

EPISTLE TO THE PHILIPPIANS

6-WEEK STUDY GUIDE

Theological Focus

The epistle to the Philippians was written by the Apostle Paul from prison to the church in Philippi. This letter is highly practical and doctrinal, specifically regarding Christology, a branch of theology that focuses on Jesus. It offers foundational principles for Christian living, modeling a life of suffering and humility as exemplified by Jesus, and provides insights to encourage the spiritual growth of the believers.

Several key themes addressed in this letter are:

1. perseverance in faith and living worthy of the gospel (Philippians 1:6, 2:12-13, 3:12-13),
2. unity and humility, following the example of Christ (Philippians 2:1-11), and
3. joy in Christ even in the face of trials (Philippians 4).

Background

The church in Philippi holds significant historical and spiritual importance as the **first church** established in Europe. It was founded by the Apostle Paul at around A.D. 50 during his second missionary journey. The church began with a small group of believers, primarily Gentile women, who gathered for prayer by the riverside due to the absence of a synagogue in the city. Among the first converts was **Lydia**, a wealthy dealer in purple cloth from Thyatira, who welcomed Paul and his companions into her home (Acts 16:13-15).

The church's growth was marked by notable events, including Paul's miraculous imprisonment and the conversion of the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:25-34). As the church matured, it established structured leadership with overseers and deacons (Philippians 1:1). Over time, Paul continued to maintain a close relationship with the Philippians, expressing gratitude for their support in his letters. This enduring bond highlights the church's role as a vital partner in Paul's ministry and reflects its significance within early Christianity.

Key Verses

Philippians 1:6

Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

Philippians 1:21

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

Philippians 2:5-8

In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!

Philippians 4:6-7

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:8

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.

Philippians 4:12-13

I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

How to Use

This study guide is designed to include smaller portions of Scripture reading each week, allowing for deeper discussion of the passages and other cross-references. We also want to emphasize community time to help members get to know one another more deeply. This guide will include optional exercises to build deeper relationships within the community, such as testimony sharing and various prayer exercises.

WEEK 01 · PHILIPPIANS 1:1-11

Paul prays for all believers to grow in love that continually increases in knowledge and understanding so they can live pure and blameless lives that glorify God.

Preface

Background: Paul wrote this letter while imprisoned with Timothy in Rome, around AD 60-63. By that time, the events recorded in the Book of Acts, which documents the formation of the early church, had already occurred. In this letter, Paul frequently uses the word "rejoice" and places significant emphasis on partnership and sharing in the preaching of the gospel, considering the Philippians had supported his ministry extensively.

Warm-up question: Who do you feel thankful for right now, and why?

Study

Read Philippians 1 in its entirety to grasp the overall idea of Paul's relationship with the church in Philippi.

1. What is the overall tone or emotion that Paul conveys in this letter?
2. How did Paul refer to himself and the believers in Philippi? (1:1-2)

Notes:

- **Bond-servants**, or **servants**, in the Bible come from the Greek word *doulos*, which means 'one who is subservient to, and entirely at the disposal of, his master; a slave.' Unlike the modern context of slavery, in ancient Hebrew or Roman times, the term bond-servant or slave could refer to someone who voluntarily served others.
- **Holy people**, or **saints**, means being 'separate' or 'set apart.' This does not imply perfection nor favoritism; it simply means set apart for a purpose.

3. How would you describe Paul's relationship with the Philippians?

Read Philippians 1:1-8 to answer the following questions.

4. What "good work" did God begin among the Philippians? (1:6)
5. What do Paul and the Philippians have in common that makes them partners? What are the goals of their partnership? (1:6-7)

Notes: **Partnership**, **participation**, or **sharing** comes from the Greek word *koinonia*, which is also translated as '**fellowship**'. This word encompasses a broader meaning than simply sharing food, as exemplified by the Philippians' support for Paul's missionary work through their prayers and financial contributions. The goal of their partnership is to defend, confirm, advance, and live out the gospel.

6. What is God's promise to those in whom He has begun a "good work"? How might these verses build our confidence as we suffer for the gospel or pursue spiritual growth in Christ?

Read Philippians 1:9-11 to answer the following questions.

7. How did Paul show his partnership or support for the Philippians? (1:4-6, 1:9-11)

8. What things did Paul ask God for concerning the Philippians? (1:9-11)

9. What is the “knowledge” and “depth of insight” that Paul was referring to?

Notes:

- The word **knowledge** comes from the Greek word *epignōsis*, that often refers to knowledge of the things of God, religious, spiritual, theological knowledge.
- In other English translations, **depth of insight** is also translated as **all discernment**. The original Greek word *aisthēsis* is only found once in the New Testament, and a variant of this word is translated as ‘**faculties**’ in Hebrews 5:14. Scholars define this word as one’s ability to make a moral decision.

10. Why is it important that our love may abound more in “knowledge and depth of insight”? What is the purpose of having that kind of love?

Application

1. What specific actions can you take this week to cultivate a love for God that abounds more and more in knowledge and depth of insight?

2. In what areas of your life do you need greater discernment to distinguish between what is good and what is best? How can you involve prayer, Scripture, and your community in this?

3. How can you actively participate in the partnership of the gospel with your community?

Optional Follow-up Exercise: Spiritual Life Mapping

No matter where we are in our spiritual journey with God, we all started somewhere and should aim to continue growing. Just as Paul prayed for the Philippians that their love might abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, we, too, must strive for a greater love toward God and one another within our community.

This week, to foster deeper connections with one another and to appreciate those who have contributed to your spiritual growth, take some time to create a spiritual life map and dedicate time to share within your group. A spiritual life map is a visual tool that reflects your journey with God, highlighting key events that shape your faith.

Instructions:

- Draw a timeline of your life, beginning with the year you were born and ending with today’s date.
- Identify the major events in your life that may have impacted your spiritual formation, beliefs, or relationship with Christ, including both the good and the bad times.
- As you reflect, think of the people who have contributed to your spiritual growth, and consider those whose spiritual growth you can encourage.
- Share within your small group, ensure that you allocate enough time for each person. If time is limited, focus on a few significant moments that have impacted your relationship with God.
- At the end of the sharing session, set aside some time to pray for those who have invested in you and for those whom you can disciple.