

Philippians Chapter 2- John Karmelich

1. Does God expect us to be joyful no matter what we're dealing with? Yes He does, and yes He will make it possible if we let Him. Let me explain. In the last lesson, I said, the Christian life is one of "Constant trouble and constant joy." It focused on external issues that affect our relationship with Jesus. In Chapter 2, we move to internal issues. The key question here is how we act internally to have the type of joy God wants us to have? As my regulars know, the chapter breaks were added about a millennium after the New Testament was written. This break is a good spot as the author Paul, jumps from discussing external struggles to internal struggles. The underlying issue of this chapter is how we Christians should act "on the inside" to have the type of joy God desires of us.
 - a) Let me give a few words to those who didn't read last week's lesson. Would you rather be around a person who was joyful or miserable? I'd argue we have an obligation to be joyful even if we don't feel like it. Yes you should develop a few close friends to discuss issues of the moment, but for the most part, God wants us to be joyful people even if we don't feel a sense of joy at the moment. Let me give an illustration: Suppose you're having a fight with your spouse and then the doorbell rings. Do we fight with the guests, or does our mood change instantly? My point is we can always control our attitude although we can't always control what happens to us. God wants us to go through life with a joyful attitude despite our circumstances of the moment. Learning God's way of having internal peace is the main point of this section of Philippians. Let me explain further:
 - b) Chapter 1 focused on how to have joy in spite of any external problems of the moment. As an example, remember Paul was tied to guards in prison but still preached having a joyful attitude. In Chapter 2, Paul teaches us about having internal joy despite our situation.
 - c) Let me put it this way: Would you like to have more joy in your life? Then you've come to the right place. Paul's suffered for decades more than any person I can think of in history. Yet he's learned how to be joyful in spite of all of that. If Paul could learn how to be joyful in all situations, then that's something I'd like to learn as well. What if you say I'm already a joyful person? My response would be, consider how God wants to act "internally" as His witnesses to the world. That covers a good portion of the chapter. The rest of the chapter talks about two of Paul's companions. One of them (who's going to deliver that letter), recovered from a bad illness and still desires to still be of service to God. I'm convinced that story is part of this letter as an example of how God wants us to be internally joyful.
 - d) Oh, by the way, that's the perfect lesson title "Internally joyful". Therefore let me discuss some of the details of this chapter and then I'll begin my verse-by-verse study.
2. Paul starts this section by asking the Philippian church to be encouraged by God's love, trust that the Holy Spirit is working in our lives, and put other's interest as priority over our own. We'll get into a discussion in this chapter about where God's work ends and where ours begins. The short version is we trust God is guiding us, but there still has to be effort on our part. Some teachers do hold extreme views on "both sides": i.e., "it's all up to God and we just kick back" or "everything is up to us and God doesn't do anything". The reality is in the middle. The point of those opening verses is that we're to trust in God, then make the effort to make a difference for Him and do that by putting others' needs as priority over our own needs.
 - a) Then Paul goes into what appears to be a prayer. Paul describes Jesus before He became a man, then what He endured as a man, and finally what He became after resurrected.
 - b) The point of that prayer isn't just to say, "Isn't that great, good for Him!" It's to realize the type of attitude God desires of all believers. It's kind of saying, if God can bring Himself to be "that low on the totem pole" (as a lowly "nothing" of a person), so God wants each of us to be that "low man or woman on the totem pole" in our dealings with other people. It's effectively a reminder to put others' needs as priority over our own. The key to having the type of internal joy that God desires is putting others needs as priority over our own.

- c) The reason that's emphasized here is the non-Christian world values the opposite: It's the false view that "God helps those who help themselves" (which is not in the bible), or those who are strong "get the spoils". So how does one succeed in life if one is always putting a need of someone else over our own needs? It's not about being scared when we need help. It's about seeing other's needs as being more important than our needs. Realize that living the Christian life is about having an internal peace in all situations. By putting others as a priority over ourselves, we develop a dependency on God for our lives. Living like that is going to bring us far more joy if we only care about ourselves. That's the point here.
 - i) The conclusion will lead us to Paul's point of "working out our own salvation with fear and trembling", which is a quote from this chapter. That leads me back to the issue of "how much God does versus how much we do" over the issue of salvation. The point is we trust in God and "work at it", in order to make a difference for God that He desires of each of us. I'll discuss that more in this lesson.
3. From there the letter moves into a discussion about Paul's younger assistant Timothy. They had a very close teacher and student relationship. The point here is Paul tells the Philippians how "Tim" has been a faithful servant. It gives the impression that Timothy cared for that church as much as Paul did. The point is both of those men want that church to have the same type of attitude when it came to putting others before themselves. Both Paul and Timothy had an internal peace over it as they put other's needs as a priority over their own needs. Anyway, the text about Timothy was meant to show the Philippians that "It's not just me, (Paul) who has that attitude, Timothy's also a good example of how God wants us to treat others". The goal here's to make each of realize if we want to have joy in our lives, the secret is to see other's needs as being more important than ours.
- a) The final few verses moves to a discussion about a man named Epaphroditus. (Yes that's a tough name to pronounce and I just cut and pasted that long name.) The reason Paul is talking about him, is because he's from Philippi, so he knows the church there. He is also with Paul at the moment, so he knows both Paul and Timothy. That makes Epaphroditus the perfect person to deliver the letter as to say, "Everything Paul says is true, and I'm the one hand-delivering this message to prove it's true".
 - b) Realize the distance from Rome to Philippi is 1,284 miles (2,067 kilometers) so traveling it by horse or walking would take some time. (I googled it.) To deliver Paul's letter would require someone who could travel that distance, who knew Paul and is also familiar with Philippi. All I'm saying is Epaphroditus was perfect for this job, and it appears that Paul dictated this letter to be delivered by him. Paul tells us how he almost died, but there are no specifics about that event. The point is Epaphroditus is now "fit for service" and wants to use his life to make a difference for the Gospel.
 - c) Let me back up and explain why we get these details about Timothy and Epaphroditus at this point in the letter. The letter indicates the church in Philippi knew who both of them were. Paul didn't mention their names to give them an introduction. Paul used them as an example of how God's "inner peace" works on a practical basis: Using our lives to make a difference for others. By having both of them be involved with the Philippian church, it is showing that these two men put the needs of that church over their own lives. It's here as an example to us of how God wants to live and give us that inner peace.
 - d) To state the obvious, I've got a lot more to say about this as I teach verse-by-verse through Chapter 2 and that's what we're going to start at now.
4. Verse 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,² then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind.
- a) The short version of this long sentence is that Paul asks the Christians in Philippi to draw closer to God. For what purpose? Paul says it's to make his joy complete. The reason this letter made it to the bible is it teaches all us Christians how to have more joy in life.

- b) Let's talk about this from Paul's perspective. Being in prison in Rome, there must be very good probability that Paul will never see these Christians again. So how will Paul's joy be complete by these Christians drawing closer to God? What does Paul physically get out of this? Is it "feeling good that people are doing what I say?" No. It's about his realization of having peace on the inside requires us to draw upon God's love, to trust in His Spirit, and to be encouraged by the fact that Jesus loves us no matter what.
- i) Let me explain this another way: Did the Christians in Philippi have lives to live? I'm sure they did. I'm sure they struggled with things, had problems they've must face and deal with people that are well, hard to deal with. By taking a little time to draw closer to God, that act gives us the strength and encouragement to face life in it's toughest moments. One of the great benefits of living the Christian life is God's giving us the power to deal with life as it comes, no matter what it is we're dealing with at the moment. That's why Paul wanted those Christians and all believers to draw upon that power so we can face life as it comes but also be have a joyful state of mind no matter what it is we face.
 - ii) Let's be honest, knowing that the God of the Universe has our back, must give us a wonderful set of comfort to face our problems. Knowing we're loved and cared for in spite of our problems of the moment gives us the peace to face all the things that we deal with in life. Paul's not preaching all of this to get "points" in heaven. He is doing this because he wants to see others have the same type of joy he has, in spite of whatever situation we're facing in life.
 - iii) Would you rather go through life feeling miserable or feeling happy? Whatever it is we're dealing with in life, we can't always control what's happening but we can always control our attitude through that situation. Paul's saying that God's giving us the means to have joy in the best and worst of life's situations.
- c) Now that I've cheered everybody up, let's get back to the verses and discuss the "how":
- i) The first thing Paul talks about is being encouraged from being united with Christ. Stop and realize the word Christ means "king". Not just any king, but THE king. I am not positive what that entails, but I'm sure it's beyond my ability to grasp all of the things He's capable of doing. Remember that we're talking about the God who made all things. He had and has the power to create all life and all things. We get to be united intimately with that God. Does that mean we can snap our fingers to get whatever we want? No, because our will should be to do His will and only get what He wants for us. Still, we're united with God in the sense that He desires that we use our lives for His glory. That's how we're united with Him.
 - ii) The second phrase is about taking comfort from His love. It is to realize no matter what we face in life, the God who created us loves us. What about our sins? They were completely paid for. When we sin as believers, we're adding to the suffering Jesus endured. Sinning is not living as God desires at that moment. I believe that we can't sin enough to lose our salvation. We' may suffer loss of what God desires of us, but not our salvation. The point here is we can be comforted by the fact that God who created all things loves us no matter what. He desires we use our lives to glorify Him. The great realization for Christians is to realize we have the power to be used by the God who created us should be a great source of comfort for us.
 - iii) Then we get, "sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion". What does the Holy Spirit want from us? To show kindness (tenderness) and compassion for other people. It's about using our lives as a living witness of His love to those who are around us. We're not just filled with the Holy Spirit to realize we're saved. We have His Spirit living in us to provide us with all the power we need so we'll make a difference for Him. Think of the Holy Spirit as our engine to make the difference God wants us to make in life.

- a) Let me think of an extreme example: Suppose we are laying in bed and too sick to do anything. How can the Holy Spirit help us then? How can we be of any use to God then? For starters, God doesn't expect us to "take over the world" when we're in lots of pain. Sometimes just being a good witness for Jesus is simply being grateful to the person who is taking care of us. It's realizing that God has us in a situation "for a reason" and our job is to trust in God's power to use that situation for His glory. It's about not wasting the most valuable thing God's given us "our time" no matter what happens.
 - d) OK then, I just beat "Verse 1" to death. The point is Paul wants us to have the same type of joy that he has: The realization that God's going to provide for us all the power we'll need to do whatever is His will at any given moment. Sometimes His will is simple things, like showing kindness to those around us. Sometimes it involves working with other believers in order to accomplish some great project. No matter what we're called to do, it begins by trusting in His love, drawing upon His power and realizing God loves us just because He does. It's something we must simply accept as a fact of life.
 - e) Hey look, there's a verse three!
5. Verse 3: Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, ⁴ not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.
- a) Does God care about our motivation? Very much so. John, didn't you lecture us in the last lesson that Paul didn't care what people's motivation was for preaching Jesus as long as it is being preached? Let's be careful here. Paul cared that God's name be glorified, not who gets the credit for doing so. People who preach Jesus out of "envy or rivalry" as Paul calls it in Chapter 1, doesn't mean punishment is avoided for those who do preach Jesus for the wrong reason. While God may benefit from whatever people are doing in life, we are still accountable to Him. But if just believing in Jesus saves us, how are such people punished? That's why I'm convinced there are rewards in heaven that are based on how we lived as a witness for Jesus. What about babies who die? I'm convinced that a "fair" God will be fair in their treatment of them. I can't control what I can't control. I just know all I can control is my life and I want to use my life for His glory.
 - b) What about when we mess up and our ego gets in the way? Confess it as sin, realizing the God who created us has forgiven us. I find one of the greatest mistakes we make in life is we're tougher on ourselves than God us. We think, "I've should have done better" and we don't forgive us as easily as God does. With that said, His goal for us is to use our lives to make a difference for Him without any desire to be rewarded for it or get a "good boy pat on the back" for that service. Our desire should be to see others grow closer to God. That's why we use our lives to make that difference for Him.
 - c) It's common knowledge that living the Christian life is all about putting other's needs as a priority over our own? So why be so "lowly"? This isn't about trying to get "ahead" in life. It's about realizing what our priorities are. There's no greater feeling of joy than when we use our lives to help others (or even let others minister to us)! Thinking of ourselves as on the bottom rung of a totem pole (so to speak) is about having eternal joy realizing that we don't have to be "first in line" to get God's blessings.
 - i) Remember how I said that if we're united with God, we get "everything He gets"? If that's true, what's the point of trying to be first in line? If the benefits of being a child of God is everything, and that "everything doesn't run out" if we're the last in line, what's the purpose of trying to cut in front of others as a simple example?
 - ii) What if it's about trying to get a promotion or a raise? Shouldn't we work hard? I would definitely say yes, because we always should be a good witness for God no matter what the situation. If we work for a company, we owe that company what is required of us, time and effort. What about say a movie line? Should we allow everyone to cut in front of us? It's time to discuss "meekness versus weakness":

- a) The idea of meekness is having power but not using it. Weakness is to not have power in the first place. Meekness is saying, "it's not important to me who's first, go ahead." Avoiding weakness is saying, "It not up to me who's picked for this job. I'm going to give it my best effort and if it's His will, it'll happen. God wants us to use the opportunities He lays in front of us. That doesn't mean we don't play by the rules. Having inner peace doesn't mean that "God helps those help themselves", as that saying isn't biblical. Our life should be about putting other's needs as a priority over our own. Of course we all need time to rest or take care of our own needs, and there has to be a balance there. Thinking of other's first is the best way to go through life!
 - iii) The point is when we recognize a need to be fulfilled, our attitude should not be to let someone else take care of it. Even if we're not qualified to help, we should care enough to find someone who is qualified. What about the classic case of making a situation worse by helping? Of course good judgment is needed. The underlying point here is that God wants us to go through life caring about others and having a desire to see others draw closer to Him as well. That's the reason for all this caring lecture in the first place.
 - iv) OK, I've beaten that point to death. Let's try Verse 5.
- 6. Verse 5: In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:
 - a) My first thought as I read that verse was, "How can I think like God? I'm not that smart!" That's not what the verse is saying. Verse 5 is an introduction to a "poem" that is the next six verses of Philippians. The short version is to think about what Jesus did by becoming man and dying for our sins. The point is the more we think about what Jesus did, it gives us the power to live the way God wants us to live. Do you struggle with putting the needs of others over our own needs? Welcome to club! Paul's saying here that the secret to live as God desires we do is to "consider what He did" and that reminder of what He did gives us the power to live as He desires, by putting other's needs ahead of our own.
 - b) Confused? Great, that's what the next six verses will explain how we do that. Let's start:
- 7. Verse 6: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;
 - a) Sometimes we forget the simple fact that Jesus was always God. What I mean is He didn't start existing at his "birth". Jesus always existed and was always one with the Father. (See Proverbs 8:30). Even in Genesis 1:26 is a statement of "Let us (notice the plural) make man in our (plural) image". In that statement, ponder who is God taking to? It can't be a man as none were made yet. It can't be angels, as they don't have the power to create anything. My point is to that Jesus always existed and is referenced in the first chapter of the bible!
 - b) The second point of this verse is to realize Jesus "didn't have an ego". You don't read Jesus saying, "I don't want to pay for people's sins, let someone else do that!" Despite the pain of that act, Jesus agreed to do it. One way I view the trinity is that "all three are equal in their power", but somebody has to lead! All three are one as God, but each has a purpose that is different from the other. I know I'm preaching to the choir here, but it's necessary to grasp that fundamental thought before moving on. The point is Jesus accepted His role and did not say, "I'm God and I'm not doing that!" Jesus submitted to God the Father just as we do submit to His will. That's living the Christian life in one thought.
- 8. Verse 7: rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.
 - a) Stop to think how "lowly" Jesus sank. He wasn't born in a king's house. He wasn't born as say, the son of a world leader somewhere. Israel is a tiny country on the world's scale. He was born to a "nothing of a family, in a nothing of a place in a nothing of a country that is an insignificant part of a large empire". My point is you can't be born lower than that. It's amazing to consider that He's still God in spite of all of that.

- b) I'm very aware that a lot people struggle with the idea of Jesus being fully God while He's fully man at the same time. It is a tough concept to grasp. Most religious Israelites will not accept Jesus as the Messiah isn't because they don't believe the miracles, it's that they can't accept the idea of someone being fully God and fully human at the same time. It is asking how can someone control the universe and be human at the same time? That's one reason why we accept the idea of the "Trinity", with each being God and each having functioning differently. The great philosophical question is, what couldn't Jesus do when He lived as a human? The obvious one is He can't be everywhere at once. I'd say He knew what others were thinking as He stated as much on several occasions in the Gospel accounts.
 - i) I believe as a man He was able to sin, but chose to not to. The same way Adam & Eve could chose to sin before they did, and made that decision. If Jesus could not sin, why would Satan try to tempt Him in the first place? The underlying point is that as a human Jesus had some limitations on His power as God, but we can't say for sure what that limitation was. We just get clues from reading Gospel accounts.
 - c) Bottom line here is we're reading a "poem" and this line refers to the fact that Jesus as God took on a lowly human form. Now for the "how He even sunk lower" line of the poem.
9. Verse 8: And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!
- a) As I said earlier, Jesus wasn't born in a palace. He came into our world in a "nothing" of a town, in a "nothing of a location" in an insignificant country on the world's scene. Still He did all of that to fulfill predictions and to show the world that just as one man (Adam) did allow sin to come into the world, another man (Jesus) was needed to pay the price for sin. (That's a brief summary of Romans 5:12-21).
 - b) Realize that of all the ways to die, the cross was designed by the Persians and perfected by the Romans as being the cruelest way one could imagine to die. Crucifixion was only used for the "lowest of lows" of crimes and meant as a public example to not mess with Rome!
 - i) Realize religious Jews consider death on a cross to be a curse as Deuteronomy says that anyone is cursed who hangs on a tree (21:22). That verse is there to remind us that Jesus took the curse of our sins and was cursed by the way He died.
 - ii) OK, enough of the bad news, let's move on to the good news.
10. Verse 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 acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.
- a) If there is one thing I've come to realize about Paul, is that he loves run on sentences. I see him as giving dictation and he gets out of breadth as trying to communicate a lot in only a sentence. However he did it, Verses 9-11 is an example of one of his "run-on" thoughts in a single sentence.
 - b) By the way, remember that the text was originally written in Greek. I don't think the text rhymed in Greek, but I suspect there was "meters" to the flow of the text so it can be read as a poem. Anyway, after two verses saying how low Jesus was brought, we get the high note in Verse 9. Whatever powers Jesus chose to gave up as a human He got back as He's now God. Christians accept the idea that Jesus became fully God and fully man. I like to argue that Jesus exists in more than three dimensions simply by the fact John tells us that Jesus walked into a locked room (John 20:19). My point is I'm convinced whatever heaven is, it's a real and physical place where God the Father and God the Son literally exist. Yes I believe God can read thoughts and can be everywhere at once. Still He must exist in some physical place, even if it exists in more than three dimensions. That's my key point I want to make here.
 - c) Anyway, wherever heaven is, and however it exists, Jesus is there and God the Father did make Him "above" every creature. That deserves a quick explanation:

- i) A lot of cults will deny that Jesus is "Fully God". They will say He is "a" God. The text refers to Jesus as being "raised up" to God the Father's right hand. That doesn't mean he was equal to, or lower in rank than an angel. It simply means after He got resurrected, God the Father said, You're now next to Me, as You're more important than anyone else around here.
 - ii) Speaking of importance, that thought leads to Verse 10, which says that every knee should bend to Jesus. OK what does that mean? Does that mean that all people in history who ever lived will bow at the same time? Don't know. The text just states every knee should (key word) bow to Him. Does that mean God will force all of us to do a "bended knee thing" in Jesus presence? Don't know. I do suspect those who do refuse to accept Jesus as Lord better do some deep knee bends, as it's coming!
 - iii) Let's back up and remember Paul's main purpose for writing all of this. Paul wants us to have a sense of joy, both externally and internally. Realizing Jesus is God and we're all in subjection to Him, should be a reason for joy in our lives. By accepting the idea of Jesus being in charge, it gives us a sense of peace knowing who is really running the show around here! That's the underlying point of Verse 10.
 - iv) Verse 11 is a continuation of the same thought. After bending knees, Paul finishes this little prayer by reminding us that we should all acknowledge Jesus as Lord of our lives. That's part of the Gospel message.
 - v) Remember that salvation is more than realizing Jesus is God and paid the price for our sins. It's about Him being Lord (i.e., in charge of our lives). Consider why it's being emphasized here. What does Paul desire of the Philippian church? The same thing He desires of all Christians, that we have a sense of peace realizing Jesus did it all in the sense of paying the complete price for our sins. He also wants to guide our lives to make a difference for Him. In order to have the type of internal peace God wants us to have, it starts by realizing who Jesus is, was and will be. Once we accept who He is compared to who we are, it does bring us peace as it that thought gives us a purpose for living that's greater than any other we could imagine.
 - vi) Yes I could give more theological implications from this poem, but we're only half way through the chapter, so I need to keep rolling.
11. Verse 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 in order to fulfill his good purpose.
- a) The big question of Verse 12 is why do we need to continue to work out our salvation? I thought we're saved when we first accept Jesus and I argue we can't lose it. Therefore, I'm pondering what did Paul mean by "work out our salvation"?
 - i) Realize that salvation is a "multi-step" process. We "were" saved when we first did accept Jesus as being God, Lord of our lives and the full payment for our sins. We will be saved when we die and get resurrected. That leaves the present tense of us "working out our salvation". The related question is does it mean we can lose our salvation? I recently read about a wonderful Christian who dedicated most of his life to serve Jesus. Near the end of his life, he got dementia and by that disease he was denying his faith. Obviously I'm still convinced he's saved as that disease did cause him to not think in his right mind. My simple point is we can't lose what we were given by God and I'm one of those people who argue that once saved, always saved. OK, then, I'm dodging the question: How do we work out our salvation?
 - ii) It starts with avoiding the thought of "I believe Jesus is in charge, so now I'm going back to what I was doing as if Jesus doesn't matter". It is about using the time God has given us for His glory. If we accept Jesus is God, the evidence of a changed life should follow. That's the basic idea of "work out our salvation". The next step is to what's logical given the situation in front of us, with that realization in mind.

- iii) So does that mean whoever works the hardest gets the biggest reward in heaven? To state the obvious, God doesn't call all Christians to save multitudes. The way I view it, is God gave each of us gifts and passions and God expects us to use what He's given us for His glory. Doing that guarantees that we're living as He desires, as we work out our life for His glory.
- iv) What about people who die young. We they get rewarded less? The God I trust in is fair and I'm convinced He'll judge all people fairly. It's not about how long we'll live. It's about what we did with the time we're given. That's what the concept of working out our salvation is all about.
- b) All of that leads perfectly to Verse 13. To repeat it again, "for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose."
 - i) One of the most important things to grasp as a Christian is that God provides each of us an "engine" to make that difference. God doesn't say once we accept Jesus as God and Lord, "OK now go away and I'll see you again after you die". He saves us for a purpose. That purpose continues in the next life, but it's also so He can use us in this life. What if we get saved right before we die? That happens lots of time in history. Again, it's not about how much time God gives us, it is about what we do with the time He's given us.
 - ii) Suppose you think, I don't have that power, how do I tap into it? First, let's ask the more important question: What are you doing with your time? I'm not thinking of time needed for work or the necessities of life. Over and above that, are you using your time to enrich yourself or are you using it to make a difference for Jesus. The reason many Christians don't "tap" that power, is they're not using their spare time for the reason God created us in the first place, to make a difference for Him.
 - a) Now suppose we pass that test and we're helping around our church or we are involved in a project that you believe God's leading you to do. Can you say, "It's not all me? Are there "neat little coincidences" that occur that you can only attribute to God being involved? Congratulations, that's how God is working in our lives.
 - b) Grant it, not every endeavor works that way. Sometimes the things that we believe God's leading us to do requires a lot of trial and error. A good way to tell if what we're doing is God's will is simply, 1) Do we enjoy the project and can't wait to work on it, 2) Have a gift for it and 3) Are positive results seen by the action and 4) Is it glorifying Jesus? If you say yes to all that, I'd assure you that whether you feel anything or not, you are tapping into that power that God provides when we make a difference for Him.
 - iii) Finally, if I'm not doing anything, where do I begin? Start by asking around where you attend church if they have needs. See what "floats your boat". No believer can do all jobs. As I state, all of us have to do our share of the "dirty work". Over and above that, go back to the four points I asked earlier. Ask God what you'd like to take on. Grant it, we're all at the mercies of others. Politics exists in churches as it does in every aspect of life. Sometimes it starts with talking to your church leader about what gifts you have or what you'd like to take on. Good church leaders will help you work toward that goal of using your gifts so we can make a difference for Him. OK, enough happiness for Verse 13, let's try the next one.
- 12. Verse 14: Do everything without grumbling or arguing,¹⁵ so that you may become blameless and pure, "children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation."
 - a) Remember how I said there are jobs to do at every church that nobody is crazy about. I've been saying for years that I've never heard anyone say they have a spiritual gift to take the trash out. My point is some jobs just have to be done, so stop grumbling "this job" isn't my spiritual gift and do what one has to do to make a difference for Jesus.

- b) Let's back up for a moment: Remember the underlying topic of this chapter is how we can spiritual joy "on the inside". Let's be honest, if we're new to a church, we are now the "low man on totem pole". I promise you that church leaders are watching when you're asked to sweep up around there. They want to see your attitude about menial jobs before they'll let you take on bigger projects. While doing the exact thing we want to do is where we want to be, the important thing is until we get there, we have a good attitude. Living how God wants us to live is about accepting the situation at hand, and realizing, "I may not be able to change it, but I can always have a good attitude through it".
 - c) What if I hate what I'm doing? Do you think Paul was crazy about being tied to guards all day and night? If you're in a miserable situation, obviously pray about it as to give to Him that situation. Then have a good attitude through it as we never know why God allows it to occur in the first place. God may put us in a horrid situation in order to help another in the same situation "down the road".
 - d) Realize what is our motivation for having a joyful attitude all the time. If being joyful on a full time basis isn't important to you, remember what Jesus commands us (not asks us) to do: be a good witness for Him. Yes we still have to explain the Gospel message when it's time, but having a good attitude is what should draw people toward us. I'm reminded of an old expression, "You can't out nice a Mormon". That term refers to the fact that most of the devout Mormon's one meets are very nice people. They get that God wants us to have a good attitude. While Evangelical Christians disagree with them on a lot of fundamental points, all I'm saying is a good attitude isn't everything, but it is a necessary start in order to be a good witness for Jesus in the first place.
 - e) Now that we get the issue about attitude, Paul wants to discuss why it's important:
13. Verse 15 (cont.) Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky ¹⁶ 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. 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.
- a) Let's start with the phrase used in Verse 15. There's a false view (based on an old movie) that stars in the sky are really angels shining down on us. Paul's not being literal here, he is saying just as all the stars combined light up our night sky, after we realize God desires we be joyful all the time and work at it, then we'll shine as a witness for Jesus whether we realize it or not.
 - b) Then we get into a reason why all of this is so important to Paul. So he can boast when he is resurrected that he didn't waste his life. Does Paul want us to be joyful so he will have a good life in heaven? Consider what motivated Paul to work as hard as he did. He suffered whippings, stonings, prison, shipwrecks, and I assume many other things in order to be a good witness for Jesus. So are you saying we should be joyful to benefit Paul. It is not that. Paul didn't want to see people saved so he'd have company in heaven. I'd say Paul's main motivation was that he wanted people to have the same sense of internal joy in spite of his situation of the moment. Paul won't be rewarded based on the number of people he saved or even the number of people who were joyful in spite of their situation. Paul will receive a great reward because he used his life after salvation to make a difference for Jesus. The point here is that God desires we have a joyful attitude joy as we go through life. We will get that joy literally from putting other people's interest ahead of our own. We also get it by literally by being grateful for what God's given us. We get joy from realizing no matter what we're facing in life, or what sin we're struggling with, we're saved because God paid the complete price for that sin all by Himself.
 - c) The point here is attitude is everything. Dealing with troubles is a big part of living a life, let alone the Christian life. Choosing to go through life with a good attitude benefits us in ways that not only benefit our own health, but the health of others around us.

- d) Let me return to Paul being rewarded for the joy other Christians have. Paul didn't want people to be saved so he could add a "notch on his belt". Paul wanted Christians to be full of joy so they'd appreciate life more. That's why Paul put up with everything he did so he could be full of joy in his own life. That's the benefit he gets from doing all of that.
 - e) On a personal note, I don't just write all of this to get it out of my system. I get joy when I get letters (e-mails) from people saying that they now "get it" and appreciate the effort this ministry makes to others be joyful. I appreciate more than you'd ever know of the prayers I get for this work. Every time I get a simple e-mail saying in effect, thanks for doing all of this makes it all worth the trouble. Just wanted to express my thanks here for that.
 - f) Finally let me quickly say a few words about a "drink offering". This was a ritual that was part of the Old Testament law and was also part of many pagan rituals. The short version is it's about pouring a drink (usually wine) on a burning offering. The smoke that rises up from the heat is symbolic of prayers going up to heaven. Paul's point is no matter what'll happen to him in the future, he's using his life to make a difference for God just like how a drink is poured out on top of an offering. When people are giving give their lives to make a difference for Jesus, teaching us about the right attitude about living that new life is like the drink offering being poured out on top of what's already being offered.
 - g) Meanwhile, I've got twelve more verses to go and not much space to write about them.
14. Verse 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. ²⁰I have no one else like him, who will show genuine concern for your welfare. ²¹For everyone looks out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. ²²But 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. ²³I hope, therefore, to send him as soon as I see how things go with me. ²⁴And I am confident in the Lord that I myself will come soon.
- a) To explain this paragraph, first I need to give a quick speech about Timothy. It's the same Timothy as 1st and 2nd Timothy. He was a man much younger than Paul who became an assistant to Paul in his ministry work. We get introduced to him in Acts, Chapter 16. That is when he goes on the road as part of Paul's missionary team. Paul was impressed about Timothy as not only did he have faith as a Christian, but also had the same sort of attitude that Paul had, where other people's interest was more important than his own. Even here in these verses we can grasp that Timothy cared for the interests of others more than what he cared for his own. I'm willing to bet that Timothy himself was full of joy as he worked to make a difference for Jesus. Just as Paul modeled for us the type of internal attitude to have as we go through life, I'm pretty positive Timothy was also work modeling as well.
 - b) Apparently Timothy had a history in Philippi. Chapter 16 opens with the fact Timothy is joining this missionary team as they go on the road. By Verse 11 of that chapter, Paul and his gang were in Philippi. My simple point is Timothy was there with Paul. Timothy was also a good witness for Jesus and had that same type of contagious joy that Paul had as he preached the gospel within that city. That's why the paragraph ends in effect with, "All of you remember my assistant Timothy. He had a positive joyful attitude as he also wanted to see the church in Philippi grow and flourish." The point here is Paul is building up his reputation as not only a faithful witness for Jesus, but one's truly concerned about other's interests over his own and therefore, had a joyful attitude.
 - c) Pause for a moment to realize that Paul is sitting in a prison somewhere tied to guards. I suspect it had to get lonely there without his friends to talk to. Even if Paul could share a good while with the guards about the Gospel, it's still easier to do if one has companions to help him. My point is notice near the end of the paragraph that Paul desired to go send Timothy to Philippi to help strengthen that church. It's a several-hundred mile journey to go from Rome to Philippi. Paul was willing to give up his close and personal "father and son" like relationship with Timothy in order to help that church. That's a great example of putting other's interests ahead of one's own to make that sort of sacrifice.

- d) All of that leads to the last sentence of that paragraph. Notice that Paul expected to win in Rome. He didn't think he was going to die there. Verse 24 talks about Paul desiring to go back to Philippi after he gets out of prison. Did Paul know for sure he'd get released? Of course not. It was just part of Paul's optimistic and joyful attitude that no matter what he is dealing with, the results and use of his life is God's problem, not his. Like all of us, Paul needed something positive to look forward to. For Paul that meant more opportunities to go back on the road, share his joy with other believers and lead more people to Jesus. That is the way to live life: Using it to make a difference for the God of the universe. That's the way to have far more joy in this life than any other way we could imagine.
 - e) Finally, notice the "when" of sending Timothy. As soon as Paul knows "what will happen to him in Rome". Realize that Paul loved Timothy like a father loves a son. Part of loving a child that way, is letting them go so they can make a difference without you. Still we do want to be with that child because we love them so much. Therefore I think Paul was torn between sending Timothy now versus waiting a bit. The related reason is because there is another man there who Paul could send immediately to Philippi. That other person is the main topic of the next paragraph. My point here is I'm convinced Paul held off on sending Timothy now, not because he wanted to put his own needs before that church, but there is someone else he could send now.
 - f) Before I move on to discuss the "other man in the room", let me quickly discuss a principal that comes from Paul's relationship to Timothy. It is "Every Paul needs a Timothy just as every Timothy needs a Paul". The point is we should always look for people to mentor in working to making a difference for Jesus just as younger people should look for their own mentors so they could grow closer to Jesus. Christianity was never meant to be multitudes of solo efforts for Jesus. God wants us to work together to make a difference for Him. We need to mentor others how to make a difference just as Paul did with Timothy here.
 - g) OK then, enough about Timothy. Time to move on to the final character of this chapter.
15. Verse 25: But I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, co-worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger, whom you sent to take care of my needs.
- a) Realize Epaphroditus was from Philippi. That church sent him to Paul. He is the one who brought Paul a financial contribution from that church to take care of his needs. My point is simply that the church in Philippi knew who this guy was. Given his unpronounceable name (ease up, I'm kidding) and the fact he was from that city as well as a Christian, Paul wanted to use him to deliver this letter back to Philippi. We'll get another mention of him near the end of this letter. Since I mentioned his name, let me give a background that you will soon forget. His name is derived from a Greek pagan god. The Roman name for the same god is "Venus". It simply shows that Christians come from all backgrounds and I'd bet he wasn't born to a Christian household given what his name was.
 - b) Anyway with all that said, the city of Philippi sent Epaphroditus to help Paul. Now Paul wanted to send him back as his way of saying thanks for their gift. It's not like he's saying, "Let this guy hang around here for awhile as I'm bored here!" This is Paul putting himself last. Remember what Paul wants more than anything else was for people to get it! That is why he was sending Epaphroditus back. Paul wanted all Christians to be joyful as we use our lives to make a difference for Jesus.
16. Verse 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.
- a) Keep in mind this was the first century AD. They didn't have the internet or phone lines to communicate. The text says somehow Epaphroditus got really sick and almost died at some point before he traveled to see Paul. What I suspect is he got sick while he was still in town, and word got around that city how he almost died, but recovered. My point is in spite of that, this guy still wanted to be useful for Jesus and still made that tough trip.

- b) Realize why Paul considered that God had mercy on him and not just Epaphroditus. It's because that man despite his illness (whatever it was) still took the trouble to travel all the way from Rome to Philippi in order to deliver that gift to support Paul. Of all the traits to have in life, nothing's more important than gratitude when it comes to being joyful. To be honest, we can always focus on what's going wrong at that moment or else we can realize what we're grateful for. Realize Paul never states in this letter how sorry he is for being in prison chained to the guards. Instead he focuses on what it is he's grateful for. It includes the gift he got in that jail. Now that I've beaten that point to death, the final three verses.
17. Verse 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. ²⁹So then, welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honor people like him, ³⁰because he almost died for the work of Christ. He risked his life to make up for the help you yourselves could not give me.
- a) Bottom line, Epaphroditus is the guy who's going to deliver this letter. I mentioned in the introduction that it's 1,284 miles (2,067 kilometers) from Rome to Philippi. That meant he performed an ancient version of "Planes, trains and automobiles" to slowly get from one place to the other. Recall that Epaphroditus is from Philippi. He knew how to get there. It is obvious that he made it, as the letter became famous and is still read by multitudes over the last two millenniums. For what it's worth the word translated "sick" can also refer to a struggle as in "a death threat for preaching the Gospel". Whether he got literally sick or if he almost died for being a Christian, either way he sacrificed a lot for the Gospel message.
- b) My point is that as much as history has respected Paul for all he accomplished, I'm willing to bet Epaphroditus was also a godly man who took risks in order to visit Paul and bring him money. He's also willing to travel all the way back. He's not only famous for a brief bible mention, but for delivering that message that became a part of history.
- c) In a sense, he represented the Christians of Philippi. It was the Christians in that city who took up the collection for Paul and this guy did the hard part of getting it to Paul. Realize he had to travel over a lot of roads and got permission to travel the way he did. For what it is worth Philippi was a Roman colony, you might recall my comments last week about a big battle between the two large Roman armies last week? A lot of soldiers settled there as it became a "free man" Roman city. My point is that Epaphroditus could travel as he was a citizen of that town.
18. OK, let's back up to see the big picture. There's not a lot of theology to get out of the descriptions about Timothy and Epaphroditus. The main point to notice about both of them is how they both committed their lives to make a difference for Jesus. Both of them had the attitude of putting the lives of other Christians ahead of their own. The secret of internal joy is putting other's needs as priority over our own needs. It's about drawing upon God's strength to use our lives as to live as He desires. The early part of Chapter 2 focused on how to have internal joy. The last part of this chapter intentionally or unintentionally gives two examples of people who lived that way. Were both of these men perfect? I doubt it. I just know that at this moment, they experienced the type of joy that God wants us to have as we use our lives to make a difference for Him. Let me see if I can help a little with our attitude on the closing prayer.
19. Heavenly Father, Help us to remember that we were created with a purpose: To glorify You by the way we live and the way we prioritize our lives. Help us to rely on Your power to put the needs of others before our own needs. May we realize that You want us to be joyful. May we be a good witness for You through being joyful. May that joy flow through us as we get our priorities right in life, by helping others to draw closer to You. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.
- a) Now list some things you're grateful for and go help someone until the next lesson. ☺