

THE PHILIPPIANS STUDY

Leader's Guide

The purpose of this discussion is to introduce our Life Group members the book of Philippians. As we go through each chapter, we will learn to discover God's eternal principles, which can be applied to their everyday life's situation.



Discussion Facilitator Tips:

- Ensure that the aim is first to understand the text and then to make it meaningful and relevant. The questions provided are intended to bring out the relevance for today.
- Begin with a prayer for the help and guidance of the Holy Spirit.
- Encourage everyone to participate in the reading or the discussion.
- Begin the study by reading the whole passage
- Discuss the overall meaning of the passage by asking your LifeGroup members of what could be the key focuses/emphases in the particular chapter
- Spend appropriate amount of time on each question with as many members as possible making a contribution. At the end of each discussion the leader should summarise the main points that have arisen and direct the group towards the key contents given in this guide
- A balance must be kept between ascertaining what the Bible teaches and what are the opinions of participants. So the facilitator should make sure that there is an understanding of the passage before questions are raised.

AUTHOR:

The Apostle Paul, along with Timothy (1:1)

DATE:

Probably the early 60s AD

BACKGROUND:

The city of Philippi was named after Philip II of Macedon, the father of Alexander the Great. He fortified it and exploited its mineral wealth, having conquered it in 360 B.C. The city became a Roman colony in 167 B.C. Its population was a mixture of indigenous Thracian, Greek and Latin families. Consequently there was a great variety of divinities and religious cults. There was a Jewish community to whom were attached the Gentile "Godfearers", who worshipped the God of the Jews.

A description of the foundation of the church at Philippi is found in Acts 16:9-40. Here we learn that Paul was specifically instructed to go into Macedonia region to preach the gospel there. When he preached in Philippi and founded a church there he was accused of introducing an alien cult. This was because Christianity, unlike Judaism and other religions, did not have the sanction of the state as a religion and was thus technically unlawful.

Having founded the church Paul kept in touch with it and, as this letter reveals, received various gifts from the members. The letter has been dated around 62 A.D while Paul was imprisoned in Rome (Acts 28:16). When he was in prison there, His imprisonment was more like what is called today "house arrest" and so he was free to

employ a scribe and obtain papyrus to write his letters.

The obvious reason for his writing this letter was to thank the Philippians and the church for various aids given to Paul through Epaphroditus when he was in need. It is also a very personal letter sent to his first converts on European soil.

The book of Philippians is known as a letter of joy or friendship between the apostle Paul and a beloved church in the Philippi. It is impregnated with the themes of joy, confidence in God, Christ-centred Humility, Security in Christ, Purpose of Gospel-driven living, our Faithfulness to God's work, Unity in Christ and Perseverance in the Christian life and faith as Paul urges the Christians to live humbly and worthy of their calling as disciples of Christ.

READ: Philippians Chapter ONE

EXAMINE:

Philippians Chapter ONE is where the Apostle Paul tells of his longing to see the Philippians and explains how his sufferings have resulted in glory for God Almighty.

Paul started the letter by greeting the church in Philippi and expressing joy and thanksgiving for their partnership in the gospel. Paul also states that he is in prison. Though he cannot travel and preach the Word, the Kingdom of God is advancing and his situation has given courage to many others.

He goes on to say that regardless of what happens to him in the future that the only thing he wishes is he conducts himself in a way that Christ is glorified!

(For this chapter, you should aim to get the participants to think about what they can do in their lives to live out Christianity in all aspects, to overcome that fear and to realise that Christianity and suffering go hand in hand. That when this time comes we are to respond as Paul did when he was imprisoned.)

DISCUSS: PHILIPPIANS ONE can be broken into 3 sections

I. Philippians 1:1-11 "Paul's Greeting & Power of Prayer"

SCRIPTURES EXPLAINED:

After his greetings Paul shares with the church the prayer he makes for its members, that they may please Christ.

Verse 1-2: Paul's greeting

Timothy became Paul's companion at Lystra. He was the son of a Jewish Christian mother and a Greek father. He was already a disciple when Paul met him but because his father was Greek (pagan) Paul had him circumcised before allowing him to join him. See Acts 16:1-3. He had a special relationship with the Philippian Christians and Paul intended to send him to them as his own representative (see 2:19-24).

In the Old Testament, the prophets were called "servants of the LORD". By describing himself and Timothy in this way Paul was indirectly stating that they were truly appointed by God and engaged in God's work. A note of authority is therefore to be seen in what he has to say in the letter.

Paul's usual description of Christians was "saints". In Christ, sinners are accepted by God and are being "made holy" or "sanctified" by the Spirit. So they are saints (holy ones). Bishops and deacons were the two basic types of church officers. Bishops were overseers, shepherds, pastors, and are sometimes called presbyters (elders). Deacons were the servants of the church, looking after her works of mercy in terms of the poor, sick, orphans and widows.

"Grace" is God's mercy to undeserving sinners. "Peace" is wholeness and thus is the salvation of the whole person through the mercy of God in Jesus Christ. Paul desires the final and total salvation of all the saints.

Verse 3-11: Paul's prayer

Paul rejoices before God in all his prayers for the Philippians because he was thankful that they had entered into a partnership with him right from the start (4:15). By generously supplying his needs they enabled him to carry on the preaching of the gospel without hindrance (see also Romans 15:26, 2 Corinthians 9:13).

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. What are the implications for Christians of being "servants of Jesus Christ" and "saints of God" (v.1)?
2. Why is praying for others so important? What do we mean by the expression "the ministry of prayer"?
3. If we all sincerely prayed Paul's prayer in verses 9-11, what kind of improvements and changes would we expect to see in our Christ-centred fellowship?

Verse 6: The church was facing internal divisions and external opponents, and there was a real fear that they would not endure to the end. Paul reassures them by reminding them that it was God himself who was responsible for the work of conversion in their lives. He could be trusted to bring his own work to its completion. The “day of Christ” is a reference to the second coming of Jesus Christ when God’s work of re-creation and redemption will be completed (see also Romans 8:19–23; 1 Corinthians 15). In the Old Testament the “day of the LORD”, at first thought of as a moment of vindication for the Israelites, became a day of judgement in the teaching of the prophets (see Amos 5:18–20 and Zephaniah 1:14–18). In the New Testament the ‘day’ is vindication for the people of Christ when their salvation will be completed; it is also judgement for those who reject him (2 Thessalonians 2).

Paul’s confinement in prison will prevent him seeing them immediately and so he will send his assistants to them (2:19–29) and will exercise his pastoral care through his prayers. He prays that the love for one another will be expressed in the mutual relationships in the church as the members recognise what needs to be done in specific situations. “Knowledge and discernment” refers at least to the ability to see a need and know how it can be met. In living in this way they will approve what is excellent and thereby be pure (and so not cause offence to others) and blameless (in their relationships with other Christians). The fruits of righteousness are probably the same as the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22).

II. Philippians 1:12-18 “Sufferings Advance the Gospel”

SCRIPTURES EXPLAINED:

Having expressed his prayer for his brothers and sisters in Christ, Paul goes on to assure them that his present imprisonment has good results by the providence and power of God.

Verse 12–14: Benefits from imprisonment

The apostle sees his own fate and the proclamation of the gospel as bound tightly together. His imprisonment was no mere accident of history; it was part of the divine plan to promote the spreading of the gospel. He dispels any suggestion that he was no true disciple just because he was prevented from preaching by his time in prison, or that his imprisonment actually hindered the progress of the faith. He gives two reasons why his imprisonment served to advance the cause of Christ. First of all it was seen by those who were guarding him and by the pagans that he was not in prison because he had broken the laws of the empire or offended the political and civil authorities. He was imprisoned because he preached the gospel of Jesus Christ. Secondly, most ordinary Christians were made bolder and more confident in speaking the word of God even though they recognised that they opened themselves to the same fate as Paul. His absence contributed to their spiritual development. The praetorian guard was the official bodyguard of the emperor, but as it numbered as many as 9,000 members Paul must have met only a proportion of them.

Verse 15–18: Christ is proclaimed

These verses are not easy to interpret for they appear to stand in tension with verse 14 where Paul had spoken approvingly of Christians’ being strengthened by his own witness in prison. Here his imprisonment appears to have caused a division among the Christians. Those who were jealous of his position and authority, or who had a different strategy of mission from his own, apparently increased their evangelistic work in the hope of stirring him to envy, and to show that they were more successful. Others out of love for the apostle and recognition of the true purpose of his imprisonment were also enthusiastic in their evangelism. Since Paul’s primary purpose was to proclaim the gospel, and since this was being done despite his own imprisonment and despite mixed motives, he rejoiced.

The actual identity of those who preached from envy and rivalry is difficult to establish. They were not false teachers. Paul attacks not their teaching but their purpose as far as he is involved. They are probably a group of evangelists who regard Paul as an obstacle to preaching the gospel because he is seen to be in prison. It is not that they have anything against Paul personally, but that their idea of effective missionary tactics has no place for obvious defeat. They depend on triumph over the opposition and unhindered success, and so are embarrassed by the apostle’s imprisonment.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

- I. Is a persecution/ suffering of Christians, whatever form it takes, always because of their commitment to Christ? Are other factors involved? How could we respond to such struggles and difficulties because of our commitment to Christ and use them to advance the gospel (v13)
- II. How important is the motivation of Christians in the proclamation of the gospel? Does God bless imperfect motivation (v.15-18)?
- III. In verse 17, Paul tells the church that he is in chains. Chains not only used to keep prisoners in prison but are also used to bind things to one another and it is not necessarily a bad thing. We are all bound to a family because God has placed us there. We are bound to our school or university; we are bound to the sports club or math club we are involved with.
 - What are the places we have been ‘chained/bound’ to in our lives?
 - How can we make it known to others that we are Christ-followers?

III. Philippians 1:19-30 – “Living a life worthy of the Gospel: Honouring & Glorifying Christ”

SCRIPTURES EXPLAINED:

For Paul there is no higher purpose in life on earth than to live in such a way that Christ is praised and exalted.

Verse 19–26 : Christ is life and death is gain

Verse 19: By the “Spirit of Jesus Christ” Paul means the Spirit of the risen and ascended Christ who came to the church on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2). Paul experienced the presence and power of the Spirit not only in his missionary activities but now also in his imprisonment.

With the Spirit’s help and the prayers of the Christians of Philippi he is sure that his time in prison will result in his deliverance. But what kind of deliverance? In the light of verse 20 it is probable that Paul is thinking not of release from prison but the final outcome of his life when both his gospel and his witness to it will be vindicated by God.

Verse 20: Paul’s primary concern is for Christ to be honoured. His own physical circumstances are of secondary consideration; his one desire is to remain a faithful witness to Christ.

Verses 21–23: Death is a gain, but not because Paul finds this life a burden. On the contrary, he rejoices in his present life because it is Christ-centred. His total ambition is to preach and commend Christ, and in this activity he has the help of the Spirit. Death is gain because it is the gate into the actual presence of Christ.

For Paul, who had probably not seen or heard Jesus in the days of his public ministry, this meeting with Christ had a great attraction. He is torn between his desire to remain in the flesh and his desire to be with Christ. However, for the sake of his followers and fellow believers he sees how necessary it is to remain in the flesh and labour among them.

Verse 27–28 : Encouragement to unity and Godly living

Verse 27: Paul’s imprisonment and the threat of persecution had caused division in the church at Philippi. He appeals for unity in their worship, fellowship and evangelism. Their lives as well as their preaching were important for a true witness to the gospel. He exhorts them to be courageous and to strive to maintain the faith even in his absence and in the face of opposition.

Verse 28: The courage and steadfastness of the Philippians in their serving of Jesus by word and deed will be a sign to them that their salvation is from God himself.

By seeing this commitment to Christ and his way, their opponents will realise that they are storing up for themselves condemnation from God.

Verse 29–30 Suffering is a privilege

In the primitive churches suffering through the persecution of opponents seems to have been the inevitable lot of Christians. This was exactly what Jesus promised (Matthew 5:11; John 15: 20).

However, when Paul says that it has been granted to the Philippians to suffer for the sake of Christ he seems to suggest that it was a special privilege given to them. They are to be engaged in the same struggle as Paul himself was in.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

- I. What are the two things Paul is torn between? Why? (v.21-26)
- II. What does fruitful labour mean? Since we are still alive, are we being fruitful? Has anything held you back from making it known/ producing a fruitful labour?
- III. Read Phil 1:27a. What does ‘Conducting Ourselves in A Manner Worthy of the Gospel of Christ’ actually mean? (Be practical)
- IV. What does Paul say to the Philippians and us on this subject in v27b-30? What has been granted to us?