

BIBLE TEACHING AND WORSHIP GUIDE



FOR THE HOME-BASED CHURCH

Produced Weekly

Look at Life Positively
Philippians 1:1-26

Copy this sheet for the Gathering Time, Bible Study, and Worship Experience leaders for the next meeting of the church.

Leaders' Responsibilities:

Important: Each person who will be leading one of the three parts of a session during a series of sessions needs to have access to the "Introduction" article found at the beginning of each series (Bible Teaching #....). The weekly session "Background" located in the Teacher Preparation is much more specific to that day's study.

1. **The Gathering Time Leader** will gather all of the people together and help them prepare their minds and hearts for a wonderful worship experience before God. His/her responsibility is to introduce the congregation to the theme (content) and the Scripture that will be central to their worship experience for the day.

2. **The Bible Study Leader** will then help the people understand what the Scriptures have to say and teach us about the content of the study for the day. He/she will guide the people to make a general application of the study (ie: How does this Bible study apply to people today?)

3. **The Worship Time Leader** has the responsibility to use the theme and Scriptures to guide the congregation to make personal commitments to God's will for each one in regard to the study for the day. He/she will use others to lead in the music, taking the offering, ministry moment comments, and other activities and parts of the **Worship Time** that can aid in participatory worship.

Prior to this Coming Session:

Gathering Time Leader:

Ask someone to read 1 Peter 2:9 in both the Gathering Time and the Worship Time. Make a copy for the reader from the one given at the end of the Worship Time.

Bible Study Leader:

Worship Time Leader:

See Gathering Time Leader suggestions.

Music Sources:

How Deep the Father's Love for Us, *The Worship Hymnal* # 101; CCLI # 1558110

Amazing Love, *The Worship Hymnal* # 168; CCLI # 1043618

Make Me a Servant, *The Worship Hymnal* # 381; CCLI # 33131

I Have Decided to Follow Jesus, *The Worship Hymnal* # 434; CCLI # 5077724 or 2151540

1

Copy this section for the Gathering Time leader.

Gathering Time: (Suggested time: 15 minutes)

Look at Life Positively

Focal Text

Philippians 1:1-26

Background

Philippians 1:1-26

Main Idea

Although we may need to deal with many negatives in life, we can learn to look at life more positively through practicing our faith in Christ.

Question to Explore

How can we learn to look at life both positively and realistically?

Teaching Aim

To lead the church to decide on ways they will approach life positively as well as realistically.

Gathering together:

Sing:

How Deep the Father's Love for Us, *The Worship Hymnal* # 101; CCLI # 1558110

Amazing Love, *The Worship Hymnal* # 168; CCLI # 1043618

First thoughts:

In 1952, Dr. Norman Vincent Peale published *The Power of Positive Thinking*. A 1996 updated version of the book declared it to be the greatest inspirational best-seller of our time. Certainly in North America it was immensely popular. The mood of the 1950's was upbeat as many self-help books were written and the emphasis was on overcoming low self-esteem and improving one's life by using one's own inner strengths. Although Peale pastored Marble Collegiate Church in New York City for many years and although the book included spirituality as a part of the road to positive living, Peale's own experience led to a variety of spiritual experiences. The emphasis on the human ability to overcome negative experiences overshadowed the importance of a relationship with Christ.

The emphasis on living life positively which is the focus of today's study and worship will lift up our dependence on Christ. Our relationship to Christ – in fact our slavery to him is the key to being able to have a positive attitude even in the midst of difficult circumstances. In the letter to the Colossians, Paul said it this way, **“Set your minds of things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God”** (Colossians 3:2, 3).

Closing the Gathering Time:

Ask someone to read 1 Peter: 2:9 **“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”**

(This passage will be read again in the worship time. Whoever is asked to read the passage should be prepared to read it again.)

Take time at this point to mention items of prayer concern for the church, announcements of ministry or activities, and anything else that needs to be shared with or by the congregation. Pray for these needs. Remember to praise God in prayer.

Break time! Take five minutes between sessions. Encourage children to use the washroom so that they won't need to leave during the Bible Study time.

Distribute youth/adult Bible study outlines or paper for note-taking, if available.

Also hand out the activity sheets for preschool and younger children to use during Bible Study and/or worship.

2

Copy this section for the Bible Study leader.

Note to the Bible Study Leader: Suggested teaching time for the Bible study should be about 35 minutes. Use the “Teacher Preparation” for your personal study during the week before the session. Use the “Bible Study Plan” for the actual session.

Teacher Preparation

Look at Life Positively

Focal Text

Philippians 1:1-26

Background

Philippians 1:1-26

Main Idea

Although we may need to deal with many negatives in life, we can learn to look at life more positively through practicing our faith in Christ.

Question to Explore

How can we learn to look at life both positively and realistically?

Teaching Aim

To lead the church to decide on ways they will approach life positively as well as realistically.

Introduction to your personal study:

A young husband and father suffered from degenerative back problems. After extensive surgery and recovery time he was returning to work. On his very first day back on the job – in fact on the way to that job, he was stopped at a stop light and a car rear-ended his vehicle. All of the progress made in correcting the back problem was, in an instant, reversed.

How can this young man and his family have a positive attitude in the face of such circumstances. It is not an easy task. We shall look to today’s session to help find answers to this question. We are challenged to ask the question “How can we learn to look at life both positively and realistically?” A positive attitude which is not realistic will not serve us well when we deal with a life circumstance which impacts finances, plans for the future, and relationships.

Background:

Please ask for and read the information contained in the “**Introduction**” article found at the beginning of this series of Bible Study and Worship sessions (Bible Teaching #.....). The person who downloaded this session should have that material for you, as well.

Traditionally, Paul’s letter to the Philippians is set during the time of Paul’s imprisonment in Rome. We cannot pinpoint the exact date of the letter. Some would argue that the imprisonment may have been in Rome during the late 50s or early 60s (Acts 28: 14-31). Others might feel he was in Caesarea during the mid to late 50s (Acts 23:23--26:32). Even Ephesus is suggested by Acts 20-18-19, 2 Corinthians 1:8-10.

Some commentators feel that the imprisonment was a good deal earlier than the Roman one, and that it was written from a city much nearer to Philippi than Rome. Rome was 800 miles from Philippi. But Paul visited Philippi on more than one occasion and the Philippians sent Epaphroditus to visit and care for Paul while he was in prison. Paul’s imprisonment in Rome was a long one, one much longer than he would have undergone in Ephesus so it may be well to assume that Paul is, indeed, writing from Rome.

Even though Paul’s circumstances were different in each of the imprisonments, there were restrictions which were, at the very least, unpleasant. In Rome he was allowed to live by himself, with a soldier to guard him (Acts 28:16). In each of these prison experiences, Paul continued preaching, teaching, and counselling people. However difficult things became, Paul used every opportunity for continuing to share the gospel.

The letter to the Philippians was brought to them by Epaphroditus on his return to the Philippian church of which he was a member. The letter is addressed to the church at Philippi, an ancient and historic city of Macedonia. Philippi took its name from Philip, the father of Alexander, who founded a new city of the site of an early settlement known as “The Springs”. The position was of high strategic value and there were mineral and ore mines in the neighbourhood and a fertile stretch of country. However, even in Paul’s day, when it most flourishing, it was only a small city and gradually it fell into obscurity with only a few vestiges of it now remain.

In 42 B.C. Philippi was the scene of the great battle between Brutus and Cassius on the one side and Anthony and Octavian on the other. It was this victory of the avengers of Julius Caesar which marked the beginning of the Roman Empire. When Octavian became the head of state, under the title of Augustus, he rebuilt Philippi and peopled it with his old soldiers. It henceforth held the rank of “colony”, a military outpost of Rome. The people of Philippi were proud of their Roman connection.

Paul began his ministry in Philippi when he crossed the Aegean Sea from Troas in A.D. 52 as a consequence of a dream in which he saw a man of Macedonia calling to him,

“Come over and help us” (Acts 16: 6-10) Paul sailed in company with Silas and Timothy and apparently with Luke.

When Paul first went to Philippi he found the Jewish community too small to have a synagogue. The Jews held their service at a **“praying place”** apparently in the open air near the river and Paul went there on the Sabbath and proclaimed his message. He won several converts to Jesus. One of these was Lydia, a native of Thyatira in Asia Minor, who dealt in the purple fabrics for which that city was famous. Lydia was not a Jewess, but a **“worshipper of God”**. She may have been impressed by the lofty character of Jewish religion and attached herself to the Jewish community. She may have been a woman of some wealth and she opened her house to Paul and his companions as a center for their work.

Paul stayed in Philippi long enough for a church to have been formed and for basic teaching to have been done.

Paul’s authorship is quite certain. Its teaching is unmistakably that of Paul. It is everywhere in keeping with all we know of his life and character. In its language and sentiment and manner of thought it carries the signature of Paul in every verse. It may be confidently affirmed that not only that the epistle is by Paul, but that it is one of the most characteristic of all his writings (See *The Interpreter’s Bible*, Volume 11).

Paul loved the Philippian church and writes to them out of a heart of love. He is concerned that they, like he, may be suffering for their faith and assures them that that suffering will be worth it all. He warns against being overly influenced by Judaism. Judaism is seductive because it offers visible tokens of God’s favour; it calls on men to put their confidence in earthly things-social privileges, rites, and ordinances, mechanical obedience to a written law.

Paul writes out of a full heart and it is difficult to trace a logical sequence to the letter. There are outbursts of tenderness and thanksgiving, warnings, profound reflections all mingled together.

Focusing on the Meaning:

The letter to the Philippians is a free-flowing, spontaneous expression of the Christian way, in all its heights and depths, by one who lived it out, fought it out and thought it out under severe pressure to the bitter end (The Interpreter’s Bible, 1955, Vol. 11, p. 14).

Chapter 1: 1-26 contains Paul’s greetings, thanksgiving and prayer and a description of Paul’s life in prison. It asks us the question, “How can we look at life both positively and realistically?”

Paul, although in prison, was able to look at life positively through

- building warm relationships with others (1:3-8)

- relating to others with concern (1:9-11)
- looking for the good even in the midst of opposition (1: 12-19)
- focusing life on Christ (1:20-26).

In verse 1, Paul greets the church with his name and with the name of Timothy. Timothy is not a co-writer of the letter, but he had assisted Paul in establishing the church at Philippi and shared Paul's interest in it. Paul does not describe himself as an apostle of Jesus Christ because he has already established a relationship with this church. He does describe himself and Timothy as **“servants of Christ Jesus”**. The word he uses literally means “slaves”. Not only did Paul and Timothy work in Christ's service, but they belonged to him – body and soul. Utter devotion to Christ becomes the keynote of the letter.

The letter is addressed to **“all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi”**. We still are amazed at this concept. We are saints because of our belief in Christ. We are set apart and made holy, not through our own ability, but because of God's working in us.

Philippians is, like all of Scripture, God's message to **“all the saints in Christ Jesus”** wherever they may be located in the world today. God's plan was that Paul's specific writing to a certain group of believers would become God's message to His people across the ages. It must have thrilled the Philippians to be addressed as **“all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi”**. It ought to thrill us today to be addressed as **“all the saints in Christ Jesus”**.

Paul has given two remarkable examples of human relationships. He considered Timothy an equal in ministry – a fellow slave. And he considered the people to whom he wrote “saints”. How unlike our natural human tendency to want to have power and prestige. We want to be the best at what we do and we want to have the human indicators of that – a bigger house or car. We long for titles and awards. But Paul demonstrates in these two small verses that we are equal in the kingdom of God – we are slaves and saints.

Paul wishes for his readers **“grace and peace”**. We would give that gift to another person if we could, but this comes from “God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ”. We, however, are sometimes conduits of this grace and peace even as Paul is to his readers in Philippi. A letter of sympathy, a home-cooked meal, a ride to the doctor's office, a heart-felt word of appreciation may be the means by which God's “grace and peace” is transmitted to people within our sphere of influence.

“I thank my God upon every remembrance of you.” This is a phrase often used by Paul as he writes to churches and individuals. Yet it never seems trite. How lovely to have in our life those people for whom we are always thankful. How wonderful to know that others are thankful upon their remembrance of us. It should be our great heart's desire to build relationships of trust which lead to thankfulness.

Verses 4 and 5: ***“Always, in every prayer of mine for you all making requests with joy. For your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now”*** continues the thankful attitude of Paul’s heart for these people. He remembers them with joy. The verse indicates a constant remembering of needs – large and small. It would seem that as we grow older, we would automatically spend more time in prayer as our list of people for whom we have love and concern grows and grows.

Is there any fellowship or friendship sweeter than the ***“fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now”***. This writer is completing almost forty years of professional ministry service and one of the tasks of these last months has been going through and rereading letters and mementoes which have been saved. It is a long process for almost every page calls to mind someone who for whom we are grateful for fellowship in the gospel at some point in our life. Sweet memories and continued prayer are combined as we go through the memorabilia of a life time. This exists in Paul’s writing here as he remembers this faithful church whose members accepted readily the good news which Paul brought.

The strong words of verse 6 encourage our hearts whatever our age may be. ***“And I am sure that He who began a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.”***

For eighteen years this writer has trained seminary students. Prior to that, my spouse and I ministered to university students. In all of these years, we have held to the promise that the good work began in believers would be completed. From a human standpoint, it does not always seem that this is true. And yet it is our heart’s desire for one another as believers. May that which God began to work in you be lasting and growing until Christ comes.

Verses 7 and 8 reemphasize the warm relationships Paul has built with the believers at Philippi. ***“It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart; for whether I am in chains or defending the gospel, all of you share in God’s grace with me. God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.”***

The following two verses continue the theme of warm relationships, but specifically speak of relating to others with concern. Paul express his prayer for the believers. ***“And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ – to the glory and praise of God.”***

For whom would we pray such a prayer? We would pray that prayer for someone we loved very much – our children, grandchildren, a student, someone we had won to Christ. Paul is not praying for more earthly knowledge – though that may be involved – but for depth of insight. He prays for a discernment that will keep them free from harm and from doing harm to others.

A further emphasis is seen in verses 12-19 where Paul encourages looking for the good in spite of opposition. In verse 12 he declares, ***“Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel”*** These are amazing words. Paul declares that it has been a good thing for him to be in prison. It has given him the opportunity to share with palace guards and to everyone else that he is in chains because of his faith in Christ. Not only that but his suffering has caused other believers to speak out more courageously. He admits that all may not speak from pure motives, but nonetheless, the gospel is preached.

This is not false bravado. Paul has truly learned through his sufferings that God’s plan is bigger than our ability to understand. God can and does use the hard circumstances of our lives to bring greater glory to Himself and ultimately great victory for us.

These are not words to be spoken lightly to someone who is genuinely suffering. In fact, these are words of encouragement that we speak to one another when life is gentler so that when the dark days and nights of sorrow come, we have them stored up in our hearts and mind. They have become for us a reality upon which we can and will rely.

Paul ends the first chapter of his letter to the Philippians with the exultant words, ***“For me to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labour for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far, but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body.”***

A dear friend of the writer recently died with pancreatic cancer. Another is dying as I write. Both would say, “My family and friends want me to stay. I need to stay; I have fruitful labour to do.” Both would enthusiastically affirm, ***“For me to live is Christ and to die is gain.”***

On my desk is a card which I need to write to a friend whose wife died on the weekend. Down the hall from my office is my co-worker and friend who only this morning made a visit to the doctor with her husband to confirm the treatment for a large tumour. Eight months last year her husband was hospitalized with other medical problems.

Are these all opportunities for sharing the gospel? Yes, and a thousand times yes. The life which focuses on Christ finds peace and purpose in every circumstance. We can say with Paul, ***“For me to live is Christ and to die is gain.”***

Your Goal as the Leader of this Bible Study:

The theme and passage for this session offers you as the teacher/leader a wonderful opportunity to demonstrate the joy of eternal life in Christ – beginning now! However, remember that Paul’s declaration ***“For me to live is Christ and to die is gain”*** cannot stand alone as a mere statement of belief. It must be seen in the life of the speaker or it

has little meaning. If you, like many of us, struggle to really believe and practice that declaration, confess it to your church as you teach. But let them know that you continually strive to make it your theme for your own life and that nothing less is expected of every Christian through every circumstance in each of their lives.

For Personal Reflection:

What have I learned from this study?

What personal experience does this session bring to mind?

What is one action I will take this week to apply this Scripture passage to my life?

Bible Study Plan (Suggested time: 35 minutes)

Regroup the church after the Gathering Time and break by singing a chorus that young children can relate to—or another praise chorus if your congregation does not have children. Children who go to their own Bible teaching session should stay with the group until after this song. Have the preschoolers and children accompany the hymn with rhythm sticks, maracas, bells, etc.

Begin by helping the group locate the Focal Text in their Bibles. Also, share with them the Main Idea to be learned from the Scriptures, and the Questions to be Explored by the group.

Look at Life Positively

Focal Text

Philippians 1:1-26

Background

Philippians 1:1-26

Main Idea

Although we may need to deal with many negatives in life, we can learn to look at life more positively through practicing our faith in Christ.

Question to Explore

How can we learn to look at life both positively and realistically?

Teaching Aim

To lead the church to decide on ways they will approach life positively as well as realistically.

Connect with Life:

Open by describing this situation to the group: A young husband and father suffered from degenerative back problems. After extensive surgery and recovery time he was returning to work. On his very first day back on the job – in fact on the way to that job, he was stopped at a stop light and a car rear-ended his vehicle. All of the progress made in correcting the back problem was, in an instant, reversed.

How can this young man and his family have a positive attitude in the face of such circumstances. It is not an easy task. We shall look to today's session to help find answers to this question. We are challenged to ask the question "How can we learn to look at life both positively and realistically?" A positive attitude which is not realistic will

not serve us well when we deal with a life circumstance which impacts finances, plans for the future, and relationships.

Guide the Study:

Involve participants in reading through the entire passage to be studied (Philippians 1: 1-26).

You may ask one person to read the entire passage or all of the class may read three verses at a time around the group. **(Only ask all to read if you are certain that everyone present is capable of reading at that level and comfortable doing so).**

Ask: How does Paul identify himself? (As a servant of Christ)

Continue: Why is Timothy included in the salutation? (Timothy helped start the Philippian church; he was with Paul and helping Paul at the time of the writing).

Look for an answer: What important word does Paul use in addressing the church? (saints). (Do not dwell on the meaning of the word saint since it will be the focus of the worship time today).

Now request someone to read verse 2 again.

Comment on the meaning that this verse might have had to the readers of the letter.

Ask: What is the relationship of Paul to this church as seen in verses 3-8? (Paul is thankful for them; he prays for them with joy; he considers them partners in starting the church and continuing in ministry; he believes God will continue to use them; he has deep affection for the people of the church).

Look for someone to read verses 9-11.

Comment: Paul's longing and prayer for the church is that they may abound in knowledge of God and his will. He wants them to have discernment and wisdom in order to make the best choices for their lives. He wants them to live holy lives.

Have someone to read verses 12-14.

Search out answers: What good results does Paul see have come from his imprisonment?

Read verses 15-18 and comment that these are difficult concepts.

Say: Obviously some of those who have been encouraged to speak the word of God have done so out of mixed motives. Yet Paul is glad they are preaching.

Encourage the group to briefly discuss this question: What are examples in modern life where the gospel is preached, but the motives of the “preacher” seem less than noble?

Solicit an answer: How can we have the right attitude about these realities?

Encourage a person to read verses 19-26.

Have the group search for what amazing statement is seen in verse 21: (“**For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.**”) Allow several participants to express what this verse means to them.

Discuss this briefly with the group: How does this verse speak to us when someone we love is dying or facing a long illness?

State: “We are attempting to focus on both the positive and the realistic of life’s circumstances.”

Ask the group to share personal stories about ways in which in very difficult situations, they have been encouraged to have a positive attitude. **Begin to watch your allotted time for Bible study.**

Note to teacher: Be sensitive to the fact that someone in your group will be dealing with a very negative situation and may be struggling to find any positive outcome for that situation. How can this session encourage them?

Encourage Application:

If you have two or more youth, this is the time to give them the **Youth!!! Take Ten** page and allow them to move away from the adults and apply the lesson by and for themselves.

Review the four concepts present in this passage and help participants give practical examples of how doing these help us to have a positive and realistic attitude about life.

1. building warm relationships with others.
2. relating to others with concern.
3. looking for the good even in the midst of opposition.
4. focusing life on Christ.

Take a five minute break to separate the Bible Study and Worship Time. Children may need to use the washroom again before worship.

Youth!!! Take Ten

Bible Study Application for Youth

You may wish to move away from the adults for the final five to ten minutes of the Bible study and help each other as youth to apply the lesson to your own needs.

Look at Life Positively Philippians 1: 1-26

A youth will lead the following activity and comments. No adults need to be present. If possible, teens should take turns in leading the application time.

Positive While In the Negative

Paul, although in prison, was able to look at life positively – thoroughly building warm relationships with others (1:3-8).

1. Relating to others with concern (1:9-11)
2. Looking for the good even in the midst of opposition (1: 12-19)
3. Focusing life on Christ (1:20-26).

Choose one or more of these concepts and give practical examples to each other of how this could help one have a positive outlook on life.

Worship Time (Suggested time: 30 minutes)***Look at Life Positively***
Philippians 1: 1-26**Beginning the Service:**

Choose hymns or praise songs to sing that reflect God's presence with us and His goodness to us. You might also try to think of one to sing that confirms that we are all "saints" who follow Jesus. One of those might be **Make Me a Servant**, *The Worship Hymnal* # 381; CCLI # 33131.

Offering:**Praying for the World:**

Workers are helping a small "jungle school" in Southeast Asia by repairing their classroom building, providing some basic textbooks, giving health lessons and providing other needed resources. Most importantly, the students will have an opportunity to hear and respond to the greatest story ever to. Pray for the students to ultimately be a channel of blessing as they provide an open door to share Truth with their families and communities.

Sharing Guide:

This sharing guide is written to assist the person who directs the worship time to reemphasize the teaching for the day and help guide the congregation to respond to God's call and will for their lives in regard to the scripture studied. The leader may choose to follow the guide closely. Or, he or she may wish to only use it to give direction and a concept for preparing an original message. The leader is free to choose other ways to communicate and share the concepts presented here.

Slaves and Saints

Our title today “Slaves and Saints” brings images to our minds immediately. We may not have positive images for either of these two words. Yet Paul uses them as descriptive words for himself and Timothy and for the people of the Philippian church.

As we worship this morning let us consider if one or both of those words are desirable descriptors for us. Do we want to be either slaves or saints?

Paul begins the letter to the Philippians with the words **“Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus”**. The translation of the Greek word used here is servants, but the words means literally “slaves” and implies that Paul and Timothy not only worked in Christ’s service, but belonged to him – body and soul. This idea of utter devotion to Christ sets the tone for the entire letter to the Philippians.

Slavery was a part of the culture in New Testament times. Ephesians 6: 5 is a part of the “household code” or admonitions about how to live harmoniously in the social system of which the early believers were a part. It says, **“Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. Obey them not only to win their favour when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men, because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free.”**

Slaves may have been a conquered people; women and children whose husbands and fathers were killed in war. Their place in the homes of others was that of a possession. They may have occasionally been treated well – either because their owner was a kind person or because their owner had learned that a contented slave worked better than an oppressed slave. But the underlying reality was that the slave had no choice to stay or to leave. He or she made no decisions for themselves. The master made all their decisions.

The small letter which Paul wrote to Philemon on behalf of Onesimus gives us a glimpse of slavery which existed in Paul’s day. Apparently, Onesimus had run away from Philemon, his owner. Paul says, **“Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me.”** We are not sure what Paul meant here. Was Onesimus always a useless slave? Was he basically lazy? Did Philemon treat his slaves cruelly even after he himself became a believer in Christ? Or was the position of slavery so degrading and hopeless that, regardless of the treatment received, Onesimus longed for freedom. He met Paul and through that relationship, he met Christ. Now he is going back to Philemon. Paul most certainly encouraged him, but perhaps he also had a desire to mend a relationship which was broken. Paul writes Philemon to receive him – no longer as a slave, but as a brother.

Paul, in his writings, is not encouraging slavery; he is dealing with a reality that existed. When possible that relationship of owner and slave should be changed to one of brotherhood.

In the 21st century, slavery still exists. Young children are stolen from or sold by desperate parents into sex-trade slavery. The scars of slavery during the early years of the United States and other nations still exist. Racial division is an ongoing issue.

Yet, as disagreeable as slavery is, Paul chooses to identify himself and Timothy as slaves to Jesus Christ.

Nothing about our 21st century mindset makes us willing to be slaves – not to another person and not even to Christ himself. Yet it is this word which can transmit the image of total belongingness which Paul wants us to understand in the Philippian letter. We belong to Christ.

Another word Paul uses in the Philippian letter is saint. He addresses the church at Philippi: ***“To all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi.”*** The word saint has for most present day thinkers a negative connotation. It refers, in casual conversation, to a “holier than thou” person. It may mean someone who is so “heavenly minded that they are of no earthly good”. This simply means that people exist who act so piously religious that they are useless for the earthly tasks and relationships we all face.

The Catholic Church has formalized the concept of sainthood to be restricted to those Catholics who have led exemplary lives of service and/or leadership. It is an honour conveyed by the Church hierarchy after the death of such a person and after careful scrutiny of that person’s life. Even those saints who are more recent and more known by common people since as Mother Teresa may be people who are admired, but few would emulate the life they led.

But Paul speaks to the church as ***“all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi.”*** He transforms the word from an honour reserved for a few to a description of a relationship of a believer and Jesus Christ. We are saints not because of our great deeds, but because of His great deed – his death, burial, and resurrection. Saint then means believer, follower, committed one, chosen one.

Call to Commitment:

We are called then to these designations. We are to be slaves. We belong to Christ. Our daily tasks are controlled by his presence in our lives. We no longer make decisions apart from His will. We are slaves of Christ Jesus.

And we are saints. We are believers, sold out ones, chosen by Christ himself. We strive to be holy, but it is not holiness that makes us saints. It is our relationship to Jesus Christ, God of the Universe and our Saviour.

Concluding the Service:

Sing **I Have Decided to Follow Jesus**, *The Worship Hymnal* # 434; CCLI # 5077724 or 2151540

Use as indicated in the session:

1 Peter: 2:9

***“But you are:
a chosen people,
a royal priesthood,
a holy nation,
a people belonging to God,
so that you may declare
the praises of him who
called you out of darkness
into his wonderful light.”***