

Joyous Journeys around the Detours

The Book of Philippians

J U A N I T A P U R C E L L

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Every attempt was made to find the source for the story on page 98. Any information regarding the story will be acknowledged in future editions of this book.

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A SPECIAL THANKS

To Tony Woolford for the great job he has done in advertising and marketing my books. He has given me encouragement that my books are meeting needs in ladies' lives.

PREFACE

Just days before I had planned to start writing this Bible study on the book of Philippians, I told a doctor and his wife, “You need to adopt my motto for this year: adjust or self-destruct.” Little did I know that a week later the doctor would say to me, “*You* need to make some adjustments in *your* life.” Without realizing it, I had stretched myself so far I was on the verge of burnout.

I spent the next two weeks in bed so my mind and body could unwind, relax, and get recharged. I read my Bible each day and kept my daily journal, but I did nothing else relating to ministry. I must have looked at ever dress catalog, craft book, and catalog of any kind in the house. One day a lady called me and asked me how I was doing. I replied, “Just fine; I ordered 150 dresses today.” She said, “Oh my, how are you ever going to pay for all of them?” I quickly assured her I had only been daydreaming.

Staying in bed those two weeks was like being in prison. Then I remembered that Paul said, while in prison, “I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content” (Philippians 4:11). Two verses later Paul wrote, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.” I serve the same God Paul served. If He did that for Paul, He could do it for me as well.

The biggest adjustment I had to make was giving up all my responsibilities for a few months. One week before, I had started teaching my evening and day Bible studies. We were studying my book, *Stretch My Faith, Lord*. The first lesson was on James 1:2–4, “Count it all joy when ye fall into [various trials].” It was a unique experience to hear others teach me the lessons I had written. That was an adjustment I was not ready to make, but learned to enjoy. Writing this book also had to be put on the back burner for a few months.

These were real detours in my plans. I had a choice to make: Would I joyously journey around the detours and adjust, or would I kick, scream and rebel, and self-destruct? I am learning to live out Philippians 4:13: “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.” I am learning to be content with the detours and make the needed adjustments.

I've learned that the joy of the Lord does not depend on favorable circumstances in my life, but on a proper relationship with Christ. When my relationship with Christ is right, I can joyously accept the detours He sends into my life.

I trust this study will help you joyously journey around the detours in your life.

INTRODUCTION

Before we begin to study the book of Philippians, we need to know a few things about it.

Who wrote the book?

Paul identified himself as the writer in Philippians 1:1. (Timothy was with Paul in Rome [see Philippians 2:19], but Paul was the writer. Note the many times he used the singular pronoun “I.”)

When was the book written?

Bible scholars date the writing of the book about A.D. 60.

To whom was it written?

Paul wrote to the “saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi” (Philippians 1:1).

What is the background of the book?

Paul visited Philippi on his second missionary journey (Acts 16:12) around A.D. 52. You may have a map in the back of your Bible that shows Paul’s missionary journeys. If so, use that map to locate Philippi and the other places mentioned below.

Paul normally went first to the synagogue when he came into a city. However, not enough Jews were in Philippi to have a synagogue, so those who desired to worship gathered by a river where they could use the water for ceremonial rites. At that riverside Paul met Lydia, who became the first convert (Acts 16:14, 15). This was the beginning of the church at Philippi. The Philippian jailer and his family were soon added to the church (Acts 16:27–34).

On Paul’s third missionary journey, he returned to the churches he had previously established—including the Philippian church—so he could nurture the believers. Paul concluded his journey in Jerusalem. There he was arrested (Acts 21:26–33). After two years, he was sent to Rome to appear before Caesar (Acts 24:27; 25:9–12; 28:16). Paul was a prisoner in Rome, but he was under “house arrest.” He was confined to his house and was guarded by Roman soldiers

(Acts 28:16, 30). From this location Paul wrote the book of Philippians; thus it is known as one of Paul's prison epistles.

Why was the book written?

Paul wanted to thank the believers in the church in Philippi for the gift of money they had sent him. Epaphroditus, a member of the Philippian church, had brought the money. After he arrived in Rome, he suffered a serious illness, which almost cost him his life. He recovered (Philippians 2:25–30), and Paul sent him back to Philippi with this thank-you letter. Because Epaphroditus had given Paul a firsthand account of the conditions in the Philippian church, Paul wrote words of encouragement for the believers' spiritual progress and unity in the faith.

What is the theme of the book?

The theme is "joy regardless of circumstances," based on Paul's frequent use of the word "rejoice." It is summed up in Philippians 4:4—"Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice."

LESSON 1

From Sinner to Saint: What a Transformation!

“Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:6).

A popular gospel chorus says, “He’s [God’s] still workin’ on me to make me what I ought to be.” Is that true in your life? It certainly has been true in my life! I think the apostle Paul would say that was true in his life as well.

In Philippians 1:6 Paul stated that when God begins a work in a person’s heart, He never quits working on him until the day he goes to Heaven. When and where did God begin this work in Paul’s heart and change him from a sinner to a saint? To find the answers, we need to go back to the book of Acts.

1. What was Paul’s Hebrew name? Read Acts 9:11 and 13:9.
2. When we are first introduced to Saul in Acts, what had he just witnessed? Read Acts 7:58–60.
3. Saul was a devout Jew, a Pharisee, a leader in Judaism. Why did he take part in the death of Stephen, a Christian? Read Acts 8:1–3 and 9:1.
4. How was Saul changed from a man who killed Christians to one whose life was threatened for being a Christian? Read Acts 9:1–24.

*"Human nature is not fixed and for this we should thank God day and night! We are still capable of change. We can become something other than what we are. By the power of the gospel the covetous man may become generous, the egotist lowly in his own eyes. The thief may learn to steal no more, the blasphemer to fill his mouth with praises unto God."*¹

5. God got Saul's attention in a dramatic way (Acts 9:3, 4). What did the Lord have to do to get your attention before you responded to Him?

6. After God had Saul's attention, what did He say to him? Read Acts 26:14.

God may have been convicting Saul of his sin, or Saul may have seen the futility of his persecution of the church. Regardless, God had prepared him for this salvation experience.

*"You don't become a Christian by osmosis. God acts through His Holy Spirit, to bring you to repentance and trust in Jesus Christ. He is the Initiator. If you are a believer, there was a beginning point."*²

7. Immediately following his conversion, what happened to Saul? Read Acts 9:8 and 9.

8. What did God ask Ananias to do? Read Acts 9:10–12.

9. Why was Ananias afraid to go? Read Acts 9:13 and 14.

10. What situation might you face that would be comparable to Ananias's situation? Describe your fears in such a setting.

11. How did the Lord calm Ananias's fears? Read Acts 9:15 and 16.

12. Ananias obeyed the Lord and went to Saul's house. What happened to Saul after Ananias laid his hands on him? Read Acts 9:17 and 18.

Bible scholars believe three years elapsed between Acts 9:21 and 22. During those three years, Paul was in the desert in Arabia. "Neither went I up to Jerusalem . . . but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter . . ." (Galatians 1:17, 18). "It seems probable that vv. 22–25 [Acts 9] refer to Paul's labors in Damascus after his return from Arabia (Gal. 1:17). The 'many days' (v. 23) may represent the 'three years' of Gal. 1:18, which intervened between Paul's return to Damascus and his visit to Peter."³

Those three years in Paul's life may have been lonely ones, but they were necessary years of training. Paul learned to draw his strength from the Lord alone.

Many of God's people are called upon to withdraw into Arabia. Think of Arabia as places of silence and loneliness, desert places. When God changes everything in our lives, we may resent it. Yet once we can accept it, we find it is the very thing we needed to draw us closer to Christ.

Following the three years in Arabia, Paul began his public ministry. If you have not read the introduction on pages 7 and 8, read it now so you will know what happened in Paul's life and what led to his being a Roman prisoner and writing a letter to the church in Philippi.

Read Philippians 1:1.

Paul—who once was Saul, the sinner who became a saint—addressed the readers of his book as “saints.” The word “saint” is from the Greek word *hagioi*, which means “sanctified, set apart, holy.”

13. The same word *hagioi*, or “saints,” is used in 1 Corinthians 1:2. What did Paul say about saints in that verse?

“The human family is divided into two groups: the saints and the ain'ts. Saints are believers in Christ. They are saints, not because of their conduct, but because of their position in Christ. Saint means ‘holy,’ set apart for God. Anything that is holy is separated for the use of God. Even the old pots and pans in the tabernacle were called ‘holy vessels,’ and they were probably beaten and battered after forty years in the wilderness. They may not have looked holy, but they were. Why? Because they had been set aside for the use of God.”⁴

14. What other phrase did Paul use to describe saints in 2 Thessalonians 1:10?

15. Are saints select people who have received special recognition from God because of devoted service? No, that is not God's description of saints. Review your answers to questions 13 and 14 and write your definition of a saint.

How did Saul the sinner become Paul the saint? He came into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ because of the work God had begun in his heart (Philippians 1:6). Paul never planned to become a Christian; his plan was to kill Christians. But God interrupted his plans and initiated a good work in his heart. Paul was transformed!

*"What we mean by salvation is this—deliverance from the love of sin, rescue from the habit of sin, setting free from the desire to sin."*⁵

16. What about you? Are you a saint, one who has experienced God's salvation? Are you positive that if you died today you would go to Heaven? If your answer is yes, describe your salvation experience.

If you are not sure of your salvation, read the verses that follow.

God **loves** you and wants you to enjoy the **abundant life** He offers you.

John 3:16—"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

John 10:10—"I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly."

Man is **sinful**, and his sin **separates** him from God.

Romans 3:23—“For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.”

Romans 6:23—“For the wages of sin is death [spiritual separation from God]. . . .”

Jesus Christ’s death is the only **provision** God has made to pay for man’s sin.

Romans 5:8—“But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”

John 14:6—“Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.”

You must **receive** Jesus Christ as your Savior before you can personally experience His love for you and the abundant life He has planned for you.

John 1:12—“But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.”

You can invite Christ into your life right now by a simple act of **faith**.

Ephesians 2:8—“For by grace are ye saved through faith. . . .”

Are you ready to invite Christ into your life to be your Savior? Use the following prayer as a guide to help you express your desire to God: “Lord Jesus, thank You for dying on the cross for my sins. Right now I open my heart and invite You into my life as my Savior. Thank You for forgiving my sin and giving me everlasting life. I want You to have control of my life so I can experience the abundant life You have planned for me.”

The Bible **promises eternal life** to all who receive Christ as Savior.

1 John 5:11–13—“And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.”

Did you invite Christ into your life? You can be sure you

have eternal life based on 1 John 5:11–13. To help you always remember this exciting experience in your life, write in the front of your Bible, “Today (date) I invited Christ into my life to be my Savior.” I also encourage you to share with your Bible study leader what has happened to you. I, too, would like to know of your salvation and would like to send you a booklet that will help you in living for Christ. Please write to me in care of the publisher of this book.



From My Heart

How long has it been since you rehearsed your salvation experience? I asked you to do that in this lesson, and I would like to share my experience with you.

It was a Sunday evening many, many years ago, in a little country church in Mount Vernon, Illinois. I was with my boyfriend (who is now my husband, J.O.). I went to church Sunday mornings, Sunday evenings, and Wednesday evenings—not so much to be in church, but to be with my boyfriend.

On that Sunday evening we were sitting in the back of the church with the other teens. We were singing the closing song, and the pastor was inviting people to come forward to receive Christ. I saw J.O.’s father walking to the back of the church. This seemed unusual because he always sat on the front pew. I soon realized he was coming to talk to me. “Little Lady (he always called me “Little Lady”), wouldn’t you like to get saved tonight?” Before I knew what was happening, I said yes and was walking to the front of the church. We got down on our knees by that front pew, and I invited Christ into my life to be my personal Savior.

Little did that teenager realize she had become a “saint,” and never in my wildest dreams could I have imagined what special mission God had planned for my life. When God called my husband into the ministry, I fought God’s convicting ministry in my life for five years. Finally, one day I got down on my knees in my dining room and, like Paul, said, “Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?”

I’m so glad God didn’t give up on me! He just kept working on me until I was willing to obey and answer His call. What God starts, He always finishes—*He is so faithful!*

From Your Heart

Thank God for the work He has done and is doing in your life. Share your “transformation story” with someone this week.

Notes

1. A. W. Tozer, quoted by G. B. Smith, compiler, *Renewed Day by Day* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), April 19.
2. John A. Huffman, Jr., *Wholly Living* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1981), p. 9.
3. Note on Acts 9:22, *The New Scofield Study Bible*, p. 1327.
4. J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible with J. Vernon McGee* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc., Publishers, 1983), vol. 5, p. 289.
5. Tom Carter, compiler, *Spurgeon at His Best* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988), p. 179.