

# BIBLE CHALLENGE

## An 8 day study of the books of Ephesians, Philippians and Philemon

The story so far: We are looking at some of the letters that Paul wrote, likely while he was under house arrest in Rome near the end of his life. These (Ephesians, Philippians, Philemon) are sometimes referred to as the Prison Epistles.

Monday:

Read: Ephesians 1:1-23

What to look for:

- Ephesians was written from house arrest in Rome to a church Paul had started on one of his earlier missions. It is a summary of the good news Paul had been sharing on his travels. It pulls together many of the themes Paul deals with in more depth in other letters.
- Note vs. 1-4 – Paul is so overwhelmed by his thoughts that he strings together phrases and ideas in a run-on fashion. These opening verses are all actually a single sentence over 200 words long.
- Vs 3-14 indicate that God has a plan to bring all creation together with Jesus as its head; vs. 15-23 is a prayer the Christians might realize God's purpose and plan.
- Note the key words in this opening passage: Chosen, Purpose, and Praise. God has chosen us and given us a destiny; we've been chosen for a purpose, which Paul outlines in vs. 9-10; our lives are not to be motivated by self-glory but we are to live for the praise and glory of God.

Tuesday:

Read: Ephesians 2:1-22

What to look for:

- If, in yesterday's passage, we discovered that our purpose in life is to live to the praise and glory of God, the reality is that we refuse to live for the purpose we were created, and instead live to glorify ourselves (2:2-3). This results in separation (2:1).
- Vs.8 – "You have been saved..." In the original Greek, the word *saved* has about it the notion of "you have been saved and remain saved..." Because we're dead (2:1), God must take the initiative to save us.
- Vs. 10 – being united in Jesus we are able to do what we were intended to do but could not: live to God's praise and glory.

Wednesday:

Read: Ephesians 4:1-16

What to look for:

- Having told us that we've been given a call and created for a purpose, that our life has been bought back when it was lost, now, because of all that, Paul goes on to show us how we can live.
- Vs 3-4 – we are to be people who live in unity. That unity is made possible by Christ who has destroyed the barriers between us (2:14-22)
- Vs 11-13 – we are to be people who claim the ministry to which each of us is called.
- Vs. 13-16 – we are people who are meant to grow into maturity in our faith and discipleship.

Thursday:

Read: Ephesians 4:17-32

What to look for:

- Having spent the first three chapters of Ephesians explaining that the meaning of our own personal lives is tied up with the purpose God has for the entire creation, namely that God intends on bringing everything in this world together again with Christ at the center, Paul goes on in the rest of his letter to outline what that looks like at a practical level.
- Paul is making the point in these verses that God has delivered us *from* something *to* something. We have been delivered *from* a life alienated from God (vs 18), from a situation in which we have lost all sensitivity to the truth (vs. 19), from unchecked concern to satisfy our own impulses (vs 19), and have been delivered *to* the freedom to be a new creation (vs 23-24).
- Paul then points out some signs of that newness of life and specific directions for living it (vs 25-32): Use words as deeds of love; newness of life is seen in the way we control and express our temper; work with meaning; relate as members of one another.

Friday:

Read: Ephesians 6:10-24

What to look for:

- Paul concludes his letter by urging his readers to be strong in the Lord. His reason for saying that is in vs. 12. The kind of struggle we are involved in goes far beyond the power of our own human abilities; it can't be resolved on our own terms or by our own efforts. It can only be won by the power of the gospel, which Paul describes as the armor of God. So, Paul says, keep watch, be alert, and put on the armor of God.
- Note that we are to "put it on", which is an active word, not a passive one. Putting on armor takes some desire and intentionality – it doesn't just jump out of the corner and wrap itself around you of its own accord.

- Paul then offers one final suggestion for staying strong: constant prayer.

### Monday:

Read: Philippians 1:1-14, 2:1-11

What to look for:

- Vs 1 – Just as Paul is going to draw a picture of the humility of Christ, he begins by naming himself as a servant, as one, not with authority, but as one under authority.
- Vs 7—Paul gives us the setting of his writing – he is a prisoner, in chains. Under these circumstances, one would expect God’s word to be silenced. But, in fact, the opposite has taken place. Consistent with the way God so often seems to operate, what should have stopped the spread of the gospel has only served to support its growth. Paul is in jail, so now even the guards hear the good news (vs 12-14).
- That pattern is a repetition of what happened in Christ (2:5-11).

### Tuesday:

Read: Philippians 3:1-14, 4:4-13

What to look for:

- Once again Paul shows how the pattern we identified yesterday, in which God uses the most humiliating of circumstances for his saving ends, repeats itself in Paul’s life. Paul had a lot of confidence in himself, his background, and his own righteousness (3:4-6). But what he had at the start, he now considers worthless because of Christ. And yet, in verse 10, he names the reason for his hope, the thing that draws him forward to a new day. The movement from glory to humiliation to true glory is the course, not just of Jesus’ life (2:5-11), but the pattern of Christian discipleship.

### Wednesday:

Read: Philemon

What to look for:

- Paul is writing to Philemon who apparently was the host of a house church. The early church of the time met in homes and was more like a modern day small group Bible study than what we normally think of as a church. Paul is writing about a runaway slave named Onesimus.
- In Paul’s day there were two categories of people: those who were free and those who were slaves. The favor Paul is asking Philemon for runs deeper than simply his freeing Onesimus when he is returned. Instead, Paul, being interested in relationships, wants Philemon to receive Onesimus back, not just as a slave, but as more than that: as a brother. So their relationship will now not be based on his status as slave or free, nor on domination and

subordination, but on a relationship of brotherhood with all the responsibility and love that kind of relationship entails.