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## Day 1: Devotion to the Cause of Christ

- † **Bible Study:** Read Acts 16. Paul evangelized in Philippi during his second missionary journey, which led to the founding of the church there. Notice, Paul traveled with Silas, Timothy, and Luke. Despite being jailed, jeered, and even beaten and stoned, Paul and the others continued to do God's work faithfully.
- † **Prayerful Reflection:** In contrast to the perseverance of missionaries like Paul, the Bible tells of others who were not steadfast in their devotion to God, nor consistent in making God's work their primary concern.
  - How would you characterize yourself, more like Paul [focused on God and his work, at all costs] or more like the others [focused on yourself and your desires]?
  - Ask God to help you better appreciate him and the blessings he has brought you, resulting in greater commitment and passion toward him and his work. Praise him, for he is worthy!

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## Day 2: Suffering Has Value

- † **Bible Study:** Read Philippians 1. As you read yesterday, the believers in Philippi had seen Paul get liberated from prison in a miraculous way. Now [when he was writing to them], Paul was imprisoned in Rome, but not being set free by a miracle. The people wondered about this, and many began to believe that this was a judgment of God against Paul. Worse, as they were suffering persecution themselves, they began to wonder if they were under judgment from God for following Paul's teachings instead of the Mosaic Law.
- † **Prayerful Reflection:** Paul responded to the concerns of the believers in Philippi by writing the following: his suffering was helping to further the gospel [1.12-14]; he was confident God would remain pleased with him [1.19-20]; he was willing – even eager! – to die for the cause of furthering the gospel [1.21-23]; and he thought they too were called to suffer for the cause of Christ's gospel [1.29-30]. To the recipients of this letter, that would have been radical thinking! Consider how like Paul and Christ you are in this respect:
  - How willing are you to sacrifice or even suffer if it helps people come to Christ?
  - How likely are you to lessen your outward enthusiasm for Christ to avoid persecution or mockery?
  - Are you ready to sacrifice some comforts so you can give more to the church or missions?
  - How confident are you that God is pleased with your personal evangelistic ministry?
  - Ask God to help you grow spiritually, to better adopt the thinking and attitudes of Christ. Pray for guidance about how you spend your time, money, and effort.

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## Day 3: Christ Set the Example for All of Us

- † **Bible Study:** Read Philippians 2. The Philippians had been thinking that Paul's suffering was a judgment from God, and also wondering if their own suffering of persecution was a judgment from God. They wondered, where was God's deliverance? Paul responded by pointing out that Christ [the Son of God] himself was willing to humbly come as a human servant, and then suffer and die to do the work of God the Father; and Paul, Timothy, and their own beloved ministry leader, Epaphroditus, were following Christ.
- † **Prayerful Reflection:**
  - Sinning cuts us off from a great deal of blessing, but not all suffering is a corrective action from God and not all success is a sign of God's approval. Do you need to adjust the way you think about this in your life or in the lives of others? *[more on next page]*

- Are you consistently a light for the Lord even in your times of trial, or do you use your suffering as an excuse to engage in less than Christ-like behavior or to back off from ministering to others?
- There are only two kinds of struggles: those that God sees you through and those during which he takes you home to Heaven; both are forms of deliverance! Praise God for your relationship with him, which will get you through all the hardships of life. Confess if you have been angry with God over things you have suffered... and let that anger go.

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#### Day 4: Righteousness Comes from Christ Only

† Bible Study: Read Philippians 3. Paul said that if anyone had a right to feel good about oneself based on identity and accomplishments, then he could. Yet Paul held all of this to be worthless compared to the value of knowing Christ, because he knew that his accomplishments could not bring him any righteousness before God. Righteousness comes to us only by grace from God on the basis of faith in Christ. First God gives us righteousness in his sight [he accounts to us the righteousness of Christ!]; then he asks us to learn to live up to that righteousness as he transforms us to be more like Christ.

† Prayerful Reflection:

- Do you ever think better of yourself because of how God made you, such as your beauty or talents? or because of what you have accomplished in life? Based on your answers and today's reading, do you think you have a biblical attitude toward righteousness?
- Do you dwell on past accomplishments or look forward to God working through you in the future?
- Do you feel good about yourself because of what you do or because of what Christ did for you?
- Confess any thoughts of pride, self-reliance, or self-righteousness. Ask God to protect you from these thoughts, and to help you remember your dependence on him for success, salvation, forgiveness, and righteousness.

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#### Day 5: Depend on Christ and the Gospel Only

† Bible Study: Read Philippians 4. Despite the struggles he knew they were going through, Paul told the Philippians to rejoice, to live in harmony and unity, to stand for the gospel and support the gospel mission, to be anxious for nothing but rather be content, to dwell on the things of God instead of the things of this earth, and to trust in the Lord for provision.

† Prayerful Reflection:

- What steps should you take to be empowered by Christ to persevere during times of struggle or suffering? Is this just about meeting material needs, or does this have a spiritual effect too?
- Do you usually try to be self-reliant or do you readily depend on God? Do you tend to isolate yourself from Christian fellowship when you are struggling?
- Do you become anxious or discontented easily? Do you change in character when you are enduring times of trial? What has to change about your perspective to be more like Christ?
- Ask God to help you cultivate the attitudes of rejoicing, contentment, peacefulness, and trust, even in hard times. Remember from the beginning of the book that Paul was confident that his suffering was furthering the gospel mission and that God would continue their good work despite their suffering; so if you are struggling, be confident that God will see you through, that God will use this struggle to grow you to be more like Christ, and that despite your problems you can still minister for God to others!