling and baiting and shaming and cancelling. And it's so easy, right? Why? Because distance demonizes. It's easy to throw stones at people you know nothing about. We've got to flip that script. Everyone is fighting a battle we know nothing about. When you know someone's story, it's hard not to have compassion.

That leads to Philippians 1:10. It says, "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."

Righteousness is not something we give to God. It's something God gives to us. Some of us would rather be right than righteous. We'd rather win an argument than win a friend. Paul is aiming higher than that.

Paul has heard the voice of God say, "There you are!" So he has this "no lose" approach to life. His holy confidence is off the chart. Paul is going to glorify God, one way or the other. In life and in death. On good days and bad days. On the mountain and in the valley!

III. Application

"There you are." You are going to encounter some people this week who need a helping hand, who need a word of encouragement, who need someone to bear their burden. If you are focused on yourself—*here I am*—you'll miss the opportunity. If you're focused on others—*there you are*—you'll find opportunities all around you all the time!

God's got this. God's got you.

SERMON OUTLINE 3

The Creative Minority

Philippians 1:27—2:4

I. Introduction

We talked about when and where Paul wrote this letter. We talked about who Paul was writing to. Now the “why.” Paul wrote:

“Above all, you must live as citizens of heaven, conducting yourselves in a manner worthy of the Good News about Christ. Then, whether I come and see you again or only hear about you, I will know that you are standing together with one spirit and one purpose, fighting together for the faith, which is the Good News. Don’t be intimidated in any way by your enemies. This will be a sign to them that they are going to be destroyed, but that you are going to be saved, even by God himself. For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him. We are in this struggle together. You have seen my struggle in the past, and you know that I am still in the midst of it” (Philippians 1:27-30).

The Apostle Paul is writing to a church that is about ten years old. As the pastor of one church for twenty-five years, Mark Batterson realizes every church goes through stages of growth, and that there are growing pains along the way! Why? Because every church is led by imperfect pastors, and every church is attended by imperfect people. We are all works in progress, and Paul says as much in verse 30. *“You have seen my struggle in the past, and you know that I am still in the midst of it.”*

The good news? If you stay humble and stay hungry, there is nothing God cannot do in you or through you. The only ceiling on your intimacy with God and impact on the world is daily spiritual disciplines!

II. Teaching

The church at Philippi was facing some threats and those threats were both internal and external. Suffice it to say, every church has issues, has conflicts, has disagreements, has crises. That's when you need to remind yourself of who you are, where you are, and why you are.

You are here for such a time as this. You are here for such a place as this. When it seems like the world is coming apart at the seams—everything from racial tension to political polarization—that is when we stand in the gap as Christ followers, as citizens of heaven.

- A. Paul is reminding the church at Philippi that their primary citizenship is in this thing called the kingdom of heaven.

When the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray, here is what he said. "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

We call it the Lord's prayer, but it's more than a prayer. It's our mission—On EARTH as it is IN HEAVEN. We talk a lot about going to heaven, but we get this backwards. Our mission is heaven on earth. The question is: how does that happen?

When we love our enemies, heaven invades earth. When we pray for those who persecute us, heaven invades earth. When we bless those who curse us, heaven invades earth.

When we care for the poor, the widow, the orphan heaven invades earth. When we exercise faith, hope, and love, heaven invades earth. When we walk humbly, act justly, and love mercy, heaven invades earth!

- B. Paul is reminding the Philippians of their citizenship in heaven. And we represent that kingdom. How? By conducting ourselves in a manner that is in keeping with Christ. If you filter your biblical theology through your political ideology, it's called idolatry! We've got to make sure that Scripture is our first and final filter.

Administrations come and go, but the kingdom of God is forever! Let's do our civic duty as citizens of this nation. But let's not forget that our primary loyalty is to this thing called the kingdom of heaven. We represent that realm. How? With all the political polarization happening in culture, we stand in the gap as peace makers, grace givers, and tone setters!

- C. Batterson quotes Timothy Gombis: “The church has its greatest relevance to the world when it is most unlike the world in its corrupted forms.”

We offer a counter narrative, a counter balance, a counter culture. Let me give you two examples.

1. The first example is racism. As the church, we celebrate the differences that divide culture. Why? Because all of us, each of us, is a unique reflection, a unique expression of who God is. The image of God in me greets the image of God in you! There never has been and never will be anyone like you. That isn't a testament to you. It's a testament to the God who created you. The significance of that is this: no one can worship God like you or for you!

We have a theology of dignity—everyone bears the image of God. We have a theology of equality—everyone is invaluable and irreplaceable. We have a theology of solidarity—it's all for one and one for all.

2. A second example is cancel culture. It ostracizes people you don't agree with. It's one strike and you're out. Now, nuance this a little bit. Do we hold people accountable for the things they say and do? Absolutely! Do we seek justice for all? Without a doubt. Simply put, we give the same measure of grace that God has given us! We speak truth to power, but we speak the truth in love.

- D. What does that look like? Mark Batterson thinks it looks like Philippians 1:27, “Standing together with one spirit and one purpose.” Paul is exhorting the Philippians to rally around each other. In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul issues seven “one” statements—one body, one spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all. He adds one here—one purpose.

What is God doing? What is God saying?

1. God is raising up a creative minority to reimagine the kingdom. There are ways of doing church that no one has thought of yet. Every generation has to incarnate the gospel in its own unique way. The message doesn't change, but the methods do.
2. God is shifting us from a weekly rhythm to a daily rhythm. It is way too easy to just go to church on the weekend, check the box, and check out Monday to Friday. We've got to take up our cross daily! The only ceiling on our intimacy with God and impact on the world is daily spiritual disciplines.

3. God is activating the gifts of the spirit in unprecedented ways. We can believe God for a supernatural demonstration of His love, His power. Why? We need it. That is our JND—just noticeable difference.
4. God is decentralizing His church. We are the priesthood of believers. We are the company of prophets. In his book, *The Prophethood of All Believers*, Roger Stronstad levels this indictment against the church: “Sound doctrine is treasured above charismatic action.” Batterson says, “We need sound doctrine more than ever. But the end goal isn’t sound doctrine, it’s right living. At the end of the day, God isn’t going to say, “Well thought, well planned, well studied good and faithful servant.”” There is one commendation: “Well done.” Christianity is not a noun. It’s a verb, an action verb. Paul said it this way: “Our gospel did not come to you with mere words, but with power, with the Holy Spirit, with deep conviction.”

III. Application

Here are three challenges:

1. Play offense: Philippians 1:28 says, “Don’t let your opponents intimidate you.” According to J.B. Lightfoot, the word *intimidate* denotes the uncontrollable stampede of startled horses. In other words, it’s fight or flight. Paul is saying: stay calm and carry on! Administrations come and go, but the kingdom of God is forever. Jesus said, “I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.” Gates are defensive measures. By definition, we are called to play offense.
2. Keep on keeping on: Verse 30 says, “It has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him.” We were born on a battlefield between good and evil, which means that bad things happen to good people. The good news? God is preparing good works in advance. God is working all things together for good to those who love Him and are called according to His purpose. And the same God who began a good work will carry it to completion.
3. Stay humble and stay hungry: Paul says in Philippians 2:1, “Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the

same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.”

If you keep your eyes and your focus on Jesus, there is nothing God cannot do in you or through you.

Attitude Check

Philippians 2:5–30

I. Introduction

Philippians begins what is called the Christological Hymn. “In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!”

Jesus emptied himself. The concept is called kenosis. It’s giving up one’s rights. It’s depriving oneself. It’s elevating others by becoming the servant of all. In the words of John the Baptist, “I must become less.”

The Talmud says there are four kinds of people. *What’s yours is yours. What’s yours is mine. What’s mine is mine. What’s mine is yours.*

As Christ followers, we fall into that fourth category. We recognize that it’s all from God and it’s all for God. Simply put, all the toys go back in the box at the end of the game! Instead of asking, *what’s in it for me?* We ask, *what’s in it for you?* How can I add value to your life?

II. Teaching

Lesslie Newbigin said, “We must live in the kingdom of God in such a way that it provokes questions for which the gospel is the answer.” How do we do that? We do what Jesus did. Right? He said that the GREATEST OF ALL is the SERVANT OF ALL. And He didn’t just talk the talk, He walked the walk. He took a towel, put it around his waist, and washed the disciple’s feet. When we follow suit, it raises questions for which the gospel is the answer!

It’s a picture of what Paul is saying to the Philippians. It’s a life of servanthood. It’s a life of sacrifice. It’s a life of surrender.

- A. That is what we sign up for when we follow Jesus. In Romans culture, a slave had no rights. They relinquish their rights. When we follow Christ, we

surrender our will to His will. It's His will, His way. We give God veto power. We pray the same prayer that Jesus prayed in the garden of Gethsemane: "Not my will, but thy will be done."

1. Jesus sets the standard for us. How? The incarnation. John 1:14 says, "The word became flesh and made his dwelling among us." Hebrews 4:15 says, "We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who was tempted in every way, just as we are, yet was without sin." He is the one who sympathizes, empathizes with us. Why? He isn't just the Son of God. He is the Son of Man. He had to learn reading, writing, and arithmetic, like the rest of us. He experienced pain and suffering, like us. He is the suffering servant that Isaiah prophesied about: "He was despised and rejected—a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief."

2. The incarnation is one piece of this puzzle, but there is something else at play. It's our redemption. The prophet Isaiah continues: "It was our weakness he carried; it was our sorrows that weighed him down. And we thought his troubles were a punishment from God, a punishment for his own sins!" But Isaiah sets the record straight: "He was pierced for our rebellion, crushed for our sins. He was beaten so we could be whole. He was whipped so we could be healed."

B. The Apostle Paul said it this way in 2 Corinthians 5:21: "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." Religion is spelled do. Christianity is spelled done. It's not about what you can do for God. It's about what God has done for you in Christ.

Here's the gospel in a nutshell. God says, "You take all of your sin—everything you've done wrong—and transfer that debt to my account and I'll pay it in full." That's amazing! But that's only half of the gospel. God says, "Then I'll take the righteousness of Christ—everything Jesus did right—and transfer it to your account. And we'll call it even." That is the good news of the gospel. It's incarnation. It's redemption. And we see both of those things in the kenosis of Christ.

C. In the ancient world, the universe was seen as three-storied. Heaven is the realm of angels. Earth is the realm of humans. And under the earth refers to Sheol, the place of the dead. It's also an allusion to fallen angels, which are called demons. Paul is using the language of his day to emphasize the all-encompassing sovereignty of God. All of creation will bow to its Creator!

The day is coming when every knee will bow. The day is coming when every tongue will confess. Why not do it right here, right now? Jesus said, “Everyone who confesses me before others, I also will confess before My Father in heaven.”

- D. Here’s the question: have you ever made a public profession of your faith in Christ? It is the most important decision and ought to be the most informed decision. But there comes a moment when you cross the line, when you go public with your faith. For some of you, that moment is right here, right now.

Romans 10:9 says this: “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” Those three words—Jesus is Lord—is the earliest Christian creed. And it’s embedded by the Apostle Paul within this Christological hymn.

III. Application

Right after this Christological hymn, Paul adds an exhortation. “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, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.” (Philippians 2:12)

You’ve got to take your faith to the gym and work it out. How? By stretching your faith. You’ve got to break a sweat. The word means a sustained strenuous effort. You can’t just pray like it depends on God. You have to work like it depends on you! And here’s the deal. You never arrive! Why? There is no finish line.

Then Paul says this, verse 14: “Do everything without grumbling or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, ‘children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.’ Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky as you hold firmly to the word of life. And then I will be able to boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor in vain. 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. So you too should be glad and rejoice with me.”

1. Work out your salvation with fear and trembling.
2. Do everything without grumbling or arguing.
3. May you be blameless and pure.

4. Without fault in a warped and crooked generation.

All four are easy, right? Not easy, but possible. How? By taking the same posture, the same mindset, the same attitude as Christ Jesus.

SERMON OUTLINE 5

Live Not by Lies

Philippians 3:1-21

I. Introduction

In Philippians 3:1, Paul says, “Whatever happens, my dear brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord. I never get tired of telling you these things, and I do it to safeguard your faith.”

Nine times in this letter, Paul uses the word rejoice. It’s a major plot line in his letter to the Philippians, but there is a plot twist in verse 2. Paul takes such an abrupt turn in verse 2 that some scholars believe Philippians is not one but two letters. Either way, the Apostle Paul is not afraid of saying what needs to be said. Paul is a straight shooter, and he issues a warning in verse 2. “Watch out for those dogs, those people who do evil, those mutilators who say you must be circumcised to be saved.”

Tell us what you really think, right? Paul doesn’t pull any punches. He takes a very different tone than the rest of the letter, but it is no less loving! When you love someone, there is a protective instinct that kicks in. If you mess with my wife or with my kids, I will take you down! It’s Paul’s protective instinct that is speaking here. He loves the Philippians too much to sit by and watch people with false motives teach false doctrine. Paul calls them on the carpet, and he doesn’t mince words.

II. Teaching

A few years ago, Kim Scott wrote a book titled *Radical Candor*. She shares a matrix that is incredibly helpful when it comes to managing conflict. The vertical axis is *caring personally*. The horizontal axis is *confronting directly*. That, of course, creates four quadrants. And here they are:

1. Caring personally but failing to confront directly: It results in something Scott calls *ruinous empathy*. It's all grace, no truth. It's weak sauce, and it maintains the status quo.
2. Confronting directly but failing to care personally: It is all truth, no grace and results in something called *obnoxious aggression*. It lacks love, and it's not very effective. In fact, it results in defensiveness rather than openness to change.
3. Failure on both counts: You don't *care personally* or *confront directly*. Kim Scott calls it *manipulative insincerity*. Batterson would call it a train wreck!
4. Caring directly and confronting directly: It's full of grace—*I'll love you no matter what*. It's full of truth—*I'll be honest no matter what*. It is caring enough to confront. It's saying what needs to be said, but it's speaking the truth in love. Kim Scott calls it *radical candor*.

That language may be new, but the Apostle Paul wrote the book on radical candor. And Philippians 3 is exhibit A. We live in a culture where it's wrong to say something is wrong and I think that's wrong. Paul models something for us in his letter to the Philippians. He oozes affection, but he doesn't pull any punches! Grace without truth doesn't get the job done!

We aren't entirely sure who Paul is calling dogs in verse 2, but the best guess is a sect called the Judaizers. They believed that Gentile converts had to be circumcised in order to be saved. In other words, they had to keep the law. That, of course, is at odds with the gospel. We are saved BY GRACE through faith, period.

- A. Paul calls these Judaizers on the carpet. He calls them mutilators of the flesh. It's a play on words in the Greek language. *Peritome* means circumcision, and it was a term of endearment. It conveyed honor. Paul uses the word *katatome*, which is translated *mutilate*. But it can also mean *castrate*. Enough said.

The Apostle Paul spiritualizes and personalizes and internalizes this idea of circumcision. It's not the circumcision of the flesh that matters most. It's the circumcision of the heart, and that happens with the help of the Holy Spirit.

Here's the bottom line. The Judaizers were adding something to the gospel. It was salvation by works. And anytime you ADD something to the gospel, you are actually SUBTRACTING from it. You are devaluing grace. By definition, grace is undeserved. The

only way to qualify for it is by not qualifying for it. The challenge is that we want to earn it. We want partial credit, but if you factor your good works into the equation of salvation, it's called self-righteousness. Grace doesn't work that way, and Paul is calling that lie on the carpet.

We are the righteousness of Christ. Our sin debt is paid in full. That's mercy, it's NOT getting what we deserve. But that's only half of the gospel. The righteousness of Christ is credited to our account. That's grace, it's getting what we do not deserve.

- B. In his book, *The Road to Character*, David Brooks makes a distinction between two kinds of virtues—resumé virtues and eulogy virtues.
 - 1. Resumé virtues are the skills you cultivate through hard work, and it's those virtues that are generally celebrated in our culture.
 - 2. Eulogy virtues are the things people talk about at your funeral. It's not what you accomplished. It's who you became. It's not your skill set. It's the character you cultivated.

Paul lists his resumé virtues. He highlights his inherited privileges, as well as his personal achievements. He is a Hebrew of Hebrews. No one was more zealous than Paul. On paper, he was faultless. But Paul flips the script, and he tells them that the focus of their confidence should not be the privileges they inherited or the things they accomplished.

Verse 7 says, “But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ 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 on the basis of faith.”

- C. Paul employs accounting terminology in this part of his letter. When he reconciles his spiritual statement, he comes to this conclusion. *Jesus plus nothing equals everything!* And it's worth flipping that coin. *Everything minus Jesus equals nothing.* Either way, Paul places supreme value on the work of Christ on the cross. That is where our righteousness comes from. That is where our confidence comes from. This is where our identity comes from.

Question. What is the focus of your confidence? Is it your personal accomplishments? Or is it what Christ accomplished on the cross?

Paul says, “I put no confidence in the flesh.” With the Holy Spirit, our *holy confidence* is off the charts. Holy confidence is based on the character of God, based on the promises of God. It’s this unshakable conviction that God is able to do immeasurably more than all we can ask or imagine.

III. Application

What percentage of your thoughts, words, and actions are a regurgitation of the news you’re watching and the social media you’re following? What percentage is revelation you’re getting from God’s Word? What percentage of your identity is based on your failures or your successes? And what percentage of your identity is based on the revelation of who you are in Christ?

“I am not what I think I am,” said Charles Horton Cooley, founder of the American Sociological Association. “And I am not what you think I am.” Well, then who am I? “I am what I think you think I am.” Cooley called it the *Looking Glass Self*, and it bases our sense of self on how we believe others see us.

That is when and where and why we need to fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith. What does Paul say? “*I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.*”

Then Paul says this in verse 10. “*I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.*”

Look squarely in the face of Jesus to find your identity. After all, Jesus is our looking glass!

The Focusing Illusion

Philippians 4:1-23

I. Introduction

This letter is a master class in theology, but it's also a master class in psychology. The positivity with which the Apostle Paul writes is unparalleled in any of his other letters, which is pretty amazing considering the fact that Paul was writing from prison. Philippians 4:1 says, "Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends!"

Your legacy is not the things you accomplish. Your legacy is what others accomplish because of you. Discipleship is growing fruit on other people's trees and it is so important for believers to invest in the lives of others. Paul calls his friends in Philippi his joy and crown and seems to continue with some housekeeping. but it's significant enough for him to include in this letter. "I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord."

Paul is doing a little damage control because conflict is inevitable and unavoidable. Why? Because we're human and we focus on different things. We have very different histories and personalities and perspectives.

There is a sociological question we intuitively ask when we walk into any social setting: *is there anyone here like me?* We look for people with a common focus in life. Nothing wrong with that. That is the way we're wired, but flip the script and ask this question: *is there anyone here not like me?* That is when and where and how we grow!

II. Teaching

In the world we live in today, anxiety is a real issue. Paul wrote in Philippians 4:6-7, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." It's hard not to focus on all the things happening around us.

- A. According to the CDC, one-third of Americans are anxious or depressed. Paul offers a prayer prescription. When anxiety is triggered, turn it into a prayer. How do you do that?
1. Don't just watch the news, pray the news! Theologian Karl Barth, said, "Take your Bible and take your newspaper, and read both. But interpret newspapers from your Bible." If we get this backwards, we're in trouble. If you filter your biblical theology through your political ideology, it's called idolatry. Over time, one of two things happens. Either our theology conforms to our reality or our reality conforms to our theology. One of the ways we filter reality through theology is called prayer.
 2. When you get upset with someone, pray for them. When someone offends you, says something that stings, or does something that betrays your confidence, pray for them. It's not usually the instinctive thing to do, but if you don't your feelings can turn into unforgiveness or bitterness. If you pray for them, you can look them in the eye. Why? Because you have turned the offense, insult, or pain into a prayer prompt. What did Jesus say? "Love your enemies, pray for those who persecute you, and bless those who curse you." When you do, it provokes questions for which the gospel is the answer and it keeps your heart in the right place.
- B. Approximately 60,000 thoughts fire across our synapses every single day. According to the Cleveland Clinic, 80% of them are negative! Houston, we have a problem. We've got to sanctify those thoughts! The question, of course, is how?

At the base of the brain stem, there is a cluster of nerve cells called the reticular activating system. It determines what we notice and what goes unnoticed. If you buy a car, you'll see that car everywhere you go. Why? The RAS has created a category for it. That's what goal-setting does. That's what prayer does. And that's what a gratitude journal will do.

We don't see the world as it is. We see the world as we are! If you're looking for something to complain about, you don't have to look very far. If you're looking for something to be grateful for, the same is true! The only difference is focus. Paul points this out in verse 8. You have to fix your focus on things that are true and noble and right and pure and lovely and admirable.

- C. A few years ago, researchers did a study with college students that posed two questions. One, *how happy are you?* Two, *how many dates have you had in*

the last month? The researchers found a weak correlation between the level of happiness and number of dates.

Then the researchers flipped the questions. One, *how many dates have you had in the last month?* Two, *how happy are you?*

All of sudden, there was a strong correlation between the number of dates the students had been on and their level of happiness! What happened? By getting those students to focus on their dating status first and foremost, or lack thereof, researchers were able to alter their entire outlook on life. It's called the focusing illusion, and it's a cognitive bias whereby humans tend to rely too much on the first piece of information presented to them.

Your feelings are *not* determined by your objective circumstances. Your feelings are a function of subjective focus. One of the best ways to fix your focus is to fix your eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of your faith.

III. Application

IV. If you want to flip the script and fix your focus, try keeping a daily gratitude journal. There are benefits to writing down what you're grateful for.

1. The first effect is clarity. Putting pen to paper forces us to be precise!
2. The second benefit is memory. In psychology, there is something called the *generation effect*—we demonstrate better memory for the things we've written down in our own handwriting than things we simply read. The shortest pencil is longer than the longest memory, and writing it down encodes it into our long-term memory.

In a sense, journaling is the key to rejoicing, emphasis on "re." When you journal, you are rehearsing what you're grateful for. You are literally re-joying or rejoicing!

On that note, there is a curious command given to ancient Jewish kings. "When he sits on the throne as king, he is to write for himself on a scroll a copy of this law." Is that really necessary? Kings have places to go and things to do! Why take the time to write it out longhand? The answer is embedded in the amendment: "So that he may learn to revere the Lord his God and follow carefully all the words of this law."

Batterson calls it the *king habit*, and it involved three stipulations. One, the king had to put it in writing. Two, they had to keep it on their person at all times. Three, they had to read

from it daily. You get a pass on the first stipulation, and if you have a smart phone, there is a digital Bible at your disposal. The key is the third stipulation—a daily Bible reading plan. It's one of the best predecisions you can make, and it serves as preventative medicine.

King David said it this way: *“Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against you.”*

If you want to fix your focus, if you want to put this exhortation into practice to think about things that are right and good and pure and just, you've got to ground yourself in God's Word.