

Lydia of Philippi

--Week Seven--

SHINING LIKE STARS

"...you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life..." Philippians 2:15-16



I love to look at the stars, especially on a clear night in the mountains. Years ago, when sleeping under the stars in the Sierra Nevada Mountains in California, I would gaze into the night sky until I saw at least one shooting star before I fell asleep. A friend of mine used to say the night sky was like a blanket, and the stars like tiny holes through which the sun shone.

We don't see the stars much in the daytime. (I know, some of you are thinking "the *sun* is a star.") Of course you are right, but the rest of the stars appear most clearly in a very dark night sky. The contrast of the black sky makes the stars appear brighter. They shine; they twinkle. This week we will see several ways that we can "shine like stars in the universe."

Holding Out the Word of Life

First, please read Philippians 2: 12-18.

There are some long, confusing sentences here. You may want to discuss them with your group at your next meeting.

What does Paul ask Lydia and the Philippians to continue to work out?

Who is working in them according to his good purpose? _____

Why should they “do everything without complaining?” _____

Whose children will they be? _____

What kind of generation does Paul say they are living in? Check all that apply.

ethical righteous evil crooked depraved loving

How do you think our world and our generation compares to Lydia’s world and her generation? more crooked and depraved less crooked and depraved

about the same

As they hold out the “word of life,” what does Paul say the Philippians do? _____

Remember, stars shine the brightest on the darkest night, when the contrast is the greatest. Paul is saying that the Philippians, including Lydia, *shine like stars* in contrast to the darkness of their “crooked and depraved generation,” as they proclaim their faith in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. As you grow in faith and confidence in the LORD, you will be shining brighter and brighter in our world. No matter how evil the world around you becomes, you will continue to shine if you hold tight to the truth about Jesus. In his letter to the Philippians, Paul describes several ways the believers shine like stars. Let’s look at them carefully and see if we can use them to become more star-like, too.



Focus on Excellence

What we think about determines to a large extent what we do. It colors our attitude; it influences our mood and feelings; it makes us say and do certain things.

Read Philippians 4: 8-9. Are there things in your life that fit Paul's suggestions of things to think about? Write them in the blanks below.

TRUTH _____

NOBLE, HONORABLE _____

RIGHT _____

PURE _____

LOVELY _____

ADMIRABLE, OF GOOD REPUTATION

EXCELLENT _____

PRAISEWORTHY _____

One Bible translation says, "Let your mind dwell on these things." What does that mean to you? _____

Try it. I think you will find that these kinds of thoughts will lead to peace, not trouble. They will cause you to smile, not worry. They will turn you toward good, not evil. If you know someone who is a good example of this kind of thinking, follow their example. Paul told his readers to put these things into practice, to follow his example. So the first tip for a star-like shine is to **focus on excellence**.



Value Others

From his letter, we can tell that Paul really loves the believers in Philippi.

Read Philippians 1: 3 again. He says he is thankful to God every time he thinks of them. In verse four, he tells them one of the reasons why. What is it?

And then in verse 7, he tells them again. “I have you in my _____,” he says. He says they share in something with Paul whether he is out preaching or chained in a jail cell. What is it that they share with Paul? _____

And then in verse 8, he tells them of his affection again. What does he say this time?

Clearly Paul loves and appreciates the church at Philippi, and he tells them so. Sometimes we forget to tell people how much we love them. Maybe a grandparent would love to hear from you. Maybe you appreciate a teacher or former teacher, and you could thank that person. Maybe you are thankful for a friend, or a cousin, or a brother. Could you tell them?

Read Philippians 2:19-30. In this section, Paul talks about two people whom he appreciates very much.

Who are these two people? _____ and _____

Paul highlights the character and work of these fellow workers. By talking about them in his letter, Paul is honoring them and also holding them up as examples. He is complementing them in public – bragging on them – demonstrating how much he values them. About Timothy he says, “I have no one else like him... He is genuinely interested in the Philippians.... He has served with me in the work of the gospel, like a son with a father...He has proved himself.” Epaphroditus nearly died in the work of Christ (see verse 30) and Paul tells the church to welcome him with joy and “honor men like him.”

Who are the people who are partners with *you* in Christ? This might be someone who leads your church’s youth program. It might be your pastor. It could include your parents and family members. It could include your friends in this study group, or your group leader. When any of these people serve the Lord or show God’s love or share the gospel, do you complement them publicly? Could you? Jot down the names of a couple of people you have seen laboring for the Gospel. Then write down some way that you might thank them.

Showing your appreciation for those around you, not only for what they do for you, but also for what they do for the LORD, is a shining character trait. So this is the second tip for shining stars: **value others.**



Cooperate for Unity

Read Philippians 2: 1-4. How does Paul expect the Philippians to “make his joy complete?” (fill in the blanks)

By being _____, having the same _____, being _____ in spirit, being _____ in purpose, consider _____ better than _____. Look to the _____ of _____.

What does he want them to avoid? _____ ambition, _____ conceit, and looking only to their own _____.

The next section of the letter speaks of having the humble heart of Jesus, which we studied in week one. Humility is not just being a quiet doormouse. In Week One we learned that having the attitude of Christ means being willing to give up our advantage. Humility is a way of cooperating with others that leads to unity. By considering the interests of others, we strengthen our friendships and demonstrate God’s love and grace.

Read Philippians 4: 2-5. It seems that there had been a “disagreement” between a couple of church women.

Who were they?

___ **Thelma and Louise**

___ **Euodia and Syntyche**

___ **Minnie Mouse and Daisy Duck**

___ **Laverne and Shirley**

___ **Lydia and her sister**

___ **Mrs. Right and Mrs. Wrong**

Notice that Paul does not take sides in the argument, but simply pleads for them to agree “in the LORD.” Silly disagreements can keep us from the fellowship God wants for us. They also keep us distracted from the Kingdom work God has planned for us to

do. We may not see everything the same as other Christians, but we should not let minor things divide us. So the third tip for shining like a star is to **cooperate for unity**.



Stand Firm in the Lord

Although cooperation and unity are important within the church, there are often times when standing firm for the Lord is more important. How do you know when that is? Sometimes this is not easy to determine. Never compromise on the Gospel. The Good News about our position in Christ is not to be watered down for the sake of unity or for the sake of our personal opinion. The Bible is God’s Word, and although we may not understand everything it says, we know God has our best interests at heart.

Read Philippians 1: 27-30.

Paul felt the good news about Jesus Christ was so awesome, so incredible, so generous, that it was of more value than ANYTHING in this life. He understood that we can never work enough to earn that free gift. (See Galatians 2: 16 for more about faith versus works.) Yet he always urged the believers to behave in a manner “worthy of the gospel.” **Look up Ephesians 4: 1-3 and Colossians 1: 9-12.**

From those two passages and your own thoughts, what do you think it means to live in a way that is “worthy of the gospel?”

Perhaps it is about having solid faith. Perhaps we are worthy of the gift of salvation if we simply believe it to be true. Believing God *really did* count our sins as forgiven by the sacrifice of Jesus, we are counted as worthy. So, to stand firm in the faith is to live worthy of the gospel.

Look up these verses that all mention “standing firm” and jot down a note so you can remember what each one says.

1 Corinthians 16: 13 _____

2 Corinthians 1: 24 _____

Ephesians 6: 14 _____

1 Thessalonians 3: 8 _____

Galatians 5: 1 _____

Colossians 4: 12 _____

People may oppose you because of your faith. Paul was put in prison, beaten, and ridiculed for proclaiming the Gospel.

What does Paul say about being frightened in Philippians 1: 27-28?

Living in America, we seldom face prison on account of our faith. However, there *are* plenty of Christians in the world who *do* risk their lives for their faith. Think of the believers in China, who must worship in underground churches. Think of the persecuted Christians in countries like Sudan, Nigeria, Egypt, Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, or Iran. Many are killed or imprisoned in these countries daily.

But even in America you may face ridicule. You may be teased by people who do not believe in God. You may find that your coach sets up practices and games for Sunday mornings, when you are the only one who normally attends worship then.

Have you ever felt that kind of opposition? _____ If so, how did you handle it? _____

So the fourth tip for shining your star is to **stand firm in the LORD**. Based on previous lessons in this study, can you think of some other tips for **shining like stars**?

I imagine Lydia was fascinated by the idea of shining like a star. I hope you are inspired, too. May you be like a star shining in the universe: focused on excellence, valuing others, cooperative, generous, hospitable, joyful, prayerful, and confidently standing firm on the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

One last scripture this week: Look up Jeremiah 17: 7-8 and fill in these blanks.

Blessed is the man who _____ in the LORD, whose _____ is in him. He will be like a _____ that sends out its roots by the _____. It does not _____ when heat comes; its leaves are always _____. It has no _____ in a year of drought, and never fails to _____.

As you grow in faith, may you become firmly planted, “like a tree planted by the water,” unmovable, able to stand firm, trusting God, fearless, worry-free and bearing much fruit.

Your name: _____

