

The Earthly Joy of Living as Heavenly Citizens

Philippians 3:12-4:3

The Journey of Joy in Christ

A Series in the Book of Philippians

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How do we make the most of our lives as those united to Christ? Paul answers that question plainly in Philippians 3:12–4:3. He shows that the joy-filled life of a citizen of heaven is not defined by drifting in religious routine or settling into complacency. It is a life marked by growing in our relationship with Christ and displaying His life through our own. Heavenly citizenship is not just a future hope reserved for when we die. It is a present reality and identity that shapes how we think, how we respond, and how we live. Paul models a relentless pursuit of Christ and calls believers to follow his example, reminding us that true joy is not found in achievements or comfort but in knowing Christ deeply and making Him known clearly.

Before we can live as citizens of heaven, we must first settle whether we actually belong to Christ. So, let us begin with an important question: How do you know that heaven is your home and that you truly belong to Christ and His kingdom? If your confidence rests in family background, moral effort, religious activity, or spiritual traditions, then you are basing your hope of salvation on the wrong foundation. Scripture makes it unmistakably clear that there is only one way into the kingdom of heaven. Jesus said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me” (John 14:6). Citizenship in heaven is granted only through a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. When that relationship is real, it will not

remain hidden. It will show itself in how we pursue Christ and how we represent Him in daily life. The joy of knowing and showing Jesus is the defining characteristic of every growing believer.

How do citizens of heaven manifest the joy of knowing Christ on earth?

1. Grow to fully know Christ 3:12-16

Citizens of heaven manifest the joy of knowing Christ by continually growing in their relationship with Him. Paul makes it clear that spiritual maturity does not come from coasting on past achievements or comparing oneself to others, but from a passionate desire to fully know Jesus Christ. He writes in Philippians 1:21, "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain," showing that knowing Christ brings fullness of life, removes the fear of death, and provides purpose and joy. In chapter 3, he renounces his religious pedigree and personal accomplishments, deeming them worthless in comparison to the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus, his Lord. This knowledge is not merely intellectual but deeply experiential. It involves knowing His resurrection power in everyday life, sharing in His sufferings during trials, and becoming more conformed to His likeness.

Paul also models humility by admitting he has not yet obtained this full maturity in knowing Jesus Christ. He rejects the idea of sinless perfection and embraces the ongoing progress of sanctification. His pursuit is laser-focused: "one thing I do" (3:13). He lets go of the past, refusing to be controlled by previous failures or to rest in past successes. Like a runner who is prone to stumble while looking backward, believers must let go of living in guilt and reliving the good ol' days of the past to move forward. Many people are stuck replaying

scenes of regret or reminiscing about former glory rather than engaging in what God wants to do now. Paul teaches that growth requires deliberate effort and a single-minded pursuit. He presses on like a sprinter, stretching every muscle toward the finish line. Spiritual maturity is not a passive drift but an active pursuit.

This pursuit to grow to fully know Christ is not a solo effort. Paul shifts from “I press on” to “let us keep living,” reminding us that sanctification is a journey as a community of believers in Christ’s church. Healthy and holy believers share the mindset of maturing together in Christ, and those who differ are entrusted to God’s correction. Spiritual growth in knowing Christ is designed by God to take place in the context of a local body of believers that is connected and supports one another. Growing as citizens of heaven requires all of us to keep our eyes fixed on the prize of fully knowing Christ in all arenas of life and expressing our relationship with Him in intentional and relational ways. This upward call of God gives us purpose, direction, and joy as we walk together in faith.

2. Show how to genuinely live in Christ 3:17-4:3

Citizens of heaven also reveal the joy of knowing Christ by showing others what it looks like to live in Him genuinely. Paul begins with a clear command: “Join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us” (3:17; see also 2:16-18). He is not drawing attention to himself out of pride but urging believers to follow Christ wherever His presence is manifested in authentic disciples. The word “example” refers to a pattern to trace, and “observe” means to fix your gaze like a runner locking onto a visual marker. Christ is always the standard, but God graciously

provides living illustrations of Christlikeness through faithful men and women who walk with us. Timothy (2:19-24), Epaphroditus (2:25-30), and the overseers and deacons in Philippi were such models (1:1). We learn spiritual maturity through imitation, not just information, just like children learn by copying what they see, not just by hearing explanations. Likewise, believers grow strong in wisdom, perseverance, service, and relational maturity by watching others live out their relationship with Jesus Christ.

Paul warns that if we are not intentional about who we follow, we may be susceptible to the wrong influence. Many people live only for pleasure, comfort, or material success rather than for Christ and His kingdom. In a brokenhearted manner, Paul describes the “enemies of the cross of Christ” as those, “whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things” (3:18-19). As we follow godly examples, we must also remember why God has placed us among unbelievers. We are not here to copy their values or retreat from them in fear. Our mission is to call them to Christ through the gospel and invite them into heavenly citizenship through faith in Him alone. They are not enemies to condemn, but souls in need of reconciliation to God. That is why Paul reminds believers of where they truly belong. Our citizenship is in heaven. Just as Philippian colonists proudly represented Rome despite living far from it, Christians live on earth while belonging to a greater homeland. We are not drifters without identity. Our ultimate allegiance is to the Lord Jesus Christ and the kingdom of God. Our lifestyle and values are to align with Him and to display His character.

Having a heavenly perspective shapes our worldview and renews us in our confident hope. Paul writes that we eagerly await our Savior from

heaven. In contrast to unbelieving Roman citizens who called Caesar “savior,” believers know that Jesus Christ is the only true Deliverer. Christ will return and one day transform our weak and temporary bodies and refashion them to be like His glorious resurrection body to be fit for eternity. Our present frailty is not permanent. God will use the same power that raised Jesus from the dead to renew our bodies completely. Knowing this should shape how we live now. Hope fuels holiness. Future heavenly glory strengthens present earthly endurance. Waiting for Christ’s return is not a passive longing but an active obedience. As we walk with Christ each day, we show the way of authentic life in Him.

As citizens of heaven, we model what it looks like to know Christ personally and to live for Him. Because our identity and future are secure, Paul calls believers to stand firm and stay united. He uses the image of soldiers holding their ground under pressure. Division within the church is just as dangerous as opposition from outside it. Even faithful women like Euodia and Syntyche needed encouragement to reconcile their conflict and walk in harmony. Disagreements over preferences can quickly become distractions, if not divisions, that weaken the church’s witness. Believers are to approach conflict with humility, take the initiative toward peace, forgive by grace, and seek wise help when needed. Citizens of heaven show the joy of knowing Christ when they follow godly examples, resist worldly influences, and pursue unity in their relationships. Growing to fully know Jesus and showing how to genuinely live in Him is how the life of Christ becomes visible to the watching world.

We manifest the joy of being citizens of heaven by growing in and showing our love for Christ on earth.

Passage Investigation: Prayerfully engage with the passage by reading it multiple times. Ask, *"What is this saying?"* and *"Why did God have this recorded?"* Look for the natural, normal meaning of the words and phrases and identify the meaning in context. **Write down your observations** about what the passage reveals about God, Christ, His kingdom, humanity, sin, the gospel, trials, and faith. Ask key questions: Who? What? When? Where? Why? How? Let your investigation lead to a deeper understanding and love for God and His word.

LIFE Application: Questions for our journey of joy in living out the LIFE we have in Christ (Loving God, Investing in others, Following His word, and Engaging our world)

1. How would you describe your current pursuit of knowing Christ? What would one deliberate step of growth look like for you this week?
2. Are you unnecessarily hindered by past failures that produce guilt or by living in the good old days of the past? How can you be undistracted and free from anything that may hinder you from moving forward in your relationship with Jesus Christ?
3. Who are a few of the godly examples you are intentionally learning from, and who might be learning from you? What qualities in others draw you closer to Christ, and how can you pursue those patterns more deliberately?
4. Where might you be absorbing unhealthy influences without realizing it? How are voices from social media, culture, or those who lack biblical wisdom possibly shaping your desires and worldview? What safeguards can help realign your focus?
5. How does remembering that your citizenship is in heaven reshape the way you respond to trials, temptations, or everyday decisions? If someone observed your week, what would they assume is your ultimate allegiance and identity?
6. What does it look like for you to stand firm and pursue unity in your relationships? Is there anyone you need to reconcile with, forgive, or encourage for the sake of Christ's name and the church's witness?