

A Confident Attitude

Philippians 1:1-11

Written by Rick Drost



Getting Started

How confident are you that God is in control of the circumstances surrounding your life? If you are like most people, you will probably admit that there are times when everything seems to be out of control. However there are also times when you have the faith of Daniel. How do we cultivate a confidence in God that can carry us through the tough times?

In this first section of Philippians (and in reality all through the letter 1:19, 20, 25; 2:24; 4:4-8; and 4:19), Paul demonstrates a confidence that God is at work in the lives of the Philippians in such a way that he can speak of them in terms of abounding joy. If you read the whole letter in one sitting, you get the unmistakable impression that Paul is overjoyed that even though the Philippians have their share of struggles, God is at work in them. How did Paul develop this attitude concerning God and the Philippians?

A big part of the answer has to be how Paul first came to know the Philippians. Read Acts 15:36 – 17:1 and take note of these events:

1. Wanting to revisit those they had met on the first missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas set out but had some conflict over who should go with them. The church of Antioch blessed their journeys, and they went. They probably had some doubts concerning that stumbling beginning.
2. When Paul and company tried to preach the Gospel in Asia and Bithynia they were stopped from preaching by the Holy Spirit, twice! Talk about confusing!
3. Paul had the Macedonia vision, which they took as the direction of God. Perhaps the struggles so far had been the hand of God at work!
4. They arrived in Philippi and had a quick convert in Lydia! God was at work!
5. Trouble came in the form of a servant girl and a confrontation with the magistrates of the city. Was God in control?
6. Paul and Silas were beaten and thrown into prison. Did they make a mistake going to Philippi?
7. The jailer responded to the Gospel and the church in Philippi was born! God was always in control. Paul's confidence in God grew.

As you study Philippians 1:1-11, keep in mind that confidence in God is built as we consistently see God at work, even through the troubling times.

Read Philippians 1:1-11

1. What words does Paul use to describe his attitude toward the Philippians?

If he walked into a gathering of Philippian believers what do you think Paul would do?

2. Compare verse 6 to verses 9-11. What elements do they share in common?

What would the complete work of God in the Philippians' lives be?

3. How did the Philippians partner with Paul in the Gospel? (see also 2:25-30 and 4:14-19)
4. What does Paul pray for the Philippians?
5. How does love grow in knowledge and dept of insight? (Remember Paul's journey to them.)
6. What is the fruit of righteousness? (Remember Paul's fruit in Philippi.)

Applying God's Word to Us Today

1. Paul developed confidence in God by growing in his loving knowledge of how God works. What past experiences have you had that helped you grow in loving knowledge of how God works?
2. What are some of the struggles that you are experiencing right now that cast doubt on God's control in the situation? (financial struggles, parenting problems, relationships, work situations, life goals being blocked)
3. How can remembering God's faithfulness to you in the past help you to have confidence in Him now?
4. Paul was confident that God would finish the work in those he loved. Are there those in your life for whom you wish you could say the same thing as Paul?

As a group encourage one another with remembrances of how God has worked.

5. What is God's main goal for your life? (see vs. 11; I John 3:2; Romans 8:28, 29; and II Peter 1:4) Are you willing to trust God to work that out in you? If you are willing to allow God to work His will in your life, pray a prayer of surrender to, and confidence in, His work for you and those you love.

A Joyful Attitude

Philippians 1:12-30

Written by Carver and Lyn Nixon



Getting Started

Joy and happiness are very different. Happiness is affected by externals – by what is happening. Joy is a delight that runs deeper than pain or pleasure. Joy, as we understand and experience it as followers of Jesus, is a gift given us by God and is ours even in the most difficult of circumstances. We experience the fullness of joy when we have a deep sense of God’s presence in our lives.

We can have an attitude of joy even in a difficult period. Our youngest granddaughter, Emma, now lives in Tucson. She has started nursery school and is very generous with sharing the germs she meets there. Her mother, Meredith, and both of us have been sick for the last two weeks, and we haven’t necessarily been very happy. But Emma still brings us great joy and we are grateful to God for the gift of her.

Even in the midst of deep sadness, we can have an attitude of joy. Our small group experienced this as we ministered to our friends Mary and Bob and their family during Mary’s last days in hospice care. Mary’s faith was so deep, and her anticipation to be with her Lord was so exuberant, that her room vibrated with joy.

Paul is an example of the experience of joy during a period of suffering. He wrote the letter to the Philippians while he was in prison (a fact he has already mentioned in 1:7 and which he notes again in vv 12-14, 17, 19 and 30 of this passage). Despite this, Philippians is known as Paul’s “joy letter” – joy is one of its major themes. Paul prays with joy for the Philippians (1:4) and he describes his joy (“I rejoice”) and the Philippians’ joy several more times in this passage and then also later in the letter. Ultimately, the source of Paul’s joy is that his imprisonment has advanced (rather than hindered) the gospel (1:12).

Read Philippians 1:12-30. Then re-read each section and discuss the questions given. The first question or two are on the content of the section—what is Paul saying? The remaining questions are about how we respond to Paul’s message.

Verses 12-14:

What are Paul’s circumstances?

What is Paul’s attitude? What opportunities does he see?

How do we react, that is, what is our attitude, in the tough times?

What opportunities are offered by our current (or past) struggles?

Verses 15-18:

How would you describe and compare the motives of the two groups who are preaching Christ?

What motives do we have when we tell others about Jesus?

Verses 19-26:

What does Paul mean by “deliverance” in verse 19? What are the benefits he describes to life and to death in verses 20-26?

How would you describe the depth and authenticity of Paul’s faith and trust in Jesus?

What do our lives exhibit about our faith and trust?

How do we react when considering death?

Verses 27-30:

What is Paul’s description of a life that is worthy of the gospel of Christ?

As followers of Jesus and with the Holy Spirit living within us, how have our lives been transformed by our suffering? How can we exalt Christ in the tough times?

Prayer: Thank you Jesus that you love us so much. Thank you that you fill us with the joy of knowing you and your love. Thank you, too, that that joy is so deep that it can be our attitude even as we face the tough times. We pray that you would fill us to overflowing so our joy may be a testimony to those who do not yet know you. Amen.

A Humble Attitude

Philippians 2: 1-11

Written by Charlie Lehardy



Getting Started

No one likes a braggart, but practicing true humility is hard. We all have egos and they just don't like to be told to be quiet. Sometimes the desire to tell people how awesome we are gets the better of us. At such times, people on Twitter have resorted to what's become known as the "humble-brag", a Tweet designed to let people know that we're pretty darned wonderful, while pretending at the same time to downplay the whole thing.

"It amazes me that I can be in Prague, London, and the Paramus Whole Foods all in one day! Travel and technology boggle my mind!" "I am featured in People's Most Beautiful, but did the shoot with no makeup, and I have to say... SCARY." "The downside of my glamorous life standing around for six hours at the royal wedding: My entire little toe is one big blister." "Dear NY City. A mansion tax?! Seriously?! It's just a two-bedroom apartment!"

It's apparent from the first chapter of Paul's letter that there was some sort of competition going on in the Philippian church. A few leaders were vying to take Paul's place now that he was safely locked up behind bars. And as these leaders jockeyed for position, it's likely that their vanity and power-grabbing was beginning to infect the whole church.

Instead of taking sides in the power struggle, Paul addressed the heart of the problem by talking about humility and pointing to Jesus as the prime example for how we should behave towards each other. In this study we want to look honestly at our behavior, our attitudes, and our hidden motives, and examine them next to the example of Jesus. We want to come away with answers to the questions, What does true humility look like, Why is it so hard, and Why does it matter to the church?

Content questions:

1. In some translations, Paul begins verse 1 "if you have...." He isn't questioning the Philippians' faith here, but is using a rhetorical device to assert that these things are in fact true for them. In verses 1 and 2, what are the things Christ has done for the Philippians, and what are the things Paul calls the Philippians to do in response?
2. From what you know or can surmise about the Philippians' culture and their church, what do you think would have been some of the issues that made it difficult for them to be "one in spirit and in mind," as Paul asks them to be at the end of verse 2?
3. Humility can be difficult to define, but Paul gives us a picture of humility in his description of Jesus in verses 3-8. Based on what Paul says and what you know about Jesus from the Gospels, list some words or phrases that describe humility. Think of some examples from Jesus' life and ministry: How did he live out humility?

4. Paul says that Jesus gave up the advantages and privileges he had as God's son. Contrast Jesus' life prior to becoming a human with the life he lived in the Gospels: What did Jesus give up in agreeing to come to earth? And on the plus side, what did he gain that made it worthwhile?
5. Verse 7 says "[Jesus] made himself nothing..." and verse 8 says "he humbled himself..." In other words, according to Paul, Jesus went all in and embraced a life of humility and servanthood. What was God's response to Jesus' humbling of himself?

Application questions:

1. What are some of the realities about who we are as Grace Community Church that keep us from being "like-minded" and "one in spirit"?
2. In verse 3, Paul says that we should "value others above yourselves" and "look... to the interests of others." Give some examples of when you have seen that happen or have been the recipient of that sort of humble, selfless love.
3. What are some of the situations you've experienced where it has been hardest to live out that sort of humble, other-focused love, and why?
4. The opposite of humility is pride, one of the sins the Bible constantly warns against. Why is pride dangerous?
5. Read Matthew 6:1-4 for one of Jesus' teachings on humility. We have a choice, apparently, between exalting ourselves and putting our own desires first, or humbling ourselves and depending on God to exalt us in his own time and own way. What would Paul say are the reasons we should leave it to God to lift us up?
6. Thinking about the relationships you are invested in at church, in marriage, at work, in school, with family and friends, how would "doing nothing from vain conceit" and "valuing others above yourself" reflect on you, on your relationships, and on the perceptions people have about Jesus?

A Positive Attitude

Philippians 2:12-30

Written by Brian Croyle



Getting Started

Let's be honest – our day to day lives can sometimes offer ample reason to grumble. We can feel justified in complaining when our work environment is steeped in negativity, or when our relationships are strained, or our finances tapped. We are inundated with negative and critical messages in our media, from news commentary to Facebook posts to “reality TV”. And it would be untrue to say that there isn't valid reason to be negative about some of the problems that surround us – they're real, frequently undeserved and unfair. The problem is that, if we fall prey to the same negative mindset we find in the world around us, we no longer stand out. If we become negative, we look like everyone else. When that happens, we send a message that Christianity has nothing of value to offer to a broken and hurting world.

In Philippians 2:15, Paul describes that our goal as Christians is to be like stars – that, as children of God, we should exude the character of Christ in such a way as to shine in the midst of the darkness of the world. Our attitudes should bring light to those around us in the form of compassion, gentleness, wisdom, and encouragement. But, like stars, we can only put forth our light when we are directing our energy outwards. We don't shine from self-absorption or self-glorification, but rather from directing the love of Christ outward to those around us. A star that begins to drop in energy – to put out less heat and light – can ultimately collapse and implode under its own weight. When this occurs, a black hole forms. Its entire makeup changes. Rather than giving out, it sucks in. In place of light, we find the deepest of darkness.

Negativity and self-absorption so often go hand in hand. We become negative when we are focused on the difficulties of our own situation. We are caught in a sort of darkness, and we can suck others into that darkness without realizing it. Alternatively, true positivity is most often accompanied by thoughts of God and of others. Despite the message we might hear from countless self-help resources and a farcical SNL skit, a positive attitude is so much more than a self-focused, vague feeling that “I'm good enough, I'm smart enough, and – doggone it – people like me.” Instead, a positive attitude that cannot be shaken can only come from recognizing the truth that God is always at work in our world – in our own lives, in those of our loved ones, in every circumstance. Even in the midst of struggle and turmoil, God is tirelessly “working all things together for good” because he is relentless in His desire to bless us and mold us into the image of His Son. And this awareness can disarm the situations we feel are attacking us, robbing them of their power over us, so that we no longer need to ruminate over them. As that happens, we can more easily look beyond ourselves to recognize the ways in which we can encourage others. We once again have something of great value to offer to lost people in desperate need of grace.

Content/context:

- 1) Read Phil. 2:12-18. Notice that Paul begins this section by saying, “Therefore...”. Many years ago I was taught an important Bible study tool – that, whenever you see the word “therefore”, you need to determine what it’s “there for”. In other words, the use of the word “therefore” in the text means that what follows is related to what comes before it, often in a cause/effect or statement/response manner. The previous verses (5-11) offer one of the most powerful declarations in all of Scripture of the character and glory of Christ. Why might Paul have linked the discussion in verses 12-13 about obedience and working out one’s faith to the description of Jesus in the prior verses?
- 2) Paul makes use of an interesting paradox in these verses when he says “work out your salvation... for it is God who works in you.” In the first instance, he tells the Philippians to get to work; in the second, he tells them that God is working in them. What might these seemingly contradictory statements indicate about how we partner with God in our own spiritual development?
- 3) Now read Phil. 2:19-30. Paul writes about two different men – Timothy and Epaphroditus – who had served with him in his ministry. What common traits do you see in these two men that made them so valuable to Paul?
- 4) Paul was clearly very grateful that the Philippians had sent Epaphroditus to him as a support and encouragement. Yet he states that he feels it is necessary for him to send Epaphroditus back to the Philippians; in fact, he says he is eager to do so. Why would Paul be so willing to release someone who had become so dear to him? What does that indicate about Paul’s perspective and priorities?

Application:

- 1) Do you find grumbling and arguing prevalent in your experience today? In what ways do we as Christians differentiate ourselves when we choose not to grumble or argue?
- 2) In what areas of your own life are you susceptible to grumbling and arguing? Are non-believers around to see you when you do become negative? What needs to change so that you’ll be less likely to be that way the next time your non-Christian friends are watching?
- 3) Paul praises the Philippians in this letter, and in this section he praises two fellow workers who have walked boldly into those areas where God has called them. Who in your own life is worthy of similar praise – a friend, family member, someone at Grace? Who has stepped out in faith and integrity in a visible way that honors God and blesses others?

- 4) Timothy and Epaphroditus helped Paul, and Paul praised them in return. How do you think genuine encouragement and positive reinforcement like this influence the culture within the church? How might this kind of positive encouragement become infectious? Have you seen that happen before?

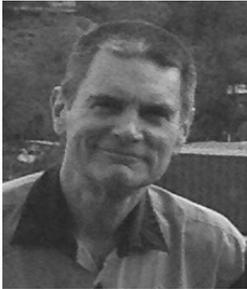
- 5) How do you think God might be calling you to look beyond yourself into unique avenues of ministry into which He has called you? In what ways have you responded, like Timothy and Epaphroditus? In what ways are you still holding back?

- 6) Paul says that God “works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill His good purpose.” If this is true (and we can trust that it is!), how can the knowledge of God’s active work in our hearts reshape and revitalize how we look at our lives and relationships?

An Undeterred Attitude

Philippians 3

Written by Rick Sims



An undeterred attitude can be a good thing. In 1946, golfer Ben Hogan returned from duty in World War II and promptly won thirteen golf tournaments. He would go on to win 37 in the three years as he rose to become golf's premier player. One foggy February morning in 1949, driving on a highway just outside Van Horn, Texas, Hogan and his wife collided head on with a Greyhound bus. Hogan threw himself across his wife to protect her. Doctors were flown in to save his life. It was doubtful if he would ever walk again. But Hogan returned to golf only eleven months after the crash. In the summer of 1950, despite severe pain, having to play 36 holes on the final day with his legs wrapped in bandages, Hogan won the U.S. Open, "the miracle at Merion". He would go on to win thirteen more tournaments, six of his nine major championships, playing a limited schedule due to his health.

An undeterred attitude can also be a very bad thing. Al-Qaeda terrorist activity around the world persists, despite the efforts of United States and other countries to combat it. Even with the killing or capturing of many of their top leaders, Al-Qaeda continues, seemingly undeterred.

An attitude of steadfast, undeterred persistence doesn't happen overnight. It develops as life happens to us. Some of us have a difficult time being persistent and steadfast in those things that really matter. This chapter gives us a bit of Paul's own story of how he came to "press on" towards God's purposes. We might not be able to match Paul's indomitable spirit and drive, but we can learn from Paul what ... or who ... we can rely on to make our lives not just meaningful, but eternal.

Rejoice in the Lord

Read Philippians 3:1

In other translations, Paul starts this chapter with "Finally ..." and then, as Paul does, he goes on for two more chapters! In all translations Paul next tells us to "Rejoice in the Lord!" Paul often encourages us to rejoice. But what does he mean to rejoice in the Lord?

The first four passages express joy in obeying and worshipping God, foretelling his promises, and being blessed with children. These are times when it is pretty easy to rejoice in the Lord.

- *Think of a time when you rejoiced. How did you include God in your joy? If you didn't include Him, how can you the next time?*

Paul says "whatever happens", rejoice in the Lord. The last two passages describe times when it was difficult to be joyful but even in these situations, Nehemiah said "for the joy in the Lord is your strength" and Habakkuk said "yet I will rejoice in the Lord".

- *What do you think about rejoicing in God during tough times? How do we do that? How might rejoicing in God during good times help us through the tough times? How would it "safeguard our faith"?*

Rejoice in the Lord

1 Chronicles 16:7-36
Isaiah 61:10
1 Samuel 2:1-2
Luke 1:46-47
Nehemiah 8:1-12
Habakkuk 3:17-19

Cut to the Heart

Genesis 17:1-14
Deuteronomy 10:12-16
Isaiah 29:13
Jeremiah 9:1-26

Acts 15:1-21
Galatians 2:11-16
Galatians 6:12-16
Romans 2:25-29
Romans 4:1-13

Cut to the Heart

Read Philippians 3:2-3

The dogs Paul refers to are probably folks who professed to be Christians but insisted that Jewish law required that Christian non-Jews should still be circumcised. Where did this circumcision thing come from?

The first Old Testament passage tells of the covenant God created with Israel and the role of circumcision. The other OT passages tell us what God desired from His people and His disappointment in their response.

- *What did God ask his people to do in Gen 17:9?*

In Gen 17-10?

- *What were God's desires and warnings in the other OT passages? What is an uncircumcised heart? (Jeremiah 9:26)?*

We see above that circumcision like many things in the Jewish law became more about obeying the law than having a relationship with God. Circumcision also divided the young church as our New Testament readings show. Even Peter struggled with it.

- *In the first two NT passages how did the early church leaders solve the circumcision issue? How was God included in their decisions?*
- *What do the other NT passages say about circumcision, obedience, our hearts, and our relationship with God? How does "who we are" change what we do and why we do it?*

A Glowing Resume ...

Acts 7:54-60
Acts 8:1-3

A Glowing Resume ...

Read Philippians 3:4-6

In the previous section we heard Paul warn of the evil dogs and their obsession with relying on "human effort". In this section Paul lists his impeccable Jewish credentials when he was just such a person. The readings for this section describe Paul when he was Saul, a fanatic Jewish Pharisee who had an undeterred attitude for evil. In fact, Saul would have made a great leader of Al Qaeda. It is likely Saul recited these same credentials to the people of Jerusalem as he was beating them or throwing them in prison.

- *To be undeterred, there must be deterrents. List the deterrents that Saul faced in his evil quests. What was the most formidable?*

... is Garbage

Acts 9:1-22
John 17:1-3

... is Garbage

Read Philippians 3:7-11

The reading for this section is the story of Paul's transformation from Saul, with an undeterred attitude for evil, to Paul, with an undeterred attitude for good. Once we know the whole story, we see more than a small amount of

sarcasm in Paul's "resume" from the previous section. His words above show how his passion was turned 180 degrees from evil to great good... great God.

- *Are you as passionate as Paul about something you do? Can we keep our best from being garbage? As you do your best, how can God use you?*

- *In his new life, with an undeterred attitude for good, what deterrents did Paul face? What was the most formidable? How did he deal with those deterrents? As we strive to serve God, what deterrents do we face?*

- *Paul sees even his good works as garbage compared to knowing Jesus Christ? In John 17:1-3 Jesus tells us why knowing Him really matters. How do we get to know Jesus? What can you do right now to get to know Him a little better?*

Press On!

Read Philippians 3:12-21

So we might never be as undeterred as Paul. But we can let the joy in the Lord be our strength. We can allow God to circumcise our hearts. And as we recognize that some (or all!) of our glowing resume might need to be thrown away, we can also take comfort in what Paul tells us...

- that we are a work in progress
 - that we can't do this without each other
 - that we will disagree
 - that there will be good examples
 - and bad examples
- ... and that it's all worth it, not because of what we do, but Who we do it for.

A Content Attitude

Philippians 4

Written by Christina Walker



Getting Started

In the introduction to this series, Dave said, “Having the right attitude is so important, because our mindsets dictate how we see life, how we view the circumstances that come our way. One person can go through a pleasant circumstance and be thrilled; another can go through the same and be indifferent. One can go through a tough circumstance and be resilient; another, overwhelmed.”

Below is the story of a man named Horatio Spafford who lived in the 1800’s. Notice how he responded to his tough circumstances.

As a young man, Spafford had established a successful legal practice in Chicago. Some months prior to the Chicago fire of 1871, he had invested heavily in real estate on the shore of Lake Michigan, and his holdings were wiped out by the disaster. Desiring a rest for his wife and four daughters as well as wishing to support some Christian ministry happening at the time, he planned a European trip for his family in November of 1873. Due to unexpected last minutes business developments, he had to remain in Chicago, but sent his wife and four daughters on the boat as scheduled. He expected to follow in a few days.

On November 22, the ship was struck and sank in 12 minutes. Several days later the survivors finally landed in Wales, and Mrs. Spafford cabled her husband, “Saved alone.” Shortly afterward he left by ship to join his bereaved wife. It is thought that in the sea near the area where his four daughters had drowned, Spafford penned the text that so significantly described his own personal grief: “When sorrows like sea billows roll...”¹

Take a moment to read (or sing) through the first two verses of the hymn that Horatio wrote on that ship: “It is well with my soul.”

*When peace like a river attendeth my way, when sorrows like sea billows roll,
Whatever my lot, thou hast taught me to say, ‘It is well, it is well with my soul.’
It is well with my soul. It is well with my soul.*

*Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come, let this blest assurance control
That Christ has regarded my helpless estate and hath shed his own blood for my soul.
It is well with my soul. It is well with my soul.*

1. What stands out to you from the story or hymn?
2. How do the words of verse 2 explain and support the words of verse 1?

Exploring Scripture

Read Philippians 4

¹ Kenneth W. Osbeck, *101 Hymn Stories* (Kregel Publications, 1982) 127.

1. In verse 11, Paul tells the Philippians that he has learned to be content.
 - a. What does contentment look like to you?
 - b. Do you think some people are just more naturally contented than others? Why or why not?

2. Notice verse 13: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."
 - a. This verse is often quoted by itself. If possible, give an example of a situation where you used this verse or heard someone else apply it.
 - b. Putting the verse in Biblical context, how does that color the meaning? Does it support how it was used in your answer to 2a?
 - c. Why might Christ's strength be the secret to contentedness?

3. Look back at verses 4-9. If we were to follow Paul's commands to rejoice, be gentle, pray, be thankful, think about true and honorable things, etc., how could that impact our ability to be content?

Application

4. When Paul compares having plenty and being in want he uses the example of food – being well fed and going hungry.
 - a. Think back to Horatio Spafford. What were some examples of plenty and want in his life?
 - b. What are some other areas of life where we can experience plenty or want? (Brainstorm as many as you can and write them down because you will need the list for the next question.)

5. Take about two minutes on your own to answer to following.
 - a. Working from the list your group just created, reflect on any places in your life where you are struggling with contentment.
 - b. Ask God to reveal the causes of that struggle. Write down what comes to mind.

6. As a small group or in groups of 2-3 spend some time in prayer.
 - a. Share with each other your answers to the previous question.
 - b. Pray for one another, asking God to bring whatever is needed into your life that will strengthen you (Phil. 4:13) and teach you contentedness.