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INTRODUCTION TO DISCOVERING THE *J-CURVE*[®] SERIES

“I’ve believed the gospel. Now what?”

Believing *more* seems like the correct response. But if you focus exclusively on believing more, you’ll likely become self-entangled, constantly looking inward at the state of your heart. The apostle Paul has a better answer:

“For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake...” (Philippians 1:29).

So we don’t just believe the gospel; we become *like* the gospel. We join Christ in what Paul calls a “fellowship of his sufferings” (Philippians 3:10).

Paul acknowledges something we’ve largely ignored as a church: Jesus’ life takes a downward path into death before moving upward into resurrection.

If you think of it visually, you can trace the letter “J.” We at seeJesus call this arc of the gospel “the *J-Curve*.” The apostle Paul describes the *J-Curve* as the normal Christian life—a reenacting of the death and resurrection of Jesus—but it doesn’t feel normal to most Christians. *Discovering the J-Curve* is a series of four units that search out what it means to faithfully live the kind of dying-resurrection life Paul describes in Philippians. By God’s grace, we will catch Paul’s radical vision of living life in the shape of the *J-Curve*—a vision that lies at the heart of Paul’s definition of what it means to be a Christian.

Living in the *J-Curve* means we don’t have to succumb to our allergy to suffering or equate God’s favor with earthly success. Embracing the *J-Curve* renews our hope in a dark world, draws us into fellowship with God’s people, and radically re-centers our daily lives on Christ. And it answers our deep and earnest question: “I’ve believed the gospel. Now what?”

SUMMARY OF DISCOVERING THE *J-CURVE* SERIES

Unit 1: United with Christ

Union with Christ—being “in Christ”—doesn’t sound like the solution to a real problem. But a careful study of Philippians 3:1-11 reveals that our problems with legalism and the Flesh are solved by our union with Christ. Justification by faith liberates us from human pride and despair by giving us righteousness as a gift. This lays the groundwork for understanding how the *J-Curve* builds on justification by faith and makes union with Christ come alive in a way that simply believing the gospel by itself doesn’t.

Unit 2: A Jesus-Shaped Life

If Unit 1 looks at the larger world that surrounds the *J-Curve*, Unit 2 analyzes the different kinds of *J-Curves* that the apostle Paul describes. We begin by “getting our bearings” on Paul’s three different kinds of *Present J-Curves* (*Suffering, Repentance, and Love*), and then we discover how our *Present J-Curves* are based on the *Original J-Curve* and the *Faith J-Curve*. We see how all these *J-Curves* work together in the story of Joni Eareckson Tada’s life.

Unit 3: The Descent of Love

The focus of Unit 3 is the *Love J-Curve* in Philippians 2. The apostle Paul uses the story of Jesus’ *Original J-Curve* (his dying and rising for us) as the model for our own life of dying love. In Christ’s descent, his obedience to his Father is the very heart of the gospel. As we re-enact Jesus’ descent, the beauty of Jesus emerges in us. We call this the *Love J-Curve*. We’ll discover some of the fascinating patterns of the *Love J-Curve* that will encourage us in this most Jesus-like of all work—the work of love.

Unit 4: Living in Resurrection

We discover how a resurrection lens reshapes the apostle Paul’s vision of life. Participating in the dying *and rising* of Jesus transforms how Paul encounters both hardship and blessings. It is the secret to Paul’s joy. We begin in Philippians 1, where Paul tells the story of his imprisonment and possible release. In Philippians 2, we discover how Paul’s co-workers, Timothy and Epaphroditus, embody the gospel. Finally, in Philippians 4, we glimpse two of Paul’s co-laborers who don’t embody the gospel.

KEY CONCEPTS OF UNIT 4: *LIVING IN RESURRECTION*

Six Different Kinds of Resurrections:

1. In me where I am encouraged.
2. In my circumstances where they improve.
3. In others' hearts where they are encouraged.
4. In others' circumstances where they improve.
5. In Jesus (this has already happened).
6. In the world where Jesus is made known and believed.

COMPARISON CHART OF UNIT 4 AND *J-CURVE* BOOK

UNIT 4: LIVING IN RESURRECTION	<i>J-CURVE</i> BOOK (Parts 3 and 4)
Part 1: Paul Lives in Resurrection	
Lesson 1 Looking Through a Resurrection Lens	Chapter 23
Lesson 2 Paul's Vision of Life	Chapter 25
Lesson 3 Resurrection Attitude	Chapter 24
Lesson 4 Dying is Rising	Chapter 26
Lesson 5 The Gift	New Material
Part 2: The Church Lives in Dying and Rising	
Lesson 6 Christ Bearers	Chapter 17, 27
Lesson 7 Emotionally Healthy Christianity	Chapter 27
Lesson 8 <i>J-Curve</i> Calms a Quarrel	Chapter 20
Lesson 9 Rejoice!	Chapter 25

PART 1:

PAUL LIVES IN RESURRECTION

LESSON 1: LOOKING THROUGH A RESURRECTION LENS

We begin in Philippians 1, looking at how remarkable Paul's description of his prison experience is. His stories show a way of doing life that re-enacts the dying and rising of Jesus. The result is a life saturated with joy.

SECTION 1: Paul in Prison

15 mins

- 1. Imagine this situation: Your boss takes credit for your work and keeps you from a promotion you deserve. How would you typically describe this to a friend?**

Read Philippians 1:12–14

¹² I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, ¹³ so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is *in Christ*.¹ ¹⁴ And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

Literary Insight: “My Chains”

The word that Paul uses for “imprisonment” is actually “chains.” Paul is strapped with leg irons and possibly wrist chains as well. He is prisoner of the elite Imperial Guard in the city of Rome, which was at that time made up of 12 cohorts of 500 soldiers each, about 6,000 soldiers.²

¹ Following the Greek and affirmed by multiple scholars, I have changed *for Christ* to *in Christ*.

² Paul could be using hyperbole to make a point. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Praetorian_Guard



Iron handcuffs from the Roman Period³

Imagine the apostle Paul writing this letter:

“I’m thankful for your prayers. The chains have been digging into my wrists creating open blisters, but the Lord has given me endurance. Some of the guards are bullies, but most are relatively kind.”

2. It is entirely appropriate to say this, but how does it compare to what Paul actually says? How is Paul’s letter different?

3. Why is Paul so different from how we would react to being *in chains*?

Ω Literary Insight: In Chains in Christ

Paul has a remarkable way of describing the message that the palace guard has heard from him. Most translations say, “I am in chains *for* Christ.” We could expect Paul to say *for Christ* not *in Christ*, but the Greek is clear; Paul is *in chains in Christ*. One scholar translates verse 13:

“It has become clear throughout the whole palace guard that I am in chains because of my *union with Christ*. ”⁴

By saying *in Christ*, Paul means *union with Christ*. Remarkably, the palace guard has some sense that Paul is not just *in chains*, but also *in Christ*! Paul sees his imprisonment through the lens of Christ’s dying and rising. We can easily picture Paul’s guards wondering why he is so joyful and thankful. Paul would not be shy about connecting his joy with his being *in Jesus* as opposed

³ Used by permission from www.HolyLandPhotos.org

⁴ Peter T. O’Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991), 92.

to *in chains*. For instance, the Secret Service get to know the character of the president and his family they are protecting. If a spouse of a president or the president treats Secret Service agents with contempt, that becomes “well known” among the Secret Service.

SECTION 2: Rising, Not Dying, Has the Last Word 10 mins



Insight: Paul’s Resurrection Lens

Paul looks at life through the lens of the death *and resurrection* of Jesus. The Christian life doesn’t get stuck in death. Rising, not dying, has the last word.

Re-read Philippians 1:13–14

So that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is *in Christ*. And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

4. **What two distinct resurrections does Paul see (vv. 13–14)?**

5. **What two places is the gospel getting to more? Who is getting it out?**

6. **Verse 12 implies that the Philippians were concerned that Paul’s imprisonment would hinder the gospel. What connection does Paul see between prison and the gospel?**

7. **How is Paul’s description of prison similar to Philippians 2:8–9: “[Jesus was] obedient to the point of death, even death on the cross. *That is why* God has highly exalted him”?**

8. **So, what is the connection between dying and rising?**



Historical Background: Iranian Church

The Iranian church suffered severe persecution in the early 1990s leading to several of its leaders being martyred. But the courage of the leaders led to greater courage on the part of the Christians—so much so that Iranian Christians said, “Thank God for the Ayatollah Khomeini.”

SECTION 3: What Doesn't Resurrect?

15 mins

9. What are the “deaths” for Paul in Philippians 1:12–14?

10. In the midst of all the blessing that Paul sees, what doesn't resurrect for Paul?

Read 2 Corinthians 4:10–12

¹⁰ [We are] always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. ¹¹ For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. ¹² So death is at work in us, but life in you.

11. Who is still experiencing death (vv. 11–12)? What phrases does Paul use to describe that?

12. Where is the resurrection?

13. How is that like the gospel?

Six Kinds of Resurrection

(Paul's life in Roman prison)

	IN ME (THE APOSTLE PAUL)	IN OTHERS (PHILIPPIAN & ROMAN CHRISTIANS)	IN JESUS
Heart (Interior)	#1: Resurrection! <i>My heart.</i>	#3: Resurrection! <i>Others' heart.</i>	#5: Resurrection! <i>Jesus' heart.</i>
World (Exterior)	#2: Still Dying <i>My world.</i>	#4: Resurrection! <i>Others' world.</i>	#6: Resurrection! <i>Jesus' world.</i>

14. Summarize what has happened in each of the blocks.

15. Rewrite your comments about your difficult boss with a resurrection lens.



Insight: Modern Cynicism

Many people instinctively feel that if they aren't negative, they are being inauthentic or superficial. "Reality" almost always feels negative. For example, if someone says, "How are you *really* feeling?" they assume you are hiding negative feelings like discouragement or anger. That may be true sometimes, but it has become a cultural assumption. Likewise, we say, "Face reality" but we never say, "Face hope."

16. Are there ways that you have given in to the cynical spirit of our age?

LESSON 1 APPLICATION

1. Describe a situation in your life where you have prayed over it and loved well. Do you see any resurrections? What has resurrected and what hasn't?

Fill in the chart below with your answers. Discuss with others in your group.

	IN ME	IN OTHERS	IN JESUS
Heart (Interior)	<p>#1: I'm encouraged.</p> <p><i>My heart.</i></p>	<p>#3: Their hearts are encouraged.</p> <p><i>Others' heart.</i></p>	<p>#5: Jesus was resurrected and is enthroned.</p> <p><i>Jesus' heart.</i></p>
World (Exterior)	<p>#2: My circumstances improve.</p> <p><i>My world.</i></p>	<p>#4: Their circumstances improve.</p> <p><i>Others' world.</i></p>	<p>#6: Jesus is made known and believed.</p> <p><i>Jesus' world.</i></p>