

Philippians – Life Group Studies 2018

Preaching Dates and topics

13 May	Philippians 1:1-11	Partners in the gospel
20 May	Philippians 1:12-30	Living a worthy life
27 May	Philippians 2:1-11	Having the mind of Jesus
3 June	Philippians 2:12-30	Work out your salvation
10 June	Philippians 3:1-11	It's all rubbish
17 June	Philippians 3:12-4:1	Pressing on to the finish
24 June	Philippians 4:2-23	Rejoice in the Lord always

Some Background

During Paul's second missionary journey he travelled to the Roman colony of Philippi (in ancient Macedonia and modern day Greece) in response to a vision God gave him of a Macedonian man pleading for help. Upon arriving in Philippi, one of the first people to hear and believe Paul's message of good news about Jesus Christ was not a man, but a businesswoman named Lydia. Next Paul and Silas encountered a demon possessed slave girl who kept following them around and bothering them until Paul drove the spirit from the girl by the power of Christ. This infuriated the slave girl's owners who had been earning money from the demon's ability to tell peoples' fortunes through her. Therefore, these men had Paul and Silas taken before the city's magistrates who had them severely beaten and thrown into prison.

While Paul and Silas were chained in their cell, they continued to pray and sing praises to God. Suddenly, there was a great earthquake and the prison doors were thrown open! The jailer drew his sword to kill himself, thinking that he had lost all of his prisoners and knowing that he would face certain execution for failing to guard his prisoners. However, Paul stopped him, prompting the jailer to ask, *"What must I do to be saved!"* To this Paul simply replied, *"Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved..."* The jailer did believe and on that day he too became a prisoner set free.

You can read the rest of the story for yourself in Acts 16. However, it would appear that the church at Philippi began with, among others, a businesswoman named Lydia, a slave girl, a

Roman jailer, and their families. But as you read this letter you will see that this little church continued to grow as more and more residents of Philippi came to believe the good news about Jesus Christ.

Some years later, Paul wrote the letter we are now studying to the church at Philippi in order to encourage these believers in their faith while he was imprisoned in Rome, again for preaching about Jesus. Paul was particularly concerned for them since they had sent one of their significant leaders, Epaphroditus, to support Paul during his imprisonment (and they did so during a time that they were facing struggles of their own). This tells us something of the love and concern that existed between Paul and the church at Philippi. Even though Paul was being kept from this church by his imprisonment, his love for them could not be contained. In fact, one of the most encouraging things about this letter is how joyful and full of thanksgiving it is. Paul's letter to the Philippians is mostly pastoral in nature. As he writes, Paul's expressions of love, hope, and thankfulness for this church spill off the page. At one point Paul declares, "*God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus*" (Philippians 1:8). Even during his absence from them, Paul continued to pray that God, who began his good work in them, would bring it to completion through his son, Jesus Christ.

Resources

I have been helped in writing these studies by drawing on the following books and study guides:

Philippians: Jesus our Joy by Donald Baker

Philippians: A life worthy of the Gospel published by CRU

(<https://www.cru.org/us/en/train-and-grow/bible-studies/philippians-life-worthy-of-gospel.html>)

Basics for Believers by D. A. Carson

Study 1: Partners in the Gospel

Introduction

- Who regularly prays for you, especially for you to grow in your relationship with God?
- Who do you regularly pray for, especially their growth in their relationship with God?

Paul's relationship with the church at Philippi shines through the pages of this letter. He knows them personally, having shared Jesus with them and established the church in Philippi (You can read about that in Acts 16). Now he is writing to them to encourage them in their faith and to assure them of his prayers for them.

Read Philippians 1:1-11

- What feelings does Paul express here towards the Philippians? List them.
- Why does he feel this way about them?
- What does Paul mean when he describes the Philippians as 'partners in the gospel'? In practical terms what does partnership in the gospel look like today?
- Who 'began a good work' in the Philippians and why is Paul confident that he will 'carry it on to completion'? What does this look like?
- What strikes you about the content of Paul's prayer for the Philippians in verses 9-11? Do you pray for people like this?
- Why are knowledge and depth of insight important in shaping our growth in love, isn't love all we need?
- What does it mean to be 'filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ'? [Does Galatians 5:22-23 help here?]

Putting it into practice

- Share what you are thankful to God for about each other. Pray giving thanks for these things.
- As a Life Group how can you commit to pray for each other through the week and not only when you meet together. Discuss what level of commitment you can all agree to.
- How can you shape your prayers for each other around growth in love, wisdom, and righteousness and not just the pressing concerns of today? [Not that there is anything wrong with sharing our needs and praying for them too – but is that all you pray for each other?]
- In pairs, share one area of your Christian life where you want to be filled with the fruit of righteousness. Pray this for each other now.

Study 2: Living a worth life

Introduction

- When have you experienced hardship, ridicule or difficulty as a result of following Jesus?
- What helped you to deal with these hard times?

Paul is writing this letter from prison in Rome. He is imprisoned because of his preaching of the good news about Jesus' death and resurrection. You might expect this to result in Paul becoming angry and disillusioned and yet the key word that keeps coming up again and again through this passage is joy!

Read Philippians 1:12-30

- How has Paul's imprisonment actually helped to spread the good news of Jesus?
- Compare the motives of the two groups described in verses 15-18
- Have you ever been critical of the motives or methods of people who are sharing Jesus? How does this attitude compare with Paul's?
- How does Paul weigh up the pros and cons of life and death? What does this show us about his priorities?
- What does it mean to say 'to live is Christ, to die is gain'?
- To what extent have you adopted Paul's attitude to life and death?
- What does it mean to 'conduct yourself in a manner worthy of the gospel'?

Putting it into practice

- What are the most difficult circumstances that you are facing at the moment?
- What tips from this passage might help to bring joy and a Jesus-focus in the midst of your difficult circumstances?
- As a Life Group are you conducting yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ? In what areas can you strengthen your conduct?
- Pray together for joy in the midst of your difficulties and for lives that are worthy of the gospel of Christ

Study 3: Having the mind of Jesus

Introduction

- Think about someone you know who is a model of humility. What is it that impresses you most about them?
- Is there a contradiction between having a good self-image and being humble?

Paul has been encouraging the Philippians to live a life worthy of the gospel of Christ and emphasizing unity as a key aspect of such a life. He now drills down more deeply on this theme and points their attention to Jesus as the one on whom they should model their lives.

Read Philippians 2:1-11

- Paul uses a series of 4 'ifs' in verse 1 followed by 'then' in verse 2. How can our experience of Jesus and his Spirit help us to live out our unity in him?
- How do selfish ambition and vain conceit undermine unity amongst Christians? Have you seen this happen?
- What does humility look like? How is it different from having poor self-esteem?
- How was humility modeled in the life of Jesus?
- What was God's response to the humility of Jesus? Is this a pattern that we can expect in our own lives? [You might also like to look at Proverbs 3:34 and James 4:10]

Putting it into practice

- In what areas of your life are you most likely to be selfishly ambitious or conceited? How does the example of Jesus challenge you to resist this temptation?
- What would greater humility look like if put into practice in your life? Write down a humility growth goal for the next month. [You might like to seal it up in an envelope and re-open it again in a month to see how you have been going!]
- How would you say your Life Group is going at being united with one another at the moment? What about unity between your group and the wider church community? Is there any sense of pride or conceit that needs to be repented of?
- Pray together giving thanks for the humility of Jesus and praying that through union with him we would increase in humility, love and unity as individuals, as a Life Group, and as a church.

Study 4: Work out your salvation

Introduction

- What, if anything, would your non-Christian friends and family say was different about the way that you live because you are a follower of Jesus?

Paul focuses in this section on living out the Christian faith in the midst of a society that has different values and priorities to those of Jesus. It is both a challenge and an encouragement to us as we seek to live for Jesus. He also highlights the importance of having fellow Christians who support and encourage us and work together with us in sharing Jesus and growing in him.

Read Philippians 2:12-30

- What does Paul mean when he says ‘work out your salvation with fear and trembling’? Does he mean that working hard for God saves us?
- Why is it important to know that ‘God works in you’ (verse 13) while you ‘work out your salvation’ (verse 12)?
- What does it mean to ‘shine like stars’ among ‘a warped and crooked generation’? In practical terms, how do you most stand out from those around you because you follow Jesus?
- How are Timothy and Epaphroditus good examples of those who seek to love and serve people like Jesus?
- If Timothy and Epaphroditus were being sent to visit your Life Group and our church, what might they do to help?
- Since they aren’t coming to visit (sorry!) in what practical ways could you do these same things for others in the Life Group and church?

Putting it into practice

- What is one area of your life where you can shine like a star amongst those that you live, study, work, or play with?
- Pray together about these things and ask that God would be powerfully at work in you as you work out these aspects of your salvation.
- Determine one thing that you can do to love and serve someone else and show genuine concern for their welfare. How will you put this into practice this week.
- Pray together that God would help you to be like Timothy and Epaphroditus as you attempt these acts of genuine concern for people this week.

Study 5: It's all Rubbish

Introduction

- What are some of the things that you have achieved that you are most proud of in your life? What things about you are central to your identity: Your family? Your job? Your house? Your sporting or academic achievements?

Paul addresses a particular challenge to the Christian faith of his readers here. Some people are trying to impose Old Testament legal requirements such as circumcision on the Philippian Christians. They are saying that you cannot be a Christian without these additional ritual requirements. Paul challenges this in very strong terms. While our danger of insisting on adding these sorts of requirements to our faith in Jesus is different, the underlying principles that Paul uses in his argument should challenge us about where we put our trust and hope.

Read Philippians 3:1-11

- Why is rejoicing in the Lord a safeguard for Christian people?
- Paul uses strong terms ('dogs', 'evildoers' 'mutilators of the flesh') to describe those who insist on circumcision. Why is he so fired up about this? What is at stake here?
- Contrast Paul the Pharisee (verses 4-6) with Paul the Christian (verses 7-11). How have his reasons for confidence changed?
- How has coming to know Jesus turned things that he used to think were gains into losses and his outstanding Resume into rubbish?
- Is Paul saying that these former things were bad in and of themselves?
- Paul speaks about knowing Christ by knowing the power of his resurrection and by participation in his suffering. What does it mean to experience these things in your life?
- Why is Paul's ultimate hope the resurrection of the dead?

Putting it into practice

- What good things in your life have the potential to be objects of boasting and confidence apart from Christ?
- Are there particular Christian things that we are inclined to boast in and have confidence in apart from the righteousness we have through Christ?
- In practical terms, how can we assess our lives to work out whether a good thing has taken priority in our lives ahead of our confidence and identity being in Christ?
- Pray for each other giving thanks for knowing Jesus. Pray that your confidence would be in him and not other things. Pray that you would know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings.

Study 6: Pressing on to the Finish

Introduction

- How is the Christian life similar to running in a race?

Paul uses athletic language in this passage as he considers living out the Christian life. He gives us a wonderful outline of both our responsibilities as Christians and also the powerful work of God in us as we work for him.

Read Philippians 3:12-4:1

- What is it that Paul has 'not yet obtained' or 'arrived at' (verse 12)?
- In verses 12-14 how would you summarise our part as Christians and God's part working in us as we live the Christian life? How well does the following dodgy clipart picture capture this dynamic?



- What does it mean to be 'mature', particularly in light of what Paul has just been saying in verses 12-14?
- In what ways is Paul a model and example that he wants others to follow?
- Paul draws a contrast between 'enemies of the cross' and Christians. What are the concerns and destiny for each group?

Putting it into practice

- Who have been models and examples to you as you have been running the Christian race? Share these with each other and give thanks to God for these people!
- In what areas do you need to strain toward what is ahead and press on in the Christian life? In what areas do you need to be reminded that Jesus has taken hold of you?
- Pray for each other as you run the race together and encourage each other to win the prize for which God called you heavenward in Christ Jesus.

Study 7: Rejoice in the Lord Always

Introduction

- How do you keep your thinking focused on Jesus in the midst of your week at work, studying, caring for your family, playing sport, and engaging in the community? Do you have a tendency to separate your Christian world from the rest of your world?

This passage is packed full of memory verses – verses that are worth learning off by heart and bringing to our minds amidst the different life circumstances that we face. Paul also thanks the Philippians for their financial backing for his missionary work and provides for us a helping way of thinking about think about and use our own material resources for serving the mission of Jesus in the world.

Read Philippians 4:2-23

- It appears that there is some sort of conflict going on between Euodia and Syntyche, but we don't know the details. What advice and help does Paul offer in this situation? What other biblical principles might be brought to bear in this conflict situation?
- Rejoicing has been a key theme in this letter. What does it look like to rejoice in the Lord always (verse 4)? Does this mean you have to be happy all the time?
- What things have you been anxious about lately?
- What does Paul suggest doing as a strategy for dealing with anxiety in our lives? Have you found this to be very effective personally for you?
- How can each of the promises and commands in verses 4-7 help you to be joyful, peaceful and free from anxiety?
- How does thinking about the right things (verse 8) and putting the right things into practice (verse 9) lead to peace?
- What is Paul's secret to being content in all circumstances? Are you content?
- What positive motivations does Paul offer here for financially supporting gospel ministry?

Putting it into practice

- Which of the following do you feel that you struggle with most: conflict, joy, gentleness, anxiety, pure thoughts, generosity?
- What practical advice from this passage can you put into practice this week to help you to grow more like Jesus in relation to this area of struggle?
- Share these struggles and strategies with each other and commit each other to God in prayer as you seek to grow in Jesus. You might like to close together using v.23.