1717 BIBLE STUDIES

"Your Word Is Truth" (John 17:17)

OVERVIEW

Study: Philippians
Theme: Speak Up!

Overview: Philippians is an epistle of joy, written by Paul from prison. In this unit, students will learn from Philippians that believers speak up for Christ not only with their words, but also by being God's children, by living with Christ's values, and by trusting him enough to give generously, so that the gospel moves forward.

HOW TO USE

Each week has a **lesson aim**, **lesson text**, and **supplemental text**.



Tabs indicate the week of each lesson.

Each week features three sections: **Study**, **Application**, and **Discovery.**



Use the **Discovery** questions to study, discuss, and apply the Scripture passages in a group or class.

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INTRODUCTION

Author

The apostle Paul wrote this letter, with Timothy joining him in the greeting (Philippians 1:1). It is one of Paul's prison epistles, written while he was "in chains for Christ" (1:13).

Audience

Paul wrote to the church in Philippi, a Roman colony in the region of Macedonia. Paul had planted the church on his second missionary journey, beginning with Lydia and her household and a Philippian jailer and his family (Acts 16:11-40). The Philippians had been generous partners in Paul's ministry from the very first day (Philippians 1:5; 4:15, 16).

Date

Paul likely wrote Philippians around AD 60–62, during his house arrest in Rome (Acts 28:16, 30, 31). His mention of the palace guard and of "Caesar's household" (Philippians 1:13; 4:22) fits this setting.

Setting

Paul was a prisoner awaiting the outcome of his case, unsure whether he would be released or put to death (Philippians 1:19-26). Epaphroditus had brought the Philippians' gifts to Paul and was returning home with this letter (2:25-30; 4:18).

Theme

Speak up! Some form of the word *joy* appears 16 times in this short letter. Paul rejoiced that "Christ is preached" (Philippians 1:18), and he called believers to hold firmly to the word of life and "shine like stars" (2:15, 16), to press on toward the goal (3:14), and to give generously, trusting that "God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus" (4:19).

Why Study Philippians?

Philippians shows that believers speak up for Christ in many ways: by proclaiming the gospel in any circumstance, by living as God's children without grumbling, by valuing Christ above everything else, and by giving generously. This study calls Christians to speak up so that the gospel advances and Christ is honored, "whether by life or by death" (Philippians 1:20).

STUDY CONTENT

WEEK 1: Philippians 1:12-21

WEEK 2: Philippians 2:12-18

WEEK 3: Philippians 3:7-21

WEEK 4: Philippians 4:10-20

WEEK ONE

LESSON AIM: **Speak up to advance the gospel.**

STUDY: Philippians

THEME: Speak Up!

LESSON TEXT: Philippians 1:12-21

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Acts 8:4-8, 26-39

CHRIST IS PREACHED, REJOICE! REJOICE!

BY MARK SCOTT

The theme for the 2015 NACC was "We Speak." President Mike Baker based the convention theme on Acts 4:20. Speaking is not the only way to advance the kingdom, but it is a primary way. John R. W. Stott said, "We speak because God has spoken" (*Between Two Worlds*).

In these next four lessons we will stress speaking up for Christ. We will do so from yet another of Paul's prison epistles, Philippians. This is indeed an epistle of joy. Some form of the word *joy* appears 16 times in these four chapters. From Paul's point of view, when Christ is spoken of, there is much rejoicing. Following the opening greeting (vv. 1, 2) and the typical giving of thanks and prayer (vv. 3-11), Paul brought the Philippian church up to speed on his "prison ministry."

Good Things in Bad Places

Philippians 1:12-14

Paul's incarceration did what being on the outside of prison could never do. There are no accidents with God. Paul's house arrest served to *advance* (drive forward) the gospel. Two advances are mentioned in verses 13 and 14. The first advance was that the palace guard and everyone else knew why Paul was in prison. It could not be clearer. Paul was in *chains* (bound) for Christ. While some might have assumed this, it is hard to imagine that Paul had not taken advantage of this "captive" audience and spoken up for Christ while in prison.

The second advance was that fellow believers had been emboldened in their faith as they heard about Paul's courage in these less-than-best circumstances. The Roman Christians had become *confident* (totally persuaded) in the Lord. Their chests expanded in bravery. In addition to that they were daring to proclaim the gospel (*word*) without fear. Boldness is contagious.

Good Things from Divisive People

Philippians 1:15-18

But Paul's prison experience was not a panacea. Something troubled Paul in prison more than being chained to a soldier or wearing an ankle brace. It was people—people with less-than-pure motives. These were not the Judaizers that brought Paul such angst (see Galatians 5:12; Philippians 3:2). Evidently these people who spoke up for Jesus did well with the content of their message. But their motives were not sanctified. They preached the gospel but in such a way as to undercut Paul's ministry.

They preached out of *envy* (jealousy or pain—this word is always used in a negative sense in the New Testament) and *rivalry* (strife). Not every preacher was bent in this direction (some did preach out of *goodwill*), but some were, and they made life miserable for Paul. They preached Christ out of *selfish ambition* and *not sincerely* (thus, duplicitous). They evidently did this knowing that it would cause Paul grief. And it did. But Paul played the bigger man. One test of genuine Christian character is the ability to rejoice in things going forward that do not have one's personal stamp on them. What mattered to Paul was not his affirmation but Christ's proclamation. He admitted that these divisive people were preaching from false motives. But the only thing that mattered to Paul was that the gospel message was preached. That brought Paul great joy.

Good Things with Deliverance or Death

Philippians 1:19-21

Paul circled back to the topic of his incarceration, to which he alluded in verse 7 and dealt with more directly in verses 12-14. He expressed a confidence of being *delivered* (saved) from his imprisonment. This confidence was rooted in two things: the church's *prayers* (a word that refers to a specific—not generic—request) and the *provision* (support or help, as in having all the instruments of the orchestra in place to play a piece of music) of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. Paul was conscious that God was at work for his release from prison.

But Paul's larger concern was whether he would have the sufficient *courage* (boldness) to face death. He *eagerly expected* (strained the neck) not to be ashamed by either deliverance or death. He just wanted to ensure that he would honor Christ either way. Verse 21 is one of the highwater marks of this joyful epistle. It is probably read as much as Psalm 23 at funerals. Paul's life, whether in or out of jail, consisted of living for Christ. But were he to die that would be *gain* (a financial term in Paul's world). Paul said something very similar in 2 Corinthians 5:6-9. He remained in good courage. He would like to be with Christ because that is far better. Regardless, he would strive to please Jesus and speak up for him.

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GIVE ME JESUS

BY DAVID FAUST

The classic songs known as spirituals sprang from the passionate faith of African-Americans oppressed by slavery who lifted up their voices while working in the fields. Frederick Douglass, the former slave who became a prominent author and speaker, said spirituals "breathed the prayers and complaints of souls suffering the most cruel anguish." Douglass admitted, "I often found myself in tears listening to them."

Me, too. How could our hearts not be touched by soulful songs like "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" and "Steal Away to Jesus"? One of my favorites is the heartfelt spiritual that repeats, "In the morning when I rise, give me Jesus." The song's last verse says, "You may have all of this world. Give me Jesus."

Nothing Else Matters So Much

I wish we would get back to such noble simplicity in today's church. Our children don't need the latest video games as much as they need Jesus. The ninth-grader with insecurity written all over her face needs Jesus most of all. So do the elderly man and woman who make their way to church hand-in-hand each Sunday. So do the young husband and wife struggling in a rocky marriage, and the guy who comes to work on Monday morning hung over from a weekend of partying. They may not say it out loud, but something in their hearts is crying out, "Give me Jesus." The living Christ is the unspoken desire of our neighbors next door and of those dwelling in the far-flung nations of the earth. They don't need flashy church programs nearly as much as they need Jesus.

When the apostle Paul wrote to the Philippians, he mentioned Christ three times in the first three verses of his letter (Philippians 1:1-3). He looked forward to the day of Christ (v. 6), cared for others with the affection of Christ (v. 8), and encouraged his readers to bear "the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ" (v. 11). Paul relied on Christ when he faced criticism and other forms of suffering. As the world flounders in darkness and struggles to find its way, there's no better advice than "fixing our eyes on Jesus" (Hebrews 12:2). Christ is the bullseye of the target, the hub of the wheel, the focal point of the gospel, the light of the world.

Worship leader, when you prepare songs for us to hear and sing, keep in mind the weary souls who will be present this Sunday, and please—give them Jesus. Sunday school teacher, when children walk into your classroom and look you in the eye this weekend, give them Jesus. Preacher, when you stand up to speak, be prepared, be clear, be relevant—but most of all, point us to Jesus. Yes, let's make sure our church buildings, grounds, and parking lots look sharp, the restrooms are clean, and the website is up-to-date—but most of all, let's give people Jesus.

The apostle Paul would have liked how the last verse of that great old spiritual says, "When I come to die, give me Jesus." Paul summed up his personal value system by asserting, "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21). While we live and when it's time to die, what could matter more? You can have all of this world. Give me Jesus.

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QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

Use one or both of these questions to introduce the lesson:

- What is it like to watch someone suffer courageously or battle fearlessly (some examples: a cancer diagnosis, the death of a child, or a situation against all odds)?
- What impact has it had on you or someone you know to witness steadfast bravery and boldness in the midst of persecution?

Read Philippians 1:12-14

1. At this point in Church history, Paul was the main evangelistic leader outside of Jerusalem for the spread of the Christian movement. Discuss how it could be possible for Paul's imprisonment "to advance the gospel."

2. Every Christian has reasons for not sharing their faith: fear, rejection, not enough knowledge or experience, embarrassment, family dynamics . . . the list goes on. The Greek word *desmous* means "chains, bonds, impediments, or infirmities" and is mentioned more than once in this short passage. Talk about some common *desmous* you face and strategize together as a group how to overcome them.

3. Many believers were encouraged by Paul's chains and became fearless in speaking God's Word. Others were not. Why do you think some people become emboldened to speak up while others are disheartened and crumble under persecution? What would you do if suddenly a massive persecution began around you?

Read Philippians 1:19-21

4. What did the prayers of the Philippians have to do with Paul's chains and his deliverance?

5. Paul talked about Christ being exalted in his body by life or by death. What does it mean when he wrote, "to live is Christ and to die is gain"?

Read Philippians 1:15-18

6. What does it mean to defend the gospel? Does it necessarily include arguing?

7. Suggest some creative ways Christians can use today's opportunities and technology to "preach Christ" with goodwill and respect in order to advance the kingdom.

8. Read Acts 8:4-8 and 26-39. Philip was among the Christians who had been scattered by persecution. God led him to Samaria and then into the desert, places that would have been unfamiliar and perhaps uncomfortable. What were the results of Philip's experiences? How uncomfortable would you be willing to get for others to change their lives for eternity and rejoice in the Lord?

Close your group study with prayer, using the following as a guide. Lord, help us to speak up and move the gospel forward, no matter the circumstances in which we find ourselves. Give us boldness and bravery, Holy Spirit strength and submission, even when we walk through deserts and valleys. Help us to rejoice as we share the good news courageously and fearlessly!

WEEK TWO

LESSON AIM: **Speak up by holding out the Word in your life.**

STUDY: Philippians

THEME: Speak Up!

LESSON TEXT: Philippians 2:12-18

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: 1 John 3:1-3

SPEAK UP BY BEING HIS CHILDREN

BY MARK SCOTT

Words matter. God used them to create the world (Genesis 1:3). Jesus used them to give life to the world (John 6:63). The apostles used them to save the world (Acts 11:14). That being said, deeds also matter. Not all speaking is voicing words. Talk must be walked for consistent witness. The old saying is true, "Your actions are speaking so loudly I cannot hear what you are saying."

Believers speak up for God in the midst of a *warped* (crooked or bent due to dryness) and *crooked* (twisted or perverted) generation by the witness of their lives. Paul addressed this calling to the Philippians following the beautiful hymn about the selfless Christ (2:5-11) and preceding the examples of selfless Timothy and Epaphroditus (2:19-30).

His Children Work Out What God Works In

Philippians 2:12, 13

The word *therefore* causes the reader to go back to Paul's call for unity and selflessness (2:2-4). By his salvific power God had worked into the believers encouragement, comfort, common sharing, tenderness, and compassion (v. 1). These Christian virtues are most evident when they are lived out. Paul seemed confident that the Philippians, whom he referred to as *dear friends* (beloved) and *children* (vv. 12, 14), would *obey* (hear) him whether he was with them or not.

One way God's children speak up for him is by working out what God has worked in. Like a person who worked yeast into dough, God worked salvation into the believers' lives. The word for *work* in both verses is where we get the English *ergonomic* (as in an ergonomic chair). But what God worked in, believers must work out—in *fear* (phobia) and *trembling* (trauma or profound reverence). This is somewhat of a paradox in the Bible. God does the providing of our salvation. But we must do the partaking. Certainly God made salvation possible, but there are what are called "The Imperatives of Salvation" (essay by Seth Wilson in *Learning from Jesus*). We are not saved by anything we do (Galatians 2:16; Ephesians 2:8). Yet, we must do many things to be saved (Matthew 19:17; Luke 10:27, 28; Acts 2:38; 16:31). Perhaps the unspoken entity here is the Holy Spirit. It is God's Spirit working in us that unites the divine and the human efforts in salvation. Divine enablement goes hand-in-hand with human responsibility.

His Children Avoid Grumbling to Gain Their Witness

Philippians 2:14-17

Sometimes we speak by what we do not say. We do not *grumble* (murmur from discontent as in Exodus 16:7, 8, 12) nor do we *argue* (dialogue with evil thoughts). Grandma used to say, "Sometimes the best thing to say is to say nothing at all." When we hold our tongues (James 3:1-12) we can be *blameless* (above reproach) and *pure* (without deceit or defilement). When people notice our restraint, we might just gain their ears. Being *without fault* (spot; blemish; not diluted; a technical term to designate something amiss in a sacrifice) takes stumbling blocks out of the way of our witness.

If the Philippians could avoid grumbling, two things would result. First, they would *shine like stars* as they would hold firmly to the word of life. The simile is easily understood. Stars make their presence known though they are millions of miles away. But there might also be a vague reference to the Abrahamic covenant here as well (Genesis 15:5; Hebrews 11:12). Regardless, believers can *hold firmly* (as in giving someone a cup from which to drink) the message of life by not grumbling.

A second result would be that Paul could appropriately *boast* about the church when Jesus returns (*the day of Christ*). Paul's ministry with the Philippians would not be compromised in any way. Their witness by what they would not say would cause Paul to realize that he did not run or labor in vain.

Paul was not asking too much of the Philippians. He was glad to spend and be spent for them (see 2 Corinthians 12:15). He expressed this in terms of a *drink offering* on the sacrifice that the Philippians had put forth. Paul used this self-disclosing metaphor more than once (2 Timothy 4:7). He seemed overjoyed to be used by God this way. In fact, in these last two verses Paul used a form of the word *joy* four times (*glad* and *rejoice*). He was filled with joy, and he wanted the Philippians to be filled with joy, too. There are few joys greater than that of putting one's head on the pillow at night knowing that, on that day Christ's mission was advanced through speaking up by "being."

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GET OFF THE GRUMBLE TRAIN

BY DAVID FAUST

Are you a passenger on the Grumble Train? Maybe you've never seen a Grumble Train, but you've heard it chugging along and you've sniffed the foul-smelling smoke it belches out.

Philippians 2:14 says, "Do everything without grumbling or arguing." That may be the most frequently broken commandment in the New Testament! We've turned grumbling into a way of life. And arguing? That's become an art form. What do you hear more at work—grumbling or encouragement? Are petty gripes and complaints common in your family and your church? These days, the Grumble Train is a popular way to travel.

It's not that Christians have to be soft and sweet all the time. God calls us to be fully engaged in the arena of ideas, in touch with the hard questions swirling around us. We need to think critically, and when necessary we should call out false, foolish, and faithless ideas and those who promote them. But that doesn't mean being cranky all the time.

If you struggle with a negative, complaining attitude, here are some ways to get off the Grumble Train.

Take the sin of grumbling seriously. Like dirt that clogs a waterpipe, constant griping crowds out the joy of the Lord, blocks the flow of God's Spirit, and repels others. Why should unbelievers be attracted to the gospel if Christ's followers are just as cranky and negative as those who don't know the Lord? Chronic discontent betrays a lack of trust in God's goodness. That's why both the Old and New Testaments treat grumbling as a serious sin. Remember how the Lord fed the Israelites with miraculous manna? This heaven-sent honey-flavored bread didn't satisfy the people; they complained because they missed the salad bar they enjoyed back in Egypt (Numbers 11:4-9). The people's non-stop grumbling discouraged their leader, Moses, and invited God's judgment. Scripture lumps grumbling along with other egregious sins like idolatry and sexual immorality (1 Corinthians 10:6-10). Grumbling isn't okay simply because everybody does it.

Cultivate a grateful heart. Instead of grumbling, we should join with David and declare, "Praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all his benefits" (Psalm 103:2). Someone has said, "When you drink from the stream, remember the spring." As a classic hymn says, "Praise God from whom all blessings flow." Instead of griping about our dislikes, we should "give thanks in all circumstances" (1 Thessalonians 5:17). I like the way author Ann Bradford puts it: "Tell the negative committee that meets inside your head to sit down and shut up."

Be an anti-grumbling force. "Let your conversation be always full of grace" (Colossians 4:6). Set a positive example in your spoken words and what you share on social media. When conversations degenerate into grumbling and negative criticism, push back. Don't tolerate whining and gossip. Often, it's better to remain silent instead of throwing more verbal gasoline on the fire. I agree with the quip, "Sometimes, instead of a Chapstick, we should use a glue stick!"

The Grumble Train keeps chugging along, but we don't have to be passengers on it. In a "warped and crooked generation," we shine "like stars in the sky" when we speak "only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs" (Philippians 2:15; Ephesians 4:29). I can't picture Jesus riding on the Grumble Train.

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QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

Use one or both of these questions to introduce the lesson:

- Character refers to a person's mental, moral, and ethical qualities. We are defined by it and our reputation is made from it. What does it mean to have blameless character?
- Think about someone who is widely viewed as a role model (locally or internationally, good or bad, in politics, entertainment, sports, music, ministry, etc.). How effective are they in representing themselves or the organizations/nations/industries they serve?

Read Philippians 2:12, 13

1. Parents love to hear that their kids behave well in their absence. What do you think motivated Paul to write verse 12?

2. In what context is Paul writing about obedience here? (One clue is to look at the previous paragraph.) What do you think a perfect model of obedience would look like and how would it be applied?

3. Explore together what it means "to work out your salvation with fear and trembling" and what roles you and God have "to act according to his good purpose."

Read Philippians 2:14-18

4. What's the difference between complaining and respectfully letting people know something isn't working well? What types of complaints are beneficial or helpful and can move your church forward in a positive way?

5. As children of God, we "hold firmly to the word of life" every day. What does it mean to be blameless? Discuss what effect blamelessness and purity (in conduct, speech, life, and love) have on Christian character and testimony.

6. Paul didn't want to run or labor in vain for the Philippians. He wanted to boast and rejoice about them one day! What do you think Paul meant by this statement (v. 16) and what kind of warning does it provide for us?

7. Read 1 John 3:1-3. We are children of God! Doesn't that make you want to cheer? One day we will be like him when we see him as he is! How blessed are we to have hope. Discuss ways to be active in offering the hope of Jesus to people in your life this week.

Conclude your group time with prayer, using the following as a guide. Thank you, Jesus. You humbled yourself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross—so that we could be adopted into the family of God. Help us to purify ourselves and become more like you, to be blameless and pure and shine like stars in this crooked and depraved generation, and to faithfully hold out your Word to those around us.

WEEK THREE

LESSON AIM: **Speak up by living with Christ's values.**

STUDY: Philippians

THEME: Speak Up!

LESSON TEXT: Philippians 3:7-21

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Matthew 5:3-12

SPEAK UP BY BEING DIFFERENT

BY MARK SCOTT

In many ways, believers are similar to unbelievers. Both are made in God's image and therefore have dignity and worth. Both are fallen due to sin and therefore have need of redemption. But they are also very different. They have chosen to follow different paths. They have chosen different lifestyles. They will have different destinies. The Bible knows this contrast—the family of Seth and the way of Cain; Israel and the nations; the church and the world; Jerusalem and Babylon; Heaven and Hell.

Paul thoroughly understood this difference in Philippians 3. He was different than he used to be (vv. 3-6). He was different than he would be (vv. 12-14, 20, 21). He was certainly different from those who were enemies of the cross of Christ (v. 18). One voice that Christians have is that of a different lifestyle. While it is not right to look at others with smug self-righteousness, forgetting the rock of grace from which we were hewn, it is proper to speak up by being different.

Different Values

Philippians 3:7-11

Paul had grounds for boasting (3:3-6; Romans 11:1; 2 Corinthians 11:16-30). It is one thing to jettison bad things from your life. It is another thing to jettison good things from your life in light of superior values. That was what Paul was willing to do. The *gains* (Philippians 3:3-6) were now *considered* (reckoned or calculated) as *loss* (damaged or detrimental). In fact, Paul considered everything as loss due to the *surpassing* (superior) worth of knowing Christ. Paul even looked at what he had valued as *garbage* (refuse or what was thrown to the dogs). He clearly had embraced different values.

The new *gain* (normally a financial term) was found totally in Christ. His faith in Christ had appropriated a new way to be right with God that was entirely different than his former way of law keeping. Even though Paul had been a believer for around 30 years when he penned these words, his different values showed up in wanting to *know* Christ. True knowledge of Jesus would show up in resurrection living, the refining power of suffering, and arriving at his eschatological home. Different values are a sanity check on these realities.

Different Goals

Philippians 3:12-14

Dallas Willard said, "Grace is not opposed to striving; it is opposed to earning." But even then, striving is not arriving. To arrive at our goal demands being "taken hold of" by Jesus. Once that happens, we *press on* (to aggressively hunt down as in trapping an animal). The famous preacher, Harry Emerson Fosdick, had a sermon entitled, "The Power to See It Through." Paul had that power because of the overwhelming glory of that goal.

To reach this goal two things were necessary. First, there must be a determined posture of *forgetting* the past. Paul had quite a past to forget (Acts 22:4, 5; 26:9-11; Galatians 1:13, 14; 1 Timothy 1:12-17). Second, there must be a *straining* (extending, reaching, or spreading out). The greater the strain, the more the prize is appreciated. Paul did not identify exactly what this *prize* is. But the word *goal* means "end of the race." Thus, the call came from the God of Heaven, and Heaven seemed to be the goal.

Different Examples

Philippians 3:15-21

In this paragraph Paul contrasted two different examples —the mature believers and the enemies of the cross. Paul was confident that God would *make clear* (reveal) to the mature believers how they could live to attain this prize. To do so they would have to *live up to* (hold true to the basics) where they had arrived. Diligence is involved in this since most Christians already know more of their Bible than they are living out. Paul's *example* (to make a mark by striking several blows) and others like him would help the Philippians to live different lives.

In contrast to the mature believers were the enemies of the cross. Paul used four expressions to describe them. (These are different people from the Judaizers spoken of in 3:2.) Their *destiny* (end) is *destruction* (a state of death). Their god is their *stomach* (they live by their lusts). Their *glory* is in their *shame* (their character is their disgust). Their mind is set on earthly things (in contrast to Heaven). The difference between these two examples is clear.

To this colony of Heaven in Philippi, Paul reminded them of where their real *citizenship* was located. From Heaven the all-powerful Savior will come and affirm that the "different ones" chose well and will experience an extreme makeover so as to look like the one who saved them.

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PRESSING ON TOWARD WHAT'S AHEAD

BY DAVID FAUST

Josh McDowell has spoken on hundreds of college campuses, and millions of readers have appreciated his books, including *More Than a Carpenter* and *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*. So when a group from our church had the chance to eat supper with him recently before one of his speaking engagements, we welcomed the opportunity.

I asked Josh, "How have questions about faith changed over the years?" He responded, "People used to ask, 'How do I know it's true?' Now they ask, 'What gives you the right to say it?'" In his view, our culture has moved from defining truth intellectually (what we think) to defining it emotionally (how we feel), and now it's increasingly common to define truth as behavior (how we act) so that however individuals choose to live, that is their "truth."

McDowell observes, "Because of the Internet, youth culture is pretty much the same now in every nation. Students all over the world listen to the same music, watch the same movies, talk and dress much the same way. They're strongly influenced by American values." I thought, *With that kind of influence, what an unprecedented opportunity for young believers to impact the world for Christ!* However, if we don't believe, model, and pass along a well-informed and biblically grounded faith in Jesus, future generations (not only in America, but all over the world) will pay a stiff price.

Later someone asked Josh, "What advice would you give today's high school or college student?" Without hesitation, he answered, "Stop looking at pornography." His website (www.Josh.org) lists disturbing data gathered by the Barna Research Group. For example:

- Today, twice as many young adults ages 25-30 first viewed pornography before puberty than did the previous generation.
- Teens and young adults have a cavalier attitude toward porn. Ninety percent of teens and 96 percent of young adults say they talk about porn with their friends in a neutral, accepting, or encouraging way. Only one in 20 young adults and one in 10 teens say their friends consider viewing pornography a bad thing. They consider not recycling more immoral than viewing pornography.
- "Sexting" is increasingly common. Sixty-six percent of teens and young adults have received a sexually explicit image and 41 percent have sent one.

What do these troubling statistics say about the church and the way we interact with the next generation? We can't go back to a simpler time; nor should we resign from our task as disciple-makers. The apostle Paul didn't focus on the past; he stayed busy "straining toward what is ahead" and pressing "on toward the goal" (Philippians 3:13, 14). Psalm 78:4 presents a noble goal: "We will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, his power, and the wonders he has done." I hope the upcoming generation won't merely equal the spiritual achievements of past generations, but surpass them. I pray that the next generation will "not be like their ancestors—a stubborn and rebellious generation, whose hearts were not loyal to God, whose spirits were not faithful to him" (v. 8)—but will be more fruitful and faithful than believers were in the past.

Parents, grandparents, youth ministers, and student leaders, we can't give up on the next generation. By pressing on and passing on the faith, we help to shape what's ahead.

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QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

Use one or both of these questions to introduce the lesson:

- What personal skills or qualities do you rely on each day? What makes you qualified (or not qualified) for what you do at school, work, home, or in ministry? What holds you back?
- What do you value most and where do you find your identity?

Read Philippians 3:7-11

1. Paul was an important man in his day, well-known, well-connected, well-educated, and well-off. How would it affect your life if, like Paul, everything that previously mattered to you—your reputation, accolades, honors, family name, education, history—no longer mattered?

2. Talk about what it means to count everything "but rubbish so that I may gain Christ and be found in him."

3. What does God value? According to the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3-13, what kind of people are "blessed" people? How do you think your life measures up to this standard?

Read Philippians 3:12-16

4. The phrase "to take hold of" in v. 13 comes from the Greek word *katalambanó*, which comes from two words meaning "to come down from a higher plane" and "to aggressively take or seize in a firm manner." How far did Jesus have to come for you? Discuss what *katalambanó* looked like in your life when you accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and what you are called to do in response to it.

5. Many people allow their past to keep them from reaching toward what God has ahead. What excuses or fears have you heard others express (or have felt personally) when feeling ill-equipped or unable to live out a Christ-centered life or calling? Based on verses 13 and 14, what position should mature Christians have?

Read Philippians 3:17-21

6. Who do you think today live "as enemies of the cross of Christ" and why do you think Paul was brought to tears over this?

7. Think about people you know who set good Christian examples. What specific things do you see and hear them do that exhibit a life filled with Christ's values? How could you follow suit? Consider ways you could thank and encourage those people this week.

Conclude your group time with prayer, using the following as a guide. Lord, help us to value what you value. Show us how to exhibit the traits that bring Jesus the most glory in our lives and that encourage others in theirs. Enable us to be living examples as we strain ahead, reaching forward into eternity, for your kingdom here on earth. Amen.

WEEK FOUR

LESSON AIM: **Speak up by trusting Christ enough to give.**

STUDY: Philippians

THEME: Speak Up!

LESSON TEXT: Philippians 4:10-20

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: 2 Corinthians 8:1-24

SPEAK UP BY GIVING

BY MARK SCOTT

Famous Methodist preacher Clovis Chappell said, "I love to preach on giving. I love to watch the generous smile and love to watch the stingy squirm." We preach sermons by what we say, by how we live, and by how we give. Our coined life is a sermon of sorts. Our testimony of giving goes in the offering plate or bag.

The Philippians must have been a smiling church. They had been generous to Paul. And one major factor in the writing of the epistle was to thank the church for their generosity toward Paul's church planting endeavors (1:3-5). As Paul closed the epistle, he emphasized right relationships (4:2, 3), right actions (vv. 4-7), right thinking (vv. 8, 9), and right stewardship (vv. 10-20).

I Am Well

Philippians 4:10-13

Paul felt constrained to assure the Philippians that he was well. They had heard about his imprisonment (1:12-18) and were no doubt worried. Perhaps they had even wondered if their financial gifts to him had been delivered. Since he had them in his heart (1:7), it was right for Paul to set their minds at ease. Paul rejoiced that they had *renewed* (thrived or flourished) their concern for him. He was confident of their concern but constraints had cut short their *opportunity* (opportune time) to renew their giving to his ministry.

In the midst of thanking the Philippians for their generosity Paul offered a self-disclosing testimony about his view of money and missions. The giving was not so much about him as it was about the church in Philippi. Paul had some genuine *need* (the same word is used of the widow in Mark 12:44). However, he had learned to be content in his circumstances. *Content* means "adequate and sufficient." It was a favorite word of the Stoic philosophers. It is where we get our English word *autocratic*.

Paul lived on both sides of God's provision. At times he was *in need* (a different word than used earlier. This term means "to be brought low or humbled"). At other times he had *plenty* (to abound or excel). But Paul had learned the *secret* (favorite word from the Greek mystery religions meaning to learn the initiation rites of something) of being content when well fed . . . or *in want* (to be behind or last). He topped off his testimony with the famous verse in 4:13. This is a strong and confident verse, but it must be held in its context. Paul did not mean that he could leap tall buildings in a single bound or that he was more powerful than a locomotive. Paul meant that God's strength got him through lean times and times of abundance.

You Did Well

Philippians 4:14-20

Paul commended the church for what they did for him and what their generosity would do for them. Paul told them that it was *good* (beautiful) for them to share in his *troubles* (pressures). In fact, Paul singled them out as a unique church. Lydia's hospitality (Acts 16:15) set the stage for one of the most generous churches in the New Testament. This was remarkable when one considers that these believers gave generously out of extreme poverty (2 Corinthians 8:1-5). Paul even acknowledged that the church gave more than once during his rather brief ministry at another Macedonian city, namely Thessalonica.

While Paul was the grateful recipient of Philippian generosity, the real winners were the church members themselves. Giving can certainly advance the mission of God in the world. But giving also does a wonderful work on the giver. The giver's trust in God grows. Paul was less concerned about the gift. He desired that the church learn the grace of giving that would be *credited to their account* (literally that the fruit would increase to their "word").

Paul acknowledged that he had received their gifts from Epaphroditus (2:25-30) and that those gifts supplied in full what Paul needed. But more to the point was that the Philippians' giving was not just charity toward Paul. The gift was spiritual in nature. Paul described it in terms of a Levitical offering. The believers' gifts would be as pleasing to God as the offerings and sacrifices mentioned in the Mosaic Law.

Seth Wilson used to say, "I shovel it out, and God shovels it in, and God has a bigger shovel." Paul shared that same spirit by saying that God would meet their needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus. What else is left other than to give glory to God (4:20)? Offering plates and bags still preach a sermon.

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BECAUSE YOU GIVE

BY DAVID FAUST

In the Christmas carol, "Hark the Herald Angels Sing," there's a line that says, "God and sinners reconciled." In a materialistic society the question becomes, "Can *gold* and sinners be reconciled?" Money is a tricky subject. Someone quipped, "It's funny how a dollar looks so big when you take it to church, and so small when you take it to the store." Henrik Ibsen said, "Money may be the husk of many things, but not the kernel. It brings you food but not appetite, medicine but not health, acquaintances but not friends, servants but not faithfulness, days of joy but not peace or happiness."

Money has a way of slipping through our fingers. Proverbs 23:5 warns, "Cast but a glance at riches, and they are gone, for they will surely sprout wings and fly off to the sky like an eagle." Here's how I say it:

By and by,
Everything we buy and buy
Goes bye-bye!

However, Proverbs 11:25 says, "A generous person will prosper; whoever refreshes others will be refreshed." Money serves a positive purpose when we are "generous and willing to share" (1 Timothy 6:18).

That's why Paul wrote a thank-you letter expressing his appreciation to the Philippians for their financial support. We don't know the amount these believers sent to support Paul while he was imprisoned for preaching the gospel, but whether it was large or small, Paul considered their gift significant. The Philippian epistle overflows with joy and thanksgiving, shedding light on what happens when we practice wise stewardship.

Gifts That Make a Difference

Do you ever wonder if your financial support really makes a difference? Whether you hand someone cash, write a check, or donate online, when you give to the Lord with faith as your motivation, you might be surprised to see the difference your generosity has made.

Because you give, God's work progresses. By giving to the Lord, you don't just invest in budgets, buildings, and bricks. You invest in priceless souls. Children are fed and students are educated. The lonely are loved and the sick are restored to health. Lost sheep are brought back to the fold, and prodigal sons and daughters are welcomed back home where they belong. God uses your tithes and offerings to fuel the church's mission. Supported by the Philippians' generosity, Paul preached Christ from his prison cell and the gospel penetrated so far into the Roman empire that even members of Caesar's household became Christians (Philippians 4:22).

Because you give, God's leaders are encouraged. Faithful, hard-working missionaries, church planters, Bible college personnel, and leaders of other non-profit ministries need our prayers and financial support. Let's bless them so they can say with Paul, "I am amply supplied, now that I have received . . . the gifts you sent" (v. 18).

Because you give, God's name is exalted. Money given in the right spirit is "a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God" (v. 18). He alone deserves "glory for ever and ever" (v. 20). We give, not to make a name for ourselves, but to glorify the Lord.

From earth's limited perspective, you may never see all the impact of your service and generosity, but you can be sure of this. God's work advances, others are encouraged, and Christ is honored because you give.

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QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

Use one or both of these questions to introduce the lesson:

- The Rockefellers, Vanderbilts, and Carnegies are some of the most well-known American philanthropic families from the last century. They gave away millions of dollars to better the lives of many. Can you name some more modern benevolent individuals?
- Why do you think people like this give so generously in the manner they do?

Read Philippians 4:10-16

1. Where do you find satisfaction and fulfillment? Being content means limiting ourselves in requirements, desires, or actions. Discuss Paul's secret for being content in every situation.

2. When Paul was imprisoned in Rome, the state did not pay for room and board. If people did not regularly send provisions, prisoners had no clothes, blankets, writing utensils, or food. Paul had to trust God to provide for him. How would your church or small group respond if one of your members were in a situation like Paul's? Why do you think the Philippians gave so generously to Paul?

Read 2 Corinthians 8:1-7

3. What do we learn about the church in Philippi (a city in the region of Macedonia) based on what Paul wrote to the church in Corinth? What role did God play in the "grace of giving" demonstrated by the Philippians?

4. What did Paul mean when he wrote that the Philippians "gave of themselves first of all to the Lord, and then by the will of God also to us" (v. 5)? How can you incorporate this same spirit into your personal giving?

Read Philippians 4:17-20

5. Giving often requires sacrifice. What do you think God is calling you to sacrifice in order to tell others about Jesus?

6. Do you ever worry about God not meeting your needs? Is there a difference between needs and wants? Talk through verse 19 and the implications of trusting the Lord to meet all our needs.

Read 2 Corinthians 8:7-15

7. In what context is Paul writing about needs? Are they physical, emotional, or spiritual? Deliberate and define what "need" is.

8. The Corinthians excelled in everything—in faith, speech, knowledge, complete earnestness, and love—yet they did not yet excel in the grace of giving. They were the first to give, but they had not finished the work. Knowing that our personal tithing and generosity supply those with need, what happens when we fail to be generous and faithful in our giving?

Conclude your group time with prayer, using the following as a guide. Lord, enable us to be more like the Philippian church, generous with our time, resources, and finances so that more people can come to know Christ.

For Next Week: This week's lesson brings this unit of study to a conclusion. Look for additional "1717: Your Word Is Truth" studies, for use with your Sunday School classes, small groups, or personal studies, at ChristianStandard.com.