

LETTERS TO PHIL: MOVING FROM ANXIETY TO JOY

JOY HANGING IN THE BALANCE - DEVOTIONAL

SUNDAY – 1 Corinthians 2: 16

Thought – True joy can be accessed through a life anchored in Christ, and when faith and service meet we can experience and share God’s love.

Prayer – Heavenly Father, this can be a confusing place to try and understand. Please help me as I trust, serve and worship You. In your holy name I pray. Amen.

NOTES:

MONDAY – Read Ephesians 5: 1-2

Thought – Knowing Christ As: Living Example

The New Testament is filled with actions and attitudes from Jesus that reveal the heart of God. Choose one: a servant (John 15: 11-13) or a shepherd (John 10: 1-5). Sit with those images in your mind, and then ask God to nudge you to serve as an ambassador of joy.

Prayer – Jesus, you came to this earth to show us God’s heart. Help me learn to love as You love. In your name I pray. Amen.

NOTES:

TUESDAY – Read Matthew 16: 24-25

Thought – Knowing Christ As: Crucified

“If any of you want to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross, and follow me.” (NLT) Close your eyes and ask God to show you the places where you have a tight grip on your own way. Now imagine placing them at the foot of the cross and walking away, toward joy.

Prayer – Dear God, it’s at the cross where I see the depth of your love. Inspire me to let go of my need to be in control. Amen.

NOTES:

WEDNESDAY – Read John 11: 25

Thought – Knowing Christ As: Resurrected

The resurrected life in Christ is not only a promise for the future, but the possibility of a new life now. Every time you sit with God in the morning, review your hours with God at the end of the day, or notice God’s presence in nature, you are allowing God to make new spaces for joy.

Prayer – God, the thought of this new life in You brings a big smile to my face. This is the new me thanking you! Amen.

NOTES:

THURSDAY – Read 2 Corinthians 3: 16-18

Thought – Knowing Christ As: Transformative

The transformed life is only possible through God’s inspiration and direction. “So, all of us who have had that veil removed can see and reflect the glory of the Lord. And the Lord—who is Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image.” (NLT)

Prayer – Oh God, I long to be an image bearer of your love, joy, peace, grace and mercy. Here I am, change me. In your holiest of names. Amen.

NOTES:

FRIDAY – Read Matthew 11: 28-29

Thought – Knowing Christ As: Balance

Sometimes it can all feel like a bit too much. Do I have enough faith? What is faith? Who is God? What does God want me to do? How can I really know? Now, take a breath. Calm down and remember Christ’s words, “Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” (NLT)

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 Colossians 2: 2-3

Thought – Knowing Christ As: Mystery

In the final analysis, we must get comfortable with mystery. Give up your need to know everything. Trust God’s promises. Trust that you are worthy of those promises. Be open to the surprises of joy.

Prayer – Lord, I trust that you keep your promises and I will never completely understand the mystery of your love. In the meantime, help me notice Your presence today. Amen.

NOTES:

JOY HANGING IN THE BALANCE– 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 will discover *true* joy as believers in the balancing point between our faith and our service. Salvation is Christ’s gift of eternal relationship through his death and resurrection. Our surrendered selves and acts of service continue to reflect that love into an anxious world.

Scripture – **Romans 15: 5-9, Ephesians 2: 8-10, James 2: 14-17, Romans 5: 1-2**

Discussion Questions:

- In Romans Chapter 15, Paul described critical conflicts in the early church that centered on legalism vs. grace. The disputes about circumcision, the Torah, and salvation were sticky conversations. In many ways, we have inherited remnants of that legalism. Although we may say that salvation is unmerited favor and that we are to share God’s love with all of creation, often our motivations and actions say otherwise. Can you identify some places where your tendency to compare, blame, feel shame, feel unworthy or be angry might be related to rules rather than to God’s love? Later this week, offer those places to God.
- Ephesians 2: 8-10 focuses on the very heart of the Christian understanding of salvation. Our sin leaves us alienated from God and we need help to live a life of joy and peace. Paul asserts that the law only served to increase our guilt and create people who were only outwardly religious. What are some ways you have found to develop a deep relationship with God rather than being outwardly religious?
- Turn your thoughts now to works as a barometer of your faith life. First read James 2: 14-17 aloud. What are some real-life examples of useless faith? On the flip side, how can you just go through the motions of good deeds without deep faith?
- *“By entering through faith into what God has always wanted to do for us—set us right with him, make us fit for him—we have it all together with God because of our Master Jesus. And that’s not all: we throw open our doors to God and discover at the same moment that he has already thrown open his door to us. We find ourselves standing where we always hoped we might stand—out in the wide open spaces of God’s grace and glory, standing tall and shouting our praise.” (Rom 5: 1-2 The Message)* How might this glorious picture rebalance your life? Your faith? Your works?

TAKE AWAY – We have been blessed with the gift of salvation that provides the foundation for a life of faith, joy and service through our relationship with God.

Pray the Lord’s Prayer.