

WORKERS IN THE KINGDOM

PHILIPPIANS 2:12-30

As you begin, pray for guidance and insight. Read Philippians 2:12-30. Then read each day's references as you come to them. Record verses where you find your answers.

Review God's Word for the week: *Philippians 2:9-11*.

DAY 1: PHILIPPIANS 2:12-13—GOD'S PART AND OUR PART

1. What is salvation, and how can a person receive it? (See John 3:16; Romans 10:9-10.)

2. a. Read James 2:14-26 to see what Paul means by "*work out your salvation*" (v. 12), and explain the relationship between faith and works.

b. With what attitudes are we to approach God's plan for our life?

3. What motivates and empowers us to "work out our salvation"? How does knowing your spiritual walk is a two-way relationship encourage you?

DAYS 2 AND 3: PHILIPPIANS 2:14-18—THE RIGHT ATTITUDE AS WE DO OUR PART

4. a. Read Romans 12:1-2. What does it mean to be "a living sacrifice, holy, and pleasing to God"?

b. If you were not to "*conform any longer to the pattern of this world*," what would change in your life?

c. What do you know to be God's "*good, pleasing and perfect will*" in the important relationships in your life right now?

5. Reread verses 14-18. What is the secret of Paul's ability to rejoice in spite of the danger and uncertainty of his situation?

DAY 4: PHILIPPIANS 2:19-24—PAUL AND TIMOTHY

6. Why do you think Paul is so totally dependent upon the Lord here? (See James 4:13-17.)
7. What does this passage tell you about
 - a. Paul's personal and professional relationship with Timothy? (See 1 Timothy 1:2.)
 - b. Paul's relationship with the Philippians?
8. What does Paul find special about the way Timothy serves others?

DAY 5: PHILIPPIANS 2:25-30—PAUL AND EPAPHRODITUS

9.
 - a. What roles does Epaphroditus fill as he relates to Paul?
 - b. To what extent is he committed to Paul and the ministry?
10. Describe the apparent relationship between Epaphroditus and the Philippians.
11. Paul helps the Philippians appreciate Timothy and Epaphroditus by reminding them of their commitment. Right now, take a moment and build up someone in your Core Group.

APPLY what you have learned. Being God's servant challenges today's concepts of identity, purpose, and personal rights. Ask yourself these questions. Where has God placed me? Am I willing to be His servant there? Do I realize that what I do in the place God has put me is a key part of His plan? Do I ever hesitate to identify myself with someone so as not to risk my own status? How often are my rights the cause of alienation from another person? Am I willing to be made willing? (Remember Philippians 2:13.)

COMMENTARY Paul has pointed to Christ, the perfect role model. He tells the Philippians to let their thoughts and attitudes be like Christ, saying that one day all beings—in heaven (angelic), on earth (human), and under the earth (demonic)—will bow before God. This universal worship of the only One who is worthy (Revelation 4:11) leads back to Paul's original thought. Christ's humble obedience is now applied to the Philippians. Paul is saying, "You should be like Him; do as He did." The word *therefore* appears in almost every letter Paul wrote. After telling of God's gracious work in Jesus Christ, he gives practical instructions on how to live the Christian life. In Philippians, Paul encourages unity then gives an illustration and the response to that. They are to obey in spite of the fact that he cannot come to visit them.

"Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling" (2:12), says Paul. This plea for obedience has caused confusion in the church. It sounds as if Paul urged them to save themselves by working. Is that what he means? No. Read Ephesians 2:1-10, which shows the paradox of divine sovereignty and human free will. God is in control. But man does have real choices with consequences. Man is responsible and accountable to God. The two truths must be balanced. The maturing and perfecting of a Christian is a cooperative effort. The phrase "work out" means to bring about as a result, to practice, to complete what has been started. In this context, Paul is speaking about something God has brought about in the believer's life that the Christian needs to cultivate. Like the earth, which God created and people need to cultivate, so Christians are to participate in bringing forth fruit. Paul continues, "For it is God who works in you" (2:13). Twice he uses the word *energein*, meaning active energy, effective power. It describes how God enables believers to follow His will. God supplies the energy and desire to do His will.

THINK ABOUT how God has saved us from the penalty of sin in the past; He is saving us from the power of sin in the present; and He will save us from the presence of sin in the future. The idea that salvation can be earned is not endorsed in this verse. Even Paul admitted that he could not do what he should by his own power (Romans 7:15-23). But he knew that God, through Jesus Christ our Lord, could enable him—and us—to live victoriously (Romans 7:24-25a).

Obedience is linked with a Christian's witness in the world. Christians who are not living in obedience to God often grumble about their circumstances. Paul says we should "do everything without complaining or arguing so that" we might become pure (2:14). Attitudes influence behavior. Wrong attitudes poison a person's life. God wants His children to live "without fault" despite the depravity of the world. Then they will stand out like bright stars in an ink-black sky and effectively hold out the word of life (the gospel) like a torch to light the way for others to follow. Paul worked hard on their behalf; he is imprisoned because of his missionary activity and does not want to feel he has labored in vain. The Philippians' good lives would cause Paul to rejoice even if he were to die as a martyr. His source of joy is in Jesus Christ, not in his circumstances. "Joy" is being secure in Christ and gives peace, hope, and comfort in spite of circumstances. People who are joyful have an impact on others. Do you know someone who radiates joy? Are you someone like that?

Paul's young associate Timothy—the son of a mixed marriage between a Greek pagan and a devout Jewish woman, Eunice (Acts 16:1; 2 Timothy 1:5)—learned the Scriptures and came to faith through his mother and his grandmother, Lois. Paul and Silas first worked with Timothy when they came to his hometown on the second missionary journey (Acts 16). Paul refers to Timothy as his spiritual son (1 Timothy 1:2; 2 Timothy 1:2).

When the team left Lystra, Timothy journeyed with them through Phrygia, Galatia, and Europe. He was dedicated to the cause of Christ, and ministered to many churches in Paul's place, serving in Macedonia (Acts 19:22); Corinth (1 Corinthians 4:17; 16:10-11); Philippi (Philippians 2:19-23); Thessalonica (1 Thessalonians 3:2, 6); and Ephesus (1 Timothy 1:2-3). He joined Paul in writing letters to the Christians in Philippi, Colossae, and Thessalonica, and served as Paul's secretary in writing the first letter to the Corinthians. Timothy served with Paul, his spiritual father, in spite of his shyness (1 Corinthians 16:10; 2 Timothy 1:7) and poor health (1 Timothy 5:23). Paul thought very highly of him.

The congregation in Philippi sent Epaphroditus to bring their financial contribution to Paul. Little is known of his background, but Paul's words here reveal his integrity and dedication. Epaphroditus became critically ill while in Rome with Paul, who says he "*almost died*" (2:27). Still, he wanted to remain and support Paul in any way possible. Paul calls him "*my brother, fellow worker and fellow soldier*" (2:25). They had a personal and professional relationship, and Epaphroditus was obviously willing to share the common danger from enemies of the gospel.

Paul describes Epaphroditus as an *apostolos*, a word sometimes used in the New Testament to describe church messengers, responsible for handling their contributions and finances. He had ministered to Paul, who appeals to the Philippians: "*Welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honor men like him, because he almost died for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up for the help you could not give me*" (2:29-30). Such men are worthy of honor. This brief passage, Philippians 2:25-30, is the only mention of Epaphroditus in the Bible.

THINK ABOUT the fact that the Holy Spirit did not see fit to have the personal characteristics of these men preserved for us. God is concerned with the person, not the persona (the image we present to the world). To Paul and to the Holy Spirit, the important thing about Epaphroditus was his commitment to Jesus Christ and his willingness to walk into danger for the sake of the gospel. We need to learn to look beneath the surface of each other's persona and get to know the real person, the person Christ is living and working in.

PERSONALIZE this lesson. This passage concerns the way we live and "*work out*" the salvation God has given us in Christ. Obedience to God produces great traits, but few of us are willing to be servants of the triune God and of other people. Paul says of Timothy: "*I have no one else like him, who takes a genuine interest in your welfare. For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ*" (2:20-21). Paul did not mean there was no one he could rely on, for he then mentions Epaphroditus; but he evidently found most Christians immature and self-involved.

Many self-centered Christians are still around, perhaps including us. But we don't need to stay that way. God wants to work in our lives, though not without our permission. He does not force us; He simply loves us. He also offers us all His resources, but we must take what He offers. Begin today. God's will for you at this time is that you do the tasks set before you well and graciously. You will be doing two things—getting the job done, and building positive Christian attitudes. No real division between "sacred" and "secular" exists for the Christian. Studying for a test or helping at home is as much a service to God as preaching a sermon. When you have finished doing what needs to be done, the reward will be more responsibilities! God may not give a big job to someone who has not learned to do a little job well. Start today to cooperate with Him and begin to become the person God knows you can be, doing what God has planned for you (Ephesians 2:10). If you do, you'll know joy and fulfillment.