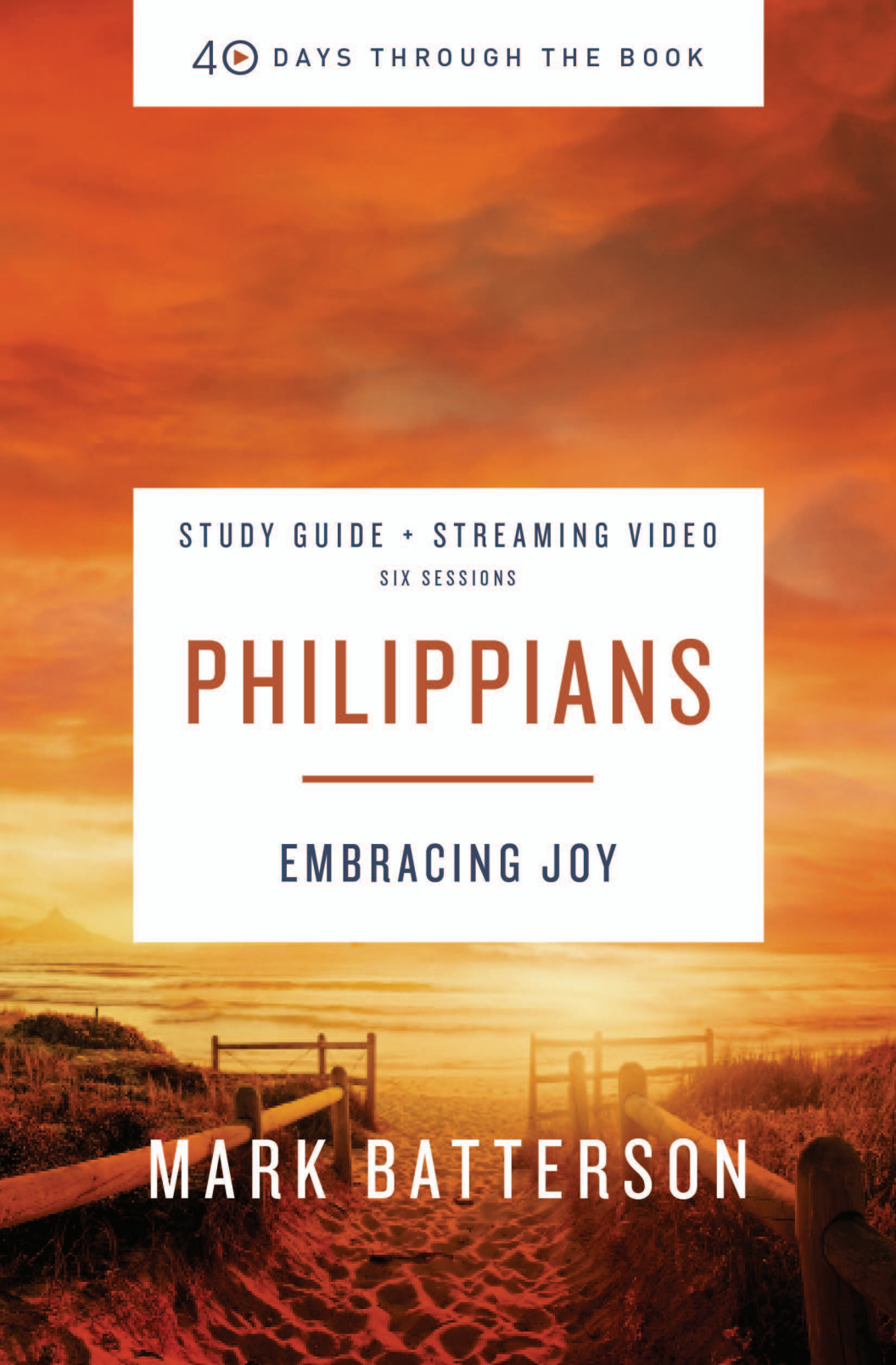




40 DAYS THROUGH THE BOOK

STUDY GUIDE + STREAMING VIDEO

SIX SESSIONS

PHILIPPIANS

EMBRACING JOY

MARK BATTERSON

40 DAYS THROUGH THE BOOK

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EMBRACING JOY

SIX-SESSION STUDY GUIDE

MARK BATTERSON

WITH KEVIN AND SHERRY HARNEY



HarperChristian
Resources

40 Days Through the Book: Philippians

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The themes of this study are drawn from the video study of the same name by Mark Batterson. All other resources, including the session introductions, small group discussion questions, prayer direction, and the 40 Days learning and reflection exercises, have been written by Kevin and Sherry Harney in collaboration with Mark Batterson.

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HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

SCOPE AND SEQUENCE

Welcome to the *40 Days Through the Book* study on Philippians! During the course of the next six weeks, you and your fellow group members will embark on an in-depth exploration of the apostle Paul's message to the believers in that part of the Mediterranean world. During this study, you will learn approximately when he wrote the book, the audience for whom he wrote, and the background and context in which it was written. But, more importantly, through the teaching by Mark Batterson, you will explore the key themes that Paul relates in Philippians—and how they relate to you today.

SESSION OUTLINE

The 40 Days Through the Word video study is designed to be experienced in a group setting (such as a Bible study, Sunday school class, or small group gathering) and also as an individual study. Each session begins with an introduction reading and

question. You will then watch a video with Mark Batterson, which can be accessed via the streaming code found on the inside front cover. There is an outline provided in the guide for you to take notes and gather your reflections as you watch the video.

Next, you will engage in a time of directed discussion, review the memory verses for the week, and then close each session with a time of personal reflection and prayer. (Note that if your group is larger, you may wish to watch the videos together and then break into smaller groups of four to six people, to ensure that everyone has time to participate in discussions.)

40-DAY JOURNEY

What is truly unique about this study, and all of the other studies in the *40 Days Through the Book* series, are the daily learning resources that will lead you into a deeper engagement with the text. Each week, you will be given a set of daily readings, with accompanying reflection questions, to help you explore the material that you covered during your group time.

The first day's reading will focus on the key verse to memorize for the week. In the other weekly readings, you will be invited to read a passage from Philippians, reflect on the text, and then respond with some guided journal questions. On the final day, you will review the key verse again and recite it from memory. As you work through the six weeks' worth of material in this section, you will read (and, in some cases, reread) the entire book of Philippians.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Now, you may be wondering why you will be doing this over the course of *forty* days. Certainly, there is nothing special about that number. But there is something biblical about it. In the Bible, the number forty typically designates a time of *testing*. The great flood in Noah's time lasted for forty days. Moses lived forty years in Egypt and another forty years in the desert before he led God's people. He spent forty days on Mount Sinai receiving God's laws and sent spies, for forty days, to investigate the land of Canaan. Later, God sent the prophet Jonah to warn ancient Nineveh, for forty days, that its destruction would come because of the people's sins.

Even more critically, in the New Testament we read that Jesus spent forty days in the wilderness, fasting and praying. It marked a critical transition point in his ministry—the place where he set about to fulfill the mission that God had intended. During this time Jesus was tested relentlessly by the enemy . . . and prevailed. When he returned to Galilee, he was a different person than the man who had entered into the wilderness forty days before. The same will be true for you as you commit to this forty-day journey through Philippians.

GROUP FACILITATION

You and your fellow group members should have your own copy of this study guide. Not only will this help you engage when your group is meeting, but it will also allow you to fully enter into the *40 Days* learning experience. Keep in mind the video, questions, and activities are simply tools to help you engage with the session. The real power and life-transformation will

come as you dig into the Scriptures and seek to live out the truths you learn along the way.

Finally, you will need to appoint a leader or facilitator for the group who is responsible for starting the video teaching and for keeping track of time during discussions and activities. Leaders may also read questions aloud and monitor discussions, prompting participants to respond and ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to participate. For more thorough instructions on this role, see the Leader's Guide included at the back of this book.

INTRODUCTION

PHILIPPIANS

AUTHOR, DATE, AND LOCATION

The apostle Paul wrote to the church in Philippi between AD 60 and 62. He was a prisoner and chained to a Roman guard. In this dark and discouraging place Paul's joy was not extinguished but continued to burn bright. The city of Philippi took its name from Philip II of Macedon, father of Alexander the Great. It was one of his military strongholds in northern Greece. Fast-forward a few hundred years, and Philippi was conquered by the Romans in 31 BC. So, Paul is writing to Roman citizens. They spoke the Latin language. They wore Roman dress. Their coins had Roman inscriptions. The city itself was patterned after Rome, and it sat on the Via Egnatia, which was a major military road in the Roman Empire.

Philippi had a wide variety of religious influences. There were altars to Greek gods. Archaeologists have found sanctuaries to the Egyptian gods Iris and Serapis. And, of course, there

were monuments to the Caesars. The Imperial Cult, as it was called, was the official state religion. There was also a Jewish community that lived in Philippi. It was to these Christians in this pluralistic and secular environment that Paul wrote a letter of unparalleled joy.

THE BIG PICTURE

Just four chapters, 104 verses, and Paul mentions his Savior more than forty times. Every theme and truth found in Philippians is saturated in the presence and power of Jesus. It is in this book that we find the great Christ hymn that gives a vision of Jesus' incarnation, humiliation, sacrifice, and ultimate glorification. Joy is everywhere in the book of Philippians, and that is because Jesus is present in all places, even in persecution. While incarcerated and chained, Paul's heart is free, and he can rejoice.

History does seem to repeat itself. When Paul came to the city of Philippi his plan was to proclaim the gospel and lift up Jesus as the Messiah. After sharing the good news with a group of women outside the city along a river, a businesswoman named Lydia came to faith in the Savior and was baptized along with many members of her family (Acts 16:11–15). After being taunted by a demon-possessed woman for many days, Paul cast out the evil spirit, which led to a major uproar in the city (Acts 16:16–24). The Roman leaders responded swiftly and severely. Paul and his ministry team were all publicly stripped, beaten with rods, severely flogged, put in prison, thrown in the inner cell, and fastened in the stocks.

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At midnight the other prisoners and the guard were treated to a worship concert and prayer meeting. In a shocking and reflexive act of faith, Paul and his companions burst into songs of praise and prayers of adoration. Joy and music filled the prison! These bruised and battered Christians were not cursing God, government, or guards through clenched teeth. They were celebrating the grace of Jesus with open mouths and hearts.

When Paul wrote the letter to the Philippians, he was in jail again. He was rejoicing again. He was willingly suffering with a smile on his face, prayers on his lips, and a song in his heart. History was repeating itself.

EPIC THEMES

There are several themes in Philippians that are worthy of our focus. These include:

- **Love-filled prayer.** The recipients of this letter are not strangers but friends, family, beloved partners in the gospel. You can feel Paul's affection for these people all through this prayer and the whole letter (see Philippians 1:1-11).
- **Evangelistic hopefulness.** Paul actually finds joy in the fact that his unfair incarceration has given him an up-close chance to share Jesus with each and every guard to whom he was chained. Before you knew it, the whole palace guard knew Paul's story and the story of Jesus (see Philippians 1:12-26).

- **The humility and exaltation of Jesus.** In one of the first recorded hymns of the early church we see the willing heart of Jesus to leave glory, live perfectly, die sacrificially, and rise in victory. Because of this, every knee will bow to him and every tongue in all creation declare that Jesus is Lord (see Philippians 2:1–11).
- **When we know Jesus, we are transformed.** Paul calls all followers of the Savior to grow in faith, adjust their attitudes, and walk in holiness. To help us have a picture of what this can look like, we get snapshots of two faithful and humble servants: Timothy and Epaphroditus (see Philippians 2:12–30).
- **A contrast of human righteousness and the righteousness of Jesus.** Legalism and trust in human religious devotion is always a temptation, but Paul teaches us that this is all garbage compared to the cleansing and glorious grace of Jesus (see Philippians 3).
- **Keep your eyes on Jesus.** How do you resolve conflicts? How do you stay joyful in hard times? How do you keep keeping on when you are weary? The answer to all three of these questions is: keep your eyes and focus locked firmly on Jesus (see Philippians 4:1–9).
- **Contentment and a generous heart grow out of a love for Jesus.** The transformational power of our Lord will change us at the deepest level . . . even the temptation

INTRODUCTION

to be possessed by possessions can be overcome by the power of our risen Lord (see Philippians 4:10–20).

The heartbeat of Philippians is for believers to have a Jesus-centered vision of life. How do we find joy in all of life's ups and downs? Jesus! How do we grow in contentment and generosity? Jesus! How do we grow in contentment and generosity? Jesus! Where should our focus be so that our life makes sense? Jesus! Perhaps these words from the prayer of Saint Patrick summarize it best: "Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me, Christ in me . . . Christ when I lie down . . . Christ when I arise."

SESSION 1

A LOVE LETTER

PHILIPPIANS 1:1–8

As followers of Jesus, we have heard the call to love God with all that is in us and to love our neighbors as ourselves. In this letter, we get a vision of how we should feel about other followers of Jesus and how we should express these feelings openly to them.

WELCOME

All throughout history, people have been writing love letters in an attempt to express the passions of their heart. But a few notable examples stand out above the rest. As a young military officer, Napoleon Bonaparte met Josephine in 1795 and fell in love with her. He wrote letters to her while he was at war, though she rarely wrote back to him. In one of these notes, he stated, “A few days ago I thought I loved you; but since I last

saw you, I feel I love you a thousand times more. All the time I have known you, I adore you more each day.”

Ludwig van Beethoven was a famous German composer who works rank among the most performed in all of classic music. He first began writing music in 1802 and continued to compose works until his death in 1827—even in spite of increasing deafness. Beethoven’s passion rang out in his music, but as it turns out, he could be passionate in his words as well. After his death, an unsent love letter was found among his papers in which he expressed these sentiments: “My thoughts rush to you, my immortal beloved, now and then joyfully, then again sadly, waiting to know whether Fate will hear our prayer—to face life I must live altogether with you or never see you.” The intended recipient of this letter remains a mystery.

But the most famous love letter of them all is found in the Bible. The book known simply as the “Song of Songs” is a passionate dialogue between a man and his beloved. In one section of the letter, the man uses this descriptive language to describe his beloved: “How beautiful you are, my darling! Oh, how beautiful! Your eyes behind your veil are doves. Your hair is like a flock of goats descending from the hills of Gilead. Your teeth are like a flock of sheep just shorn, coming up from the washing. each has its twin; not one of them is alone” (4:1-2).

The book of Philippians is also an ancient love letter. But it is not a letter between a man and a woman. Rather, it is a letter sent from the heart of God to his church, his people, his bride. The words are inspired through the apostle Paul to the church in the city of Philippi. But the words of this letter are clearly a message from the heart of God to his beloved . . . to you and me.

SHARE

Who is a person God has placed in your life that you have deep and sincere affection for (other than people in your small group)? What have you experienced together that has forged this kind of rich relationship?

WATCH

Play the video for session one (see the streaming video access provided on the inside front cover). As you watch, use the following outline to record any thoughts, questions, or key points that stand out to you.

The setting and the writer of Philippians

Hermeneutics is the science of interpreting Scripture (Pardes)

Peshat . . . Simple, plain, devotional Bible reading

Remez . . . Cues and clues in the text of Scripture

PHILIPPIANS

Deresh . . . Connecting the dots as we interpret Scripture

Sod . . . When the Holy Spirit speaks to us through Scripture

The when, where, and who of Philippians (Philippians 1:1–2)

A Love Letter (Philippians 1:3–8)

God closes one door and opens another (Acts 16:6–25)

Responding to hardship . . . whining or worship?

A LOVE LETTER

A serious challenge: Prophecy your praise . . . praise God before he does it

DISCUSS

Take a few minutes with your group members to discuss what you just watched and explore these concepts in Scripture. Use the following questions to help guide your discussion.

1. What impacted you the most as you watched Mark's teaching on Philippians 1 and Acts 16?
2. Some people regurgitate what they hear from culture, media, and society. They act like a thermometer that reflects the world around them. Others declare the revelation of God and, like a thermostat, they raise the temperature and change the environment, the conversation, and sometimes the world. What do Christians sound like when we are simply regurgitating the prevailing voices of our culture? What will we sound like when we are articulating the timely revelation of God's Word in a bold and transformational way?

PHILIPPIANS

3. **Read Philippians 1:3–8.** What do we learn about Paul's relationship with the believers in the city of Philippi from this passage? As you think about the Christian community where God has placed you, what can you thank God for about this body of believers (God's church)? What are ways you can show affection and love to the members of your church?

4. **Read Acts 16:6–10.** Tell about a time you had your plans and future all laid out and God surprised you with a whole different agenda. How did you see God work through this process? How did God bring glory to himself (and blessing to you) through his divine change of your plans?

5. **Read Acts 16:16–18.** Mark talks about how the enemy of our soul wants to dominate and control our lives, and that we must exercise spiritual authority and fight back. What are ways we can resist, push back, and overcome the enticements and work of the enemy? Tell about a time you did this and saw God win a battle.

6. When times of hardship, suffering, or loss hit our lives, what are some of the very real ways (good or bad) we respond? What do you learn from the response of Paul, and how can you follow his example?

MEMORIZE

Each session, you will be given a key verse (or verses) from the passage covered in the video teaching to memorize. This week, your memory verses are Philippians 1:3–4:

I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy . . .

Have everyone recite these verses out loud. Ask for any volunteers who would like to say the verses from memory.

RESPOND

Paul's relationship with God's people in the city of Philippi was forged through struggles, pain, public turmoil, and partnership in ministry. Why is it that some of our deepest and longest lasting relationships have included times in the furnace of life together? How did God forge a deep relationship

between Paul and the Philippian Christians through difficult and painful times?

PRAY

Close your group time by praying in any of the following directions:

- Thank God for the people he has placed in your life who you love deeply and for whom you have sincere affection. Ask for God's blessing on their lives.
- Pray for courage to learn from the apostle Paul's example so that you can express your love and appreciation for the people God has placed in your life.
- If you, or someone in your group, are in the middle of a spiritual battle, pray for God's victory, for awareness of the tactics of the enemy, and for the power of the Holy Spirit to be unleashed.

YOUR 40-DAY JOURNEY

SESSION ONE

Reflect on the material you have covered in this session by engaging in the following between-session learning resources. Each week, you will begin by reviewing the key verse(s) to memorize for the session. During the next five days, you will have an opportunity to read a portion of Philippians, reflect on what you learn, respond by taking action, journal some of your insights, and pray about what God has taught you. Finally, the last day, you will review the key verse(s) and reflect on what you have learned for the week.

DAY 1

Memorize: Begin this week's personal study by reciting Philippians 1:3–4:

I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy . . .

Now try to say these verses from memory.

Reflect: There is power in our memories. Think back over your time being part of God's family. In particular, reflect on good memories, kind people, meaningful sermons, and life-impacting moments. Thank God for the people in the family of God who have been a blessing in your life. If you want to go one step deeper, send one or more of these people an email, text, or letter expressing a memory of them that is meaningful to you.

DAY 2

Read: Philippians 1 and take time to focus on Philippians 1:1-2.

Reflect: What comes to your mind when you look at yourself in a mirror first thing in the morning? Try this on for size. "I am a saint. I am a holy one of God." This is not what most of us think when we reflect on who we are at the start of the day or when we put our head on the pillow at night. But it's true! The apostle Paul refers to the people of God in the city of Philippi as "God's holy people." Another way to say this is, "God's saints." Through Jesus Christ and his sacrifice for our sins, we are cleansed and made holy. Amazing! Take time this week and try to see yourself through the eyes and finished work of Jesus. Be reminded that the holy God of heaven looks at you and sees one of his saints. Believe it and grow into that reality.

Journal:

- Why do I have a hard time seeing myself as one of God's "holy people"?
- How I can grow in seeing myself as a saint of God (i.e., how can I adjust my words, attitudes, and actions to reflect this spiritual reality)?

Pray: Praise God for his holiness and ask for the power of his Spirit to help you embrace who you are in Jesus as you seek to become more like your Lord.

DAY 3

Read: Philippians 2 and Philippians 1:1–2.

Reflect: Grace and peace. What beautiful and powerful words! What a greeting! Paul not only used these words to begin his letter to the church, but he sought to bring peace wherever he went and extend grace to each person he met. What are ways you can bring peace to the people you encounter in your neighborhood, workplace, church, and everywhere you go? How can you bear the grace of Jesus as you interact with believers and with people who do not yet follow him?

Journal:

- What are places and situations you will enter this week that really need peace? How can you be sure to bring peace and not more tension and turmoil?
- In our graceless world, people hunger for signs of kindness, goodness, and grace. Consider someone you will encounter this week who needs a touch of grace? How can you bring the grace of Jesus into this situation?

Pray: Ask God to bring reminders to you throughout this week of how you can bear his peace and grace wherever you go.

DAY 4

Read: Philippians 3 and Philippians 1:6.

Reflect: There are two truths that Paul unveils in Philippians 1:6. First, God is at work in you. The Maker of heaven and earth is intimately involved in your life. He is close and active. He has a plan for your life. Second, God is not done growing you. He will bring his work to completion, but you are still on the journey. You can receive these truths with joy and confidence:

God is near and working in me. God will accomplish his purposes and plans in me. What is God doing in you today and how can you partner in his wise and good plan?

Journal:

- What are ways that God has been working in you, growing you, and making you more like Jesus?
- How can you partner with God to keep taking steps forward in these areas of growth?

Pray: Ask for courage and power to keep taking steps forward in God's will for your life. Ask the Spirit to show you if there is a place of needed growth where you are stalled and need to begin pressing forward today.

DAY 5

Read: Philippians 4 and Philippians 1:7.

Reflect: Love is never chained. Though Paul was in chains, he still felt deep affection for his friends in Philippi and

communicated his love to them in this letter. He was incarcerated because he confidently followed Jesus and boldly proclaimed the gospel. But even from jail Paul wrote words, inspired by the Holy Spirit, that lavished God's people with love from heaven. When we feel confined, trapped, and bound up, we can still receive, enjoy, and share the love of God. What can you learn from Paul's example of being chained but still free to share the love of Jesus?

Journal:

- What situations and circumstances in life tend to bind you up and keep you from expressing love and care for others?
- How can you continue speaking and showing love no matter what life circumstances come your way?

Pray: Ask God to help you speak words of love and take actions that reveal the love of Jesus, no matter how hard your life becomes.

DAY 6

Read: Philippians 1:8.

Reflect: The affection of Jesus. What an amazing idea! Paul's longing for the Christians in Philippi was straight from the heart of the Savior. What do we do when our energy runs low and our heart becomes a bit calloused? How do we live for Jesus when our body is tired, our schedule jam-packed, and we are feeling weary? In those moments (and they come for all of us) we live and love in the power of Jesus. Have you ever asked Jesus to grow your love and longing for other people? Have you dared to say, "Jesus, make your longing my longing—make my heart and love like yours"? These are powerful prayers. Dare to lift them up today.

Journal:

- Where has your love grown cold and your heart become calloused?
- How can you walk closer to Jesus so that your heart will become more and more like his?

Pray: Dare to pray that the heart, love, and longing of Jesus would flood your life so that you will look and live more like the Savior.

DAY 7

Memorize: Conclude this week's personal study by again reciting Philippians 1:3–4:

³ I thank my God every time I remember you. ⁴ In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy . . .

Reflect: There is power in joyful prayers. These can be prayers of praise to God, supplication for the needs of others, or thanksgiving for God's goodness. As you lift your heart in prayer, be sure you are not getting into such a routine that you say the words, but your passion is waning. Pray for joy to fill you to overflowing and for your prayers to be filled with passionate celebration. What is the joy level of your prayers and how can you increase it for the glory of Jesus?