

A Year Of Testimony & Praise Living In Christ

Rev. Dr. Kim Engelmann
West Valley Presbyterian Church

As we launch our study of Philippians I want to thank all of you for being willing to participate.

One of our values here at WVPC is Intentional Faith Development. The Bible is God's word to us, his love letter of 66 books that span thousands of years, and the vehicle he uses to communicate to us today and as Christians

We need to know what's in here. This story is our story.

I have studied the Bible for years, and I still find the same passages full of insight and depth as the Holy Spirit reveals them in new ways to me all the time.

It continues to feed my soul....

This book is what we need to be reading; and this book will open our eyes to see Jesus again and again, inspiring us in new ways.

A lot of Christians don't know the Bible...and yet

There's never been a Book like this one.

Every year, 65,000,000 copies of the Bible are bought in the U.S. or given away by organizations like the Gideons. Nothing else is a close second.

The average home has three of these (Books) in our country. It's a strange thing. A lot of people cheer the Bible, buy the Bible, give the Bible and own the Bible. They just don't actually read the Bible. That little detail escapes them.

So who we want to be at WVPC is a community of people who know the Bible, who can use Scripture, and who begin to live into the Word of God more fully.

If you are a beginner in learning the Bible you are going to discover great things... and if you have read the Bible all of your life there is so much more to learn...

So in the next six weeks we are going to get to know the book Philippians – one of the epistles – Paul’s letters - really really well. *Epistles mean the letters written to churches found at the end of the New Testament– not the wives of the apostles.* Someone thought that once.

Who has been up to the IMAX theatre in San Francisco – or to any IMAX theatre? I went up there to see Lion King a couple years ago. I did not think that I would be a big 3-D fan

But I soon realized that if I didn’t wear these glasses in an IMAX theatre, I couldn’t see distinctly. The image on the screen was blurry.

When I finally decided to put on the glasses, not only did the images become distinct but Wow! Zazoo came flying out at me – that weird toucan bird in the movie! Nalla Simba, the whole gang with Pumba and Timone were jumping in mid air right in front where I thought I could touch them...I tried but it didn’t work..

The movie came to life! I felt like I was right in it, and experiencing it in a whole different way than just looking at a flat screen. It was an entirely different experience...

Spiritually, that’s what happened to Paul – the author of Philippians Before he became a Christian Paul’s name was Saul – a good Jewish name after King Saul – he was one of highest orders of Pharisee.

Saul was educated to the hilt in the Jewish schools...and he was a Christian killer in the name of God

What happened to him? Saul encounters the risen Christ on the road to Damascus as he’s going off to kill more Christians...

A light flashes around him, and a voice says to him “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?”

He is blinded, he can’t see, because of that light...some scholars think that he had some trouble seeing afterward – never fully recovered complete vision

After three days a man Ananias comes and puts his hands on Paul’s eyes and he is able to see again...

But now, all is completely different. It’s like he has put on 3-D glasses. You could say that he not only can see physically now...

Paul also sees things from a totally different perspective and what he didn't understand before, or see clearly was now perfectly clear
Jesus was the Messiah;

He begins to love people, start churches, and preach like an evangelist.

That love of Jesus, when you know it, when you experience it as your own, changes how you see life, how you do life

From flat screen...to 3-D

Your faith in Christ begins to define everything else.

As C.S. Lewis says, **“I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen: not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else.”**

— [C.S. Lewis](#)

By being transformed, by knowing Jesus, I see everything else differently.

Let's take a look at how those 3-D glasses are apparent in what Paul says in Philippians

I. The letter to the church in Phillipis is a book filled with joy.

The 3-D glasses of transformation have made Paul full of joy in the Holy Spirit regardless of circumstances.

The **word joy appears 17 times** in this short little epistle. And in the context of what is happening to Paul, it doesn't belong.

Joy shouldn't be in this epistle at all, when taken in context.

I am at the risk of coming across like a person who only watches kids stuff... I just told you I went to see Lion King...now I am going to ask how many of you watch Sesame Street with your kids? I always did when they were young. I thought it was pretty funny...

And there was this song – One of these things just doesn't belong... and they would let's say have a series of plastic farm animals – a pig, a chicken, a horse, and a flute. Well the flute is not a farm animal, and so it doesn't belong.

It doesn't make sense in the context of things right?

Neither does Paul's joy make sense in the context of being chained and imprisoned facing execution.

Yet not once in this letter does Paul complain about his condition. Instead he sees everything as a chance to share the gospel.

This is incredible .

“What has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel...It has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ.” Philippians 1:13

Now let me just explain what this palace guard was.

It was a body of ten thousand specially selected soldiers in Rome.

They had unusual privileges like getting double pay and they were so powerful that even the emperors had to court their favor.

Paul was influencing them, and “everyone else” which probably means that his reputation was known throughout the entire city.

Amazingly, there is even a reference in **Philippians 4:22 to the saints in “Caesar’s household”** which were those in and about the emperor’s palace.

So rather than Paul being chained to one of these guards, after Paul was done with them, *these guards probably felt chained to Paul.*

They were his prisoner...they couldn't get away!

Manacled to a preacher...they probably thought. Why me? A fate worse than death!!

But Paul was a good preacher...and many came to Christ...

The palace guard switched shifts usually every 6 hours so the

number of people Paul was influencing was way more than just one.

And because of this, the whole metropolis was being infiltrated with the gospel; even the saints in Caesar’s household had been touched somehow...and probably it was through the fact that Paul was converting the palace guard.

His whole perspective reminds me of the story of Corrie Ten Boom who was put into the Auchwitz Concentration Camp in World War II. They are Christians and are there because they had harbored Jews in their home. And they get assigned to the barracks in the very back that are full of fleas. And when Corrie goes in she is mortified. But

her sister Betsy says to her, “Corrie, this is wonderful. The guards won’t come back here because they won’t want to be bitten. And Corrie, this way we can have as many Bible Studies as we want with everyone here.”

What a perspective! That’s a 3-D transformational perspective.

This tells us something.

Rather than asking the very frequently asked question “why God, are you allowing this or that to happen to me?” which I am often guilty of asking ... a much better question for us to ask is not why are you letting this happen God...

but **“What are you up to God? What are you doing in the midst of the circumstances of my life?** Yes, they may seem less than optimal, but my 3-D glasses tell me that you are at work in my life, that I belong to you, so clue me in here on how I can cooperate with your purposes.

“Its not what happens to you that ultimately matters, a mentor of mine told me once. It is what you do with what happens to you.”

If you have surrendered to Jesus Christ you can know that everything that happens to you can be used by God. And as you surrender your will to his will

It will bring joy to you...joy in the Holy Spirit as you begin to see whatever circumstances you are in, as tools for his purposes.

II. The Letter to the Church at Philippi is all about the win/win of following Christ!

Paul’s 3-D glasses of transformation have shown him that with Christ, no matter what happens to him, he is victorious.

We talked about this last Sunday...and this win/win perspective...is a them throughout Philippians.

One of the famous verses that many Christians quote is Paul’s statement in Philippians 1:21 where he says, **“For me to live is Christ and to die is gain.”**

Paul is saying, “I can’t lose either way!”

If I die ... Gain for me! (because I will go to be with Jesus and I can’t wait to be with him)

If I live ... Gain for you! (because I will be here to support and encourage you and that is my mission and purpose is to be there for the churches)

How do you stop a man like that? Totally sold out on Christ.

You can't stop him! He's not afraid of death, he's not afraid of life – even when there's suffering.

Go ahead and kill him. He'll die with a smile on his face.

Put him in prison. He'll preach to the guards.

Put him in jail at midnight and he'll start singing, Amazing Grace and convert the jailer and the jailers whole family.

Run him out of town. He'll just go down the road and start a church in the next village.

Stone him and he'll use the rocks to build a sanctuary.

Martin Luther King once said **“If you don't have something worth dying for, you probably don't have something worth living for.”**

Paul was willing to live and die for the sake of Christ. He had experienced the grace of Jesus and it was so wonderful that nothing could compare to it. He was sold out completely to Jesus...he had no other focus, no other aim, no other goal, but to be entirely surrendered to him...come what may.

That's the way to live isn't? That's what it means to...give your life to Christ...right?

When all is said and done, there are only two ways to go about life.

You can say with the Apostle Paul **“For me to live is Christ and to die is gain”** – the win/win that comes from the 3-D glasses of having been transformed by his presence and grace...or you can say with the world the lose/lose statement if that's what you choose...**“To me to live is self and to die is loss.”**

What will it be for you?

Today in Silicon Valley we can know the same Jesus that Paul knew. He's still living, he's still active, he still works miracles, he still is handing out those 3-D glasses of transformation and will give anyone the miracle of his presence in their lives if they ask him into their heart.

III. The Church in Philippi is a church that Paul loves

Where once he was out to destroy the church, NOW with the spiritual 3-D glasses – seeing everything through the powerful lenses of the love of Jesus Christ - , Paul now has deep affection and love for the

very thing he at first sought to destroy.

Paul had established profound ties and friendships in this church in Philippi and this letter written about 61AD, probably in Rome, was written as I told you, under the scrutiny of a Roman guard, to which Paul is chained.

He may well be executed very shortly – he's not sure - but the affection and joy for the church in Philippi is almost like a last blessing, a kind of benediction and affirmation and encouragement for this church that he is so fond of.

When my father died – its been about 12 years now. It was very unexpected. He was in his mid-sixties, and went into a bank in Princeton NJ and had a stroke right there...and then he was gone. His last request before he went into a coma and eventually died was to see me, and I went out to Princeton Hospital and with some faculty and friends we stood around the hospital bed and sang my dad's favorite song that he always would sing off tune in the car, in the bathroom, in the kitchen making French toast – "I've Got a Mansion, Just Over the Hilltop, In that Bright Land, Where We'll Never Grow Old."

That was a moving, significant, moment. But two days before he died so unexpectedly, he called. I wasn't home, but he left a message. I hadn't heard from him in awhile and it was so odd because Dad was pretty matter of fact on the phone, and not all that gushy – didn't really like to talk on the phone. I never had a chance to answer the call before he died, but the message he left was a kind of final benediction and affirmation and I saved it for a long time.

The message was in the context of him coming out to CA to do a wedding and he said something like this "Kim, Tim, I am going to see you soon. Blessings to you guys. Blessings to all of you - to Julie and Chris and Jonathan. I love you so much. You are a wonderful family, You are in my prayers, and God is going to bless you and there is nothing he can't do. Trust him. We are going to be together soon. I cant wait. Goodbye." A final blessing of encouragement and joy, right?

That's what comes through for me in the pages of Philippians. Paul loves the people in Philippi that make up the church. The same people he had sought to murder....he now longs for them.

He is not going to be in this world much longer – I think he has a sense of that, even though he expresses the hope that he will see them again... You can feel the emotion in the first paragraph of the first chapter...it is powerful and palpable...he cares deeply about all of them and writes...**God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 1:8)**

If you know the story of how Paul and Silas sang in prison...and converted the jailer and his whole family –(that happened in Philippi which is located in Macedonia – a province of Rome) there is no doubt that this jailer and his family were a part of the church in Philippi

And if you've ever heard of Lydia – she was a wealthy gentile woman in Philippi – who upon hearing Paul preach became a Christian and graciously opened up her home to him, that is another member of the church in Philippi.

The church could have actually been in meeting in Lydias house when Paul writes this – we just don't know...

You can read more about both of these stories in Acts 16.

But there is no letter to any church in the New Testament that is more affectionate, for the people of God than this letter. And it speaks to the kind of deep sustaining relationships we can have here at WVPC when we are a community of faith touched and transformed by the living power of Jesus Christ.

I'd like you to turn the person next to you and say **“The letter of Philippians was written for us.”**

I wanted you to do that because I believe that you WVPC are examples of what it means to be the kind of church that is sold out to spread the gospel – just like the Philippian church was. You have volunteered, you have given financially as you heard earlier and of your time and talent..., you have indeed expressed extravagant generosity on so many levels...

For the size of this church and its resources the number of

missionaries and pastors you have trained up and sent out from this place is absolutely phenomenal

You have been willing to reach out to the community on our fifth Sundays, and countless other times in many ways you've reached out.

There is a lot of love here, understanding, and a welcoming spirit.

There's a dedication to helping those who are in need, and

Many of you are prayer warriors and meet regularly to pray with me for this place and for its ministry. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

There is an openness here to the power of the Holy Spirit

There have been answered prayers, changed lives, people accepting Christ for the first time – its happening on a regular basis;

And there has been a willingness to grow as God leads us to do so – step by step; a kind of flexibility here and a willingness to try new things that I am grateful for.

God has blessing this place tremendously and it is because of your faithfulness, dedication, prayers and service.....and most of all your love for Jesus.

As we launch our study of Philippians may the Holy Spirit move you to use the perspective of those 3-D glasses so that you can see the words of Paul written for the Phillipian church then, as salient words for WVPC now,

And together let us learn and grow to be all that God wants us to be as the body of Christ

Let's close by reading this charge of Paul to the church at Phillipi and let it be a charge from him to our church today - West Valley

Presbyterian Church..."**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 for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ – to the glory and praise of God.**" (Philippians 1:9-11)

