

LETTERS TO PHIL: MOVING FROM ANXIETY TO JOY

JOY IN THE FACE OF CONFLICT – DEVOTIONAL

SUNDAY

Thought – Conflict is inevitable, but it doesn't have to be our final destination. Using the examples of Christ and scripture, conscious engagement with spiritual practices can teach us alternative ways to interact with each other.

Prayer – *Lord, we long to live peacefully with all Your children. Teach us to examine our own lives and the ways in which we love and serve in your holy name. Amen.*

NOTES:

MONDAY – Read Psalm 139:14

Thought – Practice Listening

Our bodies can often show early warning signals of impending conflict. Recall your last argument. Close your eyes and scan your body for areas of tension. Do you notice tightness in your gut or around your neck and shoulders? Continue with eyes closed and rest your open hands on your lap. Focus on those tense places as you repeat, "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on us." The next time you notice bodily tension during conflicts, stop for a moment and offer that same prayer.

Prayer – *God, you are the source of all that is good in our lives. Grant us Your mercy. Amen.*

NOTES:

TUESDAY – Read John 13:3-5

Thought – Practice Humility

"Jesus knew that the Father had given him authority over everything and that he had come from God and would return to God. So he got up from the table, took off his robe, wrapped a towel around his waist, and poured water into a basin. Then he began to wash the disciples' feet, drying them with the towel he had around him." (NLT) Close your eyes and imagine that you are one of the disciples. How does it feel as Jesus carefully washes your feet? Now imagine Jesus washing your most difficult adversary's feet.

Prayer – *Lord, this is an uncomfortable place for me to consider. Please give me new understandings of what it means to be humble. Amen.*

NOTES:

WEDNESDAY – Read Psalm 51: 10

Thought – Practice Understanding

Set yourself aside for just a moment. Create space for different experiences and points of view. Be curious. Really listen. This is the soil from which understanding can grow. *“Create in me a clean heart, Oh God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.” (NIV)*

Prayer – God, this is so worth it. You are so worth it. In your holy name, I ask for a renewed spirit and a clean heart. Amen.

NOTES:

THURSDAY – Read Psalm 31: 7

Thought – Practice Compassion

Now, more than ever, our world needs the loving touch of God. Compassion is an attitude of loving kindness that sees beyond exterior appearances into the soul. Open your eyes and your heart to those around you. Where is God leading you to show His loving kindness?

Prayer – Lord, let me be an instrument of your grace and mercy to those who long for Your touch. Amen.

NOTES:

FRIDAY – Read Philippians 2: 14

Thought – Practice Serving

“Go out into the world uncorrupted, a breath of fresh air in this squalid and polluted society. Provide people with a glimpse of good living and of the living God. Carry the light-giving Message into the night...” (The Message) In this climate of dissension and conflict, you are called to be God’s “breath of fresh air.”

Prayer – Lord, in your mercy, bring someone to my mind that needs Your loving touch today. In your precious name I pray. Amen.

NOTES:

SATURDAY – Read James 3: 18

Thought – Practice Peace

Finding joy in the middle of conflict is possible when we start from a place of peace. Neither one of us gets to be right and the other wrong. Ultimately, we are both on the side of love. *“And those who are peacemakers will plant seeds of peace and reap a harvest of righteousness.” (NLT)* Picture your frenemy sitting next to you. Christ walks up and speaks to you. What words do you hear?

Prayer – Lord, fill us with your peace. In your precious name. Amen.

NOTES:

JOY IN THE FACE OF CONFLICT– GROUP GUIDE

PRAYER – *God, we acknowledge that you are already here. May our hearts be open to your presence and to your direction. Amen.*

BIG IDEA – We are called to set aside our personal self-interests and take on the mind of Christ. Out of the inevitable events of conflict we can experience joy and deeper relationships with God and with each other.

Scripture – **Philippians 2: 1-8, 1 Corinthians 13: 4-7**

Discussion Questions:

- In Philippians 2, Paul provides a series of *if/then* statements. *“If you’ve gotten anything at all out of following Christ, if his love has made any difference in your life, if being in community of the Spirit means anything to you, if you have a heart, if you care...”* (Phil 2: 1, *The Message*) These “if’s” were a reminder to the Philippian church, and as a reminder to us as well. What are some benefits you have personally experienced from following Christ? What are some missing pieces that you have noticed in your life?
- Paul continues with, *“then do me a favor: Agree with each other, love each other, be deep-spirited friends. Don’t push your way to the front; don’t sweet-talk your way to the top. Put yourself aside, and help others get ahead. Don’t be obsessed with getting your own advantage. Forget yourselves long enough to lend a helping hand.”* (Phil 2: 2-4, *The Message*) This passage is rich with ideas for ways to deal with conflict among believers. Which ones stand out to you today? Give examples of your successes or failures with these practices.
- Here is the key truth of Paul’s message: *“Think of yourselves the way Christ Jesus thought of himself. He had equal status with God, but he didn’t think so much of himself that he had to cling to the advantages of that status no matter what....instead he lived a selfless, obedient life and then died a selfless, obedient death...”* (Phil 2: 5-7, *The Message*) Some versions use “*have the same mindset.*” (NIV) Your mindset influences the words that come out of your mouth. Remember your last conflict and the conversation that ensued. How could being other-focused rather than self-focused have changed the dialogue? Be specific.
- Jesus came to earth to reveal the heart of God. The essence of God’s heart is love and Paul describes that love in 1 Corinthians 13: 1-4. Choose someone to read this passage out loud. Pay attention to the characteristics that have direct relevance to conflict resolution. Rephrase them in your own words.

TAKE AWAY – The Good News that is revealed in the life, death and resurrection of Christ is our way forward through conflict into a joy-filled life.

Pray the Lord’s Prayer.