

Joy's Journey Group Leader Notes

Welcome to week 6 of group discussions! As we move into Philippians chapter 3, Paul begins to shift gears from working out your salvation in humble unity to addressing some false teachings that had crept into the Philippian church. In addition, he tells how his life had changed to follow the upward call of Christ (Phil. 3:14).

He immediately begins by calling out a group of people, known as the Judaizers, that had been spreading false doctrines. Judaizers were a group of Jewish Christians who insisted that their co-religionists should follow the Mosaic Law and that Gentile converts to Christianity must first be circumcised. Paul's reference to them as "dogs" wasn't just a derogatory term. Paul was using a term that ancient Jews used to describe Gentiles. Essentially, he was throwing their own term back at them.

We need to remember that the true gospel is that Jesus is enough for salvation. The Judaizers taught differently. It was Jesus plus something else. In this case, circumcision. Paul fought earnestly to correct and keep this idea from infiltrating the first century church.

Despite Paul's pedigree, he recognizes that his salvation is in Christ alone. Most people at this time would have given anything to be in Paul's position as a Jew. He was the cream of the crop and highly revered. However, none of that was sufficient to save him from his sins.

This week's discussion is going to focus on pressing forward in your faith and what it looks like to move towards the upward call, or goal we have in Christ.



What is a significant goal in life you have worked towards, or are currently working towards?

Just an icebreaker question to get the conversation going.



As a group, read Philippians 3:1-14. Follow that up with prayer asking God to provide understanding of the passage and to point your group towards practical application of it in their lives.

We recommend combining the reading of God's Word with prayer. It is sometimes easy to forget how important it is to pray that God reveal Himself and His will through His Word. One of the roles of the Holy Spirit is to illuminate, or reveal things about God through Scripture. Ephesians 1:17-18 tells us that the Spirit gives wisdom and revelation concerning Jesus Christ, and opens the eyes of understanding so we can know God's purposes in our lives.



Paul warns believers about “dogs, evil doers, those mutilators of the flesh.” Who were these people and what were they guilty of?

These people were known as Judaizers which were a group of Jewish Christians who insisted that their co-religionists should follow the Mosaic Law and that Gentile converts to Christianity must first be circumcised. In this case, they were communicating to the believers in Philippi that Jesus’ atoning work on the cross was not sufficient to save them from their sins.



Why is it so easy to fall into a pattern of thinking that leads you to believe that Jesus is not enough?

I doubt that there will be many professing Christians in your group that would say they do not fully trust Christ’s work on the cross to save them. However, we need to realize that we all struggle to completely rely on grace. This is because we live in a world that requires work to accomplish anything. In school, we learned that we got good grades as we put in the effort to study. At work, promotions come to those that work hard. Our relationships flourish when we invest time and effort into people. We have spent our whole lives having to earn things. The gospel contradicts everything we have come to understand. Salvation is based on what Jesus did on our behalf, not our own efforts.

Since we have this predisposition to work for and earn, we easily fall into the trap of thinking we need Jesus plus something else. Help your group members understand that we all need to be on guard against the lies of the enemy that says faith in Jesus is not enough to be forgiven.



Read Philippians 3:4-6. We see that Paul certainly has quite the religious pedigree. Would you say that you had a religious upbringing, or not? Take some time to share your story with your group.

Testimonies are powerful. So powerful that it is not uncommon to see people come to Christ through them. Sharing testimonies is a great way to really get to know each other. If people are not eager to share, we would encourage you to share a little bit about your story. However, try to keep it under 10 minutes to allow for more discussion.



Read Philippians 3:7-9. What does it mean to be righteous?

Despite Paul clearly saying our righteousness comes from Christ, people will have a tendency to believe that our righteousness has something to do with how we live. Isaiah 64:6 says that our good deeds are nothing more than filthy rags. People tend to view God's judgment on a scale. On one side we have all of the good we have done in our lives, while the other side has all of the wrong we have done. The belief is that we will earn our reward in Heaven if the good outweighs the bad. This simply isn't the case. Ultimately, righteousness is perfectly acting in accord with God's moral law that gives us complete confidence that we are free from guilt or sin.



Read 2 Corinthians 5:21. How do we become the righteousness of God and why do we need Christ to obtain it?

We know this verse as the Great Exchange. It is important to know that all people who came after Adam have been credited with the guilt of Adam's sin (Romans 5:18). That is the meaning of imputed sin. An imputation is an attribution or a crediting of something. Imputed sin is Adam's guilt attributed to or credited to us. All humans are counted as having sinned in Adam and thus deserving the same punishment for sin as Adam. Imputed sin affects our standing before God (we are guilty, or condemned), whereas original sin affects our character (we are morally ruined). Both original and imputed sin make us subject to God's judgment.

However, in the Great Exchange, God took our sin that had been imputed to us and exchanged it for Christ's righteousness. On the cross, Jesus took our sin upon Himself and purchased our salvation. We have "been justified by his blood" (Romans 5:9), and part of that justification is an imputation of His own righteousness. Paul puts it this way: "For our sake God made Jesus to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21). Jesus is righteous by virtue of His very nature—He is the Son of God. By God's grace, "through faith in Jesus Christ," that righteousness is given "to all who believe" (Romans 3:22). That's imputation: the giving of Christ's righteousness to sinners.



Finally, read Philippians 3:13-14. As believers, we have the ability and freedom to forget what lies behind so that we can strain towards what is ahead. How should that impact the way you live your life?

Paul, in verse 13, underlines his denial of personal power or attainment and his single-minded focus. To describe that focus, he employs the image of a runner in a race who hopes to win the prize. He cannot look back. He cannot cloud his mind with past memories. He strains every muscle in his body to achieve forward motion, keeping his eyes on the finish line. Paul forgets the guilt of persecuting the church. He forgets the pain of prison and physical punishment. He forgets the frustration of disobedient church members and false teachers. He forgets the bondage he was in as a result of his sin nature. He looks ahead to see the resurrection, where he will meet Jesus face to face.

With this focus he pursues his goal intently (v.14). His goal is to win the prize for which God had called him in Christ Jesus. He wants to hear God call his name and summon him to the victory stand, where he will meet Jesus face to face and know Him in perfect intimacy. Earthly prizes do not last. Eternal prizes do. The goal can never be realized on earth. It is a goal that pulls us heavenward. Note 1 Corinthians 9:25: "Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever." While Paul was not spiritually where he thought he would ultimately be, he intended not to be distracted by anything as he pursued his goal. Both discipline and determination are required to accomplish this objective.

So, how should that impact the way we live? Hebrews 12:1 says, "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us."