



DISCIPLESHIP|**EXPLORED**

WHAT'S THE BEST LOVE
YOU'VE EVER KNOWN?

LEADER'S HANDBOOK



FILM SCRIPTS

Episode 1: Confident in Christ

Simo (Serbia): For Christians in the West, I wish you persecution. Then, you will know the sweetness of Christ.

You may think that I'm cruel, but I'm not. I wish you the best, and the best always comes from Christ.

Out of Christ is only death. In Christ is life.

[Philippians 1:1-11]

Barry: I grew up just outside London, in a town called Epsom. We used to go to a Methodist church which was directly across the street from where we lived. My dad would take us every single week; we never missed a Sunday. I don't think we missed a Sunday unless we were on holiday or something like that.

I stopped going when I was 16.

I went looking for it a few years back, and it had been demolished and replaced with an apartment block. But I remember what it was like. There was one group of people in the church who fell out with another group of people, and there were rumors and lots of gossip flying around. Even as a kid, I could pick up on it.

But the main reason that I stopped going was selfish really. As I think back, I just didn't love the people there. And it seemed like too much effort to try.

When I start to read Paul's letter to the churches in Philippi, I find myself thinking, "This is a love letter." He never wrote like this to the churches in Corinth or Galatia: *"I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus"* (Philippians 1:8).

And I wonder, how different would my church have looked if we'd loved each other like that, with the affection of Christ Jesus? Is that even possible?

This is the beginning of a journey into the heart of Philippians.

I want to find out how Paul was able to love like he loved. I want to know how he handled a church that was in danger of being poisoned by grumbling, arguing, and in-fighting. How he encouraged people to stand firm even in the face of frightening opposition.

I want to know how he was able to say, *"I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation"* (Philippians 4:12),

even when his life seemed desperately bleak. I want to know not just what I've been saved from, but what I've been saved for. And I want to meet real followers of Jesus all over the world who've put this ancient letter to the test.

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I'm confident that Jesus Christ lived, died, was buried, was resurrected, and ascended, all so that I could be reconciled to God and enjoy him forever.

But here's the question: How can I be confident that I really am a Christian? How can I be confident that God is at work in my life? How can I know, for example, that at the end of my life, I'll still be a Christian?

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Paul was extremely confident about the spiritual health of the people in Philippi:

"I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." (Philippians 1:4-6)

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How could he be so confident? Not because he was confident in them, but because he was confident in Christ.

Remarkably, for a man who was in chains and under house arrest in Rome as he wrote this letter, Paul was convinced, absolutely convinced, that God is in control. Not just when things were going according to Paul's plan, but also when they weren't.

He knew this, not just from Scripture – he knew it from his own experience. This was the place, about 20 years or so after Jesus was crucified, that four men came and preached the gospel in Europe for the first time. There was the apostle Paul, there was a young evangelist called Timothy, there was a church leader called Silas, and a medical doctor and historian called Luke.

Initially, they hadn't planned to come here at all. Originally, they were planning to head into Asia, but God had other ideas.

The book of Acts says they were kept from preaching there, and they were also prevented from carrying out their plan B, which was to travel into Bithynia. So they ended up spending the night in Troas, where Paul had this vision of a Macedonian man begging for help.

And one of the leading cities in Macedonia was Philippi.

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I don't know about you, but I sometimes remember those moments when I longed for something that I didn't get, or I remember a time when I got something that I really didn't want. And if you're not careful, it can cripple you with regret.

But Paul understood a life-saving truth. He knew that when things don't pan out as we hope, it's because God in his goodness has other ideas. In Christ, thwarted plans are the beginning of something better.

As these new believers in Philippi well knew! If things had gone the way Paul originally wanted, they might never have heard the gospel.

Sometimes what I want is actually the very worst thing that God could give me. One pastor put it like this: "God gives us exactly what we would ask for if we knew everything that he knows."

Simo: I was in prison, and there in prison I preached to 80 prisoners who, after they finished their sentence in prison, they came to my home. Everybody took a parcel of literature, in Albanian, and after that, it led to 40 churches in Kosovo and hundreds in Albania.

Barry: Our loving Father is utterly in control. Every drop of rain finds its appointed target, and that means that nothing's accidental or haphazard.

Even the greatest evil in all of history, the murder of God's Son, achieved the greatest possible good: the salvation of everyone who believes in him.

When God intends to do something, nothing can stop him. As Paul says, "He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion" (Philippians 1:6). What God starts, he finishes.

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But how can we know that God has started to work in us? Well, the clue is in Paul's phrase, "partnership in the gospel."

It's not just that they believed the gospel. They'd been living it out.

You can see that from the story of Lydia in Acts chapter 16. She was a business-woman, one of the first people in Philippi to become a follower of Jesus. After she believes the gospel, she immediately

starts living it out by inviting Paul and his companions to stay at her home.

It's the same with the jailer who threw Paul and Silas into a Philippian prison. As soon as the jailer believes the gospel, he starts living it out. He washes Paul's wounds, he gets baptized, he invites them into his home, and gives them a meal. His emotions changed too. We read that he was filled with joy.

That's how you know a person is in Christ. The love they receive from Jesus starts overflowing to others. First of all, it overflows to fellow believers. If someone had said to Paul that they loved Jesus but preferred not to get involved with their local church, he would have had little confidence that they knew Christ at all.

When God really is at work in us, our attitude toward other people changes.

But if God always finishes the work he starts, why should we bother doing anything? Doesn't that just take away all our responsibility?

Well, actually Paul says it's because God is at work in you, that you have a responsibility to respond. Listen to the way he prays for them:

"This is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight..." (Philippians 1:9)

He wants them to be deliberate and intentional about growing in their knowledge and depth of insight. For us, at the very least, that means doing

whatever we can to get to know God's word better.

"... 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 1:10-11)

The uncomfortable reality is that we don't always know "what is best."

Things that seem good and feel right can be disastrous for us. That's a real challenge: are we willing to keep growing in our knowledge of God's word and follow it wherever it leads, even if it goes somewhere difficult or uncomfortable?

Lenny (USA): For me, being a pastor, everything that I preach, it deals with me first.

Every time I'm reading something in the Bible and it's a particular subject, if I'm preaching on grace, the things that I get in that "sermon," it starts with me first. There's lots of times where I'm like, "Dang, God, you're saying this?" It's like "gut check."

If I'm uncomfortable, I've got to change something. The Bible should hurt. It's going to hurt. The gospel hurts. It's going to be offensive, but that's because you need to do some dying. You need to do some changing.

Barbara (Rwanda): When I got saved, the pastor told us that you read Matthew to Revelation. That's the first introduction. Everyone goes to Matthew. It's later, when you mature in some sense, that you

go to the Old Testament and read the prophecies about him and all. But you get introduced to Christ and the Bible in Matthew.

Who is this man who was born of a virgin? What does the Bible say about him? He came to save us.

I do believe if you want to know Christ, go to the Bible.

Barry: When I was a small child, crossing a busy street with my father, if I was the one choosing to hold his hand, then he knew I could let go of it anytime I wanted, and I probably would.

But because he was the one choosing to hold my hand, I knew he'd never let me go. He loved me too much. Like Jesus said, *"No one can snatch them out of my Father's hand"* (John 10:29). We can be confident that God will finish what he starts.

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Scripture tells us in Colossians, chapter one, that God the Son never had a beginning. He has always existed.

Scripture tells us in Ephesians, chapter one, that his love for those who are in him never had a beginning either. His love has always existed.

Because that love never had a beginning, it can never have an end.

It's the greatest love you've ever known.

Episode 2: Living in Christ

Simo (Serbia): Before I became a Christian, for me, life was work. Tireless work.

Since Paul became a follower of Jesus, just about everything had been taken from him.

[Philippians 1:12-26]

Barry: For me, for a long time, I lived for... and I'm not proud of this... but I lived for girlfriends and academic achievement. Those were the two big things. When I didn't have those things, I just felt worthless. I felt like I wasn't lovable. I felt like I wasn't a worthwhile human being. I felt invisible. To be honest, I felt miserable.

The most recent report from the organization *Open Doors* says that Christians worldwide are facing the worst levels of persecution in modern times. At a conservative estimate, the number of people currently facing persecution for following Jesus stands at 215 million.

Simo: And even when I came here, after ten years, they threw stones at my windows. I couldn't sleep at night. Just in the middle of the night, one o'clock, two o'clock...

What about you? What are you living for?

Well, here's one way of finding out. Ask yourself this question. What is the one thing, if it was taken from you, would make you feel like life wasn't worth living?

I was persecuted. I was almost every week at the police station. They were visiting my home very often. I was in prison for one month because of distribution of literature.

Something you can't miss as you read this section of Philippians, and actually the whole letter, is Paul's joy. Now as he's writing, he's under house arrest in Rome, chained to a Roman guard day and night, knowing that at any moment, the order for his execution might come. Yet, he keeps telling them how joyful he is.

Barry: Amazingly, with all of his hardship, Paul says, *"I rejoice ... and I will continue to rejoice"* (Philippians 1:18). What's the secret to Paul's joy?

Now I don't know what you're struggling with at this point in your life. It could be problems with your marriage, problems in singleness, at work, perhaps persecution for being a Christian. But if Paul can be joyful in his circumstances, then surely there can be hope for us in our circumstances too.

The author C.S. Lewis said, "Don't let your happiness depend on something you may lose." So what does your happiness depend on? Comfort? Money? Sex? The approval of others? Family? These aren't necessarily bad things, but they are fragile things. When they go, they'll take your happiness with them. The secret of Paul's joy is that he's living for something else, something glorious that can't die or be damaged or be taken away.

"For to me," he says, *"to live is Christ"* (Philippians 1:21). He finds his deepest

happiness in Christ, and because he knows Christ is in control of all that happens to him, turning everything for good, all his circumstances are cause for rejoicing. Not even his chains can depress him, because they've served to advance the gospel.

Because of his chains, a constant stream of high-ranking, hard-nosed, thoroughly pagan Roman guards have been shackled, one after the other, to one of the most persuasive evangelists who ever lived. So the whole palace guard are hearing about Christ.

And that's emboldened others to proclaim the gospel without fear. And even if there are jealous Christians trying to stir up trouble for Paul while he's in chains, they're preaching the gospel in order to do that. So Paul says:

"What does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice." (Philippians 1:18)

The way to know joy in every circumstance is to know that Jesus is in every circumstance.

Paul saw the fingerprints of God everywhere, even on his chains.

[Map showing the growth of Christianity over time appears here. Note that the map is intended to show only where the gospel has been preached, and where churches have been established.]

What Paul couldn't have foreseen is this. At the start of the fourth century,

the Roman Empire launched a sustained effort to crush Christianity completely.

But by the end of the century, even the emperors themselves were followers of Christ.

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So, to live is Christ, but Paul doesn't stop there. He says, *"to die is gain"* (Philippians 1:21). Now how can death be a gain? Of course, he doesn't say this lightly. The threat of death is constantly over him. He's got no idea when he's going to be called to present his case before the authorities. His life might be over in an hour.

But Christ is more than a way of life to Paul. Christ is a way of death too. Paul knows that even if he dies, all that will happen is that he'll be reunited with his greatest treasure, his greatest happiness.

That will make you radical. Radically fearless, radically loving! If Christ is the one who gives you most joy – not money, or family, or sex, or comfort, or status, or freedom from prison – if Christ is the one who gives you the most joy, then nothing can rob you of that joy. Suffering and death become your servants. All they can do is usher you into the presence of your deepest joy.

To live is Christ, and to die is gain.

Simo: I knew if they kill me, I go to heaven. I was not afraid. There is a text in the Bible, that Jesus died on the cross to deliver us from the bondage of fear of death.

Barry: Would you go so far as to say you were joyful in the middle of that?

Simo: Yes, I was really joyful. I was so happy.

Barry: Why were you happy?

Simo: Because I knew, I felt Christ's presence with me all the time. He was just near me.

one who knows the very worst about you, yet loves you the very best.

For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

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Barry: But if we're honest, Jesus isn't our greatest treasure. So, we miss the secret of joy.

If we're honest, we would rewrite that sentence:

"For me, to live is having friends and family around me, and to die is loss."

"For me, to live is being comfortable and avoiding all suffering, and to die is loss."

"For me, to live is enjoying my freedom, and to die is being confined to a small, wooden box in the ground."

So here's the challenge. If your closest friend, the person who knows you best, were to finish that sentence for you, what would they say? For you, to live is... what? What is the one thing, if it were taken from you, would make you feel like life wasn't worth living?

There is only one way of living that death cannot steal from you, and that is to live for Christ.

Because when death comes, it will only succeed in bringing you face to face with your greatest joy, face to face with the one who died and was raised from death so that you could join him in a place where death and suffering no longer have any claim on you. Face to face with the

Episode 3: One in Christ

Basma (Jordan): They [ISIS] failed, definitely they failed. Because they did not expect that these large numbers would hold on to their faith.

[Philippians 1:27 – 2:11]

Barry: How do you get along with everyone at your church? Is there anyone you try and avoid? Anyone you're jealous of? Is there competition for power, information, recognition?

You can hear Paul's concern for unity all over Philippians, but especially in this part of the letter. He says, "*Stand firm in the one Spirit*" – that is the Holy Spirit given to all believers – "*striving together as one ... being like-minded ... being one in spirit and of one mind*" (Philippians 1:27, 2:2).

He repeatedly uses this Greek word, *koinonia*. It's a word that means fellowship, participation, partnership, oneness. Now, why should this togetherness matter so much?

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We don't always think of evangelism as a communal activity, but there's a particularly convincing kind of evangelism that can only be done communally.

Jesus said, "*By this everyone will know*

that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:35).

When we genuinely love each other in our local churches across lines of race, gender, and age, it shows that we really are followers of Jesus. It also shows a watching world that the gospel is credible and powerful.

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But this kind of unity is constantly under threat. One threat to our togetherness is opposition. Just think about what happened to the disciples when Jesus was arrested. They scattered. That’s why Paul tells us to stand as one without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you.

First, the opposition of these people shows they’re set against God, which means ultimately they will lose; and second, their opposition confirms that you really do belong to Christ because your opponents have seen in you something of him.

Now, we rightly celebrate the fact that our faith in Christ is a wonderful gift from God, but here in Philippians Paul says there’s another gift God gives, and it’s one we might prefer not to unwrap.

Paul knew they were facing serious opposition and yet he says this:

“It has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him” (Philippians 1:29).

How can suffering for Christ be a gift?

In the book of Hebrews, it says, *“Endure hardship as discipline” (Hebrews 12:7).* Now, when you see a man disciplining his child, you assume he’s the dad. The child is his son or daughter. Well, that’s exactly the biblical logic: when you suffer for Christ, it’s a gift, because it shows that you’re in this incredibly privileged relationship with almighty God. He’s your Father.

Also, if you’re his child, that means you’re his heir. Do you realize that one day soon you’ll inherit all that is his?

Listen to what Paul says in his letter to the Christians in Rome:

“Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.” (Romans 8:17)

As Paul well knew, the discipline of suffering and hardship is never pleasant, but it always has a purpose – to make you more and more like Jesus so that you will one day share in his glory.

Basma: There are moments when I think about how our honor was insulted, we were humiliated, and we were displaced. I think of all of the insults and persecution I have been faced with.

But I still think back and compare the insults we had and what Jesus had to endure by his enemies, what he went through, the bitterness, betrayal and the condemnation... ours was nothing compared to his.

Nashwan (Jordan): People came to the

conviction that money and property is of no use. It does not help. The only thing that is beneficial is the Lord Almighty. Nothing else will save them. Nothing.

Barry: Opposition can threaten the unity of our churches but there's another threat and it's much closer to home. The theologian Augustine called it the mother of all sins: pride.

It makes us want to compare ourselves with others. It makes us jealous when our friends do well. It keeps us from asking for help or admitting our faults. It drives our demand for recognition and applause, and makes us depressed and bitter when we don't get it. It makes us cling to our low self-esteem and use that as an excuse for self-pity. It makes us blame everyone else when things go wrong.

And it was bubbling just under the surface of the Philippian church, threatening their oneness in Christ.

That's why, after telling them to be one in spirit and of one mind, Paul says, *"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit."*

He says, *"In humility, value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others"* (Philippians 2:3-4).

It's only when we stand alongside real humility that we're shocked out of ourselves and begin to see just how full of pride we are by comparison. That's what Paul does for us here as he stands us alongside this stunning portrait of Jesus.

"In your relationships with one another,

have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing..." (Philippians 2:5-7)

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"Being in very nature God ... made himself nothing." Imagine that. You gaze into the very heart of the Creator of the universe and what do you see? There's not a trace of conceit. There's no lust for power, no desire to exploit – just pure humility.

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But it wasn't just that Jesus made himself nothing. He took *"the very nature of a servant ... made in human likeness"* (Philippians 2:7). Now, the word translated "servant" there is actually *doulos*, which means "slave" – someone who's got no rights whatsoever.

Ironically, it's the word Paul used right at the start of the letter, where he described himself as a servant, a "slave," of Christ. And yet here is Christ – and he makes himself a slave to all mankind.

It shatters all our pretension, all our pride: the Son of God, the One who created human beings in the first place, becomes a human being himself so that he can give up his rights and become like a slave. Someone put it like this: "No one has ever descended so low because no one has ever come from so high."

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But it wasn't just that he became a slave. *"He humbled himself by becoming obedient to death – even death on a cross"* (Philippians 2:8). God the Son chose to live a slave's life, and then die a slave's death.

Shamed, spat upon, scourged, stripped naked, and then publicly nailed to a piece of wood in the company of common criminals. If you really want to be “God-like” in this life – this is what it looks like.

And Paul’s saying it’s only this kind of humility that can make us truly united with each other in our churches.

I think about the church I struggled with as a boy. What would it have looked like if I’d gone each week with that picture of Christ in my mind?

Nashwan: It is hard to express how I feel about what Jesus Christ did for us. There is no description. The Lord became a man, was crucified, tortured – all this to forgive our sins.

There are no words that can adequately describe what he did.

Barry: Paul then tells us the result of Jesus’ humility and suffering:

“Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Philippians 2:9-11)

One day, Jesus will be publicly exalted, having been publicly shamed. And if we stand firm, even if we are publicly shamed, we too will be exalted.

whether we really do love Christ is that we start to love the people that Christ loves. When he draws people to himself, he draws them toward each other.

You know, if I’m honest, I find it’s the easiest thing in the world to talk generally about standing firm in the one spirit or striving together as one for the faith of the gospel. It’s all a bit vague. It’s like world peace – everyone says they’re in favor of it.

But the kind of love and unity that Paul is talking about here is very deliberate, very self-sacrificial. It actually costs us something.

He’s talking about the kind of love and unity that commits day by day to the same specific local body of believers, standing firm with them, striving together with them, with all of their weirdness, and their struggles, and their rough edges.

For the most part, that was the story of the believers in Philippi. And the question is – is it our story too?

Episode 4: Obedient in Christ

Antoine (Rwanda): I used to tell people, “I too used to speak like that, but now my life has changed. You too need to change.”

That kind of thing encourages you, because you know the gospel we are preaching is a life-transforming gospel.

[Philippians 2:12-30]

One of the most telling clues about

Barry: If all my sins are forgiven by God

because of what Jesus has done on the cross, then does it really matter how I live now? Won't God forgive me anyway?

Paul begins this section of his letter with a "therefore," which means that everything he's about to say is built on what's gone before. What he's just shown us, of course, is that stunning picture of Jesus – how Christ showed his obedience to God the Father by humbling himself, making himself a servant, and becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross.

Now Paul makes this connection between Christ and the Christian: just as Jesus obeyed his Father, so we must obey our Father too.

I love the precious truth that there's nothing we can do to earn salvation. It's a gift freely given. I'm fully accepted by God, loved as dearly as he loves his Son, made a co-heir with Christ, solely on the basis of Christ's obedience, and not my obedience.

But here's the danger. We can start to think, "If I'm accepted by God on the basis of Christ's obedience, then my obedience doesn't matter." Of course, we probably wouldn't say that out loud, but subconsciously we think, "I can live my life however I want, because whatever happens, I'm saved. I'm going to heaven."

But Paul's saying, "Your obedience is absolutely crucial." If there's little Christian obedience in our lives, it's possible we're not Christian at all. One person put it like this: "Religion says, 'I obey, therefore I'm accepted.' Christianity says, 'I'm accepted, therefore I obey.'"

If I'm consistently not obeying, there's a good chance that I wasn't actually accepted by God in the first place. That's what Paul means by "*work out your salvation*" (Philippians 2:12). It means keep acting in line with your salvation. Be obedient to Christ.

I always thought I was a Christian, but it wasn't until 1992 that I knew I really was. The difference really was the attitude that I had toward obedience.

Before that, obedience was something I just had to do, even if I didn't want to, which was most of the time. I was like a spoiled child who was only obedient to his parents because he thinks he can earn himself some extra pocket money, not out of any love for them – just sheer joyless, loveless duty.

Then, in Easter 1992, something really strange happened. I still can't account for it in non-supernatural terms. Almost overnight it was – middle of my first year at university – I suddenly found that I wanted to be obedient to God because I felt love for him, and I wanted to do everything I could to be more like him.

Also, because I began to see and feel that living in that way was good. It was true. It led to happiness – if not always in the short term, certainly in the longer term.

That was the point in my life I think when I really started to work out my salvation. That was the moment when I really began to see the beauty of Christ.

How important one word can be. Paul doesn't say, "*Work for your salvation*." He

says, "Work out your salvation."

We can't work *for* our salvation because it's already been won for us by Christ. But once we know that salvation, it begins to work itself out in loads of ways: in our relationships, the way we relate to the people in our church, in our marriages, the way we express our sexuality, our parenting, at work, in the way we talk, the way we spend our money and our time.

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And we're to live out our salvation with fear and trembling, with the consciousness that nothing we do is hidden from God. I think it's really telling that Paul mentions that they ought to be obedient not just when he's with them, but also when he's absent from them.

The temptation, of course, is to obey only when other people are watching, hoping they notice the good things we're doing, especially church leaders like Paul. What does our obedience look like when only God is watching?

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But now there's a real curve ball. Read the end of that sentence. Paul says:

"Work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose." (Philippians 2:12-13)

Well, which is it? Are we the ones working out our salvation? Or is God doing it?

As I discovered back in 1992, it's only God who can work in us so that we have this desire and the power to act obediently. That is something that is supernatural.

But then, of course, when all is said and done, we must act. Paul wouldn't bother to say any of this if our obedience just happened automatically. We have to act on the godly desires that God has planted in us.

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There's incredible beauty in obedience to Christ.

I remember once having lunch with a man who had had a wonderful lifelong ministry of preaching, pastoring, writing. I guess many would have said that he was the spiritual giant of his generation. All I wanted to do was just ply him with questions.

And I've never forgotten this. For the entire lunch, all he wanted to do was talk to me about what was going on in my life. He seemed genuinely concerned for my welfare and he barely said anything about himself. It was as if he'd forgotten who he was.

He was one of the most joyful men I've ever met, and I'm sure that was precisely because he was also one of the most self-forgetful.

Barbara (Rwanda): Her name was Nicole – Nicole Kalisa. She was one of the leaders of the youth group. The thing that really touched me about her character is the brokenness she had as a Christian, and the faith, the belief, that she had in the Scriptures. It was so real and so practical with her. It wasn't just another trend. She was very genuine. She was young, probably four or five years older than I was, but you could feel it was real. Christ in her was real.

She imparted that to me in those early

ages. She made Christ look like a friend. She made the Holy Spirit look like someone you could talk with, like I'm talking to you. It was so real.

Barry: Paul says that when we live like this, we'll shine in the world like stars in the sky. We'll be a luminous, attractive presence in the places where we live.

But one of the big threats to our "shining" is something that might seem pretty innocuous. He says, make sure you *"do everything without grumbling or arguing"* (Philippians 2:14).

This is something we see earlier in the letter: our good witness to the world depends upon our love for each other as believers in the local church. When we grumble and argue, it makes the gospel less believable to those who are watching.

It also says something about our view of God. It's an expression of mistrust in God's wise arrangement of all our circumstances. It forgets his infinite goodness to us. And against the backdrop of Jesus' humility and servant-heartedness, grumbling and arguing just seem completely out of place.

I love the story told by the eighteenth-century pastor John Newton. It's a brilliant illustration of how foolish grumbling is.

He says, "Suppose a man was going to New York to take possession of a huge inheritance. On the way, his carriage breaks down just a mile before he gets to the city, which means that he's got to walk the rest of the way.

What would we think of that man if we saw that man walking the last mile whining and complaining, "My carriage is broken down. I'm going to have to get new wheels!"

It really should be very hard for us to grumble when we remember who we are and where we're going.

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And Paul tells us who we are. We are children of God, adopted into his family, about to claim our inheritance.

What a difference it would make to our happiness if we actually took God at his word and believed that.

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So how do we make sure we become blameless and pure? How can we shine like stars, according to Paul? By holding firmly to the word of life, the gospel of Jesus Christ.

You might have heard the old phrase: "Preach the gospel – if necessary, use words." It's the idea that really you don't need to verbally share the gospel with others. You just need to live a good life and that will be enough to win people over.

But the thing about authentic disciples of Jesus is that they want to make disciples of others too. Part of holding firmly to the word of life will be holding out the word of life to others.

Although, to be honest, we sometimes struggle with what to say when we're talking about Jesus. It doesn't always go according to plan.

Antoine: When you are a pastor, you preach in a church, so people who come to church, they are already receptive. But when you preach in the market, and I did that so many times – preach in the market, preach on the street, preach on the bus – that’s where you get people who are hostile.

They say, “Why are you making so much noise here? Why are you telling us that? Why are you imposing on us your faith?”

Now that I’m a pastor, or when you preach as a pastor, people will say, “Oh fine, he’s a pastor! What else do you expect from a pastor?” It’s a bit different from the past.

But actually, the essential thing is not how people react when you preach. Because you are sowing seeds. You don’t know when those seeds are going to sprout out and bear fruit, so you don’t worry about that.

Barry: How will I know what to say? That’s often the big question we have about evangelism.

But, as Jesus says in Luke 6:45, “*The mouth speaks what the heart is full of.*” So, if you want to speak about Jesus more naturally and more frequently, make your heart full of him – and then speak out of the overflow of that passion.

How do we do that? Paul would say, “Go to the word of life, God’s word, because it will make you passionate about Christ.”

As we listen to Scripture and fill our hearts more and more with the goodness of Christ, just naturally we’ll want to start sharing that goodness with other people,

whether they’re Christian or not. We’ll start to do what Jesus called us to do when he said, “*Go and make disciples of all nations*” (Matthew 28:19). We’ll start to become what we must all be: disciple-making disciples.

So what does it actually look like to work out your salvation? A real-life example would be helpful at this point, and Paul gives us two.

Timothy had helped to plant the church in Philippi. Paul describes him as having “*served with me in the work of the gospel,*” “*as a son with his father.*” “*I have no one else like him,*” he says, “*who will show genuine concern for your welfare*” (Philippians 2:22 and 20).

And Epaphroditus is the man the Philippians sent to Paul to take care of him while he was in chains: his “*brother, co-worker, and fellow soldier*” (Philippians 2:25).

In fact, Epaphroditus had taken a journey of many hundreds of miles over many weeks just so that he could take care of Paul’s needs. Apparently, he was ill and almost died, and yet still he longs to make the return journey back to Philippi, bearing Paul’s letter.

“*Honor people like him,*” Paul says (v 30), “*because they love others. Even if it means risking their lives.*”

So when people look at us, I wonder what they see? Can they see distinctive, loving people, eager to obey Jesus and tell others about him whatever the cost?

Can they see people like Timothy and Epaphroditus, who even now, as we read about them 2,000 years on, shine like stars in the sky?

In other words, many Christians think that they can be good enough for God by doing good things, or not doing bad things.

For some people it means doing a lot of religious things, like going to church, or communion, or confession.

Episode 5: Righteous in Christ

Prasoon (India): I grew up in a religion which is cyclical, so you are born and you live a life, and then you are reborn, and as long as you continue to do good works – in society, at home, with other individuals – you can become right with God.

That was the concept that I had, to become right with God. Basically through “karma-marga,” through good works. That’s the path I followed.

[Philippians 3:1-9]

Barry: What are you doing to try and make God accept you?

Religion is spelled D-O. Christianity is spelled D-O-N-E. Religions say that God will accept me because of the good things that I do. Christianity says that God will accept me because of what Christ has done. And when we get the two confused, it’s spiritually devastating.

In a survey not so long ago, they asked 7,000 churchgoers whether they agreed with this statement: “The way to be accepted by God is to try sincerely to live a good life.” More than 60% agreed with that statement.

That was very much the case for Paul before he met Jesus. In this part of his letter, Paul gives us his résumé, his spiritual CV as a Jewish man, and it really is exceptional:

“... circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless.” (Philippians 3:5-6)

He came from the right kind of family. He was descended from God’s chosen people, the people of Israel. He joined a hugely respected Jewish order known for their hyper-strict adherence to the religious laws. He was a Hebrew of Hebrews, a leader of men, highly educated. If there were moral laws to be kept, he sincerely kept them. Religiously and ethically, he’d done everything right.

And here’s the word that Paul uses to describe that mountain of moral and religious achievement: “garbage.”

In the original Greek, the word translated “garbage” is much stronger. If you could smell what you’re seeing right now, you’d get an idea of the word Paul has

in mind. Now, how can all that moral and religious righteousness suddenly seem like excrement to him?

Because now that he knows Jesus, he sees what righteousness really looks like, and it makes his own so-called "righteousness" look disgusting by comparison. He understands that what he needs is a righteousness that is not his own, but comes from God.

All the things he thought were so powerful in making him acceptable were useless, fit only to be thrown out. *"I consider them garbage,"* says Paul, *"that I may gain Christ and be found in him"* (Philippians 3:8-9).

He knows that at the end of his life, when he stands before God and God says, "Why should I accept you?" Paul will hand him his résumé and on it will be one word: "Jesus."

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If you're tempted to think there's anything on your résumé or your CV, anything you've done that can make you acceptable to God, Paul has two words for you: "Watch out."

He said the same thing to the young Christians in Philippi. They were being told by some very respectable, very credible, very religious people who actually claimed to be Christian – they were being told that they could never be acceptable to God unless they got themselves circumcised.

He calls these people "dogs" – stray animals leading others astray, spreading a dangerous and potentially fatal disease.

These "dogs" were insisting that Jesus is all well and good, but you need something else as well: you need to be circumcised.

And though, for most of us, circumcision isn't the issue anymore, the dogs are not dead. They're still out there – or in here – trying to bully us into thinking that Jesus' righteousness doesn't go far enough, that we somehow have to meet him halfway with our own righteousness.

With our churchgoing, our money-giving, our communion-taking, our Bible-reading, our doing of good deeds.

It's not that any of these things are bad. They're wonderful things to do.

But they become bad if I start to think they can make me righteous – if they start to take the place of my dependency on Jesus and his righteousness.

We need to repent, not only of our sin, but also of our righteousness.

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Can you see that our own attempt at righteousness is like garbage next to the righteousness of Jesus? In fact, it's worse than that. It's more like toxic waste.

If we're trying to make ourselves righteous by our own efforts, we'll either become self-righteous or self-loathing. On the one hand, if I believe I can make myself righteous, and I think I'm doing a great job of it, then I'll just get proud and I'll start to look down on people. On the other hand, if I'm doing a bad job, then I'll get totally depressed because no matter

how hard I try, I keep failing.

Prasoon: I think, emotionally, I waver between these two. There were times when I would do good, so-called “good works,” and I would feel proud that I was able to do these things, and perhaps my parents are happy, others are happy. I can relate to God now.

But there were times when I didn’t do those things. I felt so guilty. And I thought, I have not achieved the mark and I need to strive hard in order to please God.

Barry: The worst part of it is this:

If I’m trying to make myself righteous, I’m effectively saying to God, “I’ve done all these things for you, so now you owe me.” It’s absurd. I’m treating the Creator of the universe as if he’s in my debt. When we do that, we insult and belittle him. We’re obeying him to get what we want, rather than obeying him simply because we love him.

Isn’t it amazing how we can use absolutely anything, even our good deeds, to treat God with contempt? We need to repent, not only of our sin, but also of our righteousness.

We badly need the righteousness of Jesus.

As Paul says, we should put no confidence in the flesh. In other words, we should put no confidence in who we are or what we’ve done, whether it be circumcision or any other moral or religious act. Our confidence should be solely in Christ and what he has done.

Now, of course, this is a controversial claim in this day and age. But Jesus is the only one who can make us good enough for God.

Why? Because he, and he alone, lived the life we should have lived. And then he, and he alone, died the death we deserved to die. All so that we could be accepted by God and enjoy him forever.

Where else on earth can you find righteousness like that? Our righteousness must be in him and only in him.

John Bunyan, who wrote *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, and who himself spent many years in prison, was walking in the fields one morning and this line came into his mind: “Your righteousness is in heaven.”

Bunyan said, “With the eyes of my soul, I saw Jesus at the Father’s right hand so that wherever I was or whatever I was doing, God could not say to me, ‘Where is your righteousness?’ for it is always right before him.”

“I saw,” said Bunyan, “that it is not my good frame of heart that made my righteousness better, or my bad frame that made my righteousness worse, for my righteousness is Christ.”

The only way we get his righteousness is not by moral or religious efforts, but by simple trust in him. It is a righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.

Prasoon: It is only by grace alone through faith alone and in Christ alone I’m accepted before God. My good day

at work, my alms-giving, even my ministry doesn't make me feel good in front of God. It's only the work of Christ, and only Christ's atoning work on the cross.

This is something that I keep reminding myself of. Somebody said that we need to be preaching the gospel to ourselves daily. This is something that I keep reminding myself of, that my identity does not come from what I do. My identity rests in Christ alone.

Barry: If anyone in the history of the world could appeal to God on the basis of his moral or religious goodness, Paul was the man. But he doesn't do that anymore because all of it, says Paul, all of it is garbage compared to the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus.

Our hearts are always trying to pull us off track here, even if we've been Christians for a long time. We can so easily start relating to God through our own credentials, through our own résumé, rather than through Christ. Sometimes even our attempts at obedience can be a subtle way of seeking to be our own savior. We need to watch out.

We may not be putting our confidence in circumcision, but have we started putting our confidence in circumstances, our education, our family, our status symbols, our moral decency?

Or have we started putting our confidence in religious things to make us righteous? Things like baptism or speaking in tongues or saying our prayers or reading our Bibles or going to church or telling others about Jesus?

And here's how you know if you're putting your confidence in Christ's righteousness or your own:

On an occasion when you've disobeyed Christ in some way, do you think you're less of a Christian than you were before?

When someone asks you, "Are you a Christian?" do you answer, "Yes, but not a very good one."

In a week when you've read your Bible, been to church, and told someone about Christ, are you more acceptable to God?

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If you answered yes to any of those questions, then you've not understood that your righteousness depends entirely on Christ's righteousness.

On an occasion when you've disobeyed Christ in some way, do you think you're less of a Christian than you were before?

No, because Christ is your righteousness.

When someone asks you, "Are you a Christian?" do you answer, "Yes, but not a very good one."

No, because Christ is your righteousness.

In a week when you've read your Bible, been to church, and told someone about Christ, are you more acceptable to God?

No, because Christ is your righteousness.

Christ is your righteousness.

Episode 6: Transformed in Christ

Lenny (USA): It wasn't until I was 19 or 20, when God seriously got a hold of my life, that my outlook of the police changed. When you have these young black males who have never had a good experience with the police, it's hard for them to erase that bad experience. First impressions – they last.

Barry: When you became a Christian, how did that impact the way you saw what was going on with the police?

Lenny: It boils down to "love." Because the gospel should change you. The gospel should change every single thing about you.

[Philippians 3:10-21]

Barry: There was a time when Jesus took his disciples aside and talked to them about the kingdom of heaven.

"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field."

"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it." (Matthew 13:44-46)

I can just imagine the response I'd get if I told my wife I'd sold literally everything we have in order to buy one thing. But what if you knew that that one thing was infinitely more precious than everything else you have put together. That was Paul's story.

Paul describes his mountain of moral, religious, and ethical achievement as "garbage" next to the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus. Like the man who knew he's found the greatest treasure on earth, Paul thought nothing of sacrificing everything he had to get more of him [Jesus].

That's the theme of this part of the letter. Jesus is so valuable to Paul, creates so much joy in him, that he'll do whatever it takes to know Jesus better and become more like him. He says, *"I want to know Christ"* (Philippians 3:10).

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How do we become more like Christ? According to Paul, one of the ways we do that is by imitating others.

But this is strange. Here's a man who said, *"May I never boast except in the cross"* (Galatians 6:14). Yet here he is in verse 17 saying, *"Join together in following my example."* He wants the Philippians to copy him. Isn't that a little egocentric?

When Jesus called me to follow him back in 1992, I didn't hear any audible voices telling me what to do. I didn't have any visions of Jesus or anything like that. I certainly didn't know my Bible very well either. But what I did have was an incredible example of what being a Christian looks like.

He was a student worker in a church in Oxford, England, and he would meet with me every week or so to read the Bible with me. We'd read a few paragraphs. He'd ask the same basic questions. *"What does this tell us about God? What does this tell us about us? What should we do about it?"*

Then he just prayed with me. But what really left an impression on me, and what still does as I think about it, was this man's life and character, his good humor, his kindness toward me, his patience with me, the fact that he prayed for me every time we met, his love of Scripture. He didn't have to ask me to do those things myself. You couldn't help but want to imitate him.

Rafael (Peru): See, there was a professor that disciplined me. Yes, he was a humble person, happy, but in serious issues he was always wanting to do things right, and I felt like he was a mentor that would help me with anything I needed. He truly was like Jesus – he had a lot of love and passion for souls.

Barry: The teaching that really sticks is the teaching that we see lived out in the life of someone else. That's why Paul says, *"Follow my example" and "keep your eyes on those who live as we do"* (Philippians 3:17). This was especially important for the Philippians because, at this point, they didn't even have a New Testament to learn from. What they did have was the life and character of the man who was about to write half of it.

For me, that's another reason why being committed to a good local church is so crucial. It's where you find the most godly people to imitate, but it's also the place where you yourself can be an example to others.

There's something else that can make us more like Christ: suffering.

We've become so good at hiding suffering and death that we're more frightened

of them than we've ever been, but Paul embraces them.

"I want to know Christ – yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead." (Philippians 3:10-11)

This is shocking to many of us, that Paul would long to participate in suffering for Christ. It certainly wasn't something that he sought out for its own sake, but he understood that the primary way in which we become like Christ is through suffering.

The Russian novelist Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn spent much of his life in prison and labor camps, but he became a Christian while in exile. He wrote, *"I turn back to the years of my imprisonment and say, sometimes to the astonishment of those about me, bless you prison. I nourished my soul there and I say without hesitation, bless you prison for having been in my life."*

Paul would have said the same. It was suffering, after all, that made him more like his greatest treasure.

We're so afraid of hardship and suffering and rejection for the sake of Christ, but are we pushing away the means by which God intends to make us most like his Son?

Paul longs for us to be transformed, just as he longs for that himself.

"We eagerly await a Savior ... the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that

enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body." (Philippians 3:20-21)

He's talking about the last day, the day the Lord will return, when all sin and suffering will be swallowed up, when the dead in Christ will be resurrected to eternal life, and we will become perfectly like him because we will see him face to face.

In the Old Testament book of Exodus, even the leader of God's people, Moses, is granted only a glimpse of God's glory, and even then, it's only reflected glory. The result is that Moses' face is transformed. It becomes radiant, so much so that the people are afraid to come near him.

What will it be like for you and I on that day when we actually see the Lord Jesus face to face?

We'll be transformed, says Paul – and not just our faces, our entire bodies – so that they'll be like Jesus: gloriously free, without sin or shame or any taint of mortality.

If one day Jesus will make us perfectly like him, does that mean we should just take it easy in the meantime? Many of us treat the Christian life as little more than a waiting room for the next life: somewhere to wait passively until your number is called and you go to heaven.

For Paul, that's unthinkable. Christ is his joy, his treasure. He pictures himself as an athlete in a race, totally focused, straining every muscle toward the finish

line when he'll finally see Christ face to face. He says:

"I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me ... one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 3:12-14)

Is that the pattern of your Christian life too?

For many of us, forgetting what is behind is the hardest thing of all. My dad has a charcoal portrait of me as a kid. I'm nine years old. I'm on a fantastic family holiday in Paris. Everybody is having a great time. And I look miserable.

I think some of us just tend that way naturally. We're always trying to swim back upstream to the moment just before we think it all went wrong. Past conversations, past incidents, past relationships. What if I'd done things differently? What if I'd said something else? What if I'd been someone else? We pace up and down rehearsing and re-rehearsing dialogue as if we were preparing for opening night on Broadway, except of course there is no play. These conversations ended long ago. And many of the people who shared them with us are now long gone.

But if anyone had reason to feel regret, it was Paul. He was, in his own words, a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a violent man. Paul hounded Christian men and women from their homes, had them incarcerated, voted to have them killed, and approved the stoning of Stephen,

one of the early church's most beloved and powerful leaders. Scripture goes so far as to say that Paul began to destroy the church. After all that, how can Paul say, *"Forgetting what is behind"* (Philippians 3:13)? How could he live with himself?

He could forget what was behind because he knew it was forgiven, all of it. He couldn't say, "I just can't forgive myself," because then he'd be saying that his own verdict on his past was more important than God's verdict on his past.

Hilda (Peru): Jesus helped me. Because in his word, in Romans, it says that we all have sinned, but he forgives us everything, and he doesn't remember my sins – so that makes me happy. I feel calm and at peace because of that.

Barry: That, I think, explains why Paul loves Christ so much. He loves him so much because Christ had forgiven him so much. Christ knew that Paul had tried to destroy his church, but Jesus allowed himself to be destroyed so that Paul could be forgiven. When you know you've been forgiven much, you love much. It transforms you.

I think back to how little I loved the people in my church as a younger man. I wonder if the reason I loved so little is because I thought that there was so little in me to forgive.

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You know that Jesus gives you a better future. But do you know, if you're a Christian, that he also gives you a better past? Just think back over your history, no matter how checkered: all the things you did or did not do, all those choices

made in cowardice or carelessness or foolishness, whether through oversight, ignorance, or malice. Paul knew that God had ordained all of those moments to make us more like Christ.

As the pastor John Newton used to say, "Everything is needful that he sends. Nothing is needful that he withholds."

Yes, if you had your time over again, you'd choose differently, but realize this: your Father, whose name is Love, would not.

Yes, if there is repenting to be done, repent – but then follow Paul's example, and look up to Christ. Take your place in wonder alongside Paul, the Philippians, and all the rest of God's people.

You've found the treasure, the pearl of great price. He's worth more than everything you've ever had, and everything you've ever lost.

And nothing in your past, present, or future separates you from him.

Episode 7: Rejoicing in Christ

[Philippians 4:1-9]

Barry: Here in the United States, every year there are approximately 19,000 major church conflicts. That's an average of nearly 50 a day, and those are just the significant ones, the ones that leave lasting scars.

1,500 pastors leave their post every month because of conflicts, burnouts, or moral failure. Four to eight million lawsuits are

filed by professing Christians every year, often against other Christians, at a cost of between 20 and 40 billion dollars.

And that's just the visible financial costs. What about the largely invisible spiritual costs?

Lenny (USA): Man, lots of frustration, lots of anger, lots of tears, and probably lots of complaining to my wife. She's probably sick of me complaining about it.

It was an emotional roller-coaster because at the end of it, the only thing that was on my mind was the students, and I was like, "They've been through enough transition, youth pastor after youth pastor," and there was no stability because of the guys leaving all the time. And I wanted to be that stability.

But eventually I had to leave, because it just wasn't a healthy environment.

Barry: The Philippian church was just as vulnerable. There was conflict and disagreement, significant enough that Paul actually names names – two women called Euodia and Syntyche.

And these women weren't pretend Christians either. He says that they both "*contended at my side in the cause of the gospel*" and that both their names "*are in the book of life*" (Philippians 4:3).

Paul is tactful enough not to go into details, but it's serious because no conflict like this is ever truly private. It begins to affect the whole church. He pleads with them that they would be of the same mind in the Lord, and then he says, "*Rejoice in the Lord always*" (Philippians 4:4).

Now, if we're in conflict with someone, how can we possibly get to a place where we're "*of the same mind*" and rejoicing? Isn't that just massively unrealistic?

The key is in a small phrase Paul repeats across the New Testament some 216 times. Once you're aware of it, you start seeing it everywhere. Paul never uses the word "Christian" in any of his letters. Instead, he describes believers as being "in the Lord" or "in Christ." Why is it so vital for us to see ourselves in that way?

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Imagine you're an orphan. You're poverty-stricken. You don't have any living relatives. You've been homeless all your life.

But then, one day, someone comes up to you on the street and hands you a letter. You open it up, and you see your name printed at the top. The letter invites you to a huge mansion in the countryside, and when you get there, a man tells you that you'd better sit down.

You've been adopted by the wealthiest and most generous man in the country, and he's signed over everything to you.

The castles are yours. The paintings are yours. The cars are yours. The thousands of square miles of beautiful forests and rivers. He's signed it all over to you.

He's also, of course, incredibly rich, and everything in his bank account is yours, too.

Not only that, but it begins to dawn on you that you're no longer an orphan. You have the father you've always longed for, but never knew.

Now, wouldn't that change the way you saw everything?

Wouldn't you see the world with new eyes? And wouldn't your view of yourself change too – your sense of identity, your roots, your potential, your security, your hope, your future?

It would feel like being reborn.

But that story is almost nothing compared to the true story of who you are now as a child of almighty God and a co-heir with Jesus Christ.

When Paul says you're "in Christ" or "in the Lord," it means all that is Christ's is yours. Your life is hidden in his.

So his identity is yours. When God looks at you, his eyes fill with the same love he has for Jesus. You are his precious child.

Christ's perfectly obedient life is yours.

His death and resurrection are yours. Paul says that you were "*crucified with Christ*" (Galatians 2:20), "*buried with him*," and "*raised with Christ*" (Colossians 2:12). More than that, you are "*seated ... with him in the heavenly realms*" (Ephesians 2:6), even while you're still on earth.

His inheritance, too, is yours. Eternal glory in the new heaven and the new earth.

The reality that you're in Christ changes the way that you resist temptation too.

When you feel temptation biting, you can

say, "No, that's not the person I am anymore. I'm in Christ."

The early Christian theologian Augustine sinned sexually again and again in his early life – but then Christ changed everything for him.

This is a story I haven't been able to source, but the story goes that while walking in the street one day, he saw an old girlfriend walking toward him.

Augustine immediately went in the other direction, and she called after him, "Augustine, it is I!" "I know," he said, "but it is not I."

That's how we battle sin in our Christian lives. When temptation crashes over us, we say, "That's not who I am anymore. It is not I. I am in Christ."

And if we do sin, we don't plunge into despair – because we're in Christ, and our lives are hidden in his. We're covered by his perfect righteousness. So on the one hand, we're not complacent about sin – because we're in Christ. But on the other hand, we're not crushed when we do sin – because we're in Christ.

And there's something else. It's not just that you are in Christ. Christ is in you.

Paul says here, "*The Lord is near*" (Philippians 4:5). A reminder that his Spirit is in you, the Spirit of the one who calmed the storm, loved the lonely and marginalized, healed the sick, raised the dead to life. He is in you, and you're in him.

In other words, you're united in your innermost being with God himself.

Being in Christ is better than any other benefit the gospel gives us. Because everything else flows from it.

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Can you see that Christian life is not about straining to be something you're not? It's about being who you are in Christ. When you do that, everything changes.

It changes the way you relate to God, the way you relate to yourself, and the way you relate to others. The way Euodia relates to Syntyche, and vice versa. Paul's saying to them, "Remember, both of you, that you're in Christ. You don't have to get your way. Have you forgotten? You've got it all. You're no longer orphans scrabbling around after the pennies of approval or power or recognition, so let your gentleness be evident to all."

This is why Paul says, "*Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!*" (Philippians 4:4). How can we not stop fighting and rejoice when we remember who we are in the Lord.

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And remember that phrase, "*The Lord is near.*" As well as being a reminder that Christ's Spirit now lives in us, it's also a reminder that the Lord will return soon to judge all things.

I saw an Internet meme recently which said, "I'm not arguing. I'm just explaining why I'm right."

If I find myself in persistent conflict with

someone, it might be because I want to vindicate myself. I want to show that I'm right, have everyone recognize that I'm right. I want to be the judge.

But Paul gives us a gentle reminder: there already is a Judge, and, unlike me, he's right 100% of the time. Christ alone knows who's truly guilty, and to what extent, and so that means we can leave the judging to him.

That doesn't mean we shouldn't be discerning, and concerned for justice. But it does take the heat out of so many personal disagreements if you can say to yourself, "Even if no one else recognizes what's going on here, there is someone who does, and he'll one day repay each person according to what they've done. So I can be gentle with others and rejoice."

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I can also hear what Paul says next: "*Do not be anxious about anything*" (Philippians 4:6).

The key, if we want to resist anxiety, is "*in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God*" (Philippians 4:6).

Paul wants us to talk to God about anything and everything we're anxious about, knowing that our Father ordains everything for our ultimate good, and loves us as deeply as he loves his Son.

He tells us to pray, not just lists of things that we want, but with thanksgiving, thanking our Father for all he is. The result, says Paul, is that "*the peace of God, which transcends all understanding,*

will guard your hearts and your minds" – here's that phrase again – *"in Christ Jesus"* (Philippians 4:7).

The way to be anxious about nothing is to be prayerful about everything.

Could there be a connection between how much we worry and how little we pray?

Lenny: I go back to the work that Jesus did on the cross, and how it talks about the veil in the temple that was torn – ripped in two. That literally means that we've got direct access to God the Father. No more priests on our behalf anymore.

Because of the work of Jesus Christ, we've got direct access. That Scripture --"Come before the throne boldly" – that comes into play, and it's a beautiful thing.

What's beautiful for me is that he wants to talk with me. He wants me to come to him in prayer.

That's the difference between true Christianity and all these other religions. Religion is what you have to do to get close to your god or your deity. True Christianity is about God wanting to get close to us.

That's the whole reason why he put Jesus on the cross – to establish that relationship that Adam jacked up back in Genesis.

That's amazing to me that the Creator of all of this, the dude who said, "Let there be light," wants to sit in the presence of Lenny.

We do that whole thing: "God, I'm chasing after you." He's chasing after us! And he's like, "Hey, come on. I got stuff

I want to show you. I got stuff I want to reveal to you."

Barry: Now, of course, we can't just empty our minds of anxiety. We have to displace it. We have to force it out. We have to fill the space with something else so the anxiety has no place to take root.

That's why Paul tells us:

"Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things" (Philippians 4:8) – and that is a perfect description of Christ. Because everything that is most admirable, most excellent, and most praiseworthy is seen most fully in him.

Paul's saying, "Do whatever you can to fill your mind with Christ."

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What might it do for your peace, your anxiety, your conflict with others, and your joy if, when you wake up tomorrow, you remind yourself of one single truth: "I am in Christ."

Episode 8: Content in Christ

Simo (Serbia): Before I became a Christian, I looked for contentment in films, cinemas.

Mostly cowboys. Oh, that was something special to me.

And also in drinking with my friends. We used to go to cinema with a bottle

of whiskey in the pocket, and we were drinking and looking at the films.

That was my life. That was my contentment before I became a Christian.

[Philippians 4:10-23]

Barry: What do you need to be content? What is the one thing you feel you lack? And you think to yourself, "If I just had that, then I'd be happy. I could handle anything as long as I had that."

For a long time for me, it was marriage. I was single into my mid-forties, and the temptation was to think that everything I struggled with in life – times of depression, times of intense loneliness – all of that would be somehow fixed when I got married. My life would finally begin.

Now, my wife is an incredible woman, but can another human being really fulfill our deepest longings for lasting happiness and wholeness?

I think many of us believe that. We think that the secret of contentment is changing our present circumstances in some way. Get more approval, get more stuff, live in a nicer home, surround myself with people who love me more, understand me better, and then I'll be content.

But how much is enough? How much approval or power or comfort do we need before we finally feel content?

One poll asked Americans how much money they believed it would take them to realize the American dream. Americans who earned \$25,000 a year believed it

would take \$54,000 a year. Those who made \$100,000 on average believed it would take \$192,000.

Apparently our contentment requires about twice as much as we currently have – however much we currently have.

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But as he signs off his letter to the Philippians, Paul turns all that upside down. He says that he's learned to be content whatever the circumstances, even apparently if you happen to be chained to a Roman guard, effectively on death row.

He sees that real contentment isn't anything to do with how much you have or how little. He says:

"I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want." (Philippians 4:12)

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Now, I think I can make the case that Philippians chapter four verse 13 is the most abused verse in Scripture. It's usually translated, "I can do all things through him who gives me strength." It's the kind of thing athletes get tattooed on their biceps, as if it means they can run faster and jump higher if they're in Christ.

But a better translation is the one here. "I can do all this" – "this" meaning contentment in every situation – "through him who gives me strength."

You and I can have deep and lasting contentment, but it can only be found in Christ.

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Now the Philippians seem to get this, that real contentment can only be found in Christ. You can tell that the Philippians aren't looking for contentment in money or material possessions, because they've been so generous with Paul.

Even though they were really young followers of Christ, Paul tells us here that they were the only church who supported him when he set out from Macedonia to plant other churches – sending him aid more than once when he was in need.

He describes it as sharing in his troubles. Not just sending money or a gift, but loving him so much that there's a deep emotional connection between them. It's as if his troubles are their troubles, and their troubles are his.

It's a lovely illustration of one of the main themes of Paul's letter: *koinonia*, partnership, togetherness. Not just pretending to care about others, but feeling their pain almost as if it's our own, and giving as generously to them as we'd give to ourselves. That's the kind of church Paul wants us to be creating.

Lenny (USA): There were nights where we were sitting on the couch watching TV. This one particular night, we were sitting on the couch watching TV – 9:00/10:00 at night. All of a sudden, there was a knock at the door. I'm like, "Who's knocking at the door this late at night?"

I open my curtains to see. All I see is a black shadow running up the street.

I'm like, what? I open the door – there's a humongous box of groceries and an envelope with \$300 in it. We lost it. Thinking about it now, I'm getting emotional.

Barry: Did you ever find out?

Lenny: No. My wife posted it on Facebook. She says, "Thank you to whoever left this box of groceries for us, and it's truly a work of God because you got Lenny's favorite cereal." It was Cinnamon Toast Crunch.

Barry: Now, Paul is at pains to point out – he's not saying all this because he's looking for another gift. He says here, "*I have more than enough*" (Philippians 4:18).

The reason he's encouraging them in their giving is really surprising. He says, "*What I desire is that more be credited to your account*" (Philippians 4:17). He's more interested in the blessing they will gain by the act of giving than any benefit he might get from the gift itself.

Can you imagine how much we would give, how much we would sacrifice ourselves for others, if we saw things in that way too? If we really believed the Lord Jesus' words that it's more blessed to give than to receive.

Again, once we've understood how wealthy we are in Christ, we're free to give and give and give emotionally, physically, and financially – knowing, as Paul says, that "*God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus*" (Philippians 4:19). We do this, trusting in the promise that

we'll receive from Christ much more than we've given.

Paul began his letter to the Philippians by reminding them of the one reality that changes everything: *"To all God's holy people in Christ Jesus at Philippi"* (Philippians 1:1). And now he ends the letter by reminding them of the same reality, *"Greet all of God's people in Christ Jesus"* (Philippians 4:21).

Because of that reality, Paul knows that the bond between them can't be stretched or broken by the small matter of a thousand miles. They're in Christ together. And that's as true today as it was then.

"The brothers and sisters who are with me send greetings. All God's people here send you greetings, especially those who belong to Caesar's household." (Philippians 4:21-22)

I wonder if there was a little twinkle in Paul's eye as he wrote that. There he was, chained to a Roman guard, and now even those in the highest courts of the Roman Empire are coming to know the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ for themselves.

We learn something profound about contentment from the Psalms in the Old Testament.

This is what King David wrote:

"I do not concern myself with great matters or things too wonderful for me. But I have calmed and quieted myself, I

am like a weaned child with its mother; like a weaned child I am content." (Psalm 131:1-2)

Now, a weaned child is content simply being in his mother's arms. He's calm and quiet, because he's learned to trust his mother completely, even though of course a small child can't possibly understand what's going on in a parent's mind.

And it's the same with Paul. He's no longer anxious or fretful when things don't go the way he wants or expects. He's content in any and every situation, because it's enough just to be in the arms of Christ.

Basma: "I have learned to be content, whatever the circumstances."

Nashwan: "I know what it is to be in need..."

Antoine: "and I know what it is to have plenty."

Barbara: "I have learned the secret of being content..."

Rafael: "in any and every situation..."

Prasoon: "whether well fed or hungry..."

Lenny: "whether living in plenty or in want."

Simo: "I can do all this through Christ who gives me strength."

It's wonderful to serve Christ! It's so... I really... I'm just... feeling short of time.

Barry: So what is the secret of Paul's contentment? As I've read and re-read Philippians, I've started to see it on every page, and it can be your secret too.

But there's something Paul is saying to me in those moments: "Forget what is behind, remember who your Father is, and remember who you are."

Whatever your circumstances, whether rich or poor, single or married, in prison or free, even in depression and loneliness, the reality is that your Father is with you.

I am in Christ. I'm unimaginably rich in him.

And even if the wheels have fallen off, I'm nearly home.

He's in the tears. He's in the hardship. And yes, he's in control. His fingerprints are all over your chains, whatever they may be.

Remember how God dashed Paul's plans and brought him to Philippi so that the Philippians could be saved? Remember how God made Paul's chains the very means by which the gospel reached the most powerful places on earth? Remember how God ordained that the cross, an instrument of torture, would become the instrument of salvation?

Barbara: When I gave birth, I had so much love for my boy. I felt like my heart was in him, and the first thing that came to mind is that, wow, God loves me this much.

And every time I look at him, even when he makes mistakes, the first thing that comes to mind is, "God loves you more than you actually love your son, and has much more in store for you than what you could do for your son."

Jesus says, "You are wicked, but you can give your children good things. How much more will God do for you?"

Barry: In my most troubled moments, as I think about what I've lost or what I've never had, yes, it's good to grieve. It's right to grieve.