



Philippians



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WORD WRITERS: PHILIPPIANS

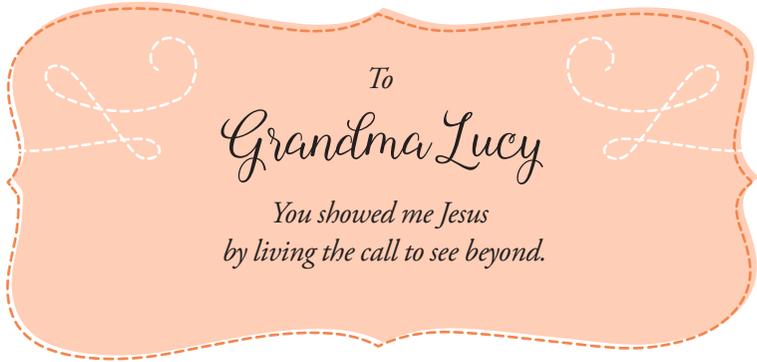
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To

Grandma Lucy

*You showed me Jesus
by living the call to see beyond.*

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Welcome to Word Writers

Welcome to Word Writers! It's truly a joy to invite you to join me on this journey through the Bible by writing the words of Scripture. Word Writers is a Bible study specially designed for individuals as well as groups. It's an inductive-plus Bible Study that makes the Bible the primary source. A traditional inductive Bible Study uses three key approaches to God's Word: *observation*, *interpretation*, and *application*. Word Writers adds a crucial fourth dimension to the Bible study experience: *saturation*—the opportunity to write the Word. Because when we write it, we remember it. So grab a few girlfriends and get together for some tea, conversation, and Word writing!

You'll notice Psalm 119:18 at the top of each new day's page, which says, "Open my eyes so that I may contemplate wonderful things from Your instruction." Let's make this our prayer every day before we begin our time in the Word. I'll be your guide through the pages of Philipians, but the Holy Spirit is our Teacher.

Each day of the study will begin with a short illustration that leads into the daily Scripture reading. After reading the designated passage in Philipians, you'll come to the Diving Deeper section, which asks a few questions. The first couple of questions will ask you about the biblical text (the *observation* and *interpretation* portion of the study). Space is provided for you to pause and answer these questions in your own words. Feel free to use this space to write some of your own questions too.

The next question or two will lead you to further contemplate how you can apply the truth of Scripture to your everyday life (the *application* portion of the study). Then you're invited to write the Word (the *saturation* portion of the



When we write it,
we remember it.

#WordWriters

study). Ample space is provided in the back of this book to write out the verses from Philippians you read that day. Now, depending on your Bible's translation, the verses you write for one day may end with a comma rather than a period. That's okay. I'm using the Holman Christian Standard Bible translation, but you're welcome to use the translation you're most comfortable with.

Last, we finish each day the same way we begin—with prayer. A prayer is printed at the end of each daily study. Make the words of these prayers your own, for we know when we seek Him with all our heart, we will find Him (Jeremiah 29:13).

Philippians: A Call to See Beyond

I have a special fondness for the characters A.A. Milne created in his stories about Winnie-the-Pooh. Winnie is a plain little bear who enjoys sweet honey and good companions. His friends are of the simple variety too. Piglet is Pooh's faithful friend. Always there. Always supportive. And where Piglet is a bit child-like and innocent, Owl is wise and proud. Tigger, on the other hand, is the ever-so-sanguine life of the party. He's happy and carefree and lots of fun to be around. He gets a little lost sometimes. But that's okay. He has fun while doing it. Then there's Eeyore. Sweet but somber Eeyore.

Of all Pooh's friends, we would characterize Tigger as the most joyful of the bunch. He certainly seems to come by it naturally. In fact, I've known people, and you probably have, too, who just seem to be naturally joyful people. They're generally cheerful and upbeat; it's part of their inborn temperament. I, however, am not one of them. I happen to come from a long line of Eeyores. In a good kind of way. My great-grandmother was a serious woman. As was my grandmother and my mother. So when it comes to being serious, I come by it honestly. It's part of my DNA, which isn't necessarily a bad thing. When the women in my family got together, no matter what age you were, you would bring a book with you. Then we'd sit together and, well, we would read. For some that might sound like the most boring gathering imaginable, but we loved it.

So why am I talking about fictional characters from a children's story when we're about to embark on a journey through the pages of Philippians? Because the predominant theme in this short book is joy. The words *joy* and *rejoice*

appear 16 times in four brief chapters. Paul's letter to the church in Philippi reads like a "personal manifesto on how to live a life full of joy."^{*} But before we

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Someone good—
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#WordWriters

begin you must know that for many years, when I observed joyful exuberance in other people, I viewed those Tigger-like folks as wholly other—a perplexing mystery I felt certain I would never understand. The nature of their jubilant behavior eluded me.

For far too long, I misunderstood the true nature of joy. I thought it was something you are born with, something that's part of your innate personality. But Paul says in Galatians that joy is a fruit of the Spirit. A fruit, of course, starts out small and then grows full and sweet. Joy isn't automatically conferred to the naturally optimistic crowd. It's a key virtue in a Christian's life, which means it should be evident in

the lives of *all* believers. Including Eeyores like me. So, being the Eeyore I am, I have taken the topic of joy very seriously, and I've made it the subject of much study.

All kidding aside, I've grown to know joy in deeper and deeper ways over time. And while we can't take a slice of joy and examine it under a microscope, we can observe the habits of joyful people, and we can cultivate joy in our own lives with greater intention. Paul's letter to the Philippians includes the steps we can take toward a life of deeper joy. The fullness of joy, however, is more than a list of dos and don'ts. Authentic joy begins with a true understanding of its meaning. True joy must reside deep within our soul, anchored in the unshakable belief that something good—Someone good—lies beyond our present circumstances.

Consider Paul's circumstances. Even though Philippians is most known for its theme of joy, Paul wrote the letter while imprisoned, not knowing if he'd be

^{*} Warren Wiersbe, "Be Joyful: Even When Things Go Wrong, You Can Have Joy"—*New Testament Commentary: Philippians* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 1974), 9.

released or executed. Paul could have easily focused on his own grim circumstances. Chained to a Roman guard 24 hours a day, no one would have blamed him if he had chosen to settle into a miserable state of gloom. Instead, Paul wrote letters of encouragement to his friends in far places, and he prayed words of thanksgiving to his Friend in high places. Paul's joy wasn't contingent upon his external circumstances, for he saw beyond his current chains.

In Philippians, Paul conveys the idea that our joy doesn't come from the here-and-now; our joy comes from the future-when. Our joy doesn't come from the events surrounding us because our joy is rooted in the future when we are face-to-face with Jesus, when we are made complete in Him. We find this repeated theme throughout the letter:

“I am sure of this, that He who started a good work in you will carry it on to completion until *the day of Christ Jesus*” (Philippians 1:6).

“Hold firmly to the message of life. Then I can boast *in the day of Christ* that I didn't run or labor for nothing” (Philippians 2:16).

“*Our citizenship is in heaven*, from which we also eagerly wait” (Philippians 3:20).

“*The Lord is near*. Don't worry about anything” (Philippians 4:5-6).

The theme of joy in Philippians cannot be separated from Paul's consistent focus on his eternal future with Christ. So as we journey through Philippians together, we'll identify the steps we can take to cultivate joy in our lives today, but all the while, we'll also recognize the growing pulse that underscores this letter: A life of deep joy comes from a heart that sees beyond the here-and-now and awaits with great hope the eternal life we'll have with Christ. Philippians is a call to see beyond. And that's something even an Eeyore like me can learn to do.

Day 1

When Women Gather

Open my eyes so that I may contemplate wonderful things from Your instruction.

PSALM 119:18

Throughout history, women have been gathering together. It's what we do. Is someone getting married? We'll throw a bridal shower. Is someone having a baby? We'll throw a baby shower. If we don't have an excuse for getting together, we'll find one. How about the park? Moms and kids and strollers. We'll call it a playdate.

It's the same at work. Do you have some papers to grade? We'll meet in the library after school and grade papers together. What about the office? We'll do lunch. What about after work? We'll call it Girls' Night Out and have dinner.

In different seasons of my life, I've enjoyed all of the above. But the most memorable gatherings I've experienced have centered on the Word. Whether it's Tuesday evening in the sanctuary or Saturday morning in a friend's living room, when women come together to grow deeper in their relationship with God, something special happens. Hearts connect. Friendships form. Bonds deepen. And lives are changed.

The book of Philippians is a prime example of this truth. In the Roman colony of Philippi, there wasn't a synagogue in town, which meant there probably weren't enough Jewish men in the area for a synagogue. Yet every Sabbath a few women would make their way to the river, and together they would pray and sing and worship. Something about this small band of women caught God's eye, too, for He stopped the apostle Paul from traveling any farther into Asia. In a dream, Paul saw a man beckoning him to cross the Aegean Sea and

visit the province of Macedonia—part of what we call Greece—which is where Philippi was located.

Read Acts 16:6-15 and Philippians 1:1-2

Paul obeys God's command at once, and when he reaches the city of Philippi, he hears about the women who gather by the river to pray. So he goes to them and preaches the cross of Christ. Lydia, a wealthy woman who sells purple linens, listens with rapt attention, her heart wide open to receive the Truth. Lydia and her whole household are baptized that same day. And the first church in Europe begins. This church will eventually grow to become a core group of believers, influencing the entire region for Christ. That's what can happen when women gather.

When women come together to grow in their relationship with God, hearts connect, friendships form, and lives are changed.

#WordWriters

Years later, while sitting in chains and waiting for his trial in Rome, Paul writes a letter to his dear friends in Philippi. The church then shares his letter with everyone. In time, this personal letter from their mentor will be inducted into the canon of Holy Scripture. The book of Philippians is the subsequent fruit born of a few women. Lydia and her friends serve as beautiful examples of what can happen when women gather to pray and worship and study the Scriptures. That's my prayer for us. The world may be a different place today, but our God is the same. When women gather, He sees, He knows, and I dare say, He smiles.

Diving Deeper

Who does Paul mention in his greeting to the saints in Philippi?

The fact that Paul includes the “overseers and deacons” in Philippi indicates that the church had not only grown in size, but it had also established some order. Are you familiar with your local church’s organizational structure? Does your church have elders or deacons in addition to the church staff? Write their names in the space below so you begin to pray for those in leadership.

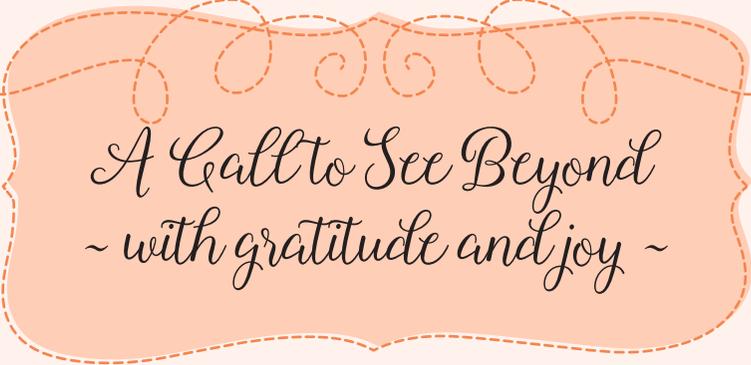
Whether this is your first Bible study or your hundredth, God’s Word is alive, and He continues to speak through His Word today. God always has something new for us when we go to Him to learn from His Word. What do you hope to learn from your time in Philippians?

The first step toward a life of deeper joy is participating in community with other believers. Do you have a group of friends you can journey with? Is there someone you could invite to journey with you through Philippians?



Like Lydia and her friends, we have the dear privilege of coming together to worship God through prayer and the study of His Word. Together, we can savor the words of Scripture by writing them down. So let's grab our favorite pens and begin by writing Philippians 1:1-2.

Prayer: Thank You, Lord, for godly women who serve as beautiful examples of what can happen when women gather. Help me to grow and become that kind of woman. I pray that as I read through and write out the words of Philippians, the Holy Spirit will teach me and reveal Truth to me. I give this time to You. For You are good and true. Amen.



*A Call to See Beyond
~ with gratitude and joy ~*

In his letter to the Philippians, Paul paves the path toward a life of deeper joy. As we saw on Day 1, the first step on the path to deeper joy is participating in community with other believers. The second step on the path to deeper joy is remembering with gratitude the people who have shown us kindness along life's journey. Paul models for us the importance of remembering those who have been the hands and feet of Jesus to us in times of great need, and he teaches us by example to give thanks for the many ways we've been carried through a difficult season.

Day 2

Partners in Grace

Open my eyes so that I may contemplate wonderful things from Your instruction.

PSALM 119:18

One of my earliest teaching jobs involved a one-hour commute each way—without traffic. But I live in the greater Los Angeles area, so there's always traffic. My commute wasn't kind to my aging Dodge sedan, either. Every morning she groaned of better days. I searched for an apartment close to the school where I taught, but I couldn't find anything in my budget. Then the worst thing possible happened. Well, maybe not the *worst* thing, but it managed to derail my life plenty good all the same. My car stopped working, and the mechanic said I'd need \$3,000 to fix the transmission. I barely had enough for gas.

The price of that transmission was a small fortune, especially to my young twentysomething self. I sold what little of value I had and scraped together what little cash I could. But it still wasn't enough. Yet I needed my car working so I could keep working. So I did the only thing I knew to do. I gave my landlord my notice, paid my last month's rent, and moved what few things I owned into a small storage unit. A friend let me sleep on her couch while I used my next paycheck to cobble together the amount I needed to repair my car.

With a fixed transmission, I continued my long commute to and from work each day, but I was too embarrassed to tell anyone at school I was basically homeless. Then after school one day, a teacher from down the hall, Mrs. Larson, asked me where I lived. I told her I was staying with a friend, which was true, but her eyes widened when I told her where I was commuting from. Mrs. Larson said her children were grown and she lived alone with her husband in a large house with several empty bedrooms. She invited me to live with her for a while. I accepted her gracious offer, and for the next two months I stayed with

her. She insisted that I not pay any rent. I was her guest. This allowed me to save my next couple of paychecks for a deposit on a nearby apartment. I will never forget Mrs. Larson's kindness and generosity. She helped me during a season of my life when I didn't have anyone else to turn to.

When Paul was nearing the end of his earthly life, he found himself imprisoned in Rome. He wasn't homeless, but as a prisoner, he likely wasn't able to work to support himself either, not as he had during his earlier years in ministry. Imagine the gratitude Paul must have felt when his old friend Epaphroditus appeared on his doorstep with a huge financial gift from the church in Philippi.

Read Philippians 1:3-7

Every time Paul remembers his friends in Philippi, he's filled with joy as he thanks God for them. Because a thank-full heart is a joy-full heart. Paul's letter to them is really a thank-you note for their kind generosity. He calls them his partners in grace. Every time I think of Mrs. Larson, I thank God for her. And when I moved into my own apartment, I wrote a long thank-you note to her.

Our past cannot
dictate our future.

God is in the
business of
transforming lives.

#WordWriters

Though Philippians is brief, it is full of rich truth. One such truth is Paul's assurance that God is faithful to finish the good work He has already started in us. Our past cannot dictate our future. God is in the

business of transforming lives. Once we go to Him with surrendered hearts, He begins His holy work inside us, fashioning us more and more into His likeness. Lydia and the other women who gathered by the river are not the same as they were when they first met Paul. They have grown and matured in Christ and will continue to do so until they meet Jesus face-to-face. The same is true of us. What God has begun in our lives, He will finish.

Almost two decades have passed since I was a young twentysomething without a place to live. Years later, when I was sitting at my own kitchen table writing addresses on my wedding invitations, I wrote Mrs. Larson's address on an

envelope from memory, her address having once been my address. Mrs. Larson and her husband traveled far to attend my wedding. No matter the years that have passed, I am filled with joy when I think of her.

Diving Deeper

When Paul prayed for the Philippians, why did joy fill his heart?

In addition to thanking his friends, what other encouragement does Paul give them?

Have you ever had a Mrs. Larson in your life? Someone who came alongside you during a trying time? Have you written a thank-you note to this person?

Paul's joy increased each time he prayed for his friends. Do you have friends you're committed to praying for on a regular basis? Who can you begin praying for today?



Write out the words of Philippians 1:3-7, and as you do, read each word aloud. This is how the ancient scribes used to copy Scripture, with their hands and their voices. Then thank God for the people He's brought into your life.

Prayer: Thank You, Lord, for caring for my physical needs as well as my spiritual needs. Thank You for bringing generous people into my life. Help me to become the kind of person who responds to the needs of those around me. Help me to become Your hands and feet. Amen.