

THE PHILIPPIANS STUDY

CHAPTER 4

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 FOUR

EXAMINE:

Paul begins this section with the word “therefore”, which means that it has to be read in the light of what he has written in 3:20–21. In the light of the great future, which is being prepared for the people of God, Paul begins to express his joy that that people has been joined by the Philippians due to his labours. The Philippian Christians are his crown, the sign of his success in the Lord’s work (v.1)

DISCUSS:

PHILIPPIANS THREE can be broken into 2 sections

I. Philippians 4:1–9 **‘Paul’s Pastoral Responsibilities’**

SCRIPTURES EXPLAINED:

1. Paul Counsels Two Women (v.2–3)

Paul pleads with Euodia and Syntyche to overcome their differences and live as fellow members of the body of Christ. It must have been a serious dispute since Paul enlists someone whom he calls a “loyal yoke-fellow” (NIV). His identity is not known but he was probably a respected and influential member of the church whose word would be heeded. These women were dear to Paul because at some stage they had worked with him in spreading the gospel.

The “book of life” picks up the idea found in Scripture that there is a book in heaven in which the names of the faithful are written. (See Exodus 32:32–33; Daniel 12:1; Luke 10:20; Revelation 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12, 15; 21:27)

2. Joy & Peace (v.4–9)

Verse 4-5: Paul repeats his appeal to the Philippians to rejoice. This constant appeal was not due to an optimism that everything would turn out right in the end. It was grounded in faith in the Lord who is true and faithful. With their rejoicing is to go a gracious, forgiving and tolerant attitude to one another. Only in this way could they hope to witness effectively for Christ. The call to be gracious is strengthened with a solemn warning of the nearness of the second coming of Jesus Christ. “The Lord is near” (NIV) may be a quotation from Psalm 145:18 (The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth). It seems to also function much the same as the ‘Marana tha’ of 1 Corinthians 16:22. (The Greek for ‘Come, Lord’ reproduces an Aramaic expression, Marana-tha used by early Christians).

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. Disagreements do happen in church. According to Paul’s instructions in verse 2-3, why should we work out disagreements in the Church? And How?

Firstly disagreements ≠ sin, usually it will be a different viewpoint or personal preference on how to do something. Both views are often valid and they both have a good, strong argument backing their point. However, differences could potentially divide the church and even cause ill feelings towards each other unless we don’t align our differences to our common goals in championing the cause of the Gospel (v.3). Unresolved disagreements are blatant disregards against unity between brothers and sisters in the church, which hinder God’s family to be like-minded, with one love, spirit and mind. (Phil 2:2)

2 How should we work out any potential disagreements in church?

We are taught by Paul to bring a third party to mediate the conflict, someone with authority, a broad knowledge on what the Bible says and an objective stand on the matter if the two parties are unable to resolve the conflicts by themselves (Matthew 18). Everyone is encouraged to develop the attitude of love & forgiveness all the through the conflict resolution process. In order to promote unity in the body of Christ, we must develop and maintain the capacity to forgive. Such forgiveness doesn’t mean that we ignore the wrong committed against us. Rather, it means that we will no longer allow the wrong to be a barrier to the relationship. “Forgiveness is a catalyst creating the atmosphere necessary for a fresh start and a new beginning.” – Martin Luther King. We also need to recognise that the wrong we’ve suffered doesn’t entirely represent the other person’s identity. It’s important that we acknowledge that our opponent, like each one of us, possesses both bad and good qualities. We ought to choose to find the good and focus on it. God’s love will cause us seek not to defeat or humiliate the other party concerned or opponent, but to win his or her friendship and understanding. Such an attitude flows not from ourselves, but from God as his unconditional love works through us. As followers of Christ who seek to lead as God would lead, we must remember that the more freely we forgive, the more clearly we reveal the nature of our heavenly Father.

Verse 6-7: Following the lead of Christ in Matthew 6:25-34, Paul bids them to show no anxiety. They should trust the One in whom their faith rests. Prayer and petition (Supplications) are to be made with thanksgiving. Petitions (Supplications) are specific prayers for specific needs. Thanksgiving is important for it shows a recognition and acknowledgement of past mercies and provides added encouragement to trust in the Lord for the future.

Verse 7: This verse is well known for its use in services of worship. When trust in the Lord replaces anxiety the Christian experiences an incomprehensible peace, which God alone gives. It is the peace, which God himself imparts to those who put their trust in him. With such a peace they will not waver in their love and allegiance to Jesus Christ. In the middle of problems and persecution, they will have an inward calm.

In verses 8-9 Paul urges the Philippians to dwell upon all that is conducive to true Christian character - truth, moral goodness, justice, sexual purity, etc. He holds up before them his own example in both his teaching and his conduct, and assures them of God's peace if they follow this type of Christian thinking.

II. Philippians 4:10-23 'Concluding Remarks'

SCRIPTURES EXPLAINED:

Paul closes his letter with an appreciation of gifts received from the church and with greetings to all the membership.

I. Paul's Gratitude Towards the Gifts (v.10-20)

Verse 10-14: Paul thanks the church for their concern towards him and their generosity in sending gifts. From verse 10 it appears that they had not lost their concern for Paul in his absence but had had no opportunity of showing it. Paul's reluctance to admit real need (verses 11-12) is not due to a lack of appreciation for what the Philippians had sent to him.

Rather it was due to his desire to maintain his independence (he laboured as a tentmaker even when preaching the gospel in Acts 18:3) and his chosen role of poverty. He had learnt to maintain a spirit of contentment regardless of his circumstances. His enduring attitude did not derive from mere self-discipline and strength of character. It was due to the fact that he knew Christ, and he could rely on him for strength in his weakness and in all his labours as an apostle.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. How should we react to worry and anxiety (v.6-7)?

Pray. We are taught to not worry about the things of life (Matt 6:25-34) and if we are to lay them at the foot of the cross. If we have trusted God with our eternal salvation why don't we trust with the lesser temporary things? Even though they may look bad trust God to work all things for good. (Rom 8:28)

2. How should we pray?

'With thanksgiving...' (v.6) when we start to focus on the things God has given to us simply by starting with a prayer of thanks we will start to realise that God has truly blessed us. It becomes apparent that the things we are worrying about aren't so big because we remember the times God has been faithful to us in the past

3. What should we think about? Why? (v. 8-9)

Paul outlines we should think about truth, moral goodness, justice, sexual purity, etc When we start to think like Christ calls us to think our perspective will change into one that of Christ's. Once our perspective is changed, we will begin to view our lives and the people we meet the way Christ views them. When we view them as Christ views them, we will begin to act like Christ acted towards them.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. How can we bless those who are faithfully serving God and labouring in ministry for the Lord, especially those who have gone out for missions (v. 10-14)?

Pray for them, send them gifts, and provide them necessary resources. Just because they aren't in our church physically, they are still a part of the body of Christ. To help them be more effective for Christ, we can offer what we have and support them in whatever way we can either through spiritual, emotional and physical/ tangible means (1 Tim. 2:1-2, Heb. 13:17). It may not seem like much but the smallest bit helps. Paul rejoiced even in the concern that the Philippians expressed (Phil 4:10).

Verse 15-20: The phrase “In the early days of your acquaintance with the Gospel” (v.15) is most probably a reference to the new direction of the Christian missionary enterprise westwards once it entered Greece through Macedonia (see Acts 16 and a map of Paul’s missionary journeys).

The gifts from Philippi certainly gave Paul pleasure, but the greater satisfaction came from knowing that the gifts brought credit to the Philippian church itself. In fact the Philippians sent more than he required. The terms used to describe their gifts are all taken from the sacrificial ideas of the Old Testament (Genesis 8:21; Exodus 29:18; Leviticus 1:9,13; Ezekiel 20:41). Therefore to make gifts in the service of Christ is like an act of worship.

God does not leave those who at self-denying cost give to the work of the Kingdom without their basic needs being satisfied. In fact, Paul claims that God rewards them not in the way they deserve but in the way that reflects his own riches and glory. In this context it is fitting that Paul ends by ascribing praise to our God and ‘Father’, the Father who knows how to give good gifts to his children (Matthew 7:11).

2. Final Greetings (v21-23)

Verse 21: When saying ‘ALL the saints’, Paul is here careful, as he has been throughout the letter, to include the whole community within his pastoral care. He is concerned about every Christian in whom the Holy Spirit dwells.

From Rome Paul sends the greetings of the church, but he singles out for special mention “those who belong to Caesar’s household”. It probably means those slaves and servants of Caesar’s bodyguard who had been converted through meeting Paul in his imprisonment. As Philippi was a military colony, it is possible that some of these people were known by members of the church in Philippi.

In his benediction (v.23), Paul prays that the grace of Christ, who is the centre and theme of his own life (1:21), will be deeply effective in the lives of the people.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

2. What does Paul mean specifically by ‘I can do everything through him who gives me strength’? (v13)

Paul believes God is His true Source of Strength and Sustainer of life. As doing God’s will and fulfilling His calling, he could face and deal with any situations and circumstances through God’s provision of strength, support and sufficiency.

3. In verses 16-17, Paul thanked the Philippian Church for their gifts sent to him when he was in need. He also said that he didn’t expect them to do that but was overwhelmed by their generosity and thoughtfulness through their gifts and support at the same time. What should we do when someone gives us support, kind help and generous assistance?

We should always show appreciation and honour to anyone who serves and supports us. We should be thankful to God and appreciative of others whom God uses to bless us including those who give of their time, talents, treasures for the work of God and the advancement of God’s Kingdom.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. Who are ‘all the saints’? Why did Paul emphasize the word, ‘ALL’ here? (v.21)

All the saints = Every Christian in the community of believers. Paul, by signing off this way, shows that every believer, whether in Macedonia, Jerusalem, Ephesus or wherever across the world, are together supporting one another and fighting for the same cause of the Gospel. Regardless of geographical locations, they are still one community.

2. What do you think is the major lesson, which the 21st century church can learn from this whole letter to the Philippians?