

## A STUDY OF THE PRISON EPISTLES

### CONTEXT

***"I am able to do all things through the one who strengthens me."*** This verse, perhaps more often quoted as the "I can do all things..." translation, gets used for almost anything. The batter approaches the plate, "I can do all things..." The climber jumping to another hold, "I can do all things..." The ballerina who gave up dancing for professional sumo wrestling, "I can do all things..."

Ok, maybe that last one is made up, but you get my point. This verse gets said a lot in the context of a person wanting to perform. Maybe the action is good, right, and noble, but rarely is this verse quoted with an understanding of its context. That's especially true when it's applied to sports.

Paul isn't saying that he can do anything through Christ—as in drive a homer out of the park to win a game. This verse is about contentment, which is sometimes harder to achieve.

Paul sat in prison thanking the Philippians for their support, but Paul assured them Christ is enough. Is Christ enough for us too? Do you want the strength of Christ to "do all things" too? The context isn't about achievement. It's about contentment.

### PHILIPPIANS 4:4-9, 12-13

<sup>4</sup> Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I say, rejoice!

<sup>5</sup> Let everyone see your gentleness. The Lord is near! <sup>6</sup> Do not be anxious about anything. Instead, in every situation, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, tell your requests to God. <sup>7</sup> And the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

<sup>8</sup> Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is worthy of respect, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if something is excellent or praiseworthy, think about these things. <sup>9</sup> And what you learned and received and heard and saw in me, do these things. And the God of peace will be with you.

<sup>12</sup> I have experienced times of need and times of abundance. In any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of contentment, whether I go satisfied or hungry, have plenty or nothing. <sup>13</sup> I am able to do all things through the one who strengthens me.

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Next Week's study will leave Philippians behind and switch to another letter Paul wrote from prison in Rome—Colossians. Unfortunately, space allows only 4 Weeks to study 4 chapters. And, that's not a lot for one of the richest books in the New Testament.

In an effort to prepare for next Week and hit the ground running, take a moment this week, scan the QR code and watch the video overview of Colossians. There will be so much good stuff to talk about, so get ready!



### DISCUSSION

"Every conflict is based on selfishness." Do you agree or disagree? Why?

1. List the commands Paul gives in these verses (4-6)

2. What things (Whatever is...) should Christians think on? (8)

3. What circumstances did Paul face and what did he learn from them? (12-13)

4. What is meant by, "I am able to do all things through the one who strengthens me"? (13)

5. What practices could you adapt to focus on the list in verse 8? How might that increase your contentment?

ICEBREAKER  
OBSERVATION

INTERPRETATION

APPLICATION

Although it was mentioned, there is a difference between forgiveness and trust. You can't have contentment and unforgiveness. If you have questions, talk to your coach today.

## STUDY NOTES SATISFIED?

What would make you satisfied? How about winning the Super Bowl and being crowned MVP? What about a \$60 million contract? What about having a world-famous supermodel for a wife? It is unimaginable to think that a person could achieve so many things that so many of us dream about and yet remain unsatisfied.

During a *60 Minutes* interview, Tom Brady had, not one, but three Super Bowl rings and two MVP awards to go with them. Yet, he reflected, “Why do I have three Super Bowl rings, and *still* think there’s something out there greater for me? Maybe a lot of people would [look at me] and say, ‘This is what it is.’ Me? I say, ‘It’s *got* to be more than this.’” Eyebrows raised, the interviewer probed, “What’s the answer?” That’s when Tom Brady, the man who had it all, shattered our expectations, “I wish I knew. I wish I knew.”

Many reading this have a goal in mind of “If/when...then I’ll be happy.” I’ll be happy when/if I dated *that* person, get into *that* college, win *that* award, get *that* grade, etc. We all have things that leave us unsatisfied, but the danger comes when we place too much hope in those things. What else could we ask for that Tom Brady didn’t have? And yet, he was clearly unsatisfied. If our ultimate hope rests in the cure to our dissatisfactions, then we will *always* be dissatisfied because it doesn’t cure our biggest problem—sin.

In Christ, we can experience true and lasting satisfaction. That doesn’t mean we become complacent. Even Paul lived with a holy discontent to see the world changed for God’s glory. The difference is that his discontentment looked ahead to eternity. He wasn’t selfishly motivated. He lived unsettled so that others may experience eternity as well.

## UNITY REQUIRES MUTUAL SUPPORT

Paul doesn’t address issues from the Philippian church until chapter 4. Apparently, conflict arose between two church members and Paul called them out by name. He did not command them to agree, he commanded them to *agree in the Lord* (4:1). Agreeing “in the Lord” supersedes squabbles—opinions must be subject to peace based on common ground (Philippians 2:1–4).

In terms of healing this conflict, Paul pointed them to the Lord, **Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I say, rejoice!** It is hard to worship the Lord and grumble with one another. When we’ve been forgiven an eternal debt of sin, any offense by another person, no matter how bad, doesn’t match the infinite

forgiveness we’ve received. Paul doesn’t command you to trust someone whom we have forgiven, but **let everyone see your gentleness. The Lord is near!**

So what’s the plan for irreconcilable disagreements in the church? Arguing and trying to get others to agree with you is *not* the answer—although that’s often what we do. Into this situation Paul gives advice that is, again, very often taken out of context, **Do not be anxious about anything. Instead, in every situation, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, tell your requests to God. And the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.**

If you can’t come to terms, as a mentor once said, “sick the Holy Spirit on them.” Guess what, he’ll also show you if *your* heart needs to change too. Don’t fuss, fight, and argue—especially if it’s you and another believer. And, double especially, if the fight is publicly displayed in front of non-believers. Conflict between believers gets resolved in prayer and through godly council of the church.

## MUTUAL SUPPORT BEGINS IN OUR HEARTS

Paul begins concluding this subject as well as the book of Philippians by focusing in on what matters—**whatever is true, whatever is worthy of respect, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if something is excellent or praiseworthy, think about these things.**

More than any other generation in history, you have a choice as to what you will fill your mind with... the phone, your browser history, your app history. What do these things say about your mind? Not everything is sin, it may just be unintentional time, wasted time. Sometimes these distractions are the source of conflict. However, we can probably agree that very little conflict exists between two people absorbed in Paul’s list.

In his fifties, with many miraculous experiences and painful trials under his belt, the adaptable evangelist could honestly say, **“I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need.”** It is because of these circumstances, not in spite of them, that Paul confidently says, **“I am able to do all things...”**

Wherever the Lord has us, we ought to find contentment. Others *will* come along to disturb that peace. However, they should only drive us to prayer, and a focus on what is of the Lord. Do not be lured into the muck of selfish conflict. Rise above it **through the one who strengthens me.**