

Adult Teaching Resources

December 15, 2024



Advent: Someone's Coming

December 1, 2024—1 Thessalonians 3:6-13 (RCL 3:9-13)—Anticipating

December 8, 2024—Philippians 1:1-11 (RCL 1:3-11)—Longing

December 15, 2024—Philippians 4:1-9 (RCL 4:4-7)—Rejoicing

December 22, 2024—Hebrews 10:1-10 (RCL 10:5-10)—Out of the Shadows

Season of Christmas

December 29, 2024—Colossians 3:12-17—Resolution Clothes

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Rejoicing

Philippians 4:1-9 (RCL 4:4-7)

FIT Teaching Guide

by David Woody

This adult teaching outline is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

If you could describe an ideal church, what sort of characteristics would you have in mind? In today's text, Paul is speaking to the Philippians, but his advice would apply to any church that wants to grow and become effective in its ministry. In Phil. 4:1-9, Paul gives several instructions designed to improve church life.

Opening

After everyone arrives form small groups of 3-4 in each group. Once each group is settled, ask each group to describe/create their ideal church. Give each group a piece of paper and pen to make notes.

What would your church do?

How would your church function?

What characteristics would you want for your church?

Give each small group time to make their notes, then open the floor for large group sharing, with each group having time to share their ideas.

Reading the Bible

How does Paul describe his brothers and sisters in Philippi? (whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved.)

What does he urge Eudoia and Syntyche? (to be of the same mind in the Lord)

What does he ask of his loyal companion? (help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my coworkers, whose names are in the book of life.)

What does Paul say again? (Rejoice in the Lord always)

What does he want to be known? (Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.)

What will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus? (The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding)

Reading the Bible *continued*

What does Paul want them to think about? (whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise)

What does Paul want them to do with the things that they have learned and received and heard and noticed in him? (do them, and the God of peace will be with you.)

Making Connections

Who are some strong male church leaders (lay leaders, not paid staff) who have made a significant difference in the church and in your life? What role (official or unofficial) did they have? What did they do that made such a significant impact? How were they recognized by the church for what they did?

Who are some strong female church leaders (lay leaders, not paid staff) who have made a significant difference in the church and in your life? What role (official or unofficial) did they have? What did they do that made such a significant impact? How were they recognized by the church for what they did?

How much of your church ministry is reliant on women? Why do you think that is?

When has your church had some level of division because of personalities and strong opinions? Without digging up too much of the story, what can you share that happened? How did it affect the church? What ultimately happened?

In discussing the division in the church at Phillippi, our Lesson Writer states that Paul reminds us, “believers should not just stand by and watch a fight, but should do their best to encourage and work toward a resolution.” When have you stood by and watched a church fight? When have you done your best to encourage and work toward a resolution?

How do you define “happiness?” How do you define “joy?” How are they similar? How are they different?

Our Lesson Writer tells us, “Many of us suffer from past injuries to the heart and to our pride. Some wounds are slow to heal, and we may respond with anger and criticism, or with sulking moods and self-pity. Paul calls us to move past this natural reaction. We are not to wallow in victimhood, but to take on the entirely unnatural quality of a gentle spirit.” What does this kind of gentle spirit look like for you as you deal with past injuries your the heart and to your pride? How does God’s help come to you with this kind of need?

How much time and energy to spend on “worry?” Is that a healthy amount or unhealthy amount? Why do you say that? How can God help you to worry less?

How often is pray an intentional part of your day? What type of prayer do you typically pray? How do you feel when you pray? How do you feel after you pray? What do you hope to gain from your prayer life?

Making Connections *continued*

Our Lesson Writer tells us, “Prayer opens the door to *hopefulness*, allowing us to pray specifically for those things we want to see changed. Prayer opens the door to *acceptance*, helping us to deal with those things we cannot change. Thus, prayer opens the door to *peace*, enabling us to trust the wisdom and the love of God who cares for us day by day.” What does prayer open up for you? How does that make a difference in your life?

In your opinion, what is “right” thinking? How does that kind of thinking affect your faith and discipleship?

So What?

Ask everyone to gather back together in their small groups from the beginning of the session. Give each group a piece of paper and a pen and then share these words from our Lesson Writer:

“Paul understood that our thought life guides our emotions and our actions. Instead of stewing over injustices, harboring grudges, or worrying about the future, Paul commends giving active, conscious thought to positive things – not just counting our blessings, but actively contemplating truth, justice, and virtue.”

Ask each these question for each group to discuss and make notes to share with the larger group.

How do we incorporate more of God and God’s way into our thought life?

How do we incorporate more of God and God’s way into our action life?

How do we incorporate more of God and God’s way into our whole life?

How do we actively contemplate truth?

How do we actively contemplate justice?

How do we actively contemplate virtue?

Give each group time to discuss and make notes, then open the floor for large group sharing, conversation, and discussion.

The Challenge

This week, take one of the suggestions from the “So What?” section and incorporate it into your life so that you are more intentional about living the way Paul suggested for the church at Philippi.

Prayer

Loving God, thank you for Paul’s words of encouragement and instruction. We try our best and we have a long way to go into achieving our goal of faithful living. Be with us as we continue to learn and grow and stretch ourselves into who you are creating us to be. Amen.

Digging Deeper

by Tony Cartledge

Digging Deeper is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. Watch for the “shovel” icon in the THE BIBLE LESSON, and then reference that item in this Digging Deeper resource. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Getting involved—I once emerged from a subway in Washington, D.C. to find a crowd of onlookers surrounding two young teenagers who were fighting. Neither boy was armed, but they could have gotten hurt. Without much thought, I pushed through the crowd and placed myself between the boys. They both seemed relieved when I said, “Come on, guys, you don’t need to be doing this.” They left together, but not fighting.

They may have resumed their fisticuffs somewhere else, but I had a feeling they had both felt trapped by pride, neither of them wanting to be the one who gave up or called it off in front of the crowd. My intervention helped them save face while de-escalating the conflict.

Can you think of ways you could facilitate peace between others? Jesus did not offer a word of blessing to peace lovers, but to peacemakers (Mat. 5:9).

Perspective—Have you ever looked at a painting up close? Even great works of art may not look so good if we examine them inch by inch and note every mark of the brush. But when we focus on the small things, and what may look like mistakes, we can’t see the whole picture. When we back up and look at the big picture, though, all those little brush strokes blend together to make a masterpiece. *The difference is the perspective.*

Paul wanted the Philippians’ perspective to be defined by this belief: “The Lord is near.” The big picture of God’s presence and plan for our lives overshadows those smaller disagreements and enables us to celebrate together the gift of God’s love.

Worries—Paul’s words remind us of Jesus’ advice in the Sermon on the Mount: “therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? . . . But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Mat. 6:25, 33).

Both Paul and Jesus underscore the truth that true joy does not depend on circumstances, because circumstances are too changeable to give lasting happiness. As Forrest Gump’s mama was prone to say, “Life is like a box of chocolates: you never know what you’re gonna get.” Hard times may come as easily as good. Sometimes it rains, and sometimes it doesn’t. Businesses may fail or succeed. Our bodies age and get sick. People die. Others misunderstand us. That’s the way life is, but for those trust in Christ, joy persists through it all.

Victory—Thirty years ago, Bob Culpepper, a long-time missionary to Japan, related some of his experiences in *God’s Calling: A Missionary Autobiography* (Nashville: Baptist Sunday School Board, 1981). In it, he tells the story of a woman named Suzuki-san. She and her husband had been very active in the Communist party until she got sick with tuberculosis, and she

Digging Deeper *continued*

had to move to a sanitarium on the island of Iki. Her husband did not want a sick wife, so he divorced her. In the midst of these circumstances, she heard the gospel of Christ and became an outspoken believer.

One day, as Bob visited her in the hospital, she said to him, “My heart is filled with the joy and peace of Christ. I just wish that everyone in this hospital knew the joy and peace in Christ that I know.” Bob remarked that her attitude reminded him of Philippians 4:6-7, and he quoted it for her. She smiled and pointed to a plaque on the wall, where the same words were written in Japanese.

When Bob spoke at Suzuki-san’s funeral two months later, he remarked, “Suzuki-san had few things the world regards as of most value. She had lost her health and her husband. She had no wealth, few friends, and no immediate family. Yet she had that which is of supreme value – the forgiveness of sins, the peace of God in her heart, and a hope for eternity. It was not difficult to preach her funeral. What a joy to proclaim a gospel that can give such hope and victory in the face of the bleakest outward circumstances!” (Culpepper, 106-107).

Role Models—Role models are important. Few of us would be so audacious as to admonish others to follow our example and “be like me,” but Paul was confident that his own life served as an appropriate model for others.

In thinking rightly and living rightly, Paul believed, believers could be assured that God’s peace would be present with them: “Even as they can know the peace of God in prayer, they can know the God of peace in practice” (Todd Still, *Philippians*, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary [Macon: Smyth & Helwys, 2011], 124).

The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartledge

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What does Paul mean by “the book of life” (4:3)?

Old Testament writers assumed that God had a heavenly register containing the names of those who had been promised life in some form (Exod. 32:32; Ps. 69:28, 139:16; Dan. 12:1), though the concept of eternal life in heaven had not yet developed. Similar thoughts – but encompassing a full-blown belief in both abundant and eternal life – are echoed in Luke 10:20 and in Rev. 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12, 15; 21:27; 22:19). Note that several of the texts (Exod. 32:32, Ps. 69:28, Rev. 3:5) relate to the danger of being “blotted out” of the book of life.

Why does Paul mention the “book of life” in Phil. 4:3? Some have suggested that it was a subtle hint to Euodia and Syntyche that they might be in danger of having their names erased from the book of life, which contained the names of the companions Paul named. It is more likely, however, that Paul simply wants to remind his readers that believers share a common life and a common place in the book of the life. This gentle reminder, perhaps, would encourage them to seek a peaceful resolution that would build community.