CHARLES R. SWINDOLL

SWINDOLL'S LIVING INSIGHTS

NEW TESTAMENT COMMENTARY

PHILIPPIANS • COLOSSIANS PHILEMON

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AUTHOR'S PREFACE

For more than sixty years I have loved the Bible. It was that love for the Scriptures, mixed with a clear call into the gospel ministry during my tour of duty in the Marine Corps, that resulted in my going to Dallas Theological Seminary to prepare for a lifetime of ministry. During those four great years I had the privilege of studying under outstanding men of God, who also loved God's Word. They not only held the inerrant Word of God in high esteem, they taught it carefully, preached it passionately, and modeled it consistently. A week never passes without my giving thanks to God for the grand heritage that has been mine to claim! I am forever indebted to those fine theologians and mentors, who cultivated in me a strong commitment to the understanding, exposition, and application of God's truth.

For more than fifty years I have been engaged in doing just that—*and how I love it!* I confess without hesitation that I am addicted to the examination and the proclamation of the Scriptures. Because of this, books have played a major role in my life for as long as I have been in ministry—especially those volumes that explain the truths and enhance my understanding of what God has written. Through these many years I have collected a large personal library, which has proven invaluable as I have sought to remain a faithful student of the Bible. To the end of my days, my major goal in life is to communicate the Word with accuracy, insight, clarity, and practicality. Without informative and reliable books to turn to, I would have "run dry" decades ago.

Among my favorite and most well-worn volumes are those that have enabled me to get a better grasp of the biblical text. Like most expositors, I am forever searching for literary tools that I can use to hone my gifts and sharpen my skills. For me, that means finding resources that make the complicated simple and easy to understand, that offer insightful comments and word pictures that enable me to see the relevance of sacred truth in light of my twenty-first-century world, and that drive those truths home to my heart in ways I do not easily forget. When I come across such books, they wind up in my hands as I devour them and then place them in my library for further reference . . . and, believe me, I often return to them. What a relief it is to have these resources to turn to when I lack fresh insight, or when I need just the right story or illustration, or when I get stuck in the tangled text and cannot find my way out. For the serious expositor, a library is essential. As a mentor of mine once said, "Where else can you have ten thousand professors at your fingertips?"

In recent years I have discovered there are not nearly enough resources like those I just described. It was such a discovery that prompted me to consider

becoming a part of the answer instead of lamenting the problem. But the solution would result in a huge undertaking. A writing project that covers all of the books and letters of the New Testament seemed overwhelming and intimidating. A rush of relief came when I realized that during the past fifty-plus years I've taught and preached through most of the New Testament. In my files were folders filled with notes from those messages that were just lying there, waiting to be brought out of hiding, given a fresh and relevant touch in light of today's needs, and applied to fit into the lives of men and women who long for a fresh word from the Lord. *That did it!* I began to work on plans to turn all of those notes into this commentary on the New Testament.

I must express my gratitude to Mike Svigel for his tireless and devoted efforts, serving as my hands-on, day-to-day editor. He has done superb work as we have walked our way through the verses and chapters of all twenty-seven New Testament books. It has been a pleasure to see how he has taken my original material and helped me shape it into a style that remains true to the text of the Scriptures, at the same time interestingly and creatively developed, and all the while allowing my voice to come through in a natural and easy-to-read manner.

I need to add sincere words of appreciation to the congregations I have served in various parts of these United States for more than five decades. It has been my good fortune to be the recipient of their love, support, encouragement, patience, and frequent words of affirmation as I have fulfilled my calling to stand and deliver God's message year after year. The sheep from all those flocks have endeared themselves to this shepherd in more ways than I can put into words . . . and none more than those I currently serve with delight at Stonebriar Community Church in Frisco, Texas.

Finally, I must thank my wife, Cynthia, for her understanding of my addiction to studying, to preaching, and to writing. Never has she discouraged me from staying at it. Never has she failed to urge me in the pursuit of doing my very best. On the contrary, her affectionate support personally, and her own commitment to excellence in leading Insight for Living for more than three and a half decades, have combined to keep me faithful to my calling "in season and out of season." Without her devotion to me and apart from our mutual partnership throughout our lifetime of ministry together, Swindoll's Living Insights would never have been undertaken.

I am grateful that it has now found its way into your hands and, ultimately, onto the shelves of your library. My continued hope and prayer is that you will find these volumes helpful in your own study and personal application of the Bible. May they help you come to realize, as I have over these many years, that God's Word is as timeless as it is true.

> The grass withers, the flower fades,
> But the word of our God stands forever. (Isa. 40:8, NASB)

Chuck Swindoll
Frisco, Texas

THE STRONG'S NUMBERING SYSTEM

Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary uses the Strong's word-study numbering system to give both newer and more advanced Bible students alike quicker, more convenient access to helpful original-language tools (e.g., concordances, lexicons, and theological dictionaries). The Strong's numbering system, made popular by the *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible,* is used with the majority of biblical Greek and Hebrew reference works. Those who are unfamiliar with the ancient Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek alphabets can quickly find information on a given word by looking up the appropriate index number. Advanced students will find the system helpful because it allows them to quickly find the lexical form of obscure conjugations and inflections.

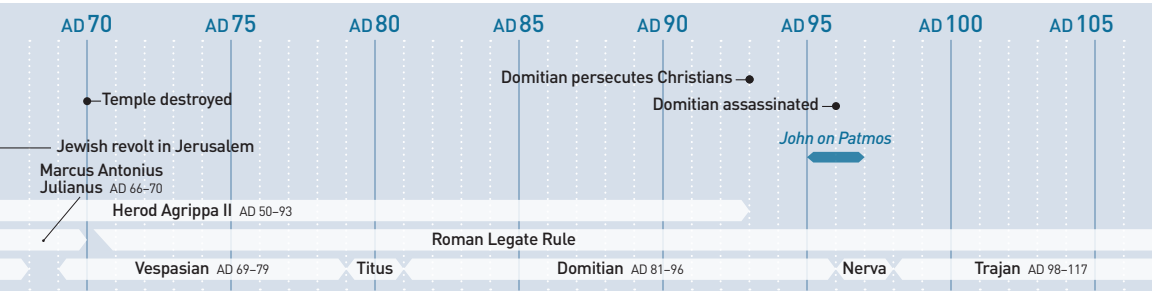
When a Greek word is mentioned in the text, the Strong's number is included in square brackets after the Greek word. So in the example of the Greek word *agapē* [26], "love," the number is used with Greek tools keyed to the Strong's system.

On occasion, a Hebrew word is mentioned in the text. The Strong's Hebrew numbers are completely separate from the Greek numbers, so Hebrew numbers are prefixed with a letter "H." So, for example, the Hebrew word *kapporet* [H3727], "mercy seat," comes from *kopher* [H3722], "to ransom," "to secure favor through a gift."

INSIGHTS ON PHILIPPIANS

It's usually difficult to capture the essence of a letter in one word, but in the case of Philippians, that one word is joy. *Paul didn't write to answer any profound theological question, solve some knotty practical problem, or deal with a specific sin. Instead, he wrote to express and encourage joy.*

The Egnatian Way. Philippi was located in eastern Macedonia, just off the coast of the Aegean Sea, on the Egnatian Way.



PHILIPPIANS

INTRODUCTION

Some of you may be old enough to remember singing—perhaps in Sunday school or at summer camp—that old song that starts out like this:

> "I've got the joy, joy, joy, joy down in my heart."
> "Where?"
> "Down in my heart!"
> "Where?"
> "Down in my heart!"

Do you know why we rarely sing that in church? Because it just doesn't sound right when it's sung with a frown. I don't want to seem ultranegative, but have you noticed the look on the faces of many in the Sunday-morning crowds? One word comes to mind—*grim*. As a close friend of mine used to say to his congregation, "Many of you have the joy so deep down in your heart that your face hasn't found out yet!"

There are exceptions. I've seen joyful believers and rejoicing congregations. I'm thankful that I've had the privilege to serve such congregations for most of my ministry. But sadly, truly joyful Christians are a rare species . . . and they seem to be facing extinction today.

Now, to be clear, when I say "joyful Christians," I'm not talking about silly Christians or foolish Christians. I'm not talking about Christians who think everything's a joke. And I'm certainly not talking about sarcastic or cynical or sneering Christians. I'm in search of Christians who are genuinely *joyful*—the kind of joyful that looks a lot more like contentment and peace than simply excitement or happiness.

What about you? Are you one of the joyful remnant? Or have you forgotten how good it is to smile? Have your burdens caused your

THE BOOK OF PHILIPPIANS AT A GLANCE

SECTION	JOY IN LIVING	JOY IN SERVING
PASSAGE	1:1-30	2:1-30
THEMES	Joy in spite of unfulfilled desires Joy in spite of circumstances Joy in spite of conflicts	Right attitude Right theology Right models
KEY TERMS	Joy, to rejoice	
	Prayer/supplication Day of Christ	Form To Make Empty

JOY IN SHARING	JOY IN RESTING
3:1-21	4:1-23
A warning A testimony A goal A command	Unity Peace Contentment
To regard	
Righteousness Mutilation/circumcision	To Worry Peace

QUICK FACTS ON PHILIPPIANS

Who wrote it? Paul, with Timothy (Phil. 1:1).

Where was it written? Rome, where Paul was under house arrest (Acts 28:16, 30-31).

When was it written? Around AD 62, during Paul's house arrest in Rome while he awaited a hearing before Caesar (Acts 28:16-31).

Why was it written? To encourage believers to find Christ-centered, Spirit-empowered joy in living, serving, sharing, and resting.

shoulders to droop and your back to slouch? Honestly, when was the last time you really let the joy of the Lord change your countenance?

If you're like most people, you could probably use a healthy dose of real joy.

Thankfully, that's the theme of the book of Philippians. From the first word to the last, Paul's letter is saturated with joy. Talk about a message desperately needed today! In our world of downers and disappointments, setbacks and failures, tragedies and disasters, how easy it is to let despair take over.

I can't think of anything that reveals the person and work of Jesus Christ in the lives of believers more than the manifestation of joy. It's the Christian's most obvious advertisement that he or she has something that can make a real difference in a world scraping for just an ounce of contentment and happiness.

THE BACKGROUND OF PHILIPPIANS

I've never spent time in jail, but I've visited a few, and I know many men and women who are heavily involved in prison ministry. Along with hospitals and cemeteries, jails are among the most joyless places on earth. How strange it seems, then—from a completely worldly perspective—that Paul and Silas were singing for joy while chained up in a dingy prison in the city of Philippi.

On one occasion, having been arrested, beaten with rods, and thrown into jail, Paul and Silas had every reason to be bitter. They could have been angry at their enemies, unhappy with their circumstances, even upset with God for allowing it all to happen. But instead, come midnight, the beleaguered apostle and his associate were singing joyous praises to God—with every tormented prisoner and every sour-faced guard within earshot (Acts 16:22-25).

Fast-forward a dozen years. Paul is again under arrest—this time not languishing in a dank cell awaiting an uncertain punishment, but under house arrest in his own rented home in the city of Rome (Acts 28:30-31). Between AD 61 and AD 63, Paul was forced to stay put in the

great capital of the Roman Empire while he waited for a hearing before Caesar's court. But he wasn't cut off from the outside world. Even though a soldier was guarding him day and night (Acts 28:16), Paul enjoyed a measure of freedom that enabled him to continue his teaching and writing ministry.

During this lengthy stay, Paul drafted the four letters that New Testament scholars call the "Prison Epistles": Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. The first is considered a "circular letter," addressed to the church in Ephesus but written to a more general audience with the intent that it would be circulated among the churches in Asia Minor.[1] As such, Paul discussed some very deep theological issues that would be doctrinally foundational and practically fruitful for many believers. The shorter letter to the Colossians shares some similar themes with Ephesians, but Paul clearly wrote it to a specific church with particular challenges from false teachers, even though he expected it to be passed around to other churches (Col. 4:16). Although brief in comparison to other New Testament letters, Paul's pointed letter to Philemon—a leader in the church of Colossae—dealt with the specific issue of what to do with a certain runaway slave, Onesimus, who had become a Christian.

Philippians was sent separately to Macedonia instead of Asia Minor and is unique not only when compared to the other three Prison Epistles but also within the New Testament itself. For example, unlike most New Testament books, there aren't any major problem passages for scholarly puzzle solvers to wring their hands over. It's a pretty straightforward presentation with an easy-to-follow argument. Remarkably, the letter doesn't contain a single Old Testament quotation, perhaps indicating that its original audience was mostly comprised of Gentile Christians and few Jewish believers. Also, Philippians sustains the theme of joy throughout the letter, using the word in each of its four chapters and mentioning "joy" or the related verb "rejoice" a dozen times throughout. Finally, Jesus Christ is mentioned over forty times in this letter, with the obvious implication that Jesus and joy go hand in hand. Overall, Philippians comes across as warm, encouraging, and affirming, the most positive of all Paul's letters . . . even though he wrote it while under arrest!

THE AUTHOR, AUDIENCE, AND OCCASION OF PHILIPPIANS

Philippians 1:1 leaves no doubt that Paul authored this letter with the assistance of his longtime companion Timothy, who had been with

PHILIPPI IN THE FIRST CENTURY

PHILIPPIANS 1:1

Founded in the fourth century BC in a region rich with silver and gold, the settlement that would come to be known as Philippi was originally given the name Crenides (Greek for "fountains"). Within a few years, however, in 356 BC, Philip II of Macedon, father of Alexander the Great, named the new city after himself: Philippi.[2]

In the year 42 BC Julius Caesar's assassins, Brutus and Cassius, were defeated in battle just outside the city. After the war, Philippi was designated a Roman colony.[3] When Paul and Silas planted the church in Philippi (around AD 49), the city was populated mostly by natives of nearby Thrace and Greece, but it also contained Romans, Egyptians, and some Jews.[4] Situated on the Egnatian Way, the major highway running east–west, Philippi was a city that traded in both goods and cultures. This led to a mixture of religious traditions, including the worship of Greek and Roman gods and goddesses as well as foreign gods from Asia Minor to Egypt—at least thirty-five different deities were worshiped in that one city.[5] Because Philippi was a Roman colony, emperor worship was also prevalent there.[6]

It was into this confused religious milieu that Paul, Silas, Timothy, and the chronicler Luke carried the light of the gospel during Paul's second missionary journey. While the team was in Troas, Paul had a vision of a man saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us" (Acts 16:9). In response, they traveled by sea to Neapolis, a port city just a few hours from Philippi. Philippi was a city of about ten thousand residents at the time.[7] Luke describes it as "a leading city of the district of Macedonia, a Roman colony" (Acts 16:12).

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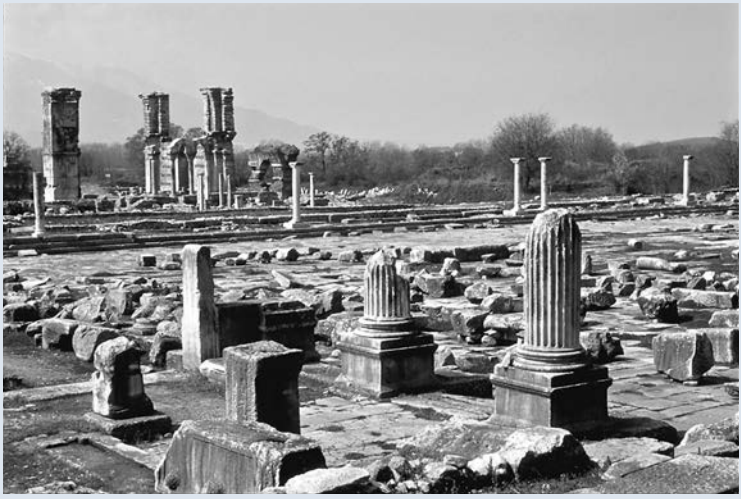
The east–west **Egnatian Way** passed through Philippi and connected it with the nearby port city of Neapolis, guaranteeing a steady stream of both commerce and great intellectual variety.

The first convert to Christ in Philippi was Lydia, who was originally from Thyatira. She was a businesswoman who sold purple fabric (Acts 16:14-15). From her house Paul continued to add to the fledgling church. After

a brief episode of imprisonment in Philippi that resulted in a jailer's conversion (Acts 16:22-36), the local authorities forced Paul and Silas to leave the city (Acts 16:37-39), but not before Paul provided encouragement to the newly planted church that was meeting in Lydia's house (Acts 16:40).

It appears that Luke, who had accompanied Paul, Silas, and Timothy to Philippi, stayed behind longer to continue to strengthen the church in the forced absence of Paul and Silas.[8] Later, Paul again visited the city of Philippi and the region of Macedonia to give the believers "much exhortation" (Acts 20:2). In fact, while most of his traveling companions, including Timothy and Tychicus, went on ahead to Troas, Paul stayed behind with Luke for several days to observe the Passover with the church (Acts 20:6).

The same church in Philippi received a letter from Polycarp, the famous bishop of Smyrna, around AD 110, in which Polycarp wrote, "The secure root of your faith, being proclaimed from ancient times, still continues and bears fruit to our Lord Jesus Christ" (Polycarp, *To the Philippians* 1.2).[9] How encouraging to know that Paul's efforts had not been in vain! A Christian presence tied to that original church plant in Philippi continued to flourish for centuries until its light was dimmed when Muslim forces flooded the region in the late medieval period.



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Excavations of the **ruins of Philippi** reveal a large Roman city straddling the Egnatian Way, complete with a hilltop acropolis, a large forum in the center of town, a spacious theater, and public baths.

OVERJOYED: THE THEME OF JOY IN PHILIPPIANS

I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all. (1:3-4)

Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice. (1:18)

I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith. (1:25)

Make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. (2:2)

I rejoice and share my joy with you all. (2:17)

Rejoice in the same way and share your joy with me. (2:18)

When you see him again you may rejoice. (2:28)

Receive him then in the Lord with all joy. (2:29)

My brethren, rejoice in the Lord. (3:1)

My beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and crown. (4:1)

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! (4:4)

But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly. (4:10)

Paul when the church at Philippi was established (see Acts 16). Though there have been a few scholars who propose alternate locations for the composition of Philippians, the majority hold that Paul wrote this letter while under house arrest in Rome.[10] This is my view too.

The audience is clear: Paul wrote this letter to the church in Philippi, a city in Macedonia on the northern shore of the Aegean Sea (see "Philippi in the First Century," pages 8-9). Because of the relatively small Jewish population in Philippi during the first century, the majority of Christians in the Philippian church were Gentiles—Romans, Greeks, local Thracians, and perhaps displaced peoples from Asia Minor and Egypt.

By the time Paul wrote Philippians, the church had been in existence for over a decade and had steadily grown from its humble beginnings as a small house church in Lydia's home (see Acts 16:40). In Philippians 1:1, Paul mentions not only "the saints" but also a plurality of leadership: "overseers and deacons." This suggests a church of dozens of members. Even in its infancy, however, the Philippian church was known for its generosity in rendering financial aid to Paul's mission (4:15-16).

Paul wrote this letter first to thank the Philippians for their support of his ministry (4:14-16). They had distinguished themselves in self-sacrificial giving. Second, he wrote to give them a general warning against false teachings (3:2, 17-19). Third, he wrote to encourage them to stand firm and strive for the faith (1:27-28). Finally, he wrote to encourage the Philippians to rejoice in the Lord, despite their outward circumstances—to find Christ-centered, Spirit-empowered joy in living, serving, sharing, and resting.

REJOICE IN THE LORD . . . ALWAYS!

It's usually difficult to capture the essence of a letter in one word, but in the case of Philippians, that one word is *joy*. Paul didn't write to answer any profound theological question, solve some knotty practical problem, or deal with a specific sin. Instead, he wrote to express and encourage joy. In a way, the book of Philippians is a showcase of joy. Like a treasure on display in the center of a gallery, joy can be examined from several angles to better appreciate its brilliance. Each of the four chapters reveals one of the distinct facets of that joy.

In chapter 1 we learn there is *joy in living*, even when we don't get what we want (1:6-7), when there are difficult circumstances (1:12-14), or when there are conflicts (1:21-30). To find joy in living, there has to be something more than good feelings and comfortable settings. That something is actually *Someone*—the Lord Jesus Christ (1:21). In chapter 2, we learn there is *joy in serving*. It starts with the right attitude—humility (2:3-8); it's maintained through right theology (2:12-13); and it's encouraged by the right models, such as Christ, Timothy, and Epaphroditus (2:5-8, 19-23, 25-30). In chapter 3, we learn there is *joy in sharing*. Paul shares a warning (3:1-2), a testimony (3:3-11), a goal for living (3:12-16), and a command (3:17-21). Finally, in chapter 4, we learn there is *joy in resting*. In one of the finest passages ever written on contentment, Paul explains how to find a joy in resting that's not undermined by circumstances (4:6-7, 10-13).

Philippians truly is a precious gem of joy, one that shines with enthusiasm and pulsates with encouragement. As we study its principles and adopt its precepts, it can turn our drab lives into brilliant jewels as well—jewels that shine with a living, serving, sharing, and resting light in a world that desperately needs it.

KEY TERMS IN PHILIPPIANS

***chara* (χαρά)** [5479] "joy," "cheerfulness," "calm delight," "gladness"; ***chairō* (χαίρω)** [5463] "to be cheerful," "to rejoice," "to be glad"

These two sister terms—the noun *chara* and the verb *chairō*—are used fourteen times in this four-chapter book of Philippians. If you're musically trained, you've probably heard of "grace notes"—little incidental notes that add charm to a piece of music. One commentator on Philippians refers to Paul's use of "joy" and "rejoice" as "joy notes." He writes, "The addition of each joy note develops the theme of joy. As we read through the letter, our understanding of the source and nature of joy expands."[11]

***phroneō* (φρονέω)** [5426] "to regard," "to feel," "to think about"

In Philippians 2:2, Paul uses the verb *phroneō* twice: "Make my joy complete by being of the same mind (*phroneō*), maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose (*phroneō*)." This verse gives a good indication of the kinds of nuances this single word can have: "mind" (as in "opinion") or "purpose" (as in "intention"). And in Philippians 1:7, the emphasis seems to be on emotion: "For it is only right for me to feel (*phroneō*) this way about you all." Though it often appears in English translations as a noun, it's actually a verb, which suggests that our opinions, thoughts, and even feelings are acts of the will and are thus able to be changed and conformed to the humble, self-sacrificial mind of Christ (2:5).

JOY IN LIVING (PHILIPPIANS 1:1-30)

Paul wrote his letter to the Philippians *to encourage them to find Christ-centered, Spirit-empowered joy in living, serving, sharing, and resting.* Though it contains sound doctrine and practical insights that have proven to be relevant throughout the centuries, Philippians is not primarily a theological treatise, but a loving letter of friendship from one brother in Christ to his extended spiritual family. Even when he warns the Philippians about false teaching, he does so warmly and graciously, expecting the best from his readers.

In chapter 1 this theme of joy is exemplified as Paul encourages the Philippians to find Christ-centered, Spirit-empowered joy in living—even when things don't seem to be going their way. It opens with Paul's cheerful admission that his prayers for the Philippians always kindle the warmth of joy in his heart (1:3-4). He also demonstrates personal joy and optimism in the midst of challenges and difficult circumstances that are beyond his control (1:6-14).

This is a message every generation of believers needs to hear! Whether we face conflicts or setbacks, we can find joy in living if Jesus Christ is the source and center of our lives. Regardless of whether we continue on in this world, striving for the gospel, or we pass on to the next to be with Christ, we're to keep our focus on Him, the source of our joy (1:21-25).

KEY TERMS IN PHILIPPIANS 1:1-30

***proseuchē; deēsis* (προσευχή; δέησις)** [4335; 1162]
"prayer," "supplication," "petition"

These two words are often coupled in both the Greek Old Testament (called the Septuagint) and the New Testament (1 Kgs. 8:54; 2 Chr. 6:29; Eph. 6:18; 1 Tim. 2:1). The first term, *proseuchē*—and its verb form, *proseuchomai* (Phil. 1:9)—refers to general addresses to God. Meanwhile, the noun *deēsis* refers to particular "requests" or specific "supplications"

and is often an "urgent request to meet a need."[1] In Philippians 1:4 Paul uses the latter term twice, indicating an intimate knowledge of the Philippians and a deep interest in their particular, urgent needs. Likewise, the Philippians themselves were offering their own supplications on behalf of Paul (Phil. 1:19), confirming the uniquely close relationship Paul had with the Philippian church.

***hēmera Christou* (ἡμέρα Χριστοῦ)** [2250 + 5547] "day of Christ"

The ominous phrase "day of the Lord" (*hēmera kuriou* [2250 + 2962]) occurs throughout the Greek Old Testament and the New Testament in reference to a period of divine judgment upon the earth (Joel 2:1-10; 1 Thes. 5:2; 2 Pet. 3:10). However, the phrase "day of Christ" found in Philippians 1:6, 10; and 2:16 emphasizes the hope of deliverance and reward. This makes sense in the context of the positive, uplifting tone of Paul's letter to the Philippians—that even when addressing prophetic events, he keeps the focus on the positive hope for believers rather than the negative consequences of judgment for unbelievers.

Confident Enough to Be Joyful

PHILIPPIANS 1:1-11

NASB

1 Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of
Christ Jesus,

To all the [a]saints in Christ Jesus
who are in Philippi, [b]including the
overseers and deacons: 2 Grace to
you and peace from God our Father
and the Lord Jesus Christ.

3 I thank my God in all my remem-
brance of you, 4 always offering
prayer with joy in my every prayer
for you all, 5 in view of your [a]partici-
pation in the gospel from the first
day until now. 6 *For I am* confident of
this very thing, that He who began
a good work in you will perfect it
until the day of Christ Jesus. 7 [a]For it
is only right for me to feel this way
about you all, because I have you

NLT

1 This letter is from Paul and Timothy,
slaves of Christ Jesus.

I am writing to all of God's holy
people in Philippi who belong to
Christ Jesus, including the church
leaders* and deacons.

2 May God our Father and the
Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and
peace.

3 Every time I think of you, I give
thanks to my God. 4 Whenever I pray,
I make my requests for all of you with
joy, 5 for you have been my partners
in spreading the Good News about
Christ from the time you first heard
it until now. 6 And I am certain that
God, who began the good work
within you, will continue his work
until it is finally finished on the day
when Christ Jesus returns.

7 So it is right that I should feel as
I do about all of you, for you have a
special place in my heart. You share

in my heart, since both in my [b]imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers of grace with me. **8** For God is my witness, how I long for you all with the [a]affection of Christ Jesus. **9** And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, **10** so that you may [a]approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless [b]until the day of Christ; **11** having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which *comes* through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

1:1 [a]Or *holy ones* [b]Lit *with* **1:5** [a]Or *sharing in the preaching of the gospel* **1:7** [a]Lit *Just as it is right* [b]Lit *bonds* **1:8** [a]Lit *inward parts* **1:10** [a]Or *discover;* or *distinguish between the things which differ* [b]Or *for*

with me the special favor of God, both in my imprisonment and in defending and confirming the truth of the Good News. **8** God knows how much I love you and long for you with the tender compassion of Christ Jesus.

9 I pray that your love will overflow more and more, and that you will keep on growing in knowledge and understanding. **10** For I want you to understand what really matters, so that you may live pure and blameless lives until the day of Christ's return. **11** May you always be filled with the fruit of your salvation—the righteous character produced in your life by Jesus Christ*—for this will bring much glory and praise to God.

1:1 Or *overseers*, or *bishops*. **1:11** Greek *with the fruit of righteousness through Jesus Christ*.

Ours is a frivolous age with lots of shallow, empty laughter . . . but very little real joy.

Most people stumble around in perpetual confusion—darkness, really. As they seek genuine joy, they satisfy themselves with only occasional glimpses of light—and artificial light at that. Occasionally, it's sad to say, some of the light they're attracted to is a consuming fire. It destroys their lives rather than illuminating their minds or warming their hearts.

Paul would have understood this plight as he, too, groped around in darkness until that glorious day when the light of the gospel of Christ shone brightly into his life (Acts 9:1-19). From that day on, although he often experienced suffering, he rarely let the darkening fog of discouragement cloud his mind or drive out the light of joy.

His letter to the Philippians, embossed with unfading joy on every page, is proof that, for Paul, joy was more than a fleeting emotion; it was part of his ingrained character. How could that be? It's because he was confident that God was at work, that God was in complete control, and that God allowed all things to occur for one ultimate purpose—His greater glory.

Paul understood that joy doesn't depend on our circumstances, our possessions, or other people. Joy is an attitude of the heart determined by confidence in God. Paul knew that he had no control over

the struggles and strife of life. But by yielding to the Spirit's work in his soul, Paul's trust and hope in God could guide him like an inner compass, keeping him on joy's course regardless of how strong the gale-force winds blew.

Poet Ella Wheeler Wilcox put this idea beautifully in her poem "The Winds of Fate":

> One ship drives east and another drives west
> With the self-same winds that blow;
> 'Tis the set of the sails
> And not the gales
> That tells them the way to go.[2]

In the first chapter of Paul's joy-filled letter to the Philippians, we come face-to-face with his bold, joyous confidence, setting the trajectory for more to come. He extends a warm greeting to the Philippians in 1:1-2, offers up joyful thanksgiving in 1:3-8, and lifts them up in prayer in 1:9-11.

— 1:1-2 —

As he does in all his letters, Paul begins with a customary gracious greeting. When the Philippians took the scroll from the hand of Epaphroditus and unrolled it (see 2:25; 4:18), the first words they would have seen in the Greek text were "Paul and Timothy" (1:1). These were not strangers, not remote leaders governing impersonally from a distance through go-betweens—these were loving shepherds and beloved friends.

Though sometimes the inclusion of multiple names could indicate a sort of coauthorship (e.g., 1 Thessalonians), in the case of Philippians, Timothy probably wasn't involved in the actual composition of the letter itself. Throughout the letter Paul uses the first-person singular, indicating that he's personally the source of the words. Why is Timothy included then? Because the Philippians would have had fond memories of that wet-behind-the-ears "intern" who had just joined Paul and Silas prior to their original arrival in Philippi (see Acts 16). Timothy had been there when Paul shared the gospel with Lydia at the place of prayer by the river, when Paul cast the spirit of divination out of a slave girl and caused a great upheaval among the pagans of Philippi, when Paul and Silas were dragged off to prison as a result, and when the fledgling church grew despite their founding apostle and prophet being beaten and jailed. No doubt Timothy had been forced to step up

and begin to lead the best he could in the absence of Paul and Silas. Now, over a decade later, Timothy was still at Paul's side as a "kindred spirit" of "proven worth" (Phil. 2:20, 22).

Today, icons, statues, and paintings of apostles tend to portray people like Paul and Timothy as larger-than-life heroes. If they aren't bulked up and poised for epic action, their faces glow, halos orbit their heads, and miracles flow from the tips of their fingers. What a contrast to Paul's own humble, self-demoting label "bond-servants of Christ Jesus" (1:1)! The term Paul uses, *doulos* [1401], means "one who serves another to the disregard of his own interests."[3]

Paul then identifies those to whom he writes: both the membership of the church in Philippi ("saints in Christ Jesus") and the leadership ("overseers and deacons"). The Greek word translated "overseers" (*episkopos* [1985]) refers to a group of leaders keeping a watchful eye over those in their charge. In the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament), an *episkopos* was one who served as judge, as treasurer, or as supervisor of the priests and the Levites serving in the temple. Elsewhere in the New Testament, Peter calls Jesus the *episkopos* of our souls (1 Pet. 2:25). In this sense, the church official designated by this term is someone charged to "shepherd" (*poimainō* [4165]) the church, to serve as an undershepherd to the Lord, leading His flock on His behalf and under His authority. Paul listed the qualifications of an "overseer" in a letter to Timothy, who was serving in Ephesus at the time (1 Tim. 3:2-7).

The deacons, in turn, assisted the overseers in various ministry-related tasks. The term *diakonos* [1249] carries the idea of serving obediently, willingly, and submissively from a heart of humility. The Latin translation of the Greek term *diakonos* is *minister*, from which we get this particular title. In the New Testament, *diakonos* can refer to a servant with a certain mission (Rom. 15:8), a personal assistant (Matt. 22:13), or a person in the office of "minister" in a local church (Phil. 1:1). Acts 6:1-6 recounts the appointment of the first deacons in the church. Paul uses the term for "minister" in the general sense of a self-sacrificing servant in the kingdom of Christ.

The church in Philippi, of course, had multiple people appointed to both offices—overseers/elders and deacons/ministers (Phil. 1:1). They were tasked with the "equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ" (Eph. 4:12). From the youngest to the oldest, from the recently baptized believers to Philippi's first converts, from followers to leaders, Paul calls them all "saints" (Phil. 1:1) and blesses them equally: "Grace to you and peace from God our Father

ORIGINAL CHURCH LEADERSHIP: OVERSEERS AND DEACONS

PHILIPPIANS 1:1

Today we hear a number of terms used to refer to the leaders of our churches: pastors, elders, overseers, superintendents, directors, coordinators, facilitators, ministers, priests, bishops . . . the list goes on. But in the early church only a few terms were used to describe what were essentially two levels of leadership: overseers (or elders) and deacons (or ministers). When an apostle planted a local church, a team of overseers/elders was appointed in it to serve as the shepherds, preachers, teachers, and general decision makers of the church—the leaders. The ministers/deacons were appointed to assist the leaders in the work of the ministry.[4]

The noun *episkopos* refers to an "overseer" (traditionally "bishop") (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:7). In the New Testament, the term could be interchangeable with the word for "elders" (Acts 20:17, 28). When the original apostles exercised direct oversight in the churches, the offices of "elder", "pastor", and "overseer" all referred to the same type of leader. After the first-century era of the apostles, the office of a senior overseeing elder developed to help stabilize church authority. It is this position that in later centuries would develop into the episcopacy, the authority of a single bishop over a number of churches.[5]

However, in the New Testament period, "elder", "pastor", and "overseer" all represented one calling with the same responsibility to shepherd the flock. All three of these terms are used together in Acts 20:17, 28. In that account, Paul calls the "elders" of the church of Ephesus to meet him in Miletus, then he instructs them, "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers (*episkopos*), to shepherd (*poimainō*) the church of God which He purchased with His own blood" (Acts 20:28).

and the Lord Jesus Christ" (1:2). Though this was a standard greeting in Paul's letters, it's a profoundly deep theological statement. Grace and peace are essential blessings for living the Christian life and especially for carrying out Christian ministry. These things can't be conjured from within; they are gifts of God through Jesus Christ.

— 1:3-8 —

Paul's fond memories of the Philippians prompted him to follow his gracious greeting with joyous thankfulness and prayer (1:3-4). Regarding the Philippians, he had no regrets, no ill feelings, no unresolved conflicts. His heart was filled with joy as he reminisced on the times he

had spent with them—their first meeting over a decade earlier when the church was planted (Acts 16) and another gathering during his third missionary journey (Acts 20).

But his thankfulness and joy were not inspired by mere nostalgia. Paul indicates in Philippians 1:5 that the Philippians were participating "in the gospel from the first day until now." Their commitment to Christ and the proclamation of His word never let up, not for a moment.

I wonder how many pastors could say that about churches where they have served. Or how many saints could say it about longtime Christian friends? Like most of us, Paul experienced some great disappointments, from churches and from individual brothers and sisters in Christ. But not from the Philippians. The thought of them didn't make his stomach churn; rather, it prompted him to thankfulness, joy, and prayer.

Because of the Philippians' past perseverance and present passion, Paul was confident in their future faithfulness (1:6). He had no doubt that God was at work in Philippi, that He had plans for that church, and that He was in control and would see them through to the end. The Greek verb translated "perfect" in 1:6 is *epiteleō* [2005], which means "to bring about a result according to plan or objective."[6] God had begun the work of spiritual growth, of ministry participation, and of faithful Christian witness among these believers. And He would stay at it until He called them home or until Christ stepped back into this world to reward them for their Spirit-enabled labor.

Paul exposes his deep feelings in 1:7-8. Far from being a cold, get-it-done apostle, Paul didn't hesitate to share his deep emotions. He always had the Philippians "in his heart" (1:7). G. Walter Hansen unpacks the meaning of this phrase nicely: "When Paul tells his friends that he has them in his heart, he is expressing more than a sentimental feeling; he is stating the commitment of his heart to give his life for his friends."[7] Their commitment to him through thick and thin and their participation in the gospel ministry only served to strengthen his own heartfelt commitment to them. They were more than friends. They were lifelong partners in Christ.

Because of this, Paul yearned for them—*all of them* (1:8). Notice how many times Paul repeated the word "all" in 1:1-8:

- He greeted *all* the saints. (1:1)
- He thanked God in *all* his remembrance. (1:3)
- He prayed for *all* of them. (1:4)

- He felt strongly about them *all*. (1:7)
- They were *all* fellow partakers of grace. (1:7)
- He affectionately longed for them *all*. (1:8)

From the family of Lydia to the Roman jailer's household, from the elders and deacons to the new believers, the deep love Paul felt for the church in Philippi made his heart leap in his chest as he yearned to spend time with them again.

— 1:9-11 —

This profound thankfulness and love led to specific prayers for the Philippians, as it should for us. Christians shouldn't just say, "You're in our thoughts." We should say, "You're in our prayers"—and we should mean it! Paul certainly did. His deep, joyful contemplation of the Philippians prompted him to pray for some specific things, things that can only come from God.

First, he prayed that their love would continue to grow and would be characterized by "real knowledge and all discernment" (1:9). I like to picture love like a river. It needs to be guided by the banks of knowledge and discernment. Paul isn't telling the Philippians to let their love blind them to truth and righteousness so they end up overlooking sin and compromising holiness. That's a false interpretation of "love" we often see in the world today. True Christian love is guided by the best interest of others. With true knowledge and discernment, love learns to spot the phony, the wrong, the evil. It learns to "approve the things that are excellent" (1:10). This love, guided by wisdom, will preserve believers in righteousness until "the day of Christ"—the Second Coming, when the Lord Jesus will reward them for faithfulness.

Second, Paul prayed that they would be filled with the "fruit of righteousness" (1:11). Don't confuse this with self-righteousness, personal piety, or self-motivated works. Paul is referring to the righteousness of Christ working in us by the indwelling Holy Spirit to produce fruit in our lives (see Gal. 5:22-23). The result of such good works empowered by God will be "the glory and praise of God" (Phil. 1:11)—*not* our own praise and glory. Jesus said essentially the same thing: "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 5:16).

What a solid basis for abiding joy! When Paul scanned the ten-year life span of the body of Christ in Philippi, he had every reason to rejoice in confidence, as expressed in thanksgiving, prayer, and praise.

APPLICATION: PHILIPPIANS 1:1-11

Setting Your Sails for the Harbors of Joy

The second stanza of Wilcox's "The Winds of Fate" provides another reminder about setting our sails for joy:

> Like the winds of the sea are the winds of fate,
> As we voyage along through life;
> 'Tis the set of a soul
> That decides its goal,
> And not the calm or the strife.[8]

While I don't believe in fate, I do believe that apart from a confidence in the providential care of God, the winds of strife can easily capsize our vessels and leave our souls drowning in despair. To set the course of our souls to experience genuine joy, let's recall a few principles from Paul's opening words in Philippians 1.

First, *confidence brings joy when we focus on the things for which we're thankful*. Paul could have looked back ten years in Philippi and recalled the demon-possessed woman frustrating their preaching. He could have remembered his arrest and beatings. He could have dwelled on his imprisonment and expulsion from the city. Instead, he recalled the positives about the Philippians: their conversion, their faithfulness, their growth and participation in ministry, and their continued perseverance.

Second, *confidence brings joy when we let God be God*. Paul had every confidence that the work *God* had begun in the past among the Philippians, *God* would bring to completion in the future. This meant *God* would continue to work in the present. Let me make this personal. When I stop trying to play God in my own life and instead let Him accomplish my spiritual growth in His own way, I'll look differently at the winds of strife that blow through my life. And while I'm at it, I need to stop trying to play God in other people's lives through constant worry, anxiety, and manipulation. What we need is to pray with confidence in every circumstance that comes our way—and thank God for His promise to navigate us through it.

Third, *confidence brings joy when we keep love within its proper limits*. Those limits are knowledge and discernment. Asking two questions can help us here: To whom should we direct our love? And how can