

Philippians

To Live Is Christ



Bible Study Guide



Some Background

Paul visited and founded the church at Philippi around 51A.D. You can get the background and details of this first visit by reading Acts 16:11-40.

This letter was written by Paul to the church at Philippi some ten years later. Paul most likely wrote it while imprisoned in Rome.

It is a positive letter. In 2 Corinthians 8:2 Paul speaks glowingly of this church "...in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part." Despite the obvious persecution the Philippians and Paul were facing the letter is full of joy. Words of joy are laced throughout the letter (joy/rejoice words are used around 16 times).

Paul also celebrates the partnership he has with the Philippians. There is a strong bond that Paul and the Philippians share because of the work of God in their lives.

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1 Study 1: Partners In The Gospel

Philippians 1: 1-11

Getting Started: Think of a Christian friend that you feel very close to. What are the words you would use to describe your relationship? Why do you have a close friendship with them? What is needed to maintain this friendship?

Digging Deeper:

1a. What challenges were the Christians at Philippi facing?
(Check out Philippians 1:28-30)

1b. What challenges was Paul facing?
(check out Philippians 1:15-19)

2. Given the persecution they were facing why is Paul so joyful (1:3) about their situation?

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3. Paul 'feels' very positively about the Philippians. Given the physical distance and lack of face to face contact for a number of years, what is the basis for Paul's 'feelings'?

4. List the specific things Paul gives thanks for in Philippians 1:3-8.

5. Paul uses the word 'partnership' in 1:5. The same idea is present in 1:7 when he refers to them as 'partakers' with him in God's grace. The partnership idea has commercial/contract overtones. The word describes people who are bound together in a joint enterprise. What is the 'joint enterprise' that Paul has in mind here? What is the key to their partnership?

6. In 1:9-11 Paul details his prayers for his 'partners'. What does he pray for? How do the prayers in vv9-11 connect with vv3-8?

What does this mean for us?

7. 'Partnership' in 1:5 is often translated as 'fellowship'. How can Paul speak of his ongoing fellowship with the Philippians even though he has had such little contact with them for a decade or so?

8. How does this impact your thinking about:-

a) Your fellowship with believers in your home church?

b) Your fellowship with Christians in other churches around Adelaide/Australia?

c) Your fellowship with missionaries who have been sent by your church overseas?

9. How can we deepen our fellowship with other Christian friends?

10a. How does Philippians 1:1-11 affect the way you think about prayer?

10ba. How will it affect the way you pray?

2 Study 2: Gospel Freedom. Philippians 1: 12-30

Getting Started: How do you feel when you are unfairly accused of something or your motives are questioned or your goals are blocked?

Digging Deeper:

Read Philippians 1: 12-30

1. How does Paul feel about being in prison? Why? (verses 12-14)
2. How does he feel about those who are trying to hurt him? (verses 15-18) Why is he willing to overlook/dismiss their bad motives?
3. Paul was imprisoned and facing the possibility of execution. How does he feel about that? (verse 21)

4. In verses 19-26 Paul speaks more comprehensively about his attitude to death. What are the keys to his thinking?

5. What is the overriding or driving force in Paul's thinking about his life?

6. What is the secret to Paul's ability to maintain focus in his troubles? (Focus especially on verses 18-21)

7. Read verses 27-30. How do verses 12-26 form the backdrop to what Paul has to say to the Philippians about their situation?

What does it mean for us?

8. For us what are the situations where we are likely to:-

a) have other Christians question or challenge our motives or make life difficult for us?

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b) Be persecuted by unbelievers (in what ways)?

How does Paul's example and teaching help in these circumstances? How can we put this instruction from God's word into practice?

9. Do you (honestly) think you would be better off dead and with the Lord? Or is it just a theoretical truth? What would be the practical indicators of believing this is true for your life?

10. Paul rejoices in the spread of the gospel. Spend some time talking and encouraging one another with examples of people you know who are hearing and responding to the gospel.

3 Study 3: Humility — The Key To Unity. Philippians 1: 27 — 2: 11

Getting Started: When you think about humility who are the people who come to mind? What are the qualities that you associate with a humble person?

Digging Deeper:

1. Would you regard Paul the Apostle as a humble person? (Check out Philippians 3:17 and Acts 20:19)

2. What is the selfish ambition mentioned in Philippians 1:17 and 2:3 ? What would be an illustration of this behavior in chapter 1?

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3. In Philippians 2:3 the Christians in Philippi are told to "...in humility count others more significant than yourselves". How do verses 3-4 describe humility?

4. How does Jesus demonstrate his humility? (verses 5-8)

5. Look through Philippians 1:27 – 2:11 and list all the mentions of unity, oneness, same etc and the key idea attached to each reference.

6. How is the humility spoken of in this section the key to unity?

What does this mean for us?

7. When are you tempted to act out of selfish ambition? What is the way to counter this? (from what we have looked at in Philippians)

8. What 'ambition' should unite us?

9. How should we express our humility to an unbelieving world? (check out 1:27-30)

10. Does having the 'same mind' mean Christians should always agree with each other? How does this work itself out in your small group bible studies?

4 Study 4: Real Spirituality. Philippians 2: 12-30

Getting Started: It is often said that 'All we contribute to our salvation is our sin'. Do you agree or disagree and why?

Digging Deeper:

Having described the 'mind of Christ' in verses 5-11 Paul now goes on to explore how this should affect our thinking/behaviour and actions in verses 12-30 (ie the 'Therefore' at the start of verse 12 builds on the previous argument). There is some general instruction in verses 12-18 followed by examples of men who have followed the example of Christ (verses 19-30).

1. Read through verses 12-13. Which of the following statements most accurately captures what is being said in these verses?
 - a) God has saved you and if you continue to obey Him then you will be saved on the last day.
 - b) God has saved you and your salvation is secure and now your job is to try and become like Jesus.
 - c) God has saved you and made you citizens of heaven therefore live in line with this by the power of God.

Are these verses here 'carrot' verses or 'stick' verses? Are they there to encourage or warn?

2. Looking more closely at verses 12-13.

a) What are you being asked to do?

b) What does God say he will do?

c) What are the practical implications of the 'work out' being spoken of in verse 12?

d) What is meant by 'fear and trembling'?

3. What do verses 14-17 tell us about God's purpose for the local church?

4. How does Paul the Apostle exemplify what is said in verses 12-13 and even 2:1-11?

5. Reading through verses 18-30:-

a) How is Timothy an example of the Christian life Paul has been describing?

b) Why does Paul commend Epaphroditus?

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What does this mean for us?

6. Discuss how the 'process' of change to become more like Christ works.

7. When it comes to growing in Godliness what is your tendency:-

a) To look for a quick fix solution eg latest book, filled with the Spirit, a technique, etc?

b) To try and ignore sin?

c) To feel really guilty?

How does this passage help?

8. What are qualities you observe in Paul, Timothy and Epaphroditus that you would like to cultivate? Isolate one or two and talk about how you could practically make plans to develop in these areas.

5 Study 5: Real Confidence.

Philippians 3: 1 — 4: 1

Getting Started: In Philippians 2 the humility of Jesus is put forward as a clear model for Christians to emulate. However, in Philippians 3 Paul urges the Christians there to 'join with others in following my example...' (verse 17). In Acts 20:19 Paul says he '..served the Lord with great humility...'. How can a Christian be both humble and confident?

Digging Deeper:

1. What problem is on view in verse 2?
2. What does it mean to put confidence in the flesh (verse 3)? Why is it a problem?
3. What is Paul doing in verses 4-6 and why does he discount this previous experience in verses 7-9?
4. How does knowing what Christ has done for him impact the way Paul lives (verses 12-14)?

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5. How does he want this to flow over into the lives of the Philippians (verse 17ff)?

6. Paul contrasts the future of believers and unbelievers in verse 19ff. How is this meant to encourage us as followers of Jesus?

What does this mean for us?

7. Not many would suggest today that we should get circumcised to establish our confidence about right relationship with God. Are there other forms of religious practice that we might be likely to substitute?

8. If you had to list the marks of spiritual maturity from this passage what would they be?

9. How can we use the future benefits promised in this passage to help us in our Christian walk now? You might want to spend time in your group giving thanks to God for these.

6 Study 6: Standing Firm. Philippians 4: 1-23

Getting Started: In Philippians 4:1 Paul wants the Christians to 'stand firm'. Do you know the sorts of things that would be most likely to stop you 'standing firm' as a Christian?

Digging Deeper:

1. What are the events and situations alluded to already in this letter that are likely to have caused Paul and the Christians in Philippi some stress?
2. How is what Paul said in Philippians 3 likely to help them stand firm?
3. Skimming over Philippians 4 what are the things that are likely to have unsettled them (especially verses 2-3, verses 4-7, verses 8-9 and verses 10-19.)?

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4. How can Paul command them to be joyful (verse 4)?

5. The instructions that follow in verses 5-9 are meant to assist in providing instructions on how to be joyful. What can we learn from this?

6. What in particular will help the Philippians to

a) Not be anxious? (verses 6-7)

b) Think holy thoughts? (verses 8-9)

c) Be content? (verses 10-13)

What does this mean for us?

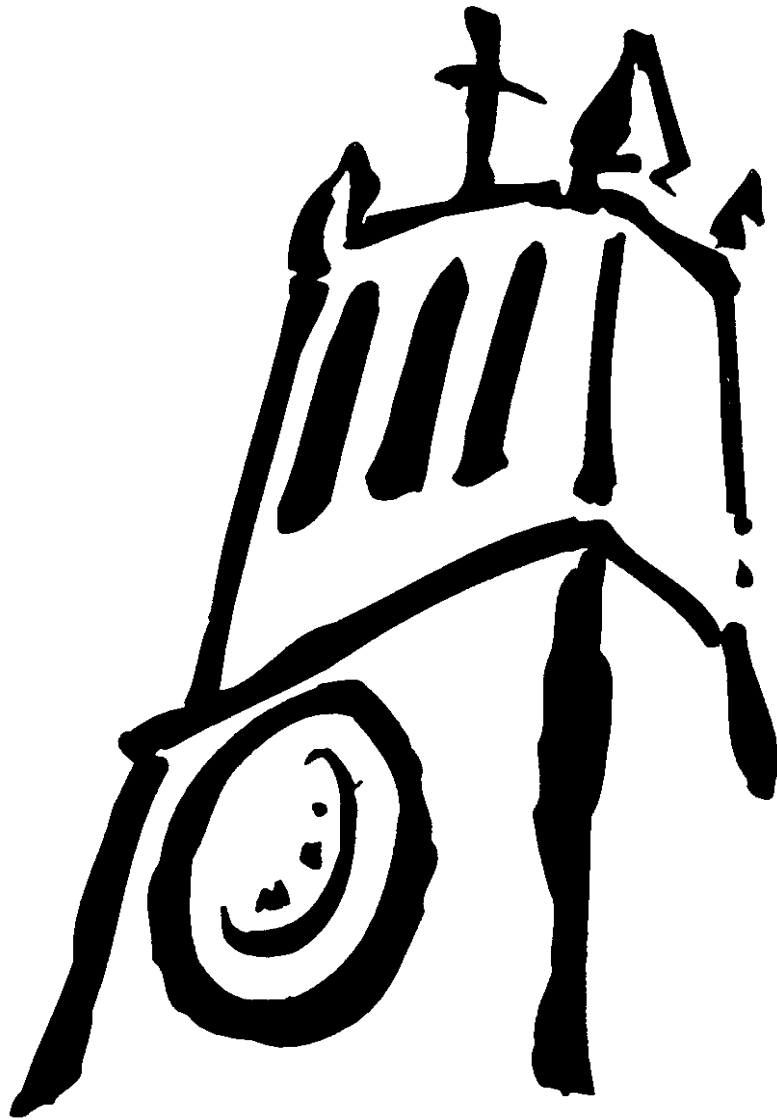
7. Despite our advances in science and medicine, it seems anxiety is at epidemic proportions in our society. Why do you think this is?

8. How is it possible to have joy even in terrible circumstances? Is this realistic?

9. The instruction to 'think about such things' in verse 8 implies a discipline of mind. Write a list of some of the lovely, pure, admirable, excellent, praiseworthy things that it would be good for you to 'think about'.

10. Concern about money or what it can provide by way of experience and lifestyle are powerful forces in our country. How could what Paul says here in Philippians 4 help us not get 'sucked in' to the same way of thinking? Practically what steps could we take to live differently in this area?

11. If you had to sum up the teaching of Philippians with a sentence (or one verse from the book) what would it be?



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