


EVEN IF

Joy That Holds
When Life Doesn't



10-Week Journey Through Philippians
Sermon Workbook

ABOUT ACAC

MISSION

Following Jesus in diverse community.

VISION

To be a Christ-centered community that bridges divides, embraces Biblical diversity, and expands God's kingdom by demonstrating the unifying power of Jesus' love in a polarized world. [John 17]

STRATEGY

We gather, grow, and go.

DNA MARKERS

1. We are Spirit-led.
2. We pursue God's presence and proclaim His truth.
3. We love people where they are.
4. We are a diverse community of faith.
5. We strive to become more like Jesus.

EVEN IF...

A 10-Week Journey Through Philippians

When you first read through Philippians, you might be struck by something profound... Paul wrote about joy from a prison cell. Not the kind of shallow optimism that pretends everything is fine, but a deep, unshakeable joy that seemed to defy his circumstances entirely. It makes you wonder, "How is that even possible?"

I've faced my own seasons of uncertainty, disappointment, and difficulty, and in those seasons, I go back to this letter. What I've discovered is that Paul's secret wasn't some supernatural ability to ignore reality. It was his ability to see Christ's presence right in the middle of his reality.

That's what I want for us over these next 10 weeks.

This journal isn't just a place to jot down sermon notes, though I hope you'll do that too. It's designed to help you actually live the truths we're going to discover together. Each week, you'll find space to reflect, practical steps to take, and ways to respond to what God is teaching you. Because here's what I know after 25 years of doing this: change doesn't happen just by listening to preaching. It happens when we pray, process, and respond in obedience to the Spirit's voice.

My hope is that by the end of this journey through Philippians, you'll have developed your own "even if" faith, the kind that holds steady when life doesn't go according to plan. The kind that finds Christ's presence in the middle of every season of your life.

So grab a pen, open your heart, and let's discover together the joy that holds when life doesn't.

Let's go,



Understanding Philippians:

Historical Context

Author: The Apostle Paul, along with Timothy (1:1), though Paul is clearly the primary author throughout.

Date: Most scholars support this letter being written approximately AD 60-62, during one of his many imprisonments.

Original Recipients: The church at Philippi, located in Macedonia (modern-day Greece). This was the first church Paul founded (around AD 49-50), as recorded in Acts 16. The congregation was predominantly Gentile and included some notable early believers like Lydia, a businesswoman, and the Philippian jailer who was converted after an earthquake freed Paul and Silas from prison.

Paul's Relationship with Philippi: The Philippian church held a special place in Paul's heart. They were his partners in ministry, consistently supporting him financially throughout his missionary journeys, a practice no other church maintained with such faithfulness (4:15-16). Their generosity is actually what prompted this letter. They'd sent Epaphroditus with a financial gift to support Paul during his imprisonment.

Paul's Situation: Paul most likely wrote this letter from Rome while under house arrest, awaiting trial before Caesar. Picture this... he's chained to a Roman guard 24 hours a day, uncertain whether his case would end in freedom or execution. And yet his circumstances had actually advanced the Gospel, even Caesar's palace guard was hearing about Jesus (1:13).

Why This Letter Matters: Unlike some of Paul's letters written to address specific problems or controversies, Philippians is primarily a thank-you note that overflows with joy, encouragement, and practical wisdom for living out faith in difficult circumstances. Paul mentions "joy" or "rejoicing" 16 times in just four chapters. Think about that, a man facing potential execution writing about joy 16 times.

Even If... Joy That Holds When

Life Doesn't

A 10-Week Journey Through Philippians

SERIES OVERVIEW

Life has a way of throwing curveballs when we least expect them. The diagnosis that changes everything. The relationship that falls apart. The dream that dies. The future that suddenly feels uncertain. In those moments, we find ourselves asking, "What now? How do I keep going when everything feels like it's falling apart?"

Paul wrote his letter to the Philippians from a Roman prison cell, chained to a guard, uncertain of his future, and yet... he wrote about joy. Not the shallow happiness that depends on circumstances, but a deep, unshakeable joy that defies logic. This isn't positive thinking or fake-it-till-you-make-it optimism. This is "even if" faith—the kind that says, "Even if my world crumbles, even if my plans fall through, even if I don't understand what's happening, I can still experience the joy that comes from knowing God is with me."

Over the next 10 weeks, we'll discover how to cultivate this "even if" faith that transforms not just how we endure hard times, but how we actually thrive in the midst of them. Because sometimes the most profound joy isn't found despite our circumstances—it's found right in the middle of them.

BIG IDEA FOR THE SERIES: *True joy isn't dependent on our circumstances changing; it's found in discovering Christ's presence in every circumstance.*

WEEK ONE

Scripture Verse ~ *Philippians 1:1–11*



Greetings from Paul

¹This 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.

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

Paul's Thanksgiving and Prayer

³Every time I think of you, I give thanks to my God.
⁴Whenever I pray, I make my requests for all of you with joy, ⁵for you have been my partners in spreading the Good News about Christ from the time you first heard it until now. ⁶And 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.

⁷So 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 with me the special favor of God, both in my imprisonment and in defending and confirming the truth of the Good News. ⁸God knows how much I love you and long for you with the tender compassion of Christ Jesus.

⁹I pray that your love will overflow more and more, and that you will keep on growing in knowledge and understanding. ¹⁰For I want you to understand what really matters, so that you may live pure and blameless lives until the day of Christ's return. ¹¹May 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.

Lesson: Even If I Don't Know What's Next

Life rarely goes according to our plans. Whether it's a career change, a health scare, or simply the uncertainty of what tomorrow holds, we all face seasons where the future feels foggy. Paul starts his letter acknowledging that he doesn't know what's coming next, but he's confident in one thing: God's faithfulness. This week we'll explore how to find peace in the unknown and trust God's character when we can't see His plan.

Big Idea:

WEEK ONE NOTES:

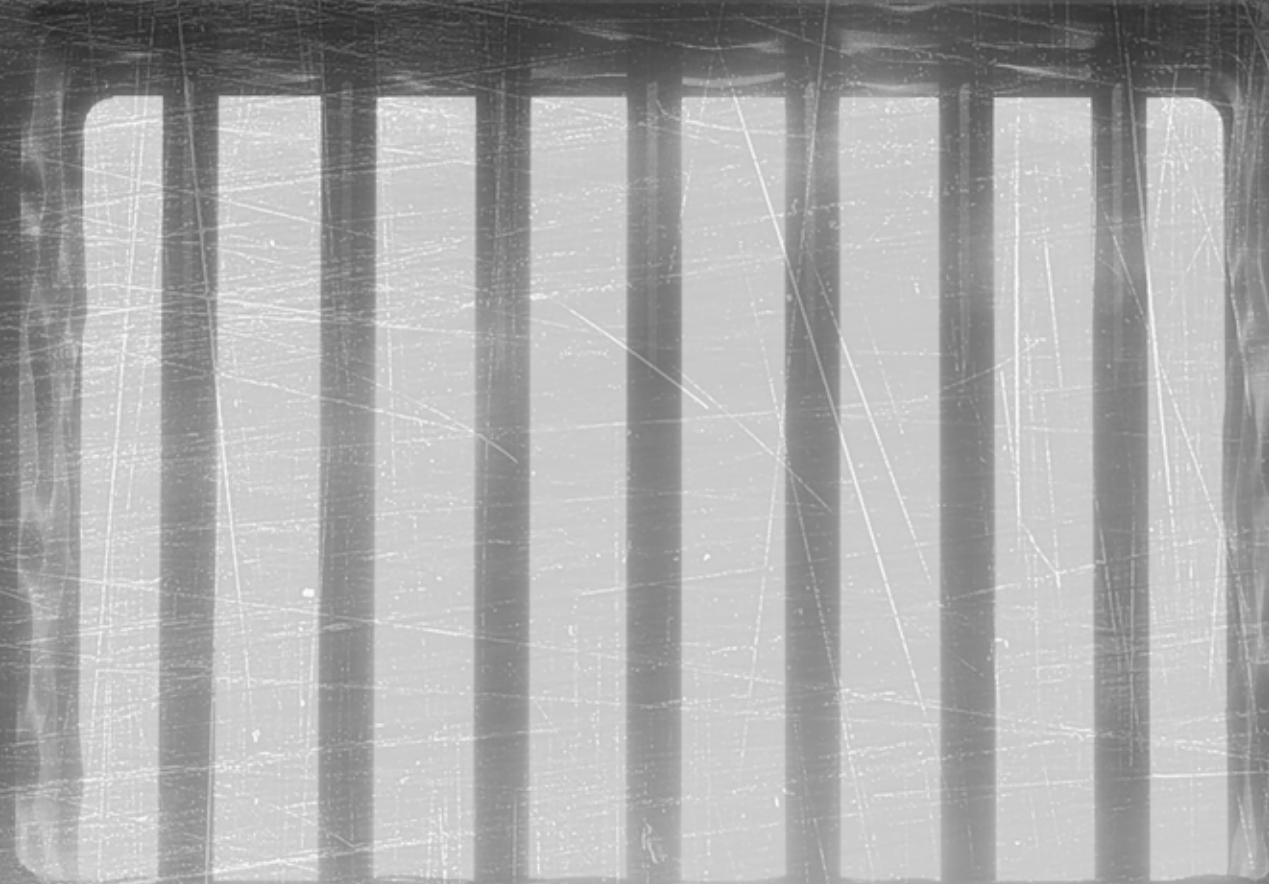
This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

What Is The Implication For Your Life?

Action Steps

WEEK TWO

Scripture Verse ~ *Philippians 1:12–30*



Paul's Joy That Christ Is Preached

¹²And I want you to know, my dear brothers and sisters, that everything that has happened to me here has helped to spread the Good News. ¹³For everyone here, including the whole palace guard, knows that I am in chains because of Christ. ¹⁴And because of my imprisonment, most of the believers here have gained confidence and boldly speak God's message without fear.

¹⁵It's true that some are preaching out of jealousy and rivalry. But others preach about Christ with pure motives. ¹⁶They preach because they love me, for they know I have been appointed to defend the Good News. ¹⁷Those others do not have pure motives as they preach about Christ. They preach with selfish ambition, not sincerely, intending to make my chains more painful to me. ¹⁸But that doesn't matter. Whether their motives are false or genuine, the message about Christ is being preached either way, so I rejoice. And I will continue to rejoice. ¹⁹For I know that as you pray for me and the Spirit of Jesus Christ helps me, this will lead to my deliverance.

Paul's Life for Christ

²⁰For I fully expect and hope that I will never be ashamed, but that I will continue to be bold for Christ, as I have been in the past. And I trust that my life will bring honor to Christ, whether I live or die. ²¹For to me, living means living for

Christ, and dying is even better. ²²But if I live, I can do more fruitful work for Christ. So I really don't know which is better. ²³I'm torn between two desires: I long to go and be with Christ, which would be far better for me. ²⁴But for your sakes, it is better that I continue to live.

²⁵Knowing this, I am convinced that I will remain alive so I can continue to help all of you grow and experience the joy of your faith. ²⁶And when I come to you again, you will have even more reason to take pride in Christ Jesus because of what he is doing through me.

Live as Citizens of Heaven

²⁷Above all, you must live as citizens of heaven, conducting yourselves in a manner worthy of the Good News about Christ. Then, whether I come and see you again or only hear about you, I will know that you are standing together with one spirit and one purpose, fighting together for the faith, which is the Good News. ²⁸Don't be intimidated in any way by your enemies. This will be a sign to them that they are going to be destroyed, but that you are going to be saved, even by God himself. ²⁹For you have been given not only the privilege of trusting in Christ but also the privilege of suffering for him. ³⁰We are in this struggle together. You have seen my struggle in the past, and you know that I am still in the midst of it.

Lesson: Even If Life Feels Like a Prison

Sometimes life just feels suffocating. We might be trapped in a job we hate, stuck in a relationship that's draining us, or bound by circumstances we can't control. Paul literally wrote his message to the church at Philippi from prison, yet he found purpose in his pain. This week, we'll discover how our most confining circumstances can become our greatest opportunities for impact and growth.

Big Idea:

WEEK TWO NOTES:

[illegible]

What Is The Implication For Your Life?

Action Steps

WEEK THREE

Scripture Verse ~ *Philippians 2:1-11*



Have the Attitude of Christ

¹Is there any encouragement from belonging to Christ? Any comfort from his love? Any fellowship together in the Spirit? Are your hearts tender and compassionate? ²Then make me truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, loving one another, and working together with one mind and purpose.

³Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves.

⁴Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too.

⁵You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.

⁶Though he was God,
he did not think of equality with God
as something to cling to.

⁷Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being.

When he appeared in human form,
⁸he humbled himself in obedience to God
 and died a criminal's death on a cross.

⁹Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor

and gave him the name above all other names,
¹⁰that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

¹¹and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

Lesson: Even If I Don't Get My Way

Disappointment is inevitable. The promotion we didn't get, the relationship that didn't work out, the prayer that seemed to go unanswered. Christ himself didn't get His way in the garden of Gethsemane, yet He chose surrender over self-will. This week we'll learn how letting go of our agenda can lead to something far better than we ever imagined.

Big Idea:

WEEK THREE NOTES:

[illegible]

What Is The Implication For Your Life?

Action Steps



WEEK FOUR

Scripture Verse ~ *Philippians 2:12-18*

Shine Brightly for Christ

¹²Dear friends, you always followed my instructions when I was with you. And now that I am away, it is even more important. Work hard to show the results of your salvation, obeying God with deep reverence and fear. ¹³For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him.

¹⁴Do everything without complaining and arguing,
¹⁵so that no one can criticize you. Live clean, innocent lives as children of God, shining like bright lights in a world full of crooked and perverse people. ¹⁶Hold firmly to the word of life; then, on the day of Christ's return, I will be proud that I did not run the race in vain and that my work was not useless. ¹⁷But I will rejoice even if I lose my life, pouring it out like a liquid offering to God, just like your faithful service is an offering to God. And I want all of you to share that joy. ¹⁸Yes, you should rejoice, and I will share your joy.

Lesson: Even If I'm Tired of the Grind

Faithfulness isn't glamorous. It's showing up day after day, doing the right thing even when no one's watching, and pressing on when motivation has long since faded. Paul encourages the Philippians to keep "working out" their salvation—not for salvation, but from salvation. This week we'll explore how to find meaning in the mundane and strength for the everyday.

Big Idea:

WEEK FOUR NOTES:

[illegible]

What Is The Implication For Your Life?

Action Steps

WEEK FIVE

Scripture Verse ~ *Philippians 2:19-30*



Paul Commends Timothy

¹⁹If the Lord Jesus is willing, I hope to send Timothy to you soon for a visit. Then he can cheer me up by telling me how you are getting along. ²⁰I have no one else like Timothy, who genuinely cares about your welfare. ²¹All the others care only for themselves and not for what matters to Jesus Christ. ²²But you know how Timothy has proved himself. Like a son with his father, he has served with me in preaching the Good News. ²³I hope to send him to you just as soon as I find out what is going to happen to me here. ²⁴And I have confidence from the Lord that I myself will come to see you soon.

Paul Commends Epaphroditus

²⁵Meanwhile, I thought I should send Epaphroditus back to you. He is a true brother, co-worker, and fellow soldier. And he was your messenger to help me in my need. ²⁶I am sending him because he has been longing to see you, and he was very distressed that you heard he was ill. ²⁷And he certainly was ill;

in fact, he almost died. But God had mercy on him—and also on me, so that I would not have one sorrow after another.

²⁸ So I am all the more anxious to send him back to you, for I know you will be glad to see him, and then I will not be so worried about you. ²⁹ Welcome him in the Lord's love and with great joy, and give him the honor that people like him deserve. ³⁰ For he risked his life for the work of Christ, and he was at the point of death while doing for me what you couldn't do from far away.

Lesson: Even If I'm Overlooked

In a world obsessed with recognition and platform, it's easy to feel invisible or undervalued. Paul highlights two men—Timothy and Epaphroditus—who weren't famous but were faithful. Their behind-the-scenes service mattered enormously. This week we'll discover how God sees and values every act of love, no matter how small or unnoticed.

Big Idea:

WEEK FIVE NOTES:

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What Is The Implication For Your Life?

Action Steps

WEEK SIX

Scripture Verse ~ *Philippians 3:1-11*



The Priceless Value of Knowing Christ

¹Whatever happens, my dear brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord. I never get tired of telling you these things, and I do it to safeguard your faith.

²Watch out for those dogs, those people who do evil, those mutilators who say you must be circumcised to be saved. ³For we who worship by the Spirit of God are the ones who are truly circumcised. We rely on what Christ Jesus has done for us. We put no confidence in human effort, ⁴though I could have confidence in my own effort if anyone could. Indeed, if others have reason for confidence in their own efforts, I have even more!

⁵I was circumcised when I was eight days old. I am a pure-blooded citizen of Israel and a member of the tribe of Benjamin—a real Hebrew if there ever was one! I was a member of the Pharisees, who demand the strictest obedience to the Jewish law.

⁶I was so zealous that I harshly persecuted the church. And as for righteousness, I obeyed the law without fault.

⁷I once thought these things were valuable, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done. ⁸Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ ⁹and become one with him. I no longer count on my own righteousness through obeying the law; rather, I become righteous through faith in Christ. For God’s way of making us right with himself depends on faith. ¹⁰I want to know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead. I want to suffer with him, sharing in his death, ¹¹so that one way or another I will experience the resurrection from the dead!

WEEK SIX NOTES:

What Is The Implication For Your Life?

Action Steps

Lesson: Even If I Lose Everything

Paul had it all—the right family, the best education, the perfect religious resume. Then he met Jesus and counted it all as loss. This isn't about losing things; it's about gaining perspective on what truly matters. This week we'll explore how letting go of what we think we need can help us discover what we actually can't live without.

Big Idea:

A black and white photograph of a person hiking on a rocky trail. The person is wearing light-colored pants and dark hiking boots, and is captured mid-stride. The background is a dense forest with many trees. The text "WEEK SEVEN" is overlaid on the left side of the image.

WEEK SEVEN

Scripture Verse ~ *Philippians 3:12-21*

Pressing toward the Goal

¹²I don't mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection. But I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me. ¹³No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it, but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us.

¹⁵Let all who are spiritually mature agree on these things. If you disagree on some point, I believe God will make it plain to you. ¹⁶But we must hold on to the progress we have already made.

¹⁷Dear brothers and sisters, pattern your lives after mine, and learn from those who follow our example. ¹⁸For I have told you often before, and I say it again with tears in my eyes, that there are many whose conduct shows they are really enemies of the cross of Christ. ¹⁹They are headed for destruction. Their god is their appetite, they brag about shameful

things, and they think only about this life here on earth. ²⁰But we are citizens of heaven, where the Lord Jesus Christ lives. And we are eagerly waiting for him to return as our Savior. ²¹He will take our weak mortal bodies and change them into glorious bodies like his own, using the same power with which he will bring everything under his control.

Lesson: Even If I Haven't Arrived Yet

Perfectionism is exhausting. The pressure to have it all figured out, to never make mistakes, to reach some imaginary finish line where we finally "arrive" spiritually. Paul admits he hasn't arrived yet—and neither have we. This week we'll learn to embrace the journey of growth while finding peace in our imperfection.

Big Idea:

WEEK SEVEN NOTES:

[illegible]

What Is The Implication For Your Life?

Action Steps

WEEK EIGHT

Scripture Verse ~ *Philippians 4:1-9*



¹Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stay true to the Lord. I love you and long to see you, dear friends, for you are my joy and the crown I receive for my work.

Words of Encouragement

²Now I appeal to Euodia and Syntyche. Please, because you belong to the Lord, settle your disagreement. ³And I ask you, my true partner, to help these two women, for they worked hard with me in telling others the Good News. They worked along with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are written in the Book of Life.

⁴Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again—rejoice! ⁵Let everyone see that you are considerate in all you do. Remember, the Lord is coming soon.

⁶Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. ⁷Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand.

His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.

⁸And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise. ⁹Keep putting into practice all you learned and received from me—everything you heard from me and saw me doing. Then the God of peace will be with you.

Lesson: Even If My World Is Anxious

Anxiety is at epidemic levels. From global uncertainty to personal struggles, it feels like there's always something to worry about. Paul offers a different way—not positive thinking, but intentional thinking. This week we'll discover practical tools for managing anxiety and finding peace that surpasses understanding.

Big Idea:

WEEK EIGHT NOTES:

[illegible]

What Is The Implication For Your Life?

Action Steps

WEEK NINE

Scripture Verse ~ *Philippians 4:10–19*



Paul's Thanks for Their Gifts

¹⁰How I praise the Lord that you are concerned about me again. I know you have always been concerned for me, but you didn't have the chance to help me. ¹¹Not that I was ever in need, for I have learned how to be content with whatever I have. ¹²I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little. ¹³For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength. ¹⁴Even so, you have done well to share with me in my present difficulty.

¹⁵As you know, you Philippians were the only ones who gave me financial help when I first brought you the Good News and then traveled on from Macedonia. No other church did this. ¹⁶Even when I was in Thessalonica you sent help more than once. ¹⁷I don't say this because I want a gift from you. Rather, I want you to receive a reward for your kindness.

¹⁸At the moment I have all I need—and more! I am generously supplied with the gifts you sent me with Epaphroditus. They are a sweet-smelling sacrifice that is acceptable and pleasing to God. ¹⁹And this same God who takes care of me will supply all your needs from his glorious riches, which have been given to us in Christ Jesus.

Lesson: Even If I Don't Have Enough

Whether it's money, time, energy, or opportunities, we all face seasons of scarcity. Paul learned the secret of contentment in both abundance and need—and it wasn't about having more stuff. This week we'll explore how to find contentment not in what we have, but in Who we have.

Big Idea:

WEEK NINE NOTES:

[illegible]

What Is The Implication For Your Life?

Action Steps

WEEK TEN

Scripture Verse ~ *Philippians 4:20-23*



²⁰Now all glory to God our Father forever and ever! Amen.

Paul's Final Greetings

²¹ Give my greetings to each of God's holy people—all who belong to Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me send you their greetings. ²² And all the rest of God's people send you greetings, too, especially those in Caesar's household.

²³May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

Lesson: Even If the Story Ends Differently

Every story ends, but not every ending looks like we hoped it would. Paul doesn't know if his story will end in freedom or execution, but he knows it will end with glory to God. This week we'll discover how to live with open hands, trusting that however our story unfolds, God will be glorified, and we will be satisfied.

Big Idea:

WEEK TEN NOTES:

[illegible]

What Is The Implication For Your Life?

Action Steps

Even If...

Moving Forward

Over these ten weeks, we've walked through Paul's letter to the Philippians— a letter written from prison, shaped by uncertainty, and yet filled with joy.

Again and again, Paul shows us that joy isn't found in ideal circumstances, but in the awareness of Christ's constant presence. This isn't joy that ignores reality, but joy that holds steady even if life doesn't unfold the way we expected.

This workbook was not meant to be a finish line. It was meant to help you slow down, listen closely, and begin practicing a faith that carries into everyday life.

KEEP THE PRACTICE GOING

One simple way to continue is to keep doing what you've already started. Consider bringing a notebook or journal with you to worship—a place to write down Scripture, sermon insights, prayers, and the ways God is speaking to you. Spiritual growth rarely happens all at once. It happens through consistent, faithful practices over time.

GO DEEPER

Studying Scripture is one of many ways God forms us. You may sense an invitation to explore other spiritual disciplines like prayer, silence, generosity, or daily reflection.

To continue your journey, visit www.acac.net/closer, where you'll find resources designed to help you grow closer to God, including a downloadable prayer journal.


A FINAL ENCOURAGEMENT

Wherever you find yourself today — steady or uncertain, hopeful or weary—may the words of Philippians continue to shape your faith:

To live is Christ.

To trust is to surrender.

To follow Jesus is to say, **"Even if... God is still at work."**



"May you walk forward with steady faith, practicing what you've learned, trusting that the God of peace is with you—even if."



Allegheny Center
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| 250 E. Ohio St., Pittsburgh, PA 15212 | 412.321.4333 | www.acac.net