

# PHILIPPIANS

THE WAY OF JESUS, TOGETHER

**LIFE**  
*groups*  
**STUDY GUIDE**

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## Introduction

As we study the Book of Philippians together, we hope you enjoy this seven-week study guide. It's designed to be used in a group setting for the purpose of deeper study and transformational growth. Complimentary to the Sunday morning teaching, this study will help your group dive into the text by asking questions and prompting discussion. We will explore who Jesus is, what he has done and what it means to be one of his followers. We will learn what it means to be with Jesus, to be like Jesus and to follow his example by the power of the Holy Spirit.

### The Author of the Letter to the Philippians

The author identifies himself as the Apostle Paul; the literary style and historical evidence agree with Pauline authorship for the book of Philippians. Paul's background is mentioned in Acts 9, Philippians 3, and Galatians 3.

### The Date of the Letter to the Philippians

Scholars estimate that the Apostle Paul's letter to the churches in Philippi was likely written during his imprisonment in Rome in the year 62 A.D.

### Major Themes within the Letter to the Philippians

The Apostle Paul pens the famous letter to the Philippians to encourage the churches in Philippi to remember that they're part of the Kingdom, citizens of Heaven, and sons of God. Paul desires for the churches to see God's hand at work, even in his imprisonment. The Apostle reminds believers to follow the ultimate example of Jesus by walking in humility. Jesus is the supreme example of this way of life. Paul, Timothy, and Epaphroditus try to be good examples as well.

## Purpose of the Letter to the Philippians

Paul wrote the letter intended for the churches in Philippi while he was imprisoned in a Roman jail. The letter shows that the Apostle Paul, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, had several purposes in writing the letter:

### 4-Fold Purpose:

- To tell the churches in Philippi that their pastor, Epaphroditus, had recovered from a serious, possibly life-threatening illness.
- To encourage the Philippians in their newly-formed faith in Jesus.
- To assure them that God was behind his current imprisonment, using it for his own purposes.
- To encourage the churches, inspire them to greater faithfulness, and thank them for their continued support.

Paul wanted the Philippians to see that what might seem like a personal loss was actually a Kingdom win; the church was being reinforced by new leaders, the Gospel was being proclaimed in Rome and the mission was advancing.

## Outline of Philippians

- I. Formal Greetings (1:1-2)
- II. Thankfulness for the Philippians (1:3-11)
- III. Paul's Situation (1:12-26)
- IV. Exhortations to the Philippians (1:27;2:18)
  - Living a Life Worthy of the Gospel (1:27-30)
  - Following Jesus' Example of Humility (2:1-18)
- V. Paul's Students (2:19-30)
  - Timothy's Example of Faith (2:19-24)
  - Epaphroditus Example of Faith (2:25-30)
- VI. Warnings Against Legalism (3:1-21)
  - Paul's Testimony of Salvation (3:1-16)
  - Paul's Example of Faith (3:17-4:1)
- VII. Conclusion (4:2-23)  
Instructions Concerning Different Aspects of the Christian Life (4:2-9)
  - Testimony, Repeated Thanks (4:10-20) and Final Thoughts (4:21-23)

## Map of Philippi



(Map from Crossway ESV Study Bible at [www.esv.org](http://www.esv.org).)

## Introduction

Perspective is everything. If you're flipping through the channels and see a close-up of a professional mountain biker going down a hill, you would assume it's a downhill race, but if the camera zooms out to a much wider perspective you will see the bike is only going down a hill as it continues up a very large mountain. Perspective matters. You may have seen two co-workers, family members or friends walk through the same situation but respond in very different ways. One person is embittered, jaded, or disenfranchised while the other is empowered and refocused because of their perspective. Same situation, different perspective. Perspective matters. Our view of God and ourselves matters.

As we begin to study the book of Philippians, we're reading a prison letter written by the Apostle Paul who is locked up unjustly, unable to be with the churches he loves, facing an uncertain future and the possibility of execution. From a worldly perspective, Paul should be depressed and despondent; instead, he is encouraged--even joyful. Paul's perspective is larger than his situation. He urges us to see God's invisible hand of providence in midst of our greatest challenges and uncertainties. Paul's perspective allowed him not to become discouraged because he saw God-given opportunities even in his unjust imprisonment; this was the chance the Philippians needed to grow, this was the chance for the Gospel to advance.

So, Paul's encouragement to the church in Philippi is his encouragement to us. Life is bigger than our marriage, children, or 401k. Paul encourages us to shift our perspective from our own preferences and comfort to the mission of advancing the Gospel as most important. As the Gospel advances, lives are changed and we find true and eternal joy.

## Read Philippians 1:12-18

### Discussion Questions

#### Engage

1. Have you ever had a food that, at first, you hated eating, but now you love?
2. Have you ever hosted visitors from out of town and, as a result, learned something new about your own city?

### Explore

3. What happened to Paul in v12 and how did other Christians respond? How did God use the terrible imprisonment of Paul to help advance the Gospel?
4. According to this text, how does Paul specifically find encouragement and hope in the midst of being imprisoned? In v15-18 Paul contrasts two motives for advancing the Gospel; what are they and how does Paul respond to both of them?

### Apply

5. What areas in your life need a perspective change? Are there areas where you are feeling hopeless, bitter, depressed, anxious, meaningless, or afraid?
6. Behavior is shaped by perspective; if Paul had written about how helpless and worthless he felt in jail, what would have been his focus? When we're struggling with anxiety, fear and frustration, how can our focus change our perspective?
7. If we follow Paul's example and change our focus, and therefore our perspective, how might we see God accomplishing his purposes in the midst of our struggle?
8. Paul was imprisoned for his faith and the result was that other Christians became more bold in their witness. What examples from biblical times, throughout the history of the church, or even in our current times, have emboldened you and given you courage?

Take some time to pray together for the next seven weeks as a group. Spend time praising God for brining you together. Pray and ask God to unify the group, to bless the time together, to create a deeply connected community, growing in spiritual maturity.

### Memory Verse - Philippians 1:12 <sup>ESV</sup>

*I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel*

## Introduction

Have you ever gone to a fancy dinner party with a multi-course menu that required formal attire? There are certain behaviors, and a specific set of manners that are expected at a very formal dinner party. If someone showed up in overalls and a dirty old t-shirt, ate with their hands, chewed loudly with their mouth hanging open, and spent their time making messes and interrupting other people's conversations, we would say that's rude and inconsiderate. Behavior like that is unfitting for such an occasion. We would agree that the right response to a stately dinner is formal dress, manners, courtesy and gratitude. Behavior should honor the host who invited us to share this amazing meal.

As we study Philippians, what is the right response to the Gospel? How do we live in alignment with what we believe? How do we walk in a manner worthy of the Gospel?

## Read Philippians 1:19-26

### Discussion Questions

#### Engage

1. Have you ever been involved in a team sport or activity that required you to perform to or meet a certain standard? What was the expectation and what was your experience like?

#### Explore

2. What are the two outcomes Paul is weighing in Philippians 1:19-24? As Paul couldn't control the outcome, what was the focus of his concern in v20, v22, and v24?
3. How would you articulate Paul's exhortation in Philippians 1:27 in your own words?

## Apply

4. We define Christian maturity in three areas:
  - Doing all of life together in Christian community (1:3-9, 27)
  - Progress in personal holiness (1:10-11, 27)
  - Boldly living and sharing our faith (1:12-14,28)

How is your growth in each of these areas?

### Community

What do you think a healthy Christian community should look like? What barriers and challenges do we need to address to really connect with other believers? Most people desire deep friendships but few take the time or make the sacrifices necessary. What are some of the challenges we will face over the next few weeks as we're striving to do life together?

### Holiness

What is the difference between the culture's view and the Bible's view of holiness? What difficulties have you experienced in trying to grow in personal holiness as you seek after Jesus?

### Witness

What opportunities do you have currently to live more courageously for Jesus? To ask the question another way, when do you feel intimidated, ashamed or embarrassed to admit you're a Christian?

### Memory Verse - Philippians 1:21 <sup>ESV</sup>

*For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.*

## Introduction

Have you ever played sports on a team where one player would hog the ball? Have you ever been a part of a choir or band where one person would sing off key? Have you ever been a part of a team at work or a study group at school and there was one person that just wouldn't work with everyone else?

Pride is one of the most destructive forces imaginable. Pride can destroy marriages, separate families, split churches, ruin businesses, divide teams, and end friendships.

While pride is one of the most dangerous forces in our lives and it's also one of the most elusive. We see pride's destruction but rarely see its origins; we see pride in others but not in our own heart.

This week we will look at the key ingredient to spiritual growth, humility. Humility is the antithesis to pride, it is the foundation for spiritual growth and the heartbeat of the Christian life. To see and understand Christian humility clearly, we must look to Christ.

## Read Philippians 2:1-11

### Discussion Questions

#### Engage

1. As you think back on your week, what situations or conversations made you joyful?
2. What sorts of relationships, situations or circumstances in your own life provoke your sense of entitlement? When and how do you recognize a feeling of entitlement in your heart?

#### Explore

3. What steps does Paul encourage the Philippians to take to complete his joy ( Philippians 2:3-4)?
4. How would you describe the mindset Paul encourages Christians to have in Philippians 2:5?
5. Philippians 2:8 speaks of how Jesus humbled himself; what are some scriptures and stories that highlight different ways Jesus was an

example of humility? According to Philippians 2:9-11, what were Jesus' rewards for walking in humility all the way to the cross?

#### Apply

6. What does pride look like most often in your own life? What are some of the effects of pride in our lives? Since pride is almost always masquerading as self-justification, how can we open ourselves up to receiving correction and recognize the pride in our own hearts?
7. Think of a recent time you became defensive when someone disagreed with you. What may have been the underlying emotions in that moment? Do you feel insecure when others disagree with you? Do you feel like you need to hide past errors in your thinking?
8. In what ways have we missed or minimized thankfulness to God for all the blessings, opportunities and relationships in our lives? What are some practical ways we can break the sense of entitlement in our hearts?

#### Memory Verse - Philippians 2:3 <sup>ESV</sup>

*Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.*

## Introduction

We have all had the experience of waking up in the middle of the night to get a glass of water or use the restroom and found ourselves stumbling around in the dark trying to find the light-switch. We need light to see what's around us; we need light to know where we are; we need light to get to where we need to be. Light reveals; light exposes and discloses; light always tells the truth.

Paul calls the Christian community to be lights in the world by being blameless and innocent among their neighbors and co-workers. Christians are to shine in a spiritually and morally dark world around them by not grumbling or complaining. Let's explore how we can turn the light up as a Christian community together.

## Read Philippians 2:12-18

### Discussion Questions

#### Engage

1. Have you ever had a time when you were completely in the dark? What was it like and what happened?
2. What's one project you've invested a lot of time working on, (maybe others helped) of which are you most proud and why?

#### Explore

3. According to Philippians 2:12-13, who is working out salvation? What does this synergism between the Spirit's power and our effort look like?
4. Paul instructs the Christian's community to be without blemish in Philippians 2:14. What are the blemishes he is referring to, according to the verse?
5. Paul uses the terms *crooked* and *twisted* to describe the world outside of Jesus. How is the world out of alignment?
6. What does Paul mean in v17 when he says his life is like a drink offering?

## Apply

7. What does it mean to work out our salvation? What is the next step for you personally in working out your salvation? Be specific.
8. Because we're called to live our spiritual lives together as the family of God, how can Christians pray, encourage and hold each other accountable to grow in godliness?
9. What situations or circumstances do you tend to grumble and complain about in your life? What does your attitude reflect about your heart and functional beliefs in those moments? How can we guard against grumbling, complaining and feeling entitled?
10. Which people in our spheres of influence need the light of the Gospel? How can we be a light to them?

### Memory Verse - Philippians 2:12-13 <sup>ESV</sup>

*Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.*

## Introduction

Most major world religions are marked by their strict moral standards, rules and traditions that must be kept, rituals that must be performed, holidays that must be observed. When people think of religion, they often assume a fix-yourself, pull yourself up by your bootstraps, self-righteous, moralistic elitism; a stereotype which is often perpetuated by television, music and movies. Christianity is often seen as self-help, at its very best. Our culture believes that to be a Christian, you've got to clean up your life; you've got to finally become 'good enough' and have it all together. Why has our culture fundamentally missed the message of Christianity? Christianity is less about what we do and more about what Jesus has done. Christianity is less about being better and more about becoming new. How is it possible that popular culture has so misunderstood the Christian faith and has actually created a mutated form of belief?

The true, original, simple and beautiful message of Christianity is that God has come to rescue us! Christianity isn't simply punching your ticket for an afterlife in heaven; it's the good news of what Jesus has done on our behalf to restore us to relationship with God. A.W. Tozer once wrote, "The Bible is not an end in itself, but a means to bring men to an intimate and satisfying knowledge of God, that they may enter into Him, that they may delight in His presence, may taste and know the inner sweetness of the very God Himself in the core and center of their hearts." This longing to know and experience God is seen in the lives of biblical figures like King David, Mary, and Paul. This longing is seen in church history in Polycarp, Augustine, Martin Luther, and Amy Carmichael.

Does this same longing, yearning, and passionate pursuit of God mark us? Is there a gap between saints of the past and ourselves? Are we too easily content with low-grade, suburban spirituality?

## Read Philippians 3:1-4:1

### Discussion Questions

#### Explore

1. Have you ever visited another country, either on vacation or for work? What was your experience like? How was that culture similar or different from your own?

### Engage

2. What does Paul warn the Philippians to look out for in Philippians 3:2-3? What does Paul mean when he says he could have confidence in the flesh? How do modern people have confidence in the flesh?
3. How does Paul contrast two different forms of righteousness in Philippians 3:7-9?
4. In Philippians 3:12-16, Paul gives at least two reasons why Christians should grow in their godliness; what are they and why do they matter as motivations for holiness?
5. Paul encourages the Philippians to follow his example in Philippians 3:17. Why is imitation such an important part of true learning?
6. Paul warns the Christian community about enemies of Christ in Philippians 3:18-20. For the enemies of Christ, what is their outcome? Who is their God? What is their glory?
7. In Philippians 3:20-4:1, what is Paul getting at when he encourages the Philippians to live as citizens of Heaven?

### Apply

8. Why do you think most of American evangelicals seem to be content with a low-grade spirituality? Why do you think we, as modern evangelical Christians living in America, are so distracted, indifferent, and satisfied with lesser things?
9. The main aim of the Christian life isn't merely to improve our moral actions, but to know God. How can we get so sidetracked with other priorities? What is the relationship between morality and knowing God?
10. What are some of the secondary pursuits and passions in your life that distract you from the primary purpose of existence? What sorts of things stir your imagination, affection and passion for Jesus to accomplish the mission he has given us?
11. Hebrews 12:1 encourages us to lay aside everything that might hinder us from our race of faith. What sorts of things can you identify in your life that aren't sin but do hinder you from what's truly and eternally significant? What practical steps can you take to re-prioritize?

### Memory Verse - Philippians 3:8<sup>ESV</sup>

*Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.*

## Introduction

A ship is moved by a rudder; a car is directed by a steering wheel; and a human's life is driven by his thoughts. What we think becomes our words and our words become our actions. If we change our minds, we can often make massive changes in our lives because our focus determines our direction, our attitude and often, our outcome.

It has been said, as we think, so we become, and in Romans 12, Paul writes that we're transformed through the renewing of our minds. What we think matters greatly. Yet, even though the life of the mind is so significant to the outcome of all we do, our thought-life is often left undisciplined.

Let's look at what it means to grow into Christian maturity as we begin to bring every thought into submission to Christ; for Jesus is Lord over all, including our inner thought life.

## Read Philippians 4:2-9

### Discussion Questions

#### Engage

1. Share a story of one of the most meaningful experiences you have had in the area of prayer. Was it an answered prayer? A miracle? A sense of deep community with others? Or someone praying *for* you?

#### Explore

2. In Philippians 4:2-3, what recommendation does Paul give toward the ongoing conflict between Euodia and Syntyche? What does it mean to agree in the Lord?
3. What discipline does Paul say we are to use to combat anxiety (Philippians 4:4-7)? What eight things does Paul encourage us to practice so that the peace of God will be with us?
4. Why does Paul encourage Christians to meditate on what is honorable (Philippians 4:8-9)?
5. Following the command in Philippians 4:9, whose teaching and example are we called to imitate?

## Apply

6. Paul addresses an ongoing conflict between two Christian women in the church at Philippi. Why is it so important to work towards unity in the church? What can be accomplished when we're unified? What happens when there is unresolved conflict within a church? Are there any conflicts or unresolved situations you need to address for the sake of fostering greater unity (please use discretion in sharing)?
7. Where do you see areas of anxiety in your heart that need to be processed through prayer?
8. In a busy and overwhelming world, how do you pray consistently? How do you pray privately, with family and with other Christians? Is prayer an easy or difficult spiritual discipline for you? Why or why not?
9. Discuss Paul's encouragement for us to, "think about these things." What does that mean? How does it look in our everyday lives?

### Memory Verse - (Philippians 4:6, ESV)

*Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.*

## Introduction

Businesses and individuals get wealthy off of our discontentment. Think about it; advertising makes billions of dollars every year by creating deep discontentment within us. It's really incredible to see once you know what to look and listen for, because it's everywhere. Almost every commercial, billboard, and magazine ad provokes us toward discontentment. The message is clear: *you aren't really happy until you get this new car, computer, clothing, etc. You deserve this, you've worked hard; why don't you have this? Who are you without it?*

How can we possibly find true contentment in a world of insecurity, greed, and selfishness? We're brainwashed to believe that we must have more, better, newer, and greater, but as the cash registers sing, our souls grow cold. What good is it to have all this world can offer and still find ourselves empty where it matters most?

Let's look at the final section of the letter of to the Philippians from the Apostle Paul, who was locked up in a Roman jail with more to complain about than any of us, yet he encouraged followers of Jesus to find true contentment.

## Read Philippians 4:10-23

### Discussion Questions

#### Engage

1. What is one of the most ridiculous TV commercials you have ever seen?
2. As we begin to explore the topic of true contentment, when do you tend to find yourself complaining or discontent?

#### Explore

3. In Philippians 4:12, Paul says he has learned the secret of being content. Why is contentment a secret to most of the world?
4. Philippians 4:13 is one of the most misused Bible verses in all of the scriptures. How would you explain to someone, in context, what this passage really means?
5. In 4:17 Paul says that he seeks the fruit that increases to the Philippians' credit. What is the fruit Paul is mentioning here?

## Apply

6. How would you define biblical contentment using Philippians 4:11-13? How does Jesus give us strength to be content, regardless of our situation?
7. What are some of the results of discontentment in your life? What sorts of thoughts, actions or activities foster discontentment in your heart?
8. Where are some common areas of discontentment in your heart now, and how do they challenge your faith? How is discontentment a subtle form of unbelief? How can you battle and put discontentment to death in your heart?
9. What did you find most helpful or challenging during the series in Philippians? How can you be praying for and encouraging one another?

### Memory Verse - Philippians 4:11 <sup>ESV</sup>

*Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am, to be content.*

**Additional Study Resources\*** (Some of our favorites are in bold.)

### **Sermon Series**

[Philippians Sermons – The Village Church – Pastor Matt Chandler and Other Speakers](#)

[Philippians – Redeemer Presbyterian Church – Pastor Timothy Keller and Other Speakers](#)

[Philippians – Desiring God Ministries – Dr. John Piper](#)

[Sermons in the book of Philippians – Grace to You – John MacArthur](#)

[Humility: The Message of Philippians by Dr. Mark Dever](#)

[Philippians - The Gospel Comes To Philippi by Dr. Albert Martin](#)

[Philippians - Downtown Cornerstone Church – Pastor Adam Sinnett](#)

### **Articles on Philippians**

[Third Millennium Ministries - Overview of the Book of Philippians - Dr. Joseph R. Nally, Jr.](#)

[Free PDF Commentary on Philippians by Vincent Cheung](#)

[Philippians \(Sermon Manuscripts\) by Geoff Thomas](#)

### **Book Recommendation**

[To Live Is Christ to Die Is Gain Paperback by Matt Chandler](#)

[Exalting Jesus in Philippians \(Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary\) by Tony Merida](#)

[Basics for Believers: An Exposition of Philippians by D. A. Carson](#)

[Paul's Letter to the Philippians \(New International Commentary on the New Testament\)](#)

[by Gordon D. Fee](#)

[Philippians by John F. MacArthur](#)

### **Other Resources**

[Read Scripture: Philippians - The Bible Project with Dr. Tim Mackie of Western Seminary](#)

[Overview of the Book of Philippians – Biblical Training – Dr. Bill Mounce](#)

[Philippians overview by Dr. Craig Blomberg of BiblicalTraining.org](#)

