

## Study Guide for October 8, 2017

### **Theme: Imitate Christ. (Philippians 2:1-13)**

It's been said that Philippians is the most affectionate of Paul's letters in its expression of deep friendship with Christ and its dedication to His church. It was most likely written to remind the home churches about the shared unity that comes through following Jesus' Way. While we have no way of knowing whether the concern for church unity grows out of a particular circumstance of Euodia and Synthe, or whether those two friends and fellow workers of Paul are simple instances of a larger problem. What worries Paul seems to worry the entire congregation in Philippi. And so Paul provides this wonderful letter to affirm and encourage their faith in Jesus Christ, to offer consolation in love, and to lead them in ways to share in the same Spirit.

Many of you have a good understanding about what disunity in the church can feel like. It often is discouraging, cold, and more often than not, not very Christlike. So is it any wonder that people might shy away from being a part of us if we are not willing to practice what we preach? Thus Paul encouraging words continue to urge us to be imitators (not impersonators) of Christ; to put our faith to work by being a reflection of Jesus out in the world. Paul is not suggesting we become Christ, but instead he is calling us all to be more Christlike. Look back on the last few weeks and see if you can identify the main themes of what it means to live like Christ in the world today.

In a conversation I had with a friend this week, I said Christians tend to be bad "billboards for God." We are the commercials that people either tune out or turn off. In the sermon I state Jesus is the Message. We are the Medium by which the world comes to know him.

**Q:** This about it for a moment. If God were a commercial, then which one would he be and why? Have fun with this, be creative. Think about what the product "God" and why would someone want to buy it?

### **READ: Philippians 1:12-30**

Paul acknowledges and understands that there is tension in the church, and perhaps people where leaving or walking away from their faith. Take a moment, right now, to offer a simple prayer for God to take over the tensions that are in your work, social or family life.

**Q:** How does this product called "Jesus Christ" help you solve these problems?

**Q:** Do your actions (or reactions) reflect the teachings of Christ?

**READ: Matthew 5:14-26; 6:16-21; 7:1-13 (all from the Sermon on the Mount)**

Catholic theologian Fr. Richard Rohr, makes this critique, *“How is it possible that after two thousand years of studying to be like Jesus Christ we’ve managed to avoid everything that he taught to do? Because most of the church has refused to take Jesus’ teaching and example seriously, now much of the world refuses to take Christians seriously.”*

**Q:** Be honest. Where are you avoiding what Christ has called you to do?

**Q:** Can you list some of the ways the product called the Holy Spirit help you return you back to the path of God’s righteousness?

**READ: Zephaniah 3:14-20; Philippians 4:4-7**

God’s promise for you, and Paul’s call for you, has always been centered in, on and around Jesus Christ. He is God’s great gift to us all. Jesus is proof that what God wants for your life is good/goodness. Through Jesus, the Lord is near. And by our faith, keeping Christ in our hearts, God is always closer than you think. Knowing this, every kind gesture and good deed you do for someone has the potential to reach a wound in someone else that only God’s compassion can heal. And so it is important that the image you put out there, the one you practice daily, is one that reflects Jesus and allows people to see God at work in you.

Slowly read of Zephaniah 3:14-20. As you do, try to find a word or sentence or phrase that speaks to you in either one of these passages, and meditate on it. Ask God to make it part of your life, knowing and believing in your heart that through you, God finds creative ways to bless you and the world.

**Pray:** Loving and all-giving Lord, today I return my heart to you, for your healing care and your gentle guidance. Help me to be more like Christ Jesus in the way I see myself and in the way I see the world. Help me to be like him in the way I forgive others and seek to be a peacemaker in good times and bad. Just as you have blessed me through Him, so too may your Holy Spirit help me be a blessing to others. Amen.