

## Finding God's Peace in Tumultuous Times: A Pandemic Devotional from the New Testament Book of Philippians

Devotional 1

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These are unprecedented times, at least in our lifetimes. Fear and panic are on the rise. Our government officials are trying to walk the line between warning us of the very significant dangers we face and not creating more panic and fear.

We in the church are going through a paradigm shift with how we do worship, fellowship, spiritual formation and ministry together. But also, every one of us individually is undergoing a paradigm shift for how we live our lives. So much has changed in such a short amount of time!

A paradigm shift is defined by Merriam Webster as: "an important change that happens when the usual way of thinking about or doing something is replaced by a new and different way." We are having to learn a new and different way for doing everything: our activities, education, work, church, even day to day, moment to moment living. And it all seemed to come upon us so suddenly. It is really hard to adjust to the gigantic shifts in our world and the rapidly evolving changes.



We face a pandemic, in particular, a danger to our healthcare system and the potential that our hospitals won't have the capacity to treat patients. In first century Palestine, Christians faced challenges too, different challenges, but with a potential of great suffering, physical pain, and life-threatening persecution. The Philippians were entering into such a time. And Paul writes to encourage them to press on.

Here is how the ESV Study Bible describes the theme of Philippians: "The chief theme of Philippians is encouragement: Paul wants to encourage the Philippians to live out their lives as citizens of a heavenly colony, as evidenced by a growing commitment to service to God and to one another. The way of life that Paul encourages was manifested uniquely in Jesus Christ; it was also evident in the lives of Paul, Timothy, and Epaphroditus....The Philippians appear to be a healthy congregation, in contrast to troubled groups in Corinth and Galatia. Can they then relax and rest? Paul's answer is an emphatic no. ***The world is too perilous, and the gospel too glorious, for them to be content with past achievements.*** They must follow Paul's example and 'press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus' (3:14). Paul explains what spiritual progress will look like. Christian maturity does not come through special mystical insights available to only a few, but rather through the patient practice of the familiar virtues of love and service to others."

Our world too is perilous and the gospel is still glorious!!! Do you believe it? Might Paul's Epistle to the Philippians offer a challenge to us, living in the times in which we live? What blessings might God be bringing to our lives as a result of the paradigm shift we are undergoing? In other words, might there

have been some things with the old way we were living that it is good that we are now being forced to change?



Is it possible that we are just a little too rooted in this world and too forgetful of our heavenly connection – that we are citizens of heaven – as the ESV Study Bible says: a colony of heaven in this world? How often we seek blessings from God and offer prayers that are ENTIRELY focused on the things of this world, material things, such as our physical health, our safety, our economic situation, the well-being of family members, and so on.....and these are important things that we should offer to God in prayer. But how often do we cry out to God for spiritual blessings for our souls? How

often do our prayers ask Him to take us and those we love on to deeper levels of spiritual connection to Him and the Kingdom of Heaven? How often do we seek God for things in this world, while our spirits atrophy? How might we be rooted in the present temporal world in how we pray for others, forgetting the most important aspect of all: the state of the soul before God?

In writing to the Philippians, Paul is eager to shift the focus toward a greater connection with God. He is bringing the resources of heaven to bear on the challenges he and the Philippians faced in this world. Oh, how we need that perspective, when each and every day we get more and more news of a growing pandemic, new counter measures, and warnings for the future. In these anxious times, we need to recover this heavenly perspective so that we too might learn the secret of joy and the peace of God that passes all understanding.

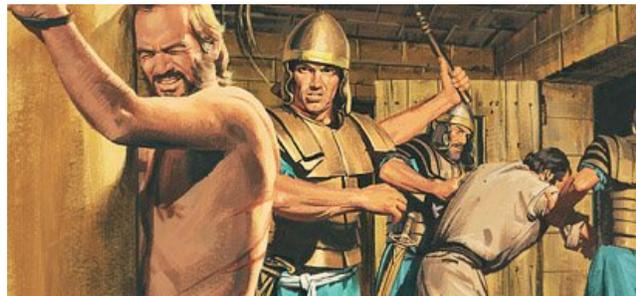
As you approach this study, would you now take a moment and ask God for the spiritual blessings to feed, nurture and strengthen your soul? Ask Him to allow you to become more aware of your connection to heaven and to Him in this study. Begin by seeking to hear from God in prayer.

**Context.** We begin by reading the back story as Luke records it for us in the book of Acts.

Read Acts 16:9-40 and consider the following questions:

1. Why did Paul and his companions go to Philippi? What is the significance of this Scripture being written in first person plural?
2. How had God prepared the way ahead of them?  
(What seemed to be ready for, almost awaiting their arrival to come and proclaim the gospel?)

3. Why are Paul and Silas arrested and beaten with rods?  
What does this volatile encounter suggest about the culture at that time and its receptivity to the Christian faith?



4. Once put in prison, what is the attitude of Paul and the others? Why are they singing hymns given all that has happened to them?

5. How does God intervene?

**Application:** What about you?

**\*\***How might God have prepared the way for you in these times of global pandemic? Can you see evidence of His providential care even in the midst of the hardship? What can you give thanks for?

**\*\***Can you offer hymns of praise in times of trouble? Why or why not?

**\*\***How might having a strong sense of God's Presence, a heavenly perspective, have helped Paul and his companions when being arrested, beaten and imprisoned?

**\*\***How might you likewise grow in developing such a heavenly perspective? What practical steps might you take?

**\*\***Even in the midst of life-threatening danger, Paul is able to lead the Philippian jailor and his family to Christ. Is there someone in your life God might be calling you to selflessly serve? Is there somewhere in the world God might be calling you to give of yourself in love, even in this time of hardship?

As you close in prayer, talk to God about these questions. What comes to mind as you do? What might He be saying to you today? Can you thank God that even when the world around you is in turmoil remembering that you are still connected to Him and rooted in the spiritual realm as a citizen of heaven?