

STUDY 4. NOTES FOR LEADERS

The Philippian letter is amazingly positive and today's study will be looking at some of the reasons for this. However there is one remarkable change of tone in Chapter 3:2 where Paul, as he does in other letters, goes into negative mode. Some commentators, seeking to explain the change of tone, feel that there might be two letters rolled into one and here we have a part of another more negative letter. Another suggestion is that Paul heard about the Jewish problem while he was dictating the letter and immediately responded to the issue.

Note how Paul thanks God for the church, and as noted in the sermon, even thanks God for attributes of the church which may be sometimes excessive. Take for example 1 Thess 1:3-4 where Paul thanks God for their faithfulness and endurance and then goes on to encourage them to endure until the coming of the Lord.

A major part of the study will focus on Philippians 4:4-9.

"Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you."

Some key words:

Rejoice. *An inner attitude of confidence in the goodness and presence of God. It could be a farewell statement. "Good bye...and be confident of the Lord's presence." Paul uses joy and its cognates frequently throughout the letter.*

Bigheartedness. *Is almost impossible to translate. "Let people know of your generosity" is one attempt and seems to fit the context.*

Guard *is a military term which would have been meaningful to a colony where there was a high percentage of army personnel.*

Think. *Let these qualities influence one's decisions and way of life.*

1. **Think about the way that you pray. How would you rate yourself in:**

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|--|--------------------------------|
| a. Praise | Never.....Sometimes.....Always |
| b. Praying for myself | Never.....Sometimes.....Always |
| c. Praying for others | Never.....Sometimes.....Always |
| d. Praying for my church & its leaders | Never.....Sometimes.....Always |
| e. Confession | Never.....Sometimes.....Always |
| f. Thanksgiving | Never.....Sometimes.....Always |

2. **See Philippians 1:3**

- What are the "ingredients" of prayer that Paul includes in this passage?
- Why do you think he emphasizes thanksgiving?
- How would thanksgiving change the way that we see ourselves and our world?

3. **See the beginning of each of Paul's letters.**

- What are the various attributes of the congregations that he thanks God for?
- Did you find a letter that did not start with thanksgiving?
- If Paul was starting a letter to our church what would he thank God for?

To get this question going divide your group into smaller groups, allocate them letters from Paul and get the groups to identify the thanksgiving aspects at the beginning of each letter. The group with Galatians might have a struggle!

Note comments in the introduction above. Paul often thanks God for a quality he wants them to either develop or modify. Take for example the beginning of the first letter to the Corinthians where he thanks God for their overt spirituality...which he later wants them to modify.

4. See Philippians 1:9.

- a. Paul prays that their love might increase. They had been so generous to Paul! Why would he pray that? Surely they had already displayed love!
- b. If Paul was thanking God for a quality in our church what would it be?
- c. If Paul was offering a prayer for our church what do you think he would pray?

a. There are hints of disunity in the church and Paul could be praying for unity. He could also be asking that the quality that they already had might increase. He could have been asking that their love of God might also increase.

Prayer and Anxiety.

5. Read Philippians 4:4-9.

- a. Which one of the following would best describe you?
 - i. I get anxious about anything, and I feel anxious most of the time.
 - ii. I only get anxious about certain issues and feel anxious some of the time.
 - iii. I just go with the flow!
- b. Does excessive anxiety affect your health or your relationships?
- c. How does Paul relate anxiety and prayer together?

Note how Paul introduces attitudes before he starts to discuss prayer. Positive rejoicing and letting people know of their big heartedness or generosity.

6.
 - a. What parts of these verses have worked for you?
 - b. Have you ever experienced that deep peace that Paul associates with prayer, or are you hoping for that to happen?
 - c. What does Paul mean by “God’s peace will keep guard over your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus” (v.7)?

c. Some suggest that this verse means that God will speak when our minds start heading towards anxiety mode and will spell out the boundaries on our how we handle our emotions.

7. Read verses 8-9.

How do these verses relate to prayer, peace and anxiety?

Paul encourages thought patterns about the positives rather than the negatives. In this context, this seems to imply that this could also be a source of peace. Could it also be that Paul is encouraging, as a part of a prayer meditation, reflection on the character and person of Jesus Christ? The qualities certainly describe him.

8.
 - a. Is there anything that is making you anxious right now that you could ask the group to pray about?
 - b. Is there anything that you feel you would like to thank God for?