

# Youth 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)

### YOUTH Teaching Guide

by Tyler Johnson

This youth 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.

#### Gathering

As your group comes together, ask students how they are doing and what their week looks like. Reflect on the previous week's challenge.

#### Opening Activity

See Tony's Prompt: 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.

#### Listening to the Scripture

Read aloud Philippians 4:1-9.

- Why do you think Paul specifically asked Euodia and Syntyche to put aside their differences, and how does this situation reflect common challenges in maintaining unity within a community?
- How does Paul's message to the Philippians about joy, even in the midst of conflict, apply to modern situations where happiness and joy are often viewed as the same thing?
- Paul encourages the Philippians to adopt an attitude of gentleness. How does this concept of gentleness differ from passivity, and why might it be challenging yet beneficial to practice?
- What is the significance of Paul asking a third party to help resolve the disagreement between Euodia and Syntyche? How can outside support be valuable in conflicts within a community?
- Paul's teaching emphasizes focusing on things that are "true, honorable, just, pure, pleasing, and commendable." How might this approach to "right thinking" impact both personal well-being and group harmony?
- Paul presents prayer as a remedy for worry. In what ways might prayer or meditation help alleviate anxiety, and how can this practice contribute to peace within a community?

If you would like to continue the discussion, consider *Digging Deeper*.

Have you ever seen a situation where two people were arguing or fighting, and someone stepped in to help them stop? Why do you think it's sometimes hard for people to make peace on their own, and what are some ways you could help others get along if they're having a disagreement?

## Listening to the Scripture *continued*

If the group is up for a challenge, discuss what Tony poses as *The Hardest Question*: What does Paul mean by “the book of life” (4:3)?

“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.”

## Application

You have more control over your decisions and life than you realize. How are you using your creativity to help create a joyful world using the gifts that God has given you?

## 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,

## Digging Deeper *continued*

and she 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.