



*transformed.*

A SIX-WEEK CORE GROUP STUDY  
THROUGH PHILIPPIANS



*Philippians  
study guide.*

*Have you ever had to get a pair of glasses?*  
Perhaps you remember the first time you put on those frames, and your world was transformed as you began to see all of life more clearly through the new lenses.

Philippians has some of the “greatest hits” verses of the New Testament and if there’s a book of the Bible that can be said to breathe exuberant joy, peace, and satisfaction, it would be the letter to the Philippians. Yet, the apostle Paul wrote this letter to a church who deeply cared for him while he was in chains potentially facing death.

*What did Paul understand about life with Christ that led him to live with joy and hope in the midst of hard circumstances?*

Paul draws the Philippians' attention to Jesus: who He is, what He's done, and what that means for us. We will discover that Paul wanted the hearers to think and live in light of Christ's death and resurrection. The gospel is not just information, but a complete transformation into a new person and community.

The book of Philippians has the power to show us the new lens of Christ through which we view all of life and to show us how to be the people of God in this world. Our prayer is that through this study you would discover that the gospel of Jesus has the power to completely transform your life.

## *core group study outline*

- WEEK 1 *everything is transformed.*
- WEEK 2 *transformed relationships.*
- WEEK 3 *transformed walk with God.*
- WEEK 4 *transformed citizenship.*
- WEEK 5 *transformed inner life.*
- WEEK 6 *transformed priorities.*

# reading New Testament epistles.

If you've ever overheard another person talking on the phone, you may have tried to listen and guess who they're talking to, what they're talking about, and why. In many ways, this is what reading Philippians is like.

Philippians falls into the biblical genre of epistles, or letters. They were written by early Christian apostles, representatives of Jesus who were appointed to spread the good news about Him. The New Testament letters are some of the most accessible and easy to read parts of the Bible, and it can be tempting to overlook their context because they appear more directly relevant.

However, *they are real letters with real audiences, written for particular purposes and in response to specific situations.* They are ancient texts written in a language and from a culture vastly different from our own. When it comes to reading an epistle like Philippians, it's precisely by honoring the context of each letter that we can learn to wisely read them and allow God to speak a powerful word to our own time and place.

## *cultural context*

### ***Jewish Culture***

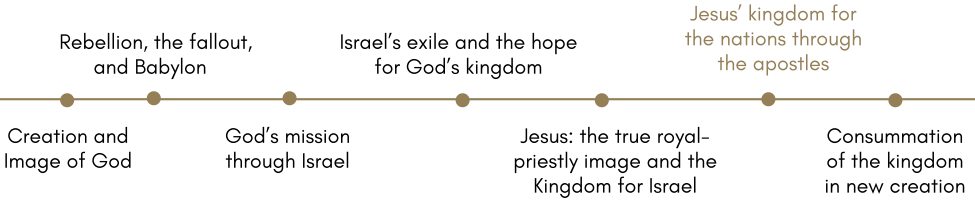
The early messianic Jesus movement was Jewish in culture and language but expanded into the non-Jewish world. James, John, Peter, and Paul all represent unique cultural expressions of early Christianity.

### ***Greco-Roman Culture***

The larger Greco-Roman culture operated according to the values of honor and shame, hierarchy and patriarchy, patronage and status, purity and pollution.

## *narrative context*

Where do the NT letters fit within the context of the larger biblical story?



As the apostles traveled around proclaiming the gospel, their oral teachings eventually took shape as writings, and they were viewed as an expression of Jesus' authority over his new covenant people, alongside the Scriptures of Israel.

## *situational context*

The situational context provides the backstory of the letter's occasion, purpose, and motivation. The apostles believed the gospel message had the power to transform individuals and whole communities, but because they lived in the first century Roman world, the specific cultural issues and challenges they often write about are not identical to ours today. If we read these letters as if they're written directly to us, we miss the fuller, deeper meaning of the text.

## *literary context*

- The letters must be read in light of the conventions and realities of ancient letter writing.
- We must avoid the modern misconception that Paul and the apostles wrote their letters in solitude, producing a single unedited draft that was hastily sent. Paul's letters would have been created over periods of weeks and months.
- The named co-senders of Paul's letters (Timothy, Sosthenes, Silas) were contributors to the content of the letters.
- Letter carriers played a key role in a letter's reception.
- These letters are written as oratory speeches, and they were designed to be read aloud and heard as one coherent statement.
- NT letters show all the signs of the Greco-Roman tradition of rhetoric: the art of persuasive communication aimed at eliciting a response from the audience.
- The NT letters were designed to accomplish something, not just communicate information.

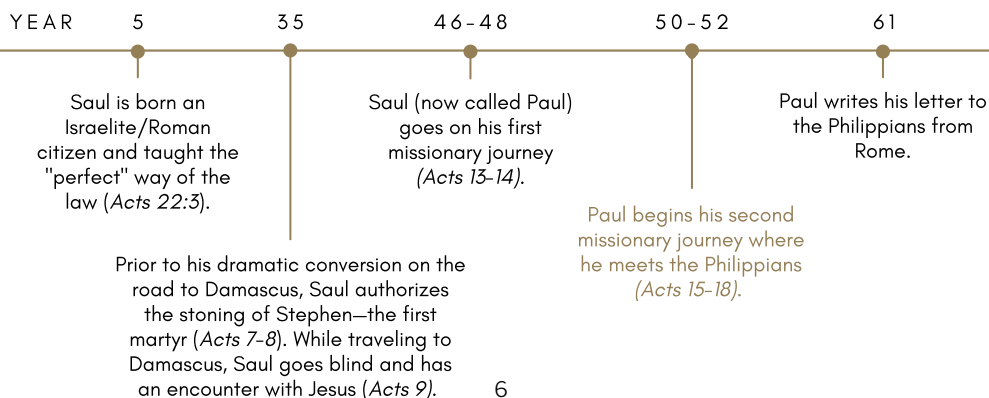
# is the gospel for everyone?

## PHILIPPIANS IN THE BOOK OF ACTS

### *Paul—an unlikely missionary.*

*Did you know that Paul started out as a religious legalist and zealous persecutor of Christians? While he was on the road to Damascus to expand his persecution efforts, Jesus struck him down and temporarily blinded him. Later, Paul was filled with the Holy Spirit and sent to preach the gospel of Christ to the world.*

Throughout the Book of Acts we get a clear picture of Paul's journey. Below is an *approximate* timeline of Paul's life (especially as it relates to the Philippians).



The diversity of the Philippian church is evident in how the church began. Let's look at three people Paul encountered in Philippi: Lydia was a wealthy woman from Thyatira, the slave girl was an oppressed Greek, and the jailer was a middle class Roman. All held dramatically different positions in society, yet all were transformed by the gospel—proving that the gospel transcends all barriers.

## Lydia

*One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. And after she was baptized, and her household as well, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay." And she prevailed upon us.*

ACTS 16:14-15

## the slave girl

*As we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by fortune-telling. She followed Paul and us, crying out, 'These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation.' And this she kept doing for many days. Paul, having become greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, 'I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.' And it came out that very hour.*

ACTS 16:16-18

## the jailer

*About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's bonds were unfastened. When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. But Paul cried with a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here." And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. Then he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household."*

ACTS 16:25-31



# *Philippians in context.*

Philippi was a city where God so wanted to plant the gospel that He directly intervened to send Paul there. Acts 16 tells us how the Holy Spirit blocked Paul from going where he had been planning to go, and instead gave him a vision to go to Macedonia, otherwise known as northern Greece. The first city in the region of Macedonia where Paul started a church is Philippi—known today by its Greek name Krenides. This marked Paul's move away from cities with a sizable Jewish population, like those in Asia minor, to cities that were essentially gentile and pagan in both religion and culture.



## *the occasion*

By the time Paul writes Philippians, the events recorded in the book of Acts will have come to pass. Paul is in prison in Rome and the Philippian church has sent him a gift through a member named Epaphroditus. The church in Philippi loved Paul deeply, and they lost touch with Paul while he was in prison so they sent Epaphroditus to take care of Paul's needs. Paul is sending him back with this letter to the Philippians in order to 1) tell them how things are with him, 2) thank them for their gift, 3) exhort them on a couple of matters.

The Philippians did not present Paul with problems. The church was relatively healthy compared to some of Paul's others. That said, the Philippians were not without their own struggles. They, like the other churches of Macedonia, had undergone persecution and hardship, and were experiencing the same struggles that Paul himself had known.

## *reading Philippians*

Philippians is a great example of biblical letter literary structure and devices. As we study Philippians, keep your eye out for the following:

1) Chiasm: A symmetrical structure where something at the center points to a central idea (for an example, see page 22).

2) Repetition: Biblical repetition can be repeated words, quotations, patterns, motifs, images, characters or events. You'll notice that Paul's main ideas about Jesus' life, death and resurrection are repeated throughout the letter.

Through the use of literary devices, structure, and repetition, Paul is trying to get the people of Philippi to sink deep roots into the reality of what Jesus has done, so that they can live transformed lives. This still rings true for us today.

**everything is  
*transformed.***

PHILIPPIANS 1:12-24

## 1.

Opening Question: *What was a "fad" you remember from your childhood?*

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This week, we will see how Paul was living a life of joy in the midst of difficult circumstances and understand what was at the heart of the letter.

When we are living for Christ, our outlook on every area our lives is *transformed*.

It's clear in these early verses that Paul is imprisoned and is potentially facing execution for his work in preaching the gospel. Yet, Paul responds in a surprising way and finds the strength to rejoice. *How?* He explains it this way:

***"to live is Christ,  
to die is gain."***

In life, he got to serve Jesus, and in death, he would get to be with Jesus forever. Paul's preference of death is his use of a literary device to emphasize that being with Christ is the best possible thing. His joy comes from relationship with Christ, not earthly circumstances. Paul tells us what is supreme in his life, and encourages us to make the same thing supreme: Jesus Christ. As theologian Gordon Fee says, "*if to live is not Christ, then to die is not gain.*" When you live for anything other than Christ, your joy is dependent on if you have that thing at that time. If you live for anything other than Christ, death is always loss because that thing is gone.

With Christ in the picture, Paul was able to have great joy because he realized that what appeared to be a set-back may be a divine set-up to share the gospel to some of the most hard to reach and influential people.

**Philippians 1**

12 Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel. 13 As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. 14 And because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear. 15 It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. 16 The latter do so out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. 17 The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. 18 But 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. Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, 19 for I know that through your prayers and God's provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance. 20 I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. 21 For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. 22 If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! 23 I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; 24 but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body.

In every major city where Rome was ruling, there was an imperial guard. As a prisoner, a different palace guard would have been chained to Paul every four hours for their shift. So every four hours, Paul got to share the message of Christ.

This guard was incredibly influential, and perhaps in our context, we would consider them hard to reach with the gospel. People were coming to faith in the most hard-to-reach and influential places! God was using Paul's imprisonment to change the face of the Roman world.

"Through your prayers" (verse 1:19) indicates how Paul expects God to bring all of this about: through the Philippians' prayers and the supply of the Holy Spirit. The grammar assumes a close relationship between their prayers and the supply of the Spirit, which for us means that our prayers matter!

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### **OBSERVATION**

Summarize Paul's situation. What sorts of things are people typically concerned about in prison, and what do we learn about Paul's priorities in this passage?

Why does Paul say it is actually beneficial for him to be suffering in prison?

### **INTERPRETATION**

Why would Paul consider dying to be more desirable? Why would he consider living to be more necessary?

What do you think "to live is Christ" means?

### **APPLICATION**

Paul's trust and satisfaction were not rooted in his circumstances, but in relationship with Christ. What would it look like to live your life this way?

If God could redeem Paul's imprisonment for good, what are ways He could potentially use your hardships for His glory?

Think about the situations God has put you in. Who might God have put there for you to reach with the gospel?



## LIVING ROOTED

Paul presents us with an equation:  
if to live is \_\_\_\_\_,  
then to die is \_\_\_\_\_.

*How do we tend to fill in that blank? What do you find yourself tempted to replace "Christ" with? Whatever you fill this blank in with that is not Christ, whether it be career, success, high GPA, prestige, esteem, relationships, or beauty, death will be a loss of it.*

*How can we grow in living for Christ?*

*What changes do you need to make to your lifestyle for the gospel and Christ's glory to be your top priorities?*

NOTES & REFLECTIONS





*transformed*  
**relationships.**

PHILIPPIANS 1:27-2:18



## 2.

**Opening Question:** *Who is the most humble person you can think of?*

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Last week, we looked at how our answer to “to live is \_\_\_\_\_,” profoundly transforms everything about our lives. We are now going to see how Christ changes our relationships through His humility. Our salvation is not only personal, but has ramifications for community.

It seems the Philippians are in the midst of some form of internal conflict. Yet Paul believes how we live in community will be a testament of the gospel to the watching world. Paul asks them to stand as one unified body, which we can only do by grasping the humility of Christ.

Paul explains what Christ’s humility looked like, and then what ours can look like as well. Jesus willingly emptied himself, dying in great shame and humiliation. Yet Jesus’s crucifixion is a picture of both humility and greatness.

God’s greatness is seen in his willingness to serve us, and God’s humiliation turns out to be his own mark of distinction and moment of glory! There is great honor in humility.

Our attitude will either be proud or humble. One leads to cynicism and division, and the other to gratitude and unity. When we embrace this humble attitude of Christ towards others, our relationships begin to change. This outflowing of a humble and grateful attitude will be what causes us to shine in the midst of darkness.

Paul didn’t see this as benign; he saw it as the beginning of a community that would either shine like stars or look just like a warped and crooked culture.

*the honor in humility***Philippians 1**

27 Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in the one Spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel 28 without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved—and that by God. 29 For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him, 30 since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.

**Philippians 2**

1 Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, 2 then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. 3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, 4 not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. 5 In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: 6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; 7 rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross! 9 Therefore

Humility was regarded in the ancient world as weakness, the characteristic of inferiors and slaves who had been kicked down to the bottom rungs of society. But for the Messiah and his people it is different. Paul wants his readers to absorb the story of Jesus, specifically the story of his humility, death, and exaltation, and to work out what their salvation is going to mean in practice.

Paul wrote what he did here, not in order to deal with the issues of Christ's divinity and humanity, but to spell out the way in which those who are in Christ ought to live.

God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. 12 Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, 13 for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose. 14 Do everything without grumbling or arguing, 15 so that you may become blameless and pure, “children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.” Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky 16 as you hold firmly to the word of life. And then I will be able to boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor in vain. 17 But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you. 18 So you too should be glad and rejoice with me.

A drink offering was one type of consecration offering, pouring wine on top of another sacrifice. This represented the personal commitment that accompanied the repentance expressed in sin offerings.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### OBSERVATION

Paul says we are to live lives worthy of the gospel of Christ. What did he have in mind?

How does unity and humility play a role in the spread of the gospel?

What is the result of living the way Paul describes?

### INTERPRETATION

How was it an act of humility for Jesus to take on the form of a human?

How does Jesus' humility impact the

way that we live in community with other believers?

What effects do you think grumbling has on a community? What about selfishness? Competition?

### APPLICATION

How is Christ's humility a model for us?

What aspect of Paul's advice for living in community do you want to grow in most?

In light of all Paul has said, what do you think it would look like for your Core Group to shine like stars in your generation?



LIVING  
ROOTED

What are ways you can replace:

*Grumbling with gratitude?*

*Selfishness with sacrifice?*

*Competition with honor?*

*How can we as a Core Group grow in these areas?*

NOTES & REFLECTIONS





# *the* Christ *hymn.*

PHILIPPIANS 2:6-11

## *chiastic structure—*

The structure of the Christ hymn crescendos in verse 8 with Jesus' death: "*by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!*" This is the key idea!

v6.

**Jesus' glory as God**

*"Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;"*

v7.

**Jesus' service to others**

*"rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant,"*

v7-8.

**Jesus' humility**

*"being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself"*

*Have you ever wondered why Philippians 2:6-11 is printed in your bible line by line, like a poem? Many biblical scholars say it has the earmarks of being a Christian hymn that Paul incorporated into his letter, whether by Paul or otherwise. This passage gives a powerful, poetic overview of Christ's mission as our redeemer, which required humility on His part.*

This Jesus poem is in two parts, corresponding to our verses 6-8 and 9-11: The first half talks about Christ giving up his privileges of heaven and becoming a human being for our sake, or in other words, the *incarnation*. The second half describes the glory the Son has received from the Father for his obedience, which is called *glorification*.

At the crux of this chiasmic structure, Paul draws everything around Jesus' crucifixion. His death shows how far Jesus was willing to go to serve humanity. Paul points to Jesus as the example we are to follow:

*humble yourself and God will exalt you,  
die to yourself to find true life, and give  
yourself away to be found in God.*

v9.

**Jesus' exaltation**

*"Therefore God exalted  
him to the highest place  
and gave him the name  
that is above every  
name,"*

v10.

**all humanity bows to Jesus**  
*"that at the name of Jesus  
every knee should bow, in  
heaven and on earth and  
under the earth,"*

v11.

**Jesus gives glory to God**  
*"and every tongue  
acknowledge that Jesus  
Christ is Lord, to the  
glory of God the Father."*



*transformed*  
**walk with God.**

PHILIPPIANS 3:2-16



### 3.

*Opening Question: When have you been in a position where you had to trust another person for something important? What made it easy or difficult to trust them?*

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*How do we relate to God, and how does He want us to relate to Him? On one hand, a common misconception of Christianity is that to be a Christian is just dependent on our actions by doing good, religious works. On the other hand, it doesn't seem right that we do whatever we want just because we're forgiven.*

In this passage, Paul is looking out for false teachers who were teaching that you could be righteous before God based on performing the law of God. He turns the “dogs” back on these false teachers and states that their gospel was not good news. He draws on his personal experience to urge the Philippians to trust in the righteousness that is theirs by faith in Christ—that they might enjoy their relationship with God, experience His power, and have the motivation to press on because of the assurance of God's favor.

This week, we will see how living for Christ transforms how we relate to God. Before Christ's sacrifice, the Jewish people tried to achieve righteousness through laws, or rules.

Now, we can rest in the sacrifice of Jesus becoming our righteousness. All that's left is for us to pursue Him! Christianity is a restful pursuit of God.

Paul's words show us the joyful paradox of the Christian life:

*the restful pursuit.*

**Philippians 3**

The Christian church began among the Jewish people of Palestine; they were highly ethnocentric, often calling non-Jewish people or Gentiles, “dogs”—a highly derogatory term. As the Christian movement began advancing into the Gentile world, some Jewish Christians began teaching that Gentiles must first become Jew through circumcision and obedience to Moses’ law.

The word used for “garbage” in verse 7 is a vulgar word! It means something closer to dung—like “foul-smelling street garbage fit only for dogs.”

2 Watch out for those dogs, those evildoers, those mutilators of the flesh. 3 For it is we who are the circumcision, we who serve God by his Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh—4 though I myself have reasons for such confidence. If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: 5 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; 6 as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless. 7 But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. 8 What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. 10 I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead. 12 Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. 13 Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and

straining toward what is ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. 15 All of us, then, who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. 16 Only let us live up to what we have already attained.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### OBSERVATION

Look over Paul's credentials. What "gain" was he deriving from them? Why does he now see them as loss?

What does verse 10 reference as ways of knowing Christ?

### INTERPRETATION

What is the difference between the circumcision that Paul describes of Christians and the circumcision of the Jewish people? Why do you think Paul considers it so important that the church understands that physical circumcision should not be considered a prerequisite for being a Christian?

In verses 4-6, what is Paul trying to communicate about himself to the Philippians church?

Why might the assurance that Paul belongs to Christ motivate him to strain toward heaven?

### APPLICATION

What things are you hesitant to lose or count as rubbish for the sake of Christ? How might this relate to putting confidence in the flesh?

What gets in the way of us feeling like we can rest in the salvation of Jesus, without trying to earn it in other ways?

How might your life look differently if you were to believe by faith that Christ's righteousness was enough for you in each moment of life?



## LIVING ROOTED

Take time to write these verses in your own words. This will help you to understand and internalize what Paul is saying.

*If someone looked at your life, what would they say you were striving for most in life?*

*What is one way you can strive to get to know Christ more this week?*

NOTES & REFLECTIONS





*transformed*  
**citizenship.**

PHILIPPIANS 3:17-4:1

## 4.

*Opening Question: What is your favorite place you have traveled, and what made it different from home?*

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*Have you ever felt a little bit out of place as a follower of Christ? This week, we will look at how living for Christ transitions our citizenship from the world to the kingdom of God. We gain a new king, and we are called to live lives that would honor Him. We can learn a lot from Paul's words about how to live in a culture that can be opposed to many aspects of faith.*

In the Roman world, Caesar was the supreme leader. He was so respected and revered that Roman citizens called him their "Lord". In a nation defined by its incredible national pride, great tensions arose when people who became Christians said that they could no longer call Caesar Lord, as their Lord was Jesus Christ alone. Paul encourages the Philippians that they are citizens of heaven, and reminds them to live lives worthy of their Lord, Jesus Christ, even as they currently reside in a nation of hostility against them.

Paul describes those who do not follow Christ as enemies of the cross. This may be a picture of someone whose life is built around their own pleasure and their highest pursuit is making sure they are satisfied. Ultimately their lives are about themselves and this kind of life is headed for destruction. But in Christ, our citizenship is in heaven. This is where our attention, pursuit, values and glory are found. The good life is wrapped up in our walk with Christ and our citizenship in heaven. Those who trust in Jesus are headed towards glory!

# Paul's résumé.

PHILIPPIANS 3:5-7



From a religious Jewish standpoint, Paul's credentials were unbeatable:

“CIRCUMCISED ON THE EIGHTH DAY” (V5)

Circumcision was the sign of belonging to the covenant people, the Israelites. Paul had been circumcised at eight days of age, just as Leviticus 12:3 commanded.

“OF THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL, OF THE TRIBE OF BENJAMIN, A HEBREW OF HEBREWS” (V5)

You could enter Judaism in two ways: by converting or (the preferred way) by being born into it. Paul was born into Judaism, even tracing his heritage specifically to the tribe of Benjamin.

“IN REGARD TO THE LAW, A PHARISEE;” (V5)

Pharisees were a group within Judaism who stressed strict obedience to the Hebrew law as well as to the traditions of the rabbis. They were very highly thought of by many Jews.

“AS FOR ZEAL, PERSECUTING THE CHURCH;” (V6)

Paul is first mentioned in the bible as an assistant at the stoning of Stephen, the first Christian martyr (Acts 7:58, 8:1). Paul and other strict Jews thought they were serving God by persecuting Jesus followers, and he went on a personal crusade to extent the persecution of Christians.

“AS FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS BASED ON THE LAW, FAULTLESS.” (V6)

Paul was diligent in obeying the laws and teachings of the rabbis, which included washing his hands correctly, following sabbath laws, avoiding certain foods, and so on.

Knowing Paul's religious resume, it's incredibly powerful for him to write in verse 7:

***“whatever were gains to me—religious advantages, status, material benefits, honor, comforts—I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.”***

**Philippians 3**

The idea of “imitating” a teacher had precedent in Paul’s Jewish heritage, where a pupil learned not simply by receiving instruction but by living out the model exemplified by the teacher. In other words, discipleship is not just taught, but caught. This language occurs in two specific contexts for Paul: suffering for the sake of Christ and behavior that conforms to the gospel. In every case, imitation of Paul means as he imitates Christ.

Notice that Paul weeps over these enemies of the cross, but he does not set them up as personal opponents.

This passage is a classic expression of the “already/not yet” framework. They are “already” citizens of the heavenly commonwealth, even as they await the consummation that is “not yet.” Paul is not asking the Philippians to renounce their citizenship of Rome, but rather live as a colony of heaven in Rome. They are to live in the present as those in pursuit of the heavenly prize.

17 Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do. 18 For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. 19 Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things. 20 But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 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 4**

4 Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends!

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### OBSERVATION

Whose example is Paul calling the Philippians to follow?

What are the characteristics of those who are enemies of Christ? For those who have citizenship in heaven?

What will Christ do for those whose citizenship is in heaven?

### INTERPRETATION

Put in your own words what Paul's main concern for the Philippians might be.

What would it mean for someone to have their stomach as their God?

We all have to think about getting an education, earning a living, finding a spouse, etc. What is the difference between a mind "set" on these things versus just thinking about them in a God-honoring way?

### APPLICATION

In what ways have you made peace with the fact that our hope is for the coming of a Savior, and that this life is full of pain and suffering for all people, but especially Christ-followers?

What causes you to grow weary of waiting for your savior Christ? When are you most susceptible to begin setting your mind on earthly things?

In what ways do you need to remember you are no longer a slave to the god of your bellies? In what ways are you still trying to live this life trying to find happiness and fill your belly?



## LIVING ROOTED

Spend time in Core Group writing a note to someone you know who has served as an example to you of conviction, community, or courage, thanking them for the impact on your life. Consider giving the note to that person this week!

NOTES & REFLECTIONS



A person wearing a dark hoodie is shown in profile, looking down with their eyes closed and hands clasped together in a prayerful gesture. The background is a dark, textured wall. The overall mood is contemplative and spiritual.

*transformed*  
**inner life.**

PHILIPPIANS 4:1-13

## 5.

Opening Question: *What do you do to make yourself feel good or to destress?*

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*Scripture calls Jesus the Prince of peace, but what does that mean? We saw a few weeks ago that through Jesus, we have peace with God. Yet Paul seems to suggest that we can not only have peace with God, but experience the peace of God.*

From endless decisions, to an overflow of information, to despairing circumstances, to social anxieties and pressures, there's something about our culture and lives that breeds anxiety. Paul's intention in writing Philippians was to encourage them to rejoice in every circumstance, whether that's when conflict arises, hardships come, or when we're stressed or anxious. Since the Philippians' suffering was at the hands of those who proclaim Caesar as Lord, Paul wanted to remind them that the true Lord is near. This was especially necessary as they lived in an increasingly hostile Roman world. He tells them over and over again to look towards Christ to give them strength.

This week, we will see how Christ shapes what goes on inside us, changing our inner-focus, our fears, and our perspective on suffering. We serve a God who cares about us, is near to us, and who brings peace. Not just peace with God, but peace of God.

*do not be anxious.***Philippians 4**

Paul rarely ever mentions anyone by name, apart from greetings and occasional mention of coworkers. But here he does, not because these two women are the “bad ones” who need to be singled out, but precisely the opposite: they are long-time friends and co-workers, influential members of the Philippian church and possibly were leaders. The fact that Paul names them at all is evidence of friendship and the value of their ministries, since typically enemies are left unnamed.

The word “guard” in verse 7 is a military term that speaks of a garrison. In the Roman world, a group of Roman soldiers would surround a building in order to guard it and make sure nobody got in. Paul uses this word to describe what God does for our hearts when we pray: He makes a garrison of peace around our hearts and minds.

Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends!

2 I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. 3 Yes, and I ask you, my true companion, help these women since they have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life. 4 Rejoice in the Lord always.

I will say it again: Rejoice! 5 Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. 6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ

Jesus. 8 Finally, brothers and sisters, 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. 9 Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice.

And the God of peace will be with you. 10 I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. 11 I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. 12 I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. 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. 13 I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### OBSERVATION

In verse 5, Paul writes "the Lord is near." For both the Philippians and us, what comfort can be found in this verse? What encouragement? What power in persecution?

What does verse 6 say should accompany our prayers when we are anxious?

Does verse 7 promise that our prayers will always be answered? What does verse 7 promise?

What are some of the things verse 8 says we should focus our thoughts on?

### INTERPRETATION

In light of all Paul says in these verses, how does praying bring the peace of God? What do our hearts and minds need to be protected from?

Why do you think Paul places such an emphasis on the life of our minds? How does the mind fit into our walk with God?

### APPLICATION

How would knowing "the Lord is near" bring peace into your life?

What sorts of things occupy your mind? How does your preoccupation with these things affect your relationships? Your joy in the Lord? Your peace?



## LIVING ROOTED

Write down your “lows” from this past week. Get into smaller pairs/trios and talk about what this section of Philippians has to say on what you wrote.

If it is conflict with someone, this section may encourage you to be of one mind. If it is an anxiety, the Lord may ask you to pray about it with thanksgiving, and not necessarily expect an answer to the problem but to fully expect peace. If it is a hard situation, the Lord may just want to tell you that He is near and can be your strength in it.

Take some time to pray with each other about the responses you feel called to have.

NOTES & REFLECTIONS





*transformed*  
**priorities.**

PHILIPPIANS 1:1-11 & PHILIPPIANS 4:10-20

## 5.

**Opening Question:** *How have you seen God provide for you in the past?*

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As we reach the end of this letter, Paul reminds of the reason for his writing. Theologian Gordon Fee writes that there are three matters that make up most of this letter to the Philippians. One is news about Paul's imprisonment. Another is an appeal for unity and steadfastness in light of opposition and false teaching.

But there is one other main theme that bookends the entire letter: gratitude for the Philippians' partnership with him in the gospel over the years, evidenced most recently by a material gift brought by Epaphroditus. Paul needed the support of the Philippians for his basic necessities. Paul is writing this letter to send back with Epaphroditus—in other words, the book of Philippians is like a missionary newsletter.

Even though Philippians is a young, small church, they have a huge legacy! Paul tells us that Philippians have been partnering with him since the very first day. The church in Philippi was facing trial, poverty, and persecution. If there was ever a group of people who should become insular and take care of themselves, it would've been them. But instead, they were faithful to partner with Paul. It was never convenient for Philippi to give to Paul.

This week we will discover how Jesus transforms our priorities, even our financial priorities. We see that Paul wants the church to share God's priority for His Kingdom to advance where it is not!

*leaving a life of legacy.***Philippians 1**

Paul thanks God for his friends, but such thanksgiving is a regular part of his praying for them.

1 Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all God's holy people in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons: 2 Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 3 I thank my God every time I remember you. 4 In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy 5 because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, 6 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. 7 It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart and, whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me. 8 God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus. 9 And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, 10 so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, 11 filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.

**Philippians 4**

In Paul's day, there was a culture of reciprocity in friendship. Even though Paul cannot reciprocate while in prison, he states that the Philippians are actually giving to God, so that God will be the one to bless them and meet their needs—physical, emotional, relational. And God's resources are inexhaustible!

10 I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. 11 I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. 12 I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. 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. 13 I can do all this through him who gives me strength. 14 Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles. 15 Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; 16 for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid more than once when I was in need. 17 Not that I desire your gifts; what I desire is that more be credited to your account. 18 I have received full payment and have more than enough. I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. 19 And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus. 20 To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### OBSERVATION

What kind of partnership did the Philippian church provide Paul, and for how long?

In 1:7, Paul implies that the Philippians share in the fruit of his labor. How would this have encouraged the Philippians?

How does God view the Philippians' financial gifts, and what might that be a symbol of? Is it a gift to Paul or to God? (Verse 18)

### INTERPRETATION

What does it mean to be content?

What motivated the Philippian church to partner with Paul, even when it was inconvenient?

How did the Philippians' partnership leave a legacy?

Paul's words seem to imply a connection between our generosity and God's provision of our needs. How do you think they connect?

### APPLICATION

What would it look like to recognize God's provision in your life, and how would it change how you live?

How does the way that we prioritize our finances reflect our heart?

What are ways we can partner with God's kingdom advancing in the world?



## LIVING ROOTED

*What kind of legacy do you want to leave at Yale? With your life? Pray as a Core Group about if there is a particular ministry or missionary that you could partner with.*

*Pray for our community to be as helpful as the Philippian church was to Paul. Who has God put into your life that is in need?*



NOTES & REFLECTIONS

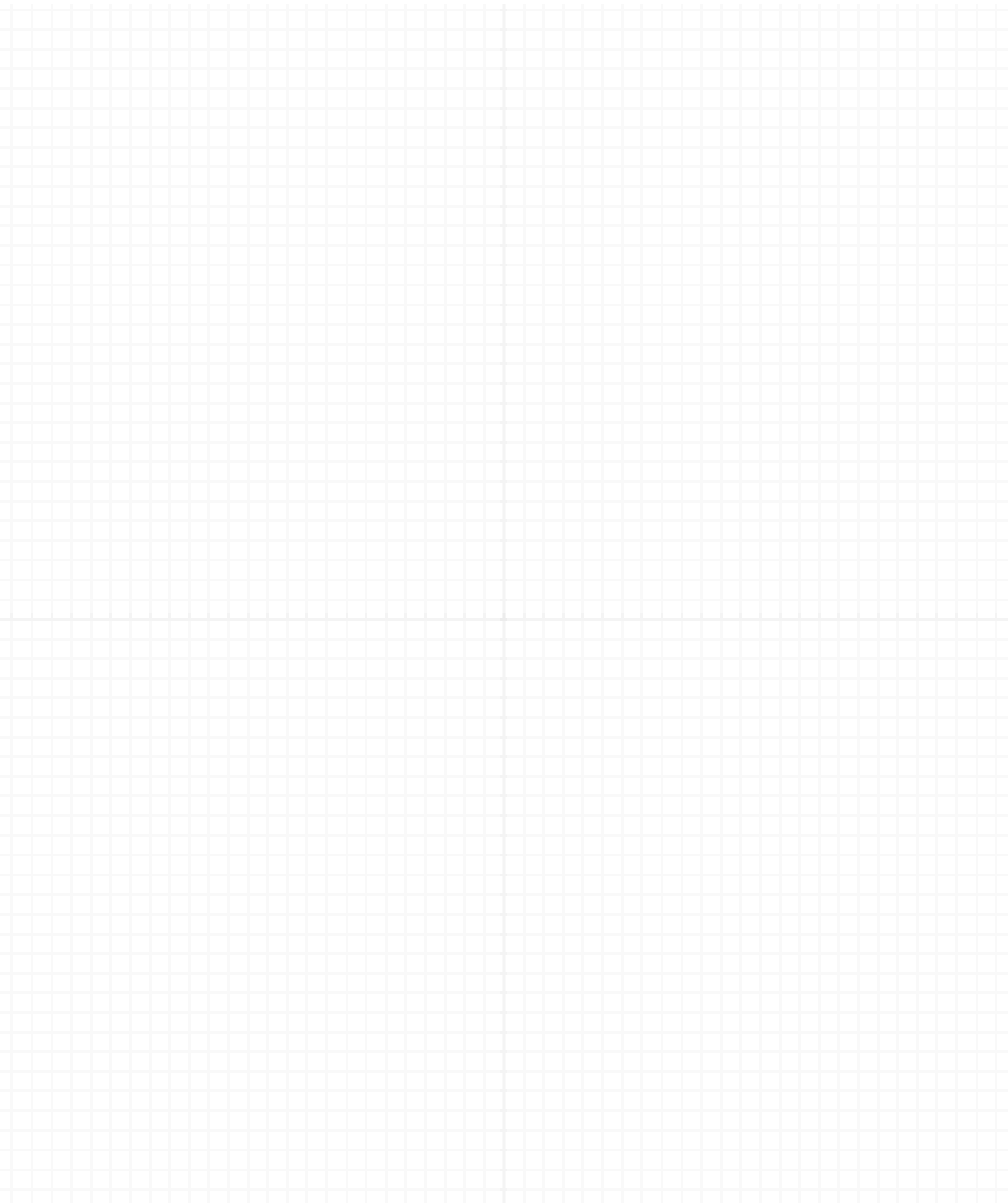




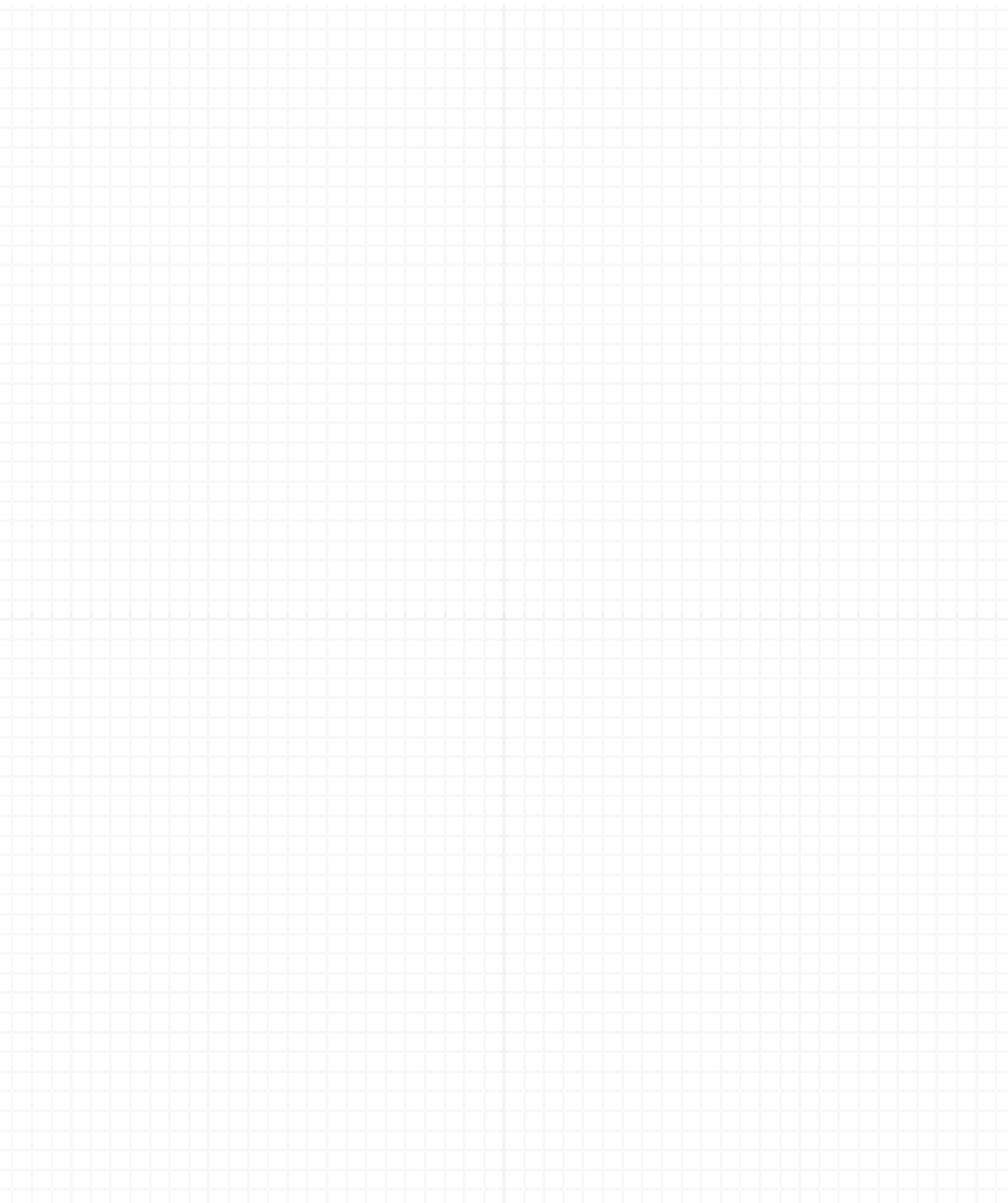
*In all my prayers for all of  
you, I always pray with  
joy because of your  
partnership in the gospel  
from the first day until  
now, being confident of  
this, that he who began a  
good work in you will carry  
it on to completion until  
the day of Christ Jesus.*

PHILIPPIANS 1:4-6

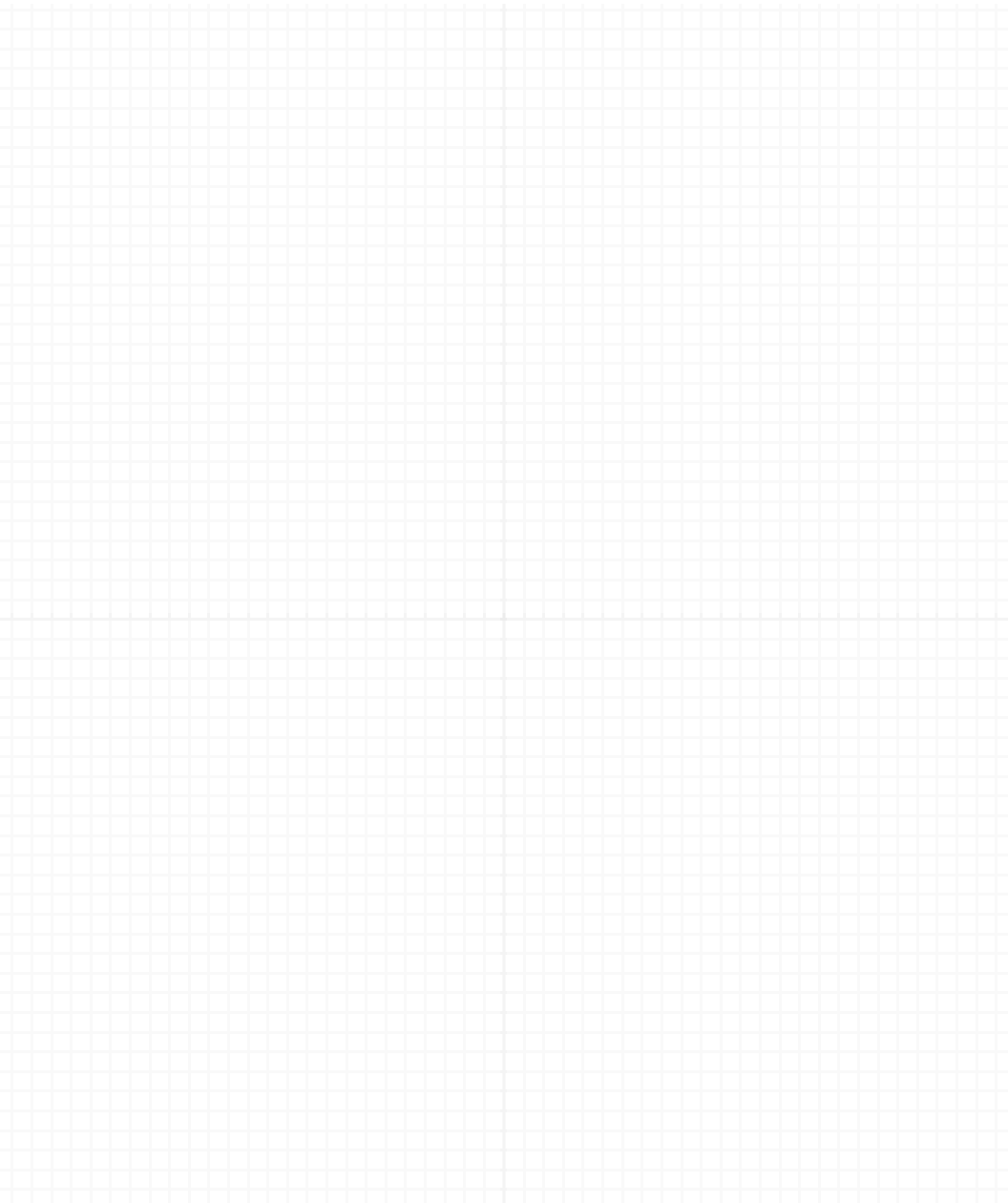
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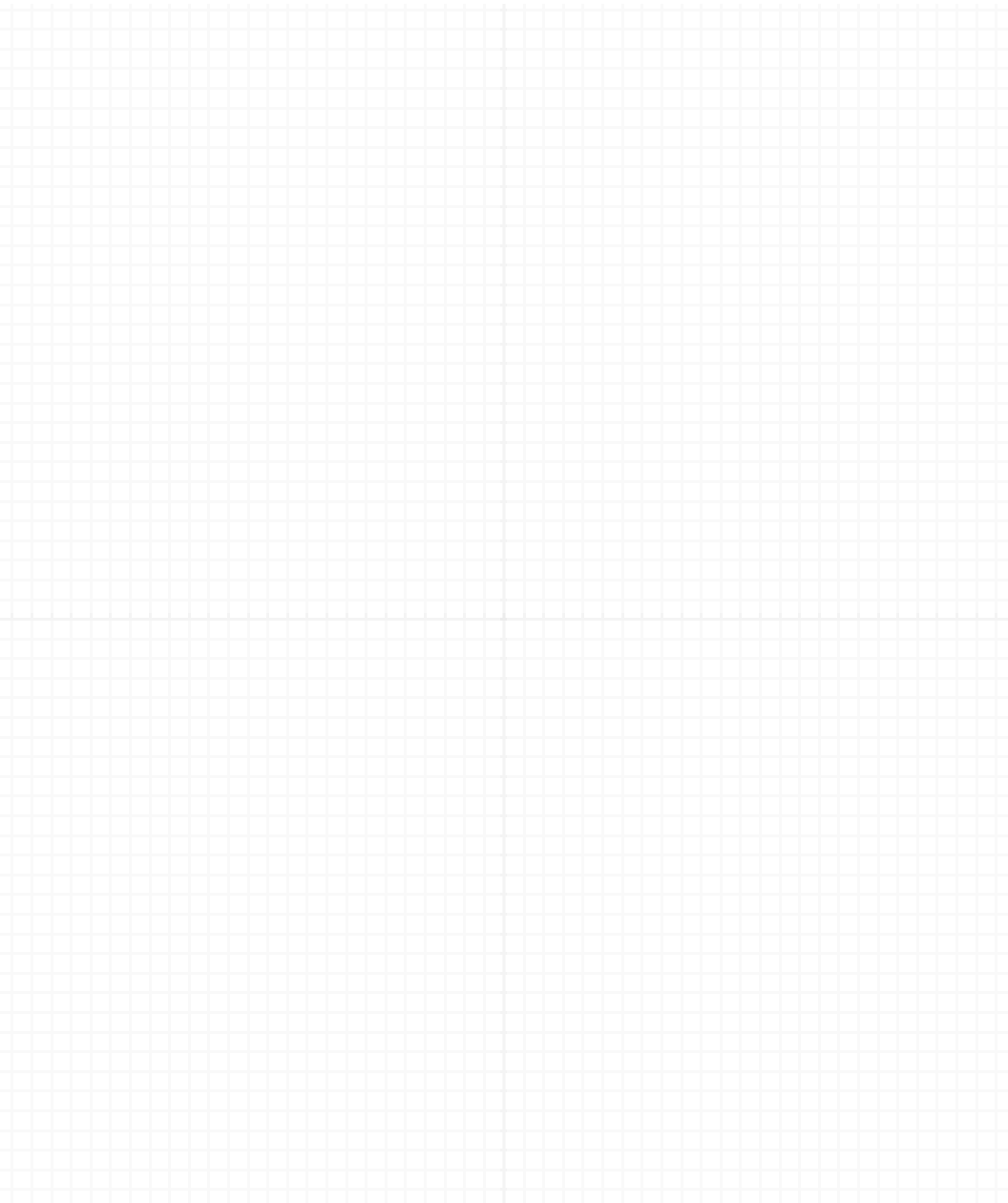
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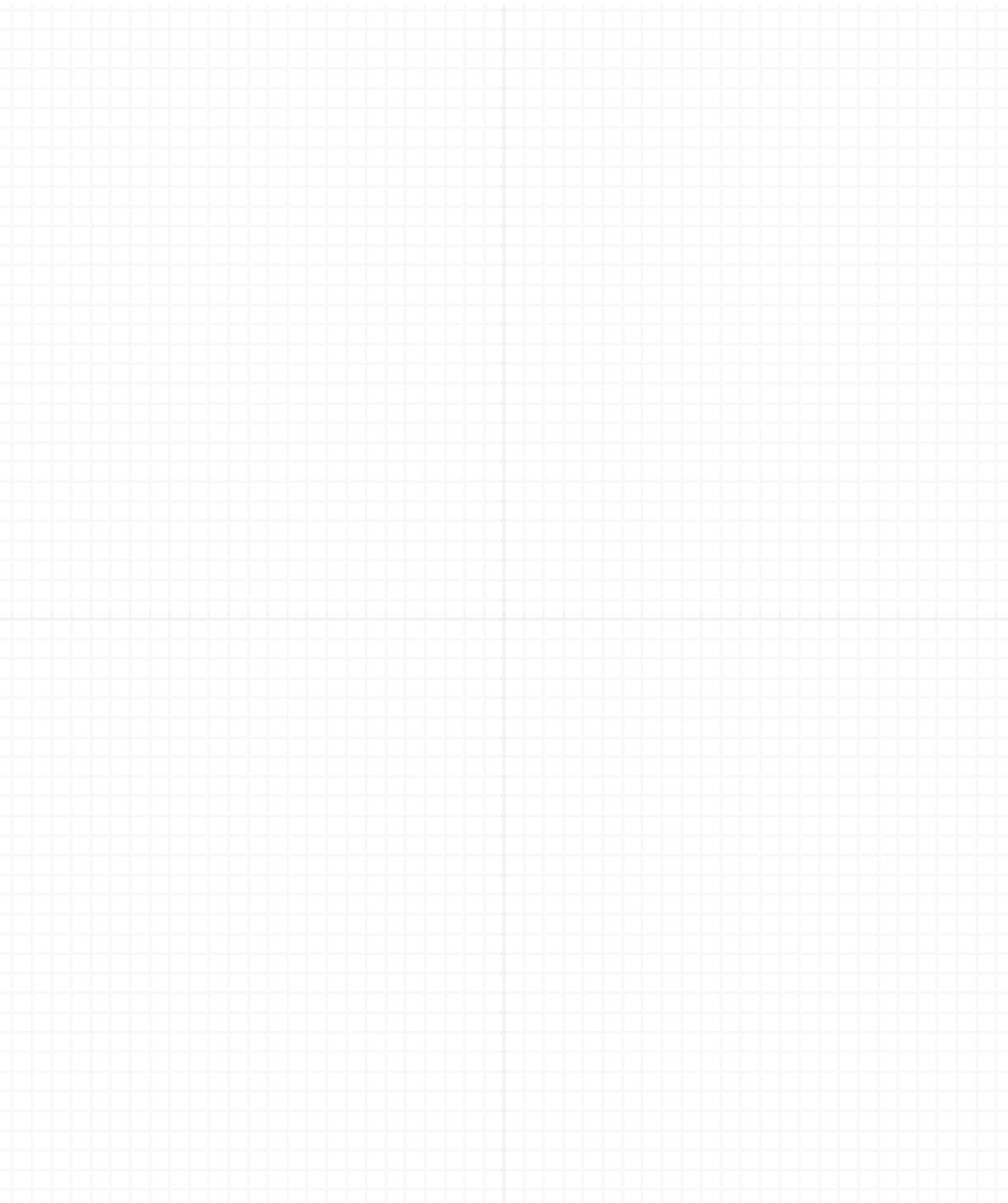
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