



Introduction

Throughout life we find ourselves in relationship with various people: classmates and colleagues; parents and children; bosses and teachers; etc. In the midst of all of these relationships, we have friends. Friendships differ from the other groups because we enter into and maintain friendships by choice. We aren't born with certain friends; work does not demand our connection to them. They are the people we choose to be around, spend time with, and enjoy life with. This distinction makes a significant difference in what the relationship looks like. It frees us to be less burdened by externally imposed expectations; the relationship is yours through and through.

We see a great distinction between friendship and other relationships in life, and we also recognize differences in relationships within different friends. Just as the voluntary nature of the relationship frees friends to enjoy their relationship, let them end, or grow more deeply in them, so too friendships are colored, shaped, and enhanced by the various factors experienced during the lifespan of the relationship. For us Christians, one of these significant factors is the influence of Christ. We can see this in our current friendships. Most of us have friends who are both Christian and non-Christian or at the very least friends with an active faith and those with a dormant faith. In many respects these friendships look very similar; in many other respects, the different friendships are worlds apart.

This study asks the basic question of what does it look like to be friends in Christ. As we ask this question, we will investigate several aspects of it. Each week we will focus on a basic question of Christian friendship. The initial questions presented in relation to their week are:

1. What are the foundations of Christian friendship?
2. How does your Christian life relate to your friendship?
3. How do friends deal with issues of disparity?
4. How do friends care for one another in life?
5. How do friends address matters of faith?
6. How do the life goals of friends intersect and diverge?
7. How do friends maintain their foundation?

To facilitate the answer of these and related questions, we look at Paul's letter to the Philippians. This letter, written with many of the characteristics of a letter of friendship, reveals much about Christian friendship as we take the relationship between Paul and the church at Philippi as an example of a Christian relationship. Each week we will focus on a different unit of the text from Philippians and grow in our understanding of three key points: 1. Paul's words to the Philippians; 2. Paul's relationship with the Philippians revealed by the text; 3. General points of Christian friendship gleaned from points 1 and 2.

Why Philippians?

Before we utilize Philippians it is first important to understand the grounds by which we approach Philippians in this light.

Letter of Friendship:

In the Hellenistic era, there were many different forms of letters. The form of the letter related to the nature of the letter. We see a similar reality in today's communication. Letters, e-mails and just about any other type of messaging are all communicated in a manner fitting the relationship between the sender and the recipient. An e-mail from a friend may not have a line of address, e.g., Dear John, and it may not have a signature, e.g., Jane Doe. But an e-mail from a boss may be written with a very clear line of address and a clear signature that communicates not only the name of the sender but also the relationship held between recipient and sender. Internally, the content of the e-mail communicates

much about the relationship of sender to recipient. While we may not have the same formal rubrics, we can certainly relate to distinctions in letter forms.

Paul's letter to the Philippians bears many of the marks of a letter of friendship.¹ The following list illustrates this point. The different parts of the letter are highlighted by corresponding verses in the text.

1. The address and greeting [1:1-2]
2. Prayer for the recipients [1:3-11]
3. Reassurance about the sender (=my affairs) [1:12-26]
4. Request for reassurance about the recipients (=your affairs) [1:27-2:18; 3:1-4:3]
5. Information about movements of intermediaries [2:19-30]
6. Exchange of greetings with third parties [4:21-22]
7. Closing wish for health [4:23]

Background information for reading Philippians

As we read Philippians, it is beneficial for us to consider the context in which Paul writes. Three aspects provide specific background for our study: 1. the understanding of friendship in Paul's culture; 2. the historical and cultural background for Philippi; 3. the establishment of the congregation at Philippi.

Three types of Friendship between equals

As you look at your life, you may recognize different levels and types of friendships. Some people you may consider friends but are more on the level of acquaintances; others friends are people with whom you share everything. Some people you have a friendly relationship with for practical purposes, e.g., your roommate during your freshmen year. Recognizing Philippians as a letter of friendship, it is also beneficial to note that in Paul's day there were similar distinctions in friendships. Aristotle delineated three types of relationships that fell under the category of 'friendship between equals'.

These were:

1. based on goodwill and loyalty
2. of pleasure: people holding common interest
3. utilitarian (i.e. a friendship centered on usefulness or mutual benefit)

In all of these relationships mutuality and reciprocity are present. This connection extends even into sharing mutual enemies. You mess with her, you mess with me. In addition, it would be appropriate for each of these types of relationships to utilize a letter of friendship for communication.

Relevance

Consider your life. What different types of friendships do you see? Especially consider your friendships outside of this small group.

How does the type of friendship influence your interaction within the relationship?

Why might it be significant to understand possible categories of friendship that might produce a letter of friendship?

Philippi

The Philippi of Paul's day was a town on the edge of a fertile plain in Central Macedonia. The Egnatian Way, a major route in the Roman Empire, ran through the town on its way to the port of Neapolis. The original colony was taken over and renamed after Philip of Macedon (the person who conquered it), Alexander the Great's father. It was next to Mount Pangaion, rich in mineral deposits. It was strategic in

¹ For a more complete argument of why Philippians can be considered a letter of friendship consult Gordon Fee's *Philippians* the 11th volume in the IVP New Testament Commentary Series. Fee's commentary also provides support for most of the background information provided in this study.

its location; it was able to be a sentinel for the large fertile plain and it was well protected.

In 42 B.C. Cassius and Brutus (assassins of Julius Caesar) fought Octavian and Mark Antony on the nearby plain. Octavian and Mark Antony were victorious and 'refounded' the city as a Roman colony. The city thus had rights of Roman citizenship. The town was also populated by Octavian with veterans from the war to improve allegiance to Rome. The repopulation again occurred as he defeated Antony at Actium and he repopulated the city with veterans from Antony's army. The city had a mixed population of both Roman and Greek affiliation.

Relevance

What does the background information tell us about the social, economic, and political background of Philippi?

Why would this background matter in our understanding of Philippians? How might this context affect the lives and perspectives of the Philippians?

The Church at Philippi

The records of the church's founding are limited but much is articulated Acts 16:11-40. Take some time to read the account.

Relevance

What do you learn about the establishment of the congregation at Philippi?

How was the congregation established? What is accented in Acts?

How might this formative experience affect the culture of the congregation?



Friends in Christ: A study of Philippians

Session 2: Foundations of Friendship

Introduction

Think back through your life and consider your different friendships. What friendships have been your strongest? What friendships were your weakest? Why were some friendships stronger than others? Why did some of the friendships last longer than others?

Addressing the Text

Philippians 1:1-2

Read Philippians 1:1-2. Cf. also Romans 1:1-7; 1 Corinthians 1:1-3; 2 Corinthians 1:1-2; Galatians 1:1-5; Ephesians 1:1-2; Colossians 1:1-2.

What stands out about the greeting of Philippians? Why would Paul do this?

To whom is the letter addressed? How does this inform us about Paul's view of the church in Philippi?

What would this greeting look like today? What would a comparable scenario and expression of greeting be today?

Philippians 1:3-11

In the greeting we see relationship expressed through the style of address used by Paul. It expresses an attempt to emphasize a relationship between equals. As we move forward into the Thanksgiving we see this relationship illustrated in more detail. Read the text; reflect upon how Paul presents that relationship in these verses.

How would you describe the relationship Paul's words express? What parts of the text lead you to your conclusion?

As you read the text, what is not an issue for the relationship? Consider Paul's current situation, the account of the formation of the church in Philippi found in Acts, the people's current situation, etc.

Why is this unselfishness and lack of pride possible? Cf. Galatians 3:26-29; 1 Corinthians 12:12-26; Ephesians 2:11-22.

Relevance

Paul's relationship teaches us much about Christian friendship. With Christ as our foundation we are freed to be true and good friends. This certainty gives us great joy, but it also challenges us. Consider the following aspects and the implications this teaching has on the living out of our Christian friendship.

1. Foundation

We have already recognized the foundation for our Christian friendships. How does this foundation affect the relationship itself? What implications are there with respect to how you treat your friends?

2. Breadth

Recognizing the foundation for the Christian friendship, who is your Christian friend? Cf. Philippians 1:3-4.

How does this play out in your life?

What difficulties are present with this reality? How do we address those challenges?

Are you ready to have an issue addressed by a fellow Christian you don't really know? Should you be? Why or why not? Are you ready to address a fellow Christian's issue? How should you approach that? How should you not approach that?

3. Endurance and longevity

The foundation we have in Christ gives our Christian friendship longevity. How does this reality free you in your Christian relationships?

4. Prayer

For what does Paul pray? Cf. Philippians 1:3-11.

How does Paul's prayer encourage us to pray in our Christian friendships?

Concluding thoughts

We have been given a great foundation in Jesus Christ. This foundation changes everything in our friendships. It frees us and emboldens us.

Throughout the week pay attention to your friendships. Ask what the true foundation of your friendship currently is. Consider how you can make the friendship an enduring one. Pray that your friendships might find their grounding in our Lord Jesus Christ.



Friends in Christ: A study of Philippians

Session 3: A Living Witness

Introduction

Consider your best summer break ever. When was it? As you got back to school/college after the break, how did you communicate that summer to your friends? What did you tell them?

Today we begin the next portion of the letter of friendship. Following the "Thanksgiving" and/or prayer for the recipients the writer communicates to the friend "my affairs". This section lets the friend know about 'summer break' to update them on how they are doing and the happenings of life.

Addressing the Text

Philippians 1:12-26

This unit of text is delineated by two phrases in the Greek. In Philippians 1:12 we hear "And I want you to know, brothers, that *the things with respect to me* have come for the greater advancement of the good news." In Philippians 1:27 we hear "Only be a citizen worthy of the good news of Christ in order that whether I come and see you or being absent I hear *the things concerning you*, that you stand in one spirit, in one life, struggling along with the faith of the good news." While the English versions generally smooth over the two italicized phrases (and thus sound better in English), the two phrases demarcate two different sections of the letter: 'my affairs' and 'your affairs'. This delineation is further accented by the repetition of a distinct term 'advancement' in Philippians 1:12, 25.

General Content

Read Philippians 1:12-26.

How would you present the content of these verses? How are they organized? What are they conveying?

Specific Content/Message

Philippians 1:12-14

What does Paul present in these verses? What is Paul's tone? What is Paul's concern?

How easy is it for you to take this perspective when talking with your friends? When you are faced with similar situations, what does your conversation highlight?

Philippians 1:15-18a

What issue does Paul recognize here? What do you think is going on?

Does Paul take the bait? Why not?

In life, do you approach relationships and people with this mind? Why/why not? Why is it difficult sometimes?

Philippians 1:18b-26

What struggle does Paul face in prison? What does this struggle suggest about his situation in prison?

Can you relate to Paul? Have you faced a situation in life that you thought that to die would be far better for you? Have you faced similar situations that did not quite bring you to that point but did make you want to escape?

Implications on Christian Friendship

Consider the verses again. Remember that this section informs the people about how Paul is doing in life; it tells the Philippians his affairs while he has been distant from them. Compare Paul's presentation of his affairs to the telling of your friends about your summer break. What is significant about Paul's presentation?

What would your knee-jerk presentation of your affairs be if you were in Paul's shoes? How does Paul make this kind of presentation? Cf. Philippians 1:1-11 and Romans 6:1-11.

What is Paul doing by presenting his affairs in this light? How is God teaching/encouraging his friends through these words?

Elsewhere we hear Paul expressing himself as an example more explicitly: 1 Thessalonians 1:6; 2:14; Ephesians 5:1-2; 1 Corinthians 11:1. These are bold statements. Can you say the same? Should you be able to say the same? Why?

Relevance

Do you find that other people's living witness provides an example (whether positive or negative) that influences your life?

What role does being a living witness play in Christian friendships? How does this look in practice?

How does this reality encourage you in your living? How can you provide a better living witness in your life?

What is the key to maintaining a proper perspective on your life?

Concluding thoughts

We daily find ourselves in the midst of friendships. Our actions and words, our responses to life's situations, and our perspective on our interactions all provide a living witness to our friends.

Throughout the week pay attention to your friendships. Think about the influence that your friends' lives have upon you and vice versa. Evaluate the strength and weakness of this reality. Consider how you can improve to make your living witness a stronger witness in your friendships. Pray that your life would reflect these efforts and more significantly reflect the fact that you are a partaker in the grace of God and a servant of the Lord.



Introduction

"There ain't no I in team." Have you ever heard this phrase? What does this phrase seek to teach? In your experience is it a true statement?

Today we begin the next portion of the letter of friendship. Following the "my affairs" section is the "your affairs". This section is generally used by the writer to express the desire to know how things are going for the recipient(s). As we see in today's text, Paul's concern extends far beyond health and pleasantries; Paul's concern demonstrates what it means to be true partners.

Addressing the Text
Philippians 1:27-2:18

General Content
Read Philippians 1:27-2:18.

How would you present the content of these verses? How are they organized? How do they flow out of the preceding verses? What are they conveying?

Specific Content/Message
Philippians 1:27-30

As you read the text, recognize that the Greek word being translated by the ESV "let your manner of life" is greatly tied into being a citizen. The noun that is related to this word is found in Philippians 3:20: "But our *citizenship* is in heaven..." (ESV). While "let your manner of life" is a fine translation, it is important to recognize that the activity is one that is about carrying out your responsibility as a citizen.

Another note on the language of the text: In verse 29, the verb translated "granted" in the (ESV) is a 'gracious giving'. Two nouns connected to this word are 'grace' and 'gift'.

What seems to be the current Philippian context? What gift has been given to the church there?

How easy is it to see suffering as a gift? Why would it be a gift?

Philippians 2:1-11

How does Paul instruct the Philippians to rejoice with him in their sufferings?
Verses 1-3

Verses 4-11

What role does unity play in Paul's exhortation? Why does he emphasize this? Cf. also Philippians 1:27-30.

Philippians 2:12-18

As this section comes to a close, how does Paul wrap up his words of encouragement?

What does Paul hold up as the Philippians role in the partnership? What are his instructions for them in that role? Cf. Exodus 16:6-12 and Isaiah 42:6.

Implications on Christian Friendship

Consider the verses again. How do these verses encourage you in your Christian friendships? What do they teach you? What does true partnership look like? Consider especially 1:27 and 2:18.

What role does Christ play as you live out your Christian friendships? Cf. Habakkuk 3:17-19.

Relevance

In your experience, do you find that friends suffer with one another? What permits this loyalty? What inhibits it?

How well do people do seeing their friend have everything going well while they suffer throughout life?

What makes a Christian friendship different? How can Christian friends truly suffer in joy? How can we rejoice, as Paul exhorts, even in suffering.

What does this look like in your life?

What is the key to maintaining a proper perspective on your life?

Concluding thoughts

Throughout our lives bad things happen. We face challenges that stretch us; we face challenges by which we suffer. How we face those challenges is greatly related to our perspective on life and our role as partners. How we shine like stars to our friends and to the world provides a great witness to the joy we have in Christ Jesus.

Throughout the week pay attention to your relationships. How do people relate to their difficulties and suffering? How do people respond to other people's successes? Think about the message their actions communicate to you and the message you communicate to others. Consider how you can improve your perspective on your situation and your interaction with others in theirs. Daily remind yourself of the humility and victory of Christ through it all. Pray that your life would reflect this victory so that you may reflect the fact that you are a partaker in the grace of God and a servant of the Lord.



Friends in Christ: A study of Philippians

Session 5: There for You

Introduction

Judy, a second grader, sat in school working on her math problems. Her next door neighbor, Frank, sat in the desk just behind her. They had been friends for as long as they could remember and they were extremely close. As she was working, she heard a rising whimper. Frank's pencil lead had just broken. It was his best pencil, and he needed it to finish his problems. He wasn't the best at math and the pencil was his magic feather. Unfortunately, their teacher Miss Helga Kranawetter permitting no sharpening except at appointed times. Recognizing the problem, Judy turned around and handed him her favorite pencil. Taking the pencil, he was able to finish his math problems.

The scenario seems a bit juvenile, but it illustrates something about friendship. Consider the situation: What did Judy risk by letting 'pressure writing Frank' use her favorite pencil? Why did Judy take this risk? What does Judy demonstrate about her care for Frank? What does Judy demonstrate about her relationship with Frank?

Addressing the Text

Philippians 2:19-30

General Content

Read Philippians 2:19-30. These verses present the portion of the letter in which a friend presents the movement of intermediaries. It might be similar to expressing to a friend on the phone that you saw a mutual friend and the correspondence pertinent to the friend who is on the phone.

Summarize the content of these verses. Who is doing what? Why?

Specific Content/Message

Philippians 2:19-24

What does it mean to Paul to send Timothy? How would Timothy's departure affect Paul's life? Consider also Timothy's character and service in Acts 16:1-5; 17:14-15.

Why then does Paul send Timothy?

Why is Timothy concerned for the Philippians? What does this teach us about our concern for others?

Philippians 2:25-30

What is Epaphroditus' story? Consider also Philippians 4:18.

What is Paul sending Epaphroditus to do?

Philippians 2:19-30

Why then does Paul need to send Timothy? Consider 1 Corinthians 4:16-18; 1 Thessalonians 3:1-7.

How does Paul describe Timothy and Epaphroditus to the Philippians? Why does he accent what he accents? What function does it serve?

Implications on Christian Friendship

How do these verses encourage you in your Christian friendships? What do they teach you? What does being 'there for' each other look like?

To what extent does Paul give up his best pencil? What does this teach us about being 'there for' you?

What does Paul's careful description of the rationale behind sending Epaphroditus and Timothy teach us about being 'there for' people? What two key components need to happen for us to be 'there for' people? Consider the problem in James 2:15-16.

Relevance

In your experience, what are some situations where you would need to be 'there for' a friend?

What limitations inhibit you from being 'there for' them? How do you address these challenges?

What sentiments inhibit you from being 'there for you'?

What sacrifices are required for us to be 'there for' people?

How do Christians overcome these obstacles?

What does this look like in your life?

What is the key to maintaining a perspective that allows you to be there? What is helpful towards this end?

Concluding thoughts

In friendships we often are called to be 'there for' others. Being 'there for' looks different in different situations. It requires listening, assessing, and acting appropriately. Often it requires our giving up of our prized pencil.

Throughout the week pay attention to your relationships. Keep your eyes open for situations in which you can be 'there for' friends. Look beyond the immediate needs and seek to recognize the underlying needs. Consider how you can best be 'there for' them recognizing both sets of needs. Recognize also how frequently your friends are there for you. Note how you respond to these opportunities and these gifts.



Introduction

Think back through your life and consider your friendships. What was the best news you got to share with a friend? How did sharing that news make you feel? Why was it so good to share that news with your friend?

Now consider your life and friendships again. What was the hardest thing you ever had to communicate to a friend? How long did it take for you to share it with your friend? What thoughts went through your head before you shared it? After you shared it? Why was it so difficult?

Today we recognize that being friends in Christ means that we get to share good news with our friends and we have the responsibility of sharing the more difficult words with our friends.

Addressing the Text

Philippians 3:1-11

General Content

Read Philippians 3:1-11. These verses transition out of the matters of visitation and well wishes and address an area of concern Paul had with the Philippians.

Specific Content/Message and Implications on Christian Friendship

Philippians 3:1

In these verses, Paul expresses joy to write 'the same things' to the Philippians. Why does Paul find this act a cause for rejoicing?

How does this attitude encourage you in your Christian friendships? Is this perspective difficult to hold?

Philippians 3:2-11

What problem did Paul see facing the Philippians? What type of language does Paul use to communicate his concern?

What does this problem look like today? Do we see this problem in today's church culture?

Why does Paul bring up his personal life? What is he illustrating?

How does Paul's recognition of the value of knowing Jesus Christ encourage him to write to the Philippians? How does it affect his confidence in bringing up this issue? How does it affect his motivation to address the issue?

Why would Paul need to tell these people about the value of knowing Jesus? Aren't these people believers? Do you find the same need to be true in your life or in your friend's life?

Relevance

Paul addresses a significant issue; are we called to do that today? Why would a friend do that for another friend? Consider Matthew 18:15.

What fears/dangers are present for the one speaking-up? Consider Matthew 10:37.

What happens if the friend does not speak up?

How can you address such issues with friends? What confidence do you hold that frees you to do so? How does the foundation of your friendship relate to this question? What wisdom is there in Proverbs 27:6.

Are there times when you need to hear the words of a friend speaking up? How do you respond? How does your consideration of the need for you to speak up affect your response to their concern?

How does your reception of a friend's speaking up instruct your speaking up?

Concluding thoughts

Life brings many difficult situations and confusing times. It is easy for us to have our judgment clouded by the events of our life; it is easy for us to fail to see the truth. In these times we give thanks for friends who help us to see more clearly, for friends who share the Word with us in our need. Recognizing this great gift given to us, we also share that gift with others. We speak up even when we are afraid to do so; we speak up so that others might hear what they need to hear. We speak up so that they might have the haze in their life removed that they may see clearly.

Throughout the week pay attention to your relationships. Keep your eyes open for situations where you should speak up. Consider how you can best speak up so that they can be benefited. Also seek to recognize better the times when you need to hear the words of a friend. Pray for God's guidance in both situations.



Friends in Christ: A study of Philippians

Session 7: Striving Towards the Goal

Introduction

What are your goals in life?

How do your goals influence what you do in life? How do they influence how you interact with other people? Consider implications for interactions with classmates, friends (some of which may be classmates), professors, employers, etc.

Today we ask the question of what the goal is in a Christian friendship and how that influences those relationships.

Addressing the Text

Philippians 3:12-4:3

General Content

Read Philippians 3:12-4:3.

Outline these verses to highlight Paul's argument.

How do these verses flow out of the preceding verses? What is their primary thrust?

Specific Content/Message

Philippians 3:12-4:1

What is the goal for which Paul is striving? What has he attained? What has he not attained?

What is the call of verse 15? Consider 2:1-5.

What exhortation does Paul put forth again in 3:17-4:1? What are the 'enemies' doing/promoting?

Why should the people 'stand firm'?

Philippians 4:2-3

These verses encourage two specific people to 'think the same in the Lord'. The verb continues the exhortation of 2:1-5 and at 3:15.

Relevance—Implications on Christian Friendship

Who all should carry this same mind and have this same goal?

If Christians all are to have the same goal, what does that mean for friendships among them?

Does the same hold true with your friendships that are with non-Christians? How does this affect your friendships?

What reality about Christian friendships is present in the present? Consider 4:2-3.

In verse 13 Paul says that he forgets what lies behind, i.e., all that he has done worthy of merit, and strives forward towards the goal. How does this happen in friendships? What might this look like in conflicts? How does this relate to grudges?

How often does Paul's focus come into view in your Christian friendships? When is the last time the goal has entered into your mindset in relationship to your Christian friendships?

How does this affect the friendship's dynamics? What freedom does it provide? What focus does it give?

How does the focus on the goal that we have in Christ strengthen or fade in your life? What characterizes the times of strength? of fading?

How can we better keep the goal in mind? Consider 2 Timothy 4:5-8 and Acts 2:42-47.

Concluding thoughts

The present and past often play significant roles in our relationships, but God calls us to look forward and strive towards the goal he has set before us. God has made us for relationship and the completion of that relationship on the last day should propel us forward. The greatness of that goal should far exceed the present and the past.

Throughout the week pay attention to your relationships. Recognize the implications of the goal on your relationships. Consider how the common goal is expressed; consider how the common goal is forgotten. Pray for God's guidance that his goal may guide you.



Introduction

What was the most exciting/joyous thing that has happened in your life?

When it happened how did you share it? How did the joy and excitement from that event come out?

Today we see a joy that permeates relationships and instructs our Christian friendships.

Addressing the Text

Philippians 4:4-23

General Content

Read Philippians 4:4-23.

How does Paul conclude his letter?

Do you notice some themes from elsewhere in the book? What are these themes and where do you see them?

Specific Content/Message

Philippians 4:4-9

By now you may have noticed that Paul's letter to the Philippians is one that is filled with much joy. The noun for 'joy' and the related verb is found in no fewer than twelve verses of Philippians: Cf. Philippians 1:4, 18, 25; 2:2, 17-18, 29; 3:1; 4:1, 4, 10. What produces such joy in Paul and encourages such joy in the Philippians?

How should this joy translate in actions for the Philippians? What does Paul's instruction suggest?

Do you have this same joy? Does it permeate your life? How does that look?

How easy is it for you to listen to the exhortation of Paul in verse 6? How do verses 4 and 7 encourage us to heed the instruction of this passage?

Verses 8 and 9 introduce a concluding word of instruction. It calls us to consider what is good and consider those who set examples of godly living and thought. In our world today, it is easy for us to get wrapped up in considering things that are not good and idolize examples that are far from godly. Consider the top five things and people that fall into this category of not good/ungodly. Consider also the top five good things and people that you find in your life that would fall under the category of things

upon which we should think. How do you combat the tendency to focus on the bad things and entities and focus on the good? What does the text provide by way of help?

Philippians 4:10-20

In verse 10, the verb translated 'revived' (ESV/NASB/NRSV) and 'renewed' (NIV) is a botanical term referring to a plant and the revival of its blooming, i.e., 'blooming again' or 'causing to bloom again'.

Why does Paul rejoice greatly in the Lord?

What is the secret of contentment?

Do you find joy in letting others give gifts to you? Why/why not? How does this compare to Paul's joy?

Philippians 4:21-23

The final verses conveys greetings to the saints from Paul, the brothers, even Caesar's household. This greeting is fairly standard letter format. The final farewell takes a distinctively Christian form and reminds the Philippians of the grace that is central to their relationship and their life.

How do you close your correspondences with fellow Christians? Why? Do your farewells convey the heart of your relationship? Why/why not?

Relevance—Implications on Christian Friendship

These closing verses of Philippians highlight the joy that overflows throughout the relationship between Paul and the Philippians. Joy is a significant part of friendships. It is contagious and it enhances the relationship.

How is the joy you have in Christ Jesus reflected in your Christian friendships? How is it not? Why/why not? How can this be improved?

Think of five specific areas/things you can improve on in your life by purposefully injecting and highlighting the joy you have because of Christ into those things.

How can you encourage each other and other friends to joyous living? Consider specific situations in your life.

Concluding thoughts

We have been given confidence, security, and peace in Christ Jesus. These gifts give us great joy in the Lord. This joy we have in Christ Jesus in turn permeates our lives and our friendships. It leads us to a freedom to love and care for each other being secure in the foundation we have in Christ. It enables us to put ourselves forth as an example and speak the hard words to people who need to hear them. It enables us to give of ourselves freely knowing that God will take care of us and give us strength. It propels us forward as partners with the same goal rejoicing in and sharing the gifts we have been given.

As you go throughout this week and your lives, continue to recognize the relationship you have with all those in Christ. Look for opportunities to share the joy you have in the Lord. And be empowered to be true friends in Christ.