

SOUTHLAND CHURCH

THE BOOKS OF  
**PHILIPPIANS,  
COLOSSIANS, TITUS  
AND PHILEMON**

*17 Day Devotional*



**foundations**  
daily devotional



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Versions of scripture quotations are noted.

*The Book of Philippians***DAY 1**

**READ:** If your Bible has an introduction to the book of Philippians, read that.

**INTRODUCTION**

The book of Philippians is a letter written by Paul to the Church at Philippi. Although Timothy is mentioned in the introduction, the writer is Paul. Likely Timothy was his companion and so by proxy the letter was also from him. The city of Philippi was located in what is now Northern Greece. 'The Church at Philippi' refers to the whole body of Christ in Philippi. Paul felt a type of Father-like responsibility and love toward the Philippian Church because they were all his direct converts, or spiritual children of his. The letter reveals the heart of a man who would love to be right there with them but can't this time.

He visited there several times. On his second missionary trip to Philippi Paul was led there in a vision by a Macedonian man. While he was there he baptized the first Christian convert: Lydia, the merchant of purple dye. Later, in his third trip, Paul exorcised a demon from a slave girl. This threw the city into an uproar and he, along with Silas, were arrested and thrown in prison. While in prison, God caused an earthquake to shake the prison so hard the shackles of the prisoners came off and the guard was about to commit suicide assuming the prisoners had escaped. Paul kept him from taking his life. This prison guard became a Christian. From these two converts the Church at Philippi began to develop into a stable and growing body of believers.

Most scholars believe Paul was under arrest in Rome when he wrote this letter to the Philippians. Epaphroditus, who was a leader in the Philippian church, was the deliverer of a care package sent by the church to help Paul. Epaphroditus got very sick while in Rome. When he was fully recovered Paul sent him back to Philippi carrying this letter.

If we were to choose one word to describe the theme of Philippians it would likely be joy. Paul, often imprisoned and persecuted for his faith, is the perfect person to write a letter on joy. If he could live in joy through the situations he'd been in, with God's grace, anyone could! In this letter he encourages the Philippians to have joy in suffering, in service, in faith, in giving and in all circumstances.

Philippians also reveals the tender, vulnerable heart of Paul, as he speaks to the church members with kindness and encouragement. He portrays himself as a sinner who falls short, identifying with the letter-recipients. Yet he also uses his words to empower them to abundant living and raises the standard of excellence in holy living to that of Christ. He is not over-bearing or pushy. Although he is passionate, his tone in this letter is gentle, father-like, and compassionate.

**JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. Reflect on the people who had a part in your conversion or spiritual growth and maturity. Have you respected them and treated them with loving care and kindness like the Philippian church cared for Paul? Evidently, the Philippian Church also took his letter to heart, took his advice and used it to grow even stronger. Do you take the advice and spiritual exhortation of your spiritual leaders to heart? Ask the Lord to speak to you about your relationship and responsibility toward those who have led you and grown you up in the faith. Thank Him for them.
2. As we head into a book with the theme of joy, reflect on how much joy you have in your life right now. Is it true joy based on Christ? Or is your joy based on your

circumstances or feelings? Ask the Lord to show you where the source of your joy comes from and to give you a word, thought or picture of how He wants to deepen and grow your joy through the Book of Philippians.

3. Take some time to thank the Lord for the leaders you have in your church. If you know of specific needs your church leaders have, pray for those. If not, ask the Holy Spirit to give you specific things you can pray for them. Pray they will have joy in great abundance today!

## DAY 2

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 **READ:** Philippians 1

Throughout this chapter we see Paul's tender love toward the people at Philippi. He counts them as partners in the gospel. Right from the beginning the Church at Philippi has remained involved with Paul. They've obviously continued to correspond, however, there is a deeper relationship Paul refers to here.

He has had their support while in prison as well as keeping up the spreading of the gospel while he's been away. The partnership in imprisonment, though, is significant. Paul clearly encourages them by letting them know how their support of him in prison, their prayers and continued spreading of the gospel is having great effect on the ministry he has in prison. He counts them as part of the success. Paul does not see himself as a lone ranger. He is giving them the good news from prison so they can be encouraged and motivated to keep on keeping on.

Paul is also very honest about how difficult it is to be in prison. We could entitle this chapter 'Joy in Suffering'. He really would rather die. Yet he communicates to his converts how effective persecution is for the furthering of the Kingdom of God. Even the Imperial Guard has noticed Paul and knows he is there because of his faith. Paul has been busy. His time in prison has been difficult, full-time ministry. He explains with his life how he wants to live so as not to be ashamed, even in the most dire situation, when most would excuse bad behavior. He would prefer to die and be with Jesus, yet his longing to see others saved becomes a solid reason to stay alive. He is completely submitted to God... whether in life or in death. We might call this a gospel of suffering as Paul explains that his joy still comes from the Lord.

He raises a difficult issue, one many struggle with today. Paul talks about preachers and evangelists who are doing it for all the wrong reasons. They have selfish and sinful motivations. Yet people are still being saved while he, the genuine article, sits in jail. They are purposely doing it to offend him while he is in prison. Paul could have been angry, even be tempted to give up all together. Instead, though, he is joyful and praising God that even though the methods are not good, people are still being saved.

 **JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. Paul makes a very deliberate effort to let the believers at Philippi understand how much of a difference their prayers make, not only for his endurance and ability to stay alive, but also for the furthering of the gospel. Ask the Holy Spirit to bring to mind situations, or countries, or specific people you have heard are suffering or in prison for their faith. Perhaps they are not in prison, but they have been held back from gainful employment or education, etc. because of their faith. Spend some time praying for their endurance and the furthering of the gospel among those who persecute them. Consider going to [www.persecution.net](http://www.persecution.net) to find people to pray for (Voice of the Martyrs Canada).

2. Reflect on a recent difficulty you have faced. Could you say along with Paul that you are completely submitted to God, whether you live or die there is truly benefit for you? Ask the Holy Spirit to speak to you about how prepared you are to suffer for your faith in such a way that your suffering would be a catalyst to growth in the Kingdom.
3. Do you have a mentality about your church or your pastor or your way of doing things that it is **the only** way to lead others to Christ and into growth? Confess this as sin and ask the Lord to show you how it is His work to bring people to Him. Ask Him to speak to your heart about the unity of those who truly come to Christ no matter who led them to Christ. Thank Him for the miracle of unifying people across borders, denominations, language and race through the work of the Holy Spirit.

## DAY 3

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### READ: Philippians 2

This chapter could be entitled 'Serving with Joy'. Paul could easily point to himself as a good example of servanthood. But instead he pulls no punches and exhorts them to live up to the example of Christ, the ultimate Example. He is telling the Philippians they can serve with joy and love because Christ did it for them. He points them to the sacrifices Jesus made to become human, suffer, and die for them without any hesitation because of the joy set before Him and the love He had for them. He reminds them how Jesus never held his sacrifice over their heads, He didn't rehearse the cost over and over, He didn't become proud of His sacrifice or service. He just served in complete humility. His joy came in obedience and the reward coming from it.

Paul wanted them to grow so deep in their faith that their external behavior was affected. He encouraged them to serve and work without complaining. It may seem like such a little thing next to his prison sentence, yet Paul knew this 'little' thing could make huge inroads in a difficult culture. The way the Christians would live and work and treat each other would be the light in the dark world letting the crooked generation know there was another way to live. Their lights, their pure lifestyles, would act as a beacon in a dark, stormy world.



### JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Reflect on the way you serve your family (your children or your parents or your siblings or your in-laws). Ask God to show you where you have done well in serving in difficult situations. Ask Him to show you an area or two where you could improve. Confess if necessary. Ask Him to fill you with His Spirit again and cause His love to overflow so your service to others can bring both you and Him joy.
2. Spend time reflecting on everything Jesus gave up for you. Reread vs. 5-10. Ask the Holy Spirit to bring His thoughts, words and pictures to your mind as you read these verses over several times to grasp this more deeply. Spend time on your knees (if you're physically able) thanking Jesus for all He has done and all He gave up.
3. Ask Jesus if you are a complainer, or if you have behaviors or attitudes that turn others away from Christ rather than drawing them to Christ. Confess if necessary. Ask Him to show you one thing you can work on in the next while to live as a light in a dark world. Thank Him for His forgiveness and grace.

**DAY 4****READ:** Philippians 3

If Paul's good works and great theological training could have gotten him to heaven, he'd have been the first one there. His record was spotless. This is something Paul says he could have boasted about, but in light of what he had in Jesus anything he would have gained through all his good credentials was the equivalent of garbage. Worse. Only the righteousness he has by faith counts for anything. He actually says he would willingly give up any reward for those 'good credentials' in exchange for the opportunity to suffer with Christ. So solid is Paul's belief in heaven and in God's rewards to those who love and serve Him till the end he would give everything up for that.

Paul's history, as he states so bluntly in this passage, includes persecuting Christians. That had to be a hard reputation to overcome! By God's grace though, he was overjoyed to be persecuted for Him. This is why Paul is so emphatic about forgetting what is behind. What's behind him is a life of horrendous sin – even though at the time he thought he was doing God's work. If Paul had let his mind dwell on these things during his time in prison he would not have had joy, or courage to keep pressing on. Instead, he thwarted every attempt of the enemy to destroy his joy by concentrating on all that God had done for him. Even more specifically, it was what God had promised him: the reward of heaven and being in God's presence.

However, one thing Paul points out is that the attitude of forgetting what's behind to push on to the prize is an attitude of the mature believer. This is the goal. It is not the starting point. And - it's not easy. He encourages the believers in Philippi not to hold it against anyone if they don't believe quite the same on this. Instead they need to trust God to reveal it when it's time. This is such a beautiful and tender teaching Paul gives us. Like the spiritual Father he is, he is allowing each to grow at their own pace, pushing no one to grow faster than the Holy Spirit is leading them.

**JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. Ask the Lord to reveal to you if there are any 'good credentials' or 'good behaviors' you are unknowingly holding onto as a measuring stick for God to use instead of your righteousness that came by faith alone in Him. Ask the Lord to show you if your belief in your resurrection after death into heaven is so strong you are willing to suffer for, and with, Christ. Ask Him to fill your heart with promises and your mind with His words and pictures to encourage you when you suffer for Him with joy.
2. Do you have sin from your past that is holding you back from pressing on toward the prize? Ask God to show you how 'forgetting what is behind' (purposely not thinking or dwelling on past sin we'll not likely ever forget) will give you joy and passion to move forward. Listen to the Lord as He speaks to you about your complete forgiveness. Journal what He says so you can go back to this for encouragement.
3. Have you ever been frustrated with another believer who just 'doesn't get it'? Or who seems to be growing slowly while you a growing quickly? Or do you sometimes feel like others are pushing you to grow and finding it very frustrating? Ask the Lord to speak to you about your spiritual growth. Ask Him to reveal to you if you need to leave others alone and instead pray for the Holy Spirit to lead them into deeper growth. Confess any sin of getting in the Holy Spirit's way, if necessary. Thank the Lord that He has your spiritual growth as His focus and that He promises to bring your growth to completion. (Phil. 1:6)

**DAY 5****READ:** Philippians 4

We often think peace has to do with our circumstances. If things are going well, we have peace. If things are chaotic, we can't have peace. Yet according to vs. 4-7 we can have peace and it has everything to do with how we are relating to God. The challenge is to rejoice in all things. ALL things. Not being anxious about our situations is also key. When we rejoice, we are putting our focus on the Lord rather than on our dilemma. In order to avoid anxiety from worry, we are told to pray. If we practice this as the Lord outlined it in this chapter, we'll first be rejoicing, which will give us perspective, and remind us who we serve and who God Almighty is. With this reminder and refocus, going to prayer is much, much easier. When we pray with this kind of focus we can't help but leave our worries in His more than capable hands. When we see there is nothing left for us to do but to wait on God who is good and worthy of our praise, and who has all things in His control, we will have peace.

Phil. 4:8 is a well-known verse about what to think about. This is an ideal passage for taking thoughts captive and training, and retraining, our thoughts, and therefore hearts, in purity and holiness. It also establishes our worldview in Truth and Love. When our hearts and minds are full of things pleasing to the Lord, our actions will follow suit. In this kind of solid thinking and living we will know and sense the God of peace. Our minds will not be thrown into confusion by lies, or tempted to sin with gossip, or vengeful thinking, or ideas that are contrary to God's holy will and plan. When we are aligned with God through His Spirit we will know His peace.

Paul spends some time thanking the Philippians for their gift, and explaining how tough things had been for him for a while when no one sent him anything. He explains how he is glad they are concerned for him again. Not because he needed them to send him stuff, even though he did. To Paul their revived concern shows they are growing again and listening to the Holy Spirit. So he is thrilled! The other benefit of having gone without is Paul can now say with confidence that he can live with joy even with he doesn't have very much or anything at all. His sights have been set higher.

**JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. Reflect on a current or recent struggle or difficult situation you have had. Were you rejoicing in the midst of it? Ask the Lord to reveal to you a current struggle you are having and ask the Holy Spirit to show you how to rejoice in HIM through this. Ask Him to turn your eyes to Him and see His strength, provision, might, and love in your situation. Praise Him for it!
2. Ask the Holy spirit to show you a lie you have been believing or a difficulty you are facing that could be turned around completely if you captured your thoughts and deliberately focused on things approved by Phil. 4:8. Ask God to give you the truth about your situation, and help you to think pure and holy thoughts about this difficulty and the people involved.
3. The Philippians growth was evidenced by the way they cared for Paul, their spiritual leader. Ask the Lord to show you if there is someone (perhaps a spiritual leader, cell leader, or mentor) who you should care for in some way, even if it's small. Leaders are encouraged when they see growth in those they lead. Ask God if there is another step you need to take in any other area that would show others your growth and fruit

*The Book of Colossians***DAY 6**

**READ:** If your Bible has an introduction to the book of Colossians, read that.

**INTRODUCTION**

Paul, the writer of the letter to the church at Colossae, was in prison when he wrote this epistle.

Colossae was located in Lower Asia Minor, now Turkey. It was part of the Kingdom of Phrygia, and very close to several other small cities such as Laodicea and Hierapolis. Epaphras was likely a leader in the church at Colossae, and in nearby churches. (Col. 4:12) Epaphras was likely visiting Paul in prison. Because of the relationship Epaphras had with neighboring churches, Paul asked the Colossians to share their letter with the Laodicean church, and to read the one the Laodiceans had been sent. (ch. 4) This indicates to us the relationship the churches had with each other, and with their leader, Epaphras. They likely struggled with some of the same issues, lived in similar cultures, and had been taught similar doctrine regarding Christianity.

Paul had never been to Colossae. The believers there were not his direct converts. No one can say for sure who introduced Christianity to this city, but there are two likely options. The people from Colossae could have been present at the time of Pentecost in Jerusalem (Acts 1:9 indicates people from Phrygia). Or Epaphras may have been the initial witness to the area. We don't know his conversion story but it was likely either at Pentecost, or at Ephesus when Paul ministered there. It is likely he was under Paul's instruction since his dedication to Paul as a spiritual father seems strong. Epaphras led the church at Colossae to honor Paul and his teaching, even though they had never met Paul personally. Many of them longed and prayed for Paul to visit, as if Paul was their spiritual father, not Epaphras.

The Colossian church likely had a mix of both Gentile Christians and those of Jewish heritage. This lent itself to a different religious experience for this church than for others. Colossae itself was originally not Jewish at all. However, because of the Jews brought to Babylon by Antichus III many years before, there was a strong Jewish population by the time Paul wrote this letter.

This cultural mix, was likely the reason for some of the instruction Paul gave. He cautioned against various false teachings and practices that seemed to be blossoming. From the extremes of legalism to liberalism, it seemed Paul needed to address it all. This makes the book of Colossians very applicable to the Church today.

**JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. As you work your way through Colossians, ask the Holy Spirit to convict you of any sin that may blind you to the truth of God's Word. Accept His forgiveness and thank Him for it.
2. Ask the Lord to reveal something He wants you to grow in this week. Write down the word, thought or picture He gives you.
3. Take a few minutes to pray for the spiritual leaders of your church. Pray for the preaching and teaching pastor(s) as well as the elders and/or deacons. Pray for God's blessing over them, for deeper understanding of His Word, and greater intimacy with Him in prayer and listening prayer. Ask the Lord to purify and protect their marriages and families, and to expand their influence and effectiveness in the Kingdom.

**DAY 7****READ:** Colossians 1:1-14

Paul begins his letter with a greeting, and in it gives himself a title. He calls himself an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God. The first thing this demonstrates to the reader is his authority. He is confident in his position and willingly takes on the responsibility of the position. At the same time he is acknowledging this as God's idea, not his. This humility is necessary for any leader, but especially for Paul who is writing to a church he's never personally met. He writes to correct and teach them, so if he doesn't come with both authority and humility, they may reject him, and then in turn reject Jesus Christ.

Paul tells the church how and what he prays for them. This is meant as a threefold encouragement. First, just knowing they are being prayed for will give them motivation to keep fighting the good fight. Secondly, as they know what Paul is praying for them they will be able to look at their lives and see God at work in their lives as a direct answer to his prayer. Thirdly, they can pray along with Paul for the very things he has, in essence, told them are necessary for spiritual growth.

Paul tells the Christians at Colossae exactly what he prays for them to encourage them, but it's also to instruct and affirm. As an apostle (and disciple maker) it is his responsibility to ensure those under his direction have accurate teaching and are encouraged to keep growing in the faith.

One of the specific things Paul prays is for their filling of spiritual wisdom and knowledge. However, Paul doesn't expect them to sit and study to gain copious amounts of knowledge. No. The knowledge is to come not only from study but from a filling of the Holy Spirit. The **purpose** of the knowledge is so their behavior would change.

Behavior should change as a result of this increased knowledge. There must be fruit. It's pointless to be filled with knowledge if that knowledge is never used. There is a common saying, or proverb, which reflects this teaching: *Don't be so heavenly minded you are no earthly good.* Those who are truly heavenly minded – with their thoughts focused on Christ and filled by the Holy Spirit – will actually be those of the **most** earthly good, just like Paul is instructing here. However, there are those who would be tempted to spend all their time gaining knowledge, and seeming to be spiritual, yet not living out the practical applications of what they've learned. Paul prays against this, and lets the church at Colossae know this knowledge is to be the motivation for godly living.

**JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. Are you as confident in your calling as Paul was? Ask the Lord to speak to you about the gifts He has given you, and how you are using them. Are you being deliberate and intentional with them? Are you exhibiting humility and a servant heart? Ask the Lord how to become more effective in your calling and in the use of your gifts. Write down what He says.
2. Are you regularly praying for your disciples/cell members/converts? Do you let them know? If you have not led anyone to the Lord, are there new believers you could be praying for and encouraging in their walk with the Lord? Ask the Holy Spirit to give you the name(s) of those He would like you to carry in prayer over the next few weeks. Write down their name(s). Start today by praying the scripture from our reading passage today over them as a blessing.
3. Ask the Holy Spirit if you have fruit in your spiritual life, or if you are full of knowledge that doesn't lead to action. If necessary, confess any sin. Ask the Lord to motivate you

through the reading of His Word and the voice of His Spirit to live the godly life He has called you to. Thank Him for any fruit He has produced in you. Ask Him if there is any action He wants you to take today.

## DAY 8



**READ:** Colossians 1:15-29

In this passage, Paul establishes the credibility of Jesus as God. Paul says, *“He is the image of the invisible God.”* For those who were Gentile believers, this likely spoke volumes to them. History is full of account after account of men and complete nations running after all kinds of gods in an effort to find the true, yet invisible God. For those who were of Jewish heritage and already served the invisible God, this was a confirmation of Jesus’ identity. With Jesus established as God, as the Creator who existed before time, Paul has laid the basis for why Christ is the head of the Church. It’s not Epaphras, or himself, or any other leader. The Head of the Church is Christ.

In the next few verses Paul speaks straight-forwardly about the issue of salvation. He explains how much Christ has done to present each one to God as holy and blameless. However, he adds the word ‘if’. That standard of holiness and blamelessness will only count though if they remain steadfast. According to Paul’s letter, they must be steadfast and hold on until the end. He says they must be stable, not shifting from the hope they have. It is clear from Paul’s teaching he believes Christians can put themselves in a place to lose the privilege of being presented holy and blameless. He uses this as a challenge to the Christians at Colossae to stay connected to Jesus all the time.

Verses 25-29 brim with intense application and teaching. Paul rejoices in his suffering. He doesn’t survive, or tolerate them – he rejoices! This is unnatural. Paul understands that suffering is part of the cost of following Christ. Christ on the earth suffered brutally in His physical body. Paul seems to believe being persecuted for being a Christian is the best way he can identify with Christ. It is almost as if the suffering for his faith is the mark to prove he is indeed sharing in Christ. Christ’s Body (the Church) will continue to suffer as He suffered on the earth until she is reunited with Christ.

One other thing Paul slips into that last verse is something many of us need to realize. He says, *“...I toil, struggling with all His energy...”* So many times we toil (work hard) in our own energy, not realizing there is no benefit at all. We need instead to rely on God’s strength. The other thing often overlooked is that even **with** His energy there is still struggling. Just because we are following the way of Christ, and relying on Him, doesn’t mean it will be easy. Many of us have fallen into the trap of believing that with Christ everything will be ‘easy’, instead of ‘possible’, and that we only struggle when we are on our own and not working in the power of the Holy Spirit. Those things may be true sometimes, but according to Paul it is also possible to struggle even with God’s energy to do what He has set before us.



## JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Jesus is the Head of the Church and should be Head of our lives as we are part of the Church. Reflect on that in your life for a moment. Then ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you if there is any area in your life where Jesus is not the Head. If so, confess it as sin. Ask Jesus if there is something He would like to say to you today as Head of your life.
2. Are you remaining steadfast and not shifting in your faith and in your hope for salvation? We all go through different seasons, and the Lord knows if our hearts are still

wholly devoted to Him. Ask Him to speak to you about your steadfastness or lack of it. Ask Him what you need to do to grow in this area and to remain steadfast to the end.

3. Ask the Lord to speak to you with words, thoughts or pictures about your attitude toward suffering or struggling to do what He wants you to do. Is there a sin, habit, or anything else God is not pleased with? Do you give up on struggles – even if it is in the Lord’s strength – too easily because you’ve believed the lie that doing things in God’s strength will be easy? Ask God to speak to you about this. Thank Him for the energy He offers us.

## DAY 9



**READ:** Colossians 2

Paul is careful and forceful in this chapter to remind the Colossians to be careful of the teaching they receive and believe. He warns them of philosophies and high-sounding teaching. This is highly applicable to our day and age when teachers and preachers are popping up all over, teaching falsely. Just because they say it, or have it printed, or shown on TV, doesn’t mean it is gospel truth. Paul warns the Colossians, and he’s warning us, to take very seriously the mandate to follow Christ alone. All Truth is found in Him, and in His Word. We must guard our hearts and minds against those things that may **sound** good, but are not from the Lord.

Because the congregation at Colossae included some Jewish believers, there were some specific topics Paul had to address. The Jewish men would have been physically circumcised and would have been following all the Jewish food, Sabbath and other laws as well. However, in the same church were Gentile believers who wouldn’t have been circumcised and wouldn’t even have known the Law in order to follow it. Paul needed to clear up the confusion. To the Jews it would have seemed wrong not to continue in their Jewish practices, especially considering Jesus must have been an exemplary Jew. Yet to the Gentiles, the Laws would have seemed burdensome and contrary to the freedom Jesus offered.

So Paul addresses this. According to this passage, every believer in Jesus is circumcised. They are circumcised of heart not body. The circumcision cuts them apart from their sinful nature, giving them full access to live according to the godly nature imparted by Christ dwelling in them. This applies to both Jews and Gentiles, and therefore is extremely good news.

This means the legal demands are gone. Paul says there’s no point in following laws that seem to make sense just because they seem to make sense. There’s no point in suffering to do something that doesn’t need to be done! He is specifically speaking to those taught the need to suffer (asceticism) in order to please God, by sticking to rigorous food and drink laws, among other things. It’s as though Paul is giving them a new checklist to evaluate themselves. Instead of a list of rules, regulations and details for them to fuss over, worry about, and judge others with, the new checklist simply has one checkbox: Submit to Christ.

Paul says the rules and regulations, the asceticism and severity of restrictions are useless in avoiding sinful indulgence. Just because we beat our bodies in pain doesn’t mean we won’t sin in our minds and heart. The only sure way to avoid sin is for our sinful nature to die with Christ so we can be filled with His Spirit and live according to His nature. We need to hang on to Christ as our Head, or boss, or leader, and live according to everything He says to do.



## JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Thank the Lord for giving us the Holy Spirit and His Word so we can know the Truth that will set us free. Ask Him to speak to you now about anything you have read, listened to, or watched (whether secular or Christian) that fills your mind with teaching and thoughts that are contrary to the Truth of God's Word. If untrue teaching has come into your mind or heart, ask Him how He would like you to guard yourself from this point on.
2. Ask Jesus if you have a mental or subconscious checklist of things you have to do, or things you shouldn't do, in order to please Him, or that you use to judge others with. If so, ask Him to show you how to become free of that burden and fully understand what it means to have your sinful nature circumcised (cut off).
3. Ask Him to speak to you with words, pictures or thoughts about how to live submitted to Him completely. Ask Him to show you one step to take today to be free of a sin or struggle you have been trying to overcome on your own, instead of by His leading. Thank Him for the freedom you have in Christ.

## DAY 10

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**READ:** Colossians 3:1 – 4:1

In chapter 3 we are given a list of sins to get rid of. And we are not just to get rid of it as one might give away unwanted, used items, but we are to completely destroy and kill it. There is no room to be 'okay' with any sin. This is it. The last straw.

Regardless of what the culture says about sin and tolerance, sin must die. And the reason to put these sins to death is not because we feel guilty, or because our sin is hurting anyone else, or even because we want to, but because our sinful natures have been cut away (circumcised) we are now new people with new natures. God requires us to live out in the physical world what has happened in the spiritual realm.

Paul understands we cannot simply put sin to death. We must fill the gaps left by their removal. We are to bring to life the character of Christ within us. Holy living does not happen by accident, or even automatically when we submit our lives to Jesus. We must 'put on' holy living. As we remove the sinful behaviors of our old nature and replace them with behaviors that reflect the character of Christ we are allowing Christ to dwell in us richly. Paul teaches that every moment, every thought, every action, and every single thing must be done in and through and for Christ.

Thankfulness and forgiveness are two of the behaviors we must put on. Thankfulness is a characteristic that must be seen in believers as we, of all people everywhere, have so much to be thankful for. Forgiveness is also critical. We are to forgive as we have been forgiven. When we are constantly aware of all we have been forgiven, we will naturally become more and more thankful. And, remembering what we have been forgiven also helps us to extend forgiveness to those who have offended and hurt us.



## JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Ask the Lord if there is a sin or habit you have not been putting to death. Ask the Lord to speak to you about *why* you have been holding on to it. Confess this sin and ask God to give you a word, thought or picture about the truth of your old self being circumcised and your new self being raised to life in Christ. Make a commitment to the Lord to put that sin to death for good!

2. Ask the Lord what area of holy living He wants you to grow in. Commit to becoming more like Him and deliberately putting on His character as you put on your new self. Thank Him for His help and grace and support.
3. Ask the Lord to remind you right now of all He has done for you. Thank God for all He has done. Make a commitment to thank Him whenever your mind or heart wants to be entangled in a sin. Focus on all Christ has done to forgive you and be thankful. Make a list and add to it day after day.

## DAY 11

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**READ:** Colossians 4:2-18

Paul asks the church at Colossae to pray for him. Even though he is in prison, Paul asks for prayer so he would have the opportunity share his belief and spread the gospel – the very reason he is in prison in the first place. One might think Paul is so amazing he probably evangelized with eagerness and ease all the time. Yet, he requests prayer for a door to open. This is a fantastic reminder for us as we pray for believers who are in prison today, that they would also have opportunity to share the gospel with their persecutors.

In addition to putting on godly character, as challenged in chapter 3, we are also to walk in wisdom with how we speak to and interact with others. Chapter 4:5-6 tells us we need wisdom, we must speak graciously, and season our speech with salt. We need to know how to answer each person. This has great application for us today in our hypersensitive culture. Wisdom comes from the Lord and He promises to give us the wisdom we need when we ask (James 1). We cannot live in fear of saying the wrong things, but neither can we speak the same way with every person. We never know which words a person needs to hear, but God does. We need to take every conversation with others as an opportunity to make the best use of it for God's glory.

After sending all his greetings, Paul makes a simple request: “remember my chains”. He doesn't want to be forgotten. He also doesn't want them to forget that persecution is ongoing and that people, Paul in this case, need support in every way, especially through prayer.

This is a reminder that we need to regularly remember our brothers and sisters in Christ who are being persecuted every single day. He is also saying to them to remember his chains, not so they would shrink back from sharing the gospel, but so that they would be prepared to be in chains for Christ as well. As we prepare for chains we recognize how desperately we would long for the prayers of many believers, and this will motivate us to pray for others who are suffering.



## JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Pray for persecuted Christians around the world to be strong in the Lord and to have words to say at just the right moment that would change the hearts of their persecutors. Pray for opportunity for them to share the gospel. Consider signing up to pray for those who are being persecuted so you can pray regularly. (You might want to consider signing up for 'News & Prayer for the Persecuted' at [persecution.org](http://persecution.org), or the 'Prisoner Alert & Prayer Email' at [persecution.net](http://persecution.net).)
2. Spend time praying for leaders in your church and in politics who are regularly pressured to say something wrong, especially something in relation to their faith. Pray Chapter 4:5-6 over them. Then ask the Lord to keep your tongue pure and your words seasoned by Him.

3. Ask the Lord to speak to you about what you need to do to remember the prisoners in jail today, and ask for specific prayer requests for them. Also ask the Lord to begin working on your heart so you will be prepared if the day comes that persecution affects you personally. Thank him for His everlasting care!

*The Book of Titus*

**DAY 12**

 **READ:** If your Bible has an introduction to the book of Titus, read that.

**INTRODUCTION**

The book of Titus is a letter from Paul to Titus, a convert of Paul's. He had learned, studied, traveled with, and been extensively trained by Paul. He had a strong faith, but was still young.

Throughout this whole letter Paul writes to Titus with fatherly wisdom and also expectation that Titus will obey as a son might. Paul's instructions are for Titus' personal faith and growth, but also for Titus' use as a leader. We can surmise from the tone of this book that Titus may have been struggling with some strong personalities and strongly held but misplaced beliefs in the churches he was part of. As a young believer, it would be hard to stand up to older men and women, especially if they need correcting. So Paul sends this letter of encouragement and direction.

Paul has a strong focus in this letter on godly living. It is clear Paul sees no excuse for sinful habits and lifestyles. He makes it clear that by God's grace, holiness and godliness are possible. He sets the standard high – not just for Titus, but for all the older men and women in the church, and the young men and women too. According to Paul, godliness in lifestyle is an indicator of the new life that has been formed in our hearts. As such, we must follow in the path of godliness as a response to what God has promised and done for us.

As we read through this book we will be challenged in our actions, our disciple-making, and in our hope. Our hope in heaven is sure and, if we allow, it can change how we live today.

 **JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. Take a few minutes to ask the Lord to speak to you about some strong personalities you have had to deal with recently. Ask Him to open your heart and mind to His truth about your attitude toward them and how your hope for heaven can affect this struggle. Ask Him for wisdom to deal with this practically. Thank Him for the wisdom He so generously gives when we ask.
2. Ask God to begin to stir your heart to long for even deeper and more lasting holiness in your heart and lifestyle. Ask Him to speak to you about what one or two areas to focus on as we read through this book. Thank Him for refining you, and pray for strength and grace to grow in those areas.
3. Take a moment to pray for the church leaders you have. Pray for wisdom for them, as well as the ability to train up more leaders to take the church into the next generation with strength and power by the grace of God.

**DAY 13****READ:** Titus 1

Many people in today's culture abandon the idea of church and church membership. There is antagonism towards organized religion. It seems clear from Paul's instructions to Titus that organized church leadership and organized church congregations are an integral part of the plan God has for the Body of Christ. Paul says he left Titus with the job of taking care of, organizing and straightening out the unfinished business at the church.

He also outlines the high expectations of character and behavior for elders or church leaders. The whole point is not to be perfect but to be in line with God's Word and be blameless before Him so he does not bring disrepute to the church. Because he is entrusted with God's work, he has a responsibility to do it well. He must love what is good and be self-controlled. This does not just mean outbursts of anger or violence (as is so often assumed), but rather of a self-controlled lifestyle – in every way.

A leader must also be tenacious in his beliefs. Not only to endure in his own faith journey, but he must also be able to defend it and refute those who oppose it. This becomes particularly important in our day and age when our faith is becoming more often and more rigorously interrogated by the culture around us. Leaders in the church need to know and be able to refute those accusations. Knowing we are *all* leaders on some level, whether it's within our home, our workplaces, or the church as volunteers or staff, means these requirements also apply to each of us. The mistake many tend to make is to say these requirements are only for people who hold specific paid positions within the church. Although this may have originally been directed to people with a specific position, these are the requirements for godly living for every leader, not just those who hold official church positions.

It seems Paul also addresses people who are deceiving believers in the congregation. Specifically, there were Jews no longer following the ways of Christ, but who were adding rules, regulations and commands to new believers. What would shock most American or Canadian churches is that Paul tells Titus to rebuke them sharply. Our culture does not take kindly to sharp rebukes! The point is not to offend them, or hold it over them, but to make them sound in the faith. Being careful to have a pure and true faith in God is important and integral to church life. Church leaders must take seriously, and handle carefully, those who are bringing misinformation, wrong doctrine, and other false teaching into the church.

Verse 16 says they claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. This is a scary verse. It makes us ask the question: Am I claiming to know God but denying him with my actions? Do my actions prove my faith in God?

**JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. How have you been affected by the culture's false teaching that Jesus is okay, but the church and organized religion is not? Ask the Holy Spirit to give you a fresh vision, passion, and love for the Church, Christ's Bride. Thank Him for His love for her.
2. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you what or who you are a leader of that requires you to live to the high standard Paul sets forth in this chapter. Ask Him how you are doing in this regard and if there is any area you can improve in or that you need mentoring or teaching in. Ask Him for next steps and thank Him for trusting you with people to lead.
3. Ask the Lord if there is anything at all in your life, whether on purpose, unintentional, or even hidden, that denies Him and His power in your life. Confess if necessary. Ask the Lord to fill you with His strength and grace to live out your faith in action.

**DAY 14** **READ:** Titus 2

In this chapter we see more about what the character and lifestyle of believers should be. Each type of person in the congregation has a role to play, whether man or woman, young or old.

Paul addresses the older men first. Sometimes we think older men must already know everything. Yet Paul specifically says they must learn to be respectful, and be full of love and endurance.

Another passage talks about the older woman. There is a direct instruction for women to teach younger women. This kind of teaching seems to naturally fit the relational characteristics women tend to have. Being a godly wife or woman doesn't come naturally like many would like to believe. So it bears witness that women need to have older women guide them, teach them, and be good examples of what it is to be a godly wife.

An interesting thing about the charge to encourage younger men is that it must be done by example. This means older men must be living in accordance with this kind of characteristic and strength so they can then teach the young men by example. We can almost hear Paul yell out, "*Show them, men! **Show** them how it's done!*"

This chapter leaves no doubt that the teaching of the next generation must be done deliberately. We cannot say, "*do what I say, not what I do*". The passing on of faith and godly living is done through lifestyle, through side-by-side teaching, and all within the context of relationship. This fits with the Old Testament teaching of Deuteronomy 6. If we lived out our faith in such a way that we were constantly pouring into the next generation with our godly example, sound speech, and sound doctrine, we might be blessed to see the next generation live in purity, and with integrity and the ability to endure to the end.

Verses 11 – 14 teach us the definition of grace. Grace teaches us to say no to ungodliness and to will (or force) our passions to self-controlled, upright, godly lives. Again, Paul says here the reason for living this godly life is because we wait for the hope of eternity. He reminds us a godly life is possible because of Jesus Christ who gave himself up for us, to redeem us from all wickedness, and to purify us. It's God's grace that enables us to live in purity and in holiness. Without Christ we cannot live according to the standards he has set. The hope and the knowledge of eternity motivates us to live with integrity, to be self-controlled, to walk in truth, and to live differently than the world around us. Paul encourages Titus to teach these things. It's difficult for any leader to reject and rebuke those who are teaching false doctrine. Yet Paul outlines for Titus why this is so critical: all of eternity hangs in the balance.

 **JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. Have you ever had a mentor or someone who was deliberately discipling you? Perhaps a parent, Sunday School teacher, or the person who led you to Christ? Pray for all those who have played a part in your spiritual growth and maturity. Thank God for them and pray they would continue to stand strong.
2. Ask the Lord to examine your heart and reveal to you if you are living the kind of godly example that can and should be followed by new believers. Ask Him if anything needs to change so you can be effective at training the next generation. What next steps does He want you to take? Is there someone specific He wants you to pour time and energy into? Ask Him for strength and anointing to pass on the faith.

3. Ask the Lord to reveal to you if you are living by His grace. Are you walking in purity even though it is hard but because God is giving you the hope of eternity in your heart? Are you looking forward to and longing for heaven? Does a longing for heaven make a difference in your daily living as you struggle against temptation or overcome sin? Ask the Holy Spirit to speak clearly to you about the joy of heaven and how that truth can guide you to holy living. Thank Him for the promise of heaven.

## DAY 15



**READ:** Titus 3

It is important to notice in chapter 3 again Paul is focusing on godly living. He makes it clear that we have changed. We are no longer the people we once were. The change is because of God not because of our own self-strength. God's grace, kindness, and love toward us are what change us. Paul actually says to Titus in verse 8 that he wants Titus to **stress** these teachings so believers will be careful to devote themselves to holy living. This chapter outlines God's character, and His purpose in saving His people. The Bible says in Romans 2:4 that it's God's kindness that leads us to repentance. In verse 4 of Titus we see it's the kindness and love of God that saved us. It is not our own goodness, or our own strength that gives us Salvation, but only God's mercy. It's through rebirth and renewal of the Holy Spirit that we can live by His grace this godly life we're called to.

Today we have many online social media sites in which many people are tempted to get involved in useless conversation or argument about the gospel. There is a time and place for controversy about our faith. However, this passage in verse 9 thru 11 make it clear that it is a waste of time to argue with those who are against solid doctrine. Too much time has been lost and too many relationships ruined over useless debates about faith through arguments that cannot be won. We must remember it is the Holy Spirit that renews, not arguments.

Tucked away in verse 13 and 14 is an interesting teaching. Paul tells Titus the church needs to help Apollo and Zenas, the lawyer have everything they need. It would seem that a lawyer would make enough money to have everything they need. Yet Paul ensures the church knows it's their responsibility to care for those who are doing church and ministry work. He says devotion to doing good includes providing for daily living. It's necessary to living a productive life. This is highly practical teaching. Going to work, getting a job, taking care of the home, putting food on the table, and other daily necessities are all part of Godly living. If we neglect our daily responsibilities in order to grow a seemingly more spiritual life we are not living according to sound doctrine and godliness.



## JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Spend time thanking the Lord for His mighty and abundant grace. Spend time worshiping Him for His holiness, His love and His mighty deeds of kindness that draw us to repentance.
2. Ask the Lord if there is a conversation, argument, or debate you have been part of that has not brought Him glory or even turned the thoughts of those involved to the things of Christ. If so, confess as necessary. Ask the Lord to quicken your heart to obedience when you encounter comments, debates, arguments or other situations that do not bring glory to Him in any way at all.
3. Are you busy accomplishing the daily tasks God has for you? Or do you shirk your daily responsibilities for the seemingly more "important" ministry opportunities? Ask the Lord if there is anything you need to confess regarding this, or if there is anything you need to give or do to support your church leaders and missionaries. Thank Him for His provision and take action if needed.

*The Book of Philemon***DAY 16**

**READ:** If your Bible has an introduction to the book of Philemon, read that. If not, read Philemon.

**INTRODUCTION**

The book of Philemon contains a different sort of Bible reading than what we are used to. Not only is it a letter to a specific person about a specific topic, the instruction in it may seem inapplicable to current day readers. At first glance there does not seem to be any teaching or instruction that is common to all.

Paul is the author of this letter. He wrote it from prison, or house arrest at the very least. The letter is addressed primarily to Philemon. We can tell by the greeting that Philemon is very dear to Paul. Paul had converted him in the past and Philemon was his faithful disciple. We also learn in this book that Philemon is a slave owner.

In more modern history, this letter has fuelled both sides of the argument surrounding slavery. As we go through this short book, we'll see that Paul never spoke against slavery. In fact, Paul was sending a man who had been Philemon's slave back to him. It's likely that Onesimus (Philemon's slave) had run away and likely stolen a few things when he left. Because Paul did not condemn slavery in this letter, those who were in favour of slavery throughout history used this book to prove men could be slave owners.

On the other hand, this book was used by those opposing slavery to prove slavery as wrong. Paul was in prison when he wrote this, yet he was careful to call himself a prisoner of Christ. His only master was Christ and no other man, not even those who held him under arrest. Throughout his letter Paul uses family words to describe his relationship with Onesimus and strongly instructs Philemon to treat him as a brother, one who shares in the family of Christ. This spoke clearly to those fighting for the abolition of slavery that the only One who could truly own another person was God Himself. In our relationships with others, we are to work to develop family-like relationships. Many used this book as further confirmation that under Christ we now live to an even higher standard than what has been assumed in the Law, and that the law of love and forgiveness trumped the freedom to be a slave owner.

As we read through this letter we will dig past the surface instruction to Philemon to uncover the truths that motivated that instruction. It's unlikely anyone in our culture today has a slave they need to treat like family. Instead, we need to discover the heart of God and His characteristics that challenge and disturb such a strong system of slavery with family-like relationships.

**JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. Thank the Lord for the real people in Scripture we can learn from. Thank Him for letters like this one that reveal how practical Christianity is in the life of a believer.
2. Ask Jesus to begin working in your heart and preparing you for what He wants you to learn and notice in this letter.
3. Take a few minutes to pray for people in today's culture who are in some form of slavery (human trafficking, child labor, inhumane working conditions, etc.). Pray that God would be their strength and that He would send them a "Paul" to bring them the gospel.

**DAY 17****READ:** Philemon 1 (Please read it again if you read it yesterday.)

In this short book Paul calls himself a prisoner three times. This is significant because in each case he calls himself a prisoner of (or in) Christ. Paul is a smart man! He has studied and been taught as a Pharisee in the past and is highly educated. It is not by accident that he calls himself a prisoner of Christ. Even though Paul is actually under arrest as he is writing this, just by reading this letter we wouldn't know who was holding him prisoner. Paul does this purposely because he wants to make the point that only Christ can hold him prisoner. Even if he were out of jail, he would still be a prisoner of Christ Jesus. This will have a great impact on Philemon, the slave-master.

Paul's point is not to be pitied because he's a prisoner. No way! Instead he wants Philemon to see that anyone who is a follower of Christ is a prisoner. His words challenge Philemon to reconsider his identity: instead of being a master, in Christ, he is literally a slave or prisoner. These would have been hard words to swallow for a man who owned people to do his bidding and cater to his every whim. Philemon had the power, legally, to kill Onesimus for running away. He held the life and death of his slaves in his hands according to the law. Now Paul is challenging him to think of himself on the other side of his own table.

Paul is respectful to Philemon, even while he is challenging and instructing him to do a very difficult thing. He says he could flat out tell him what to do but instead, he's asking nicely. Onesimus had obviously become very close to Paul, but that actually is not the point Paul is making. It's not only his relationship with Onesimus that Paul refers to. Rather it is Philemon's relationship with Paul and with God and with the community of believers. This whole chapter is about relationship! Paul loves Philemon and Onesimus. Because they are in a broken relationship, Paul is instructing Philemon to fix it. As the master of Onesimus, Philemon has the power to transform that relationship from slave-to-master to brother-to-brother.

Paul wants Philemon to know this: all believers are prisoners of Christ, therefore no matter the status or rank, in the eyes of God we are all equal. So if some can be considered family, then all must be considered family.

**JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. Ask the Lord to speak to you about your life as a prisoner of Christ. Ask Him to give you a picture of some recent events you have experienced where you submitted to Him like a prisoner, and perhaps where you didn't. Confess if necessary. Ask Him to grow your understanding of yourself as a prisoner of Christ.
2. Ask the Holy Spirit to bring to mind anyone you have dismissed or treated as less-than (a customer, a neighbor, a family member, a stranger, someone with less money, someone who doesn't dress in fashion, etc.). Ask God to show you what your responsibility is to treat this person (or these people) as family and with the dignity He has assigned to them. Confess any sin He reveals. Ask God for an opportunity to practice this today.
3. This letter speaks strongly about relationships within the Body of Christ and how it is practically worked out by treating each other well. Ask the Lord to reveal to you anything you have done to offend or mistreat another believer, regardless of what they have done to you, that you need to apologize for and make right. Confess your sin to the Lord and ask if there is anything you need to do to set things right with this person or people.
4. Ask God to fill you with overflowing love for others in the Body of Christ.



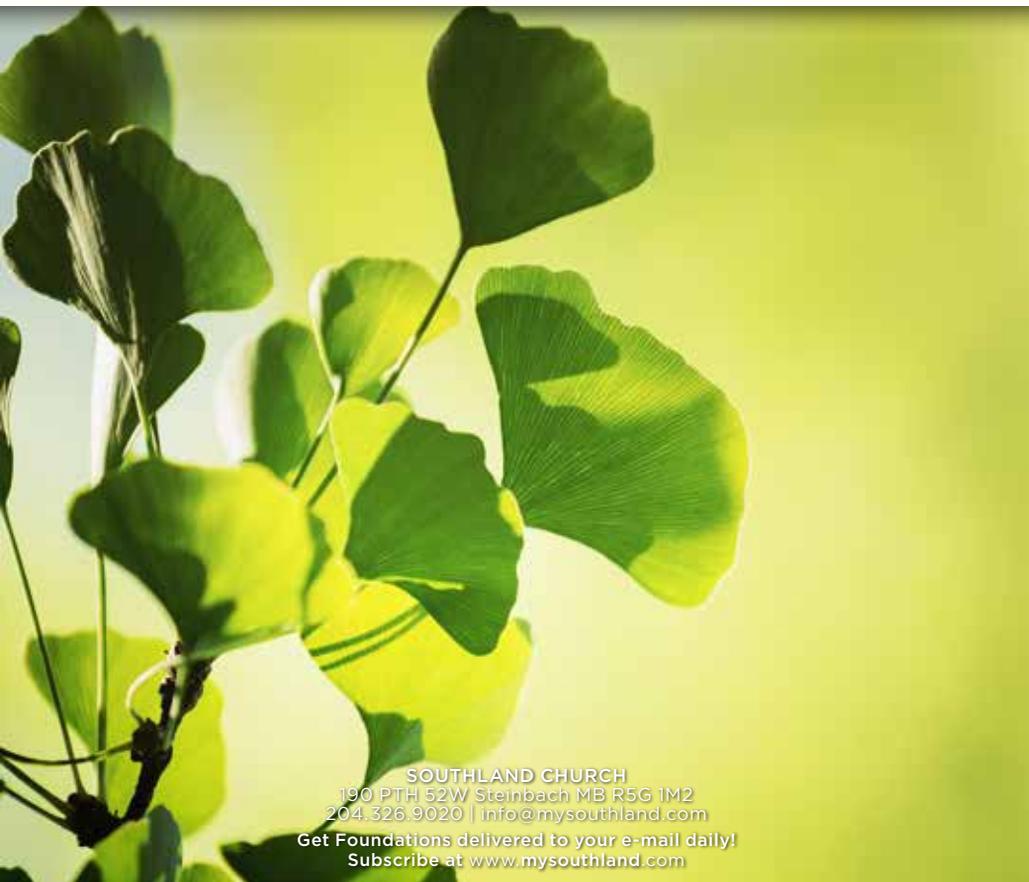


## The Books of Philippians, Colossians, Titus and Philemon

These letters to New Testament believers teach us about basics of the faith as well as practical instruction on everyday life. Sometimes with tender and gentle words of encouragement, other times with passionate, firm correction these letters become part of our handbook on living a life of faith in Christ. The goal of these letters is spiritual maturity in the lives of the readers. This is a great motivation to study and apply what was written in them.

### Philippians 1:9-11 (ESV)

*“And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.”*



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