

Philippians Small Group Series

Lesson 1 – Introduction to Philippians & Chapter 1

Partnering in the Gospel

Introduction:

Philippians was probably written while Paul was in prison (62 AD) in Rome back to the church in Philippi. Acts 16 tells us about Paul's time in Philippi. He and Silas ran into opposition and were put in jail. God miraculously released them from jail resulting in the conversion of his jailor (Acts 16:24-34). So Paul knew the Christians in Philippians and is writing this letter back to them to encourage them against false teaching in the church and threats from outside the church.

Partnership in the Gospel (1:1-11):

What does it mean to be "partners in the Gospel"?

For Paul, knowing that he was on the same mission as the Christians in Philippi gave him great joy because he knew that what was started among them would be seen through to completion (1:3-6). That means, God was not through with them yet. There was still more growing, learning, and maturing to do. That is what Paul prays for on their behalf in 1:9-11. *What two things does Paul pray for them in those verses?*

- Their love to abound and for them to be filled with the fruit of righteousness

What three things does Paul say will result from that?

- They will be able to discern what is best, they may be pure and blameless, and that God would receive glory and praise

How would our becoming more loving result in any of those things?

Suffering for Christ (1:12-30):

We will all go through suffering at some time or another. Some of us more than others. The question is not when or how much we have to endure but whether or not those sufferings are used for God. *What does Paul say is the result of his suffering in 1:12-14?*

- The gospel has been advanced, the palace guard now have some understanding of Christ, and it has encouraged Christians to be more bold about their faith

Paul mentions two groups of people who are causing trouble the Philippian Christians are having deal with. The first group is within the church (1:15-18) and the second is outside the church (1:27-28). With both groups Paul says the end result is the same – God will use both to work for good in the lives of the Philippians.

In 1:18 he says the troublemakers in the church at least preach Christ. 1:28-30 says the troublemakers outside the church will be destroyed but that the Christians will be saved. So their sufferings will be used for godly purposes resulting in the salvation of God's people.

How have you seen God work "bad" things for good?

Romans 8:28 reinforces this idea – God is able to ultimately use all things for the good of his kingdom. What about Paul’s own suffering? We learn a lot in this chapter about how he views his suffering and how it can be used for God. *What does he hope for in 1:20 regardless of whether he lives or dies?*

No matter what things in life we have to worry about this puts things into perspective. You may not like your job. You may have difficult relatives. You may have an illness or wrestle with some serious issues. *Bottom line – is Christ being exalted through your life?* If we can answer that a “Yes” then what else do we have to worry about because our lives our being lived the way God made us to live.

“to live is Christ and to die is gain” – Philippians 1:21

How does this verse put our life and sufferings into perspective?

This is like saying to a child going through a tough time, the worst that can happen is make tomorrow Christmas day. That would be a hopeful thought. As Christians, we have much more in store than a day full of presents. Even if we die, life awaits, God awaits, Christ awaits...how much better could things get?

99.9% of us will be alive next week and so practically speaking, it is important that we learn to live well for Christ.

“Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ” – Phil 1:27

When bad things happen it is easy to make excuses to backslide. Paul encourages them to press on and that whatever happens to him in prison, whether he is released or whether he is killed that they continue to live for Christ Jesus.

How can discouragement be a roadblock to a healthy faith?

What things are you facing that make it difficult to live worthy of the gospel of Christ?

Paul does end up being executed in jail at Rome. Paul never says, bad things might happen to me but for you things will be different. He never returns to see them and never writes back again. *Why should we expect to have problems in the world if we are really standing firm in our faith and living in a manner worthy of the Gospel?*

Application:

What suffering or struggles have you faced as a result of your faith in Christ?

Who is one hurting person you could encourage this week to build their faith?

What areas of your life are still needing some help to be lived in a manner worthy of the Gospel?

Lesson 2 – Philippians 2

Shining Like Stars for God

Paul is going to do some real convincing in Philippians 2. He is out to convince them that if God truly has made a difference in their lives that they should respond by being Christ-like. It is an “If...then” type statement. If these things are true, then you should do the following.

Read Philippians 2:1-5

What things does Paul list as differences God had made in their lives (2:1-2)?

What then does he call them to do as a result? (2:3-5)

Philippians 2:3-5 have to be some of the hardest verses in the Bible to put into practice. These verses go against the grain of everything the world has ever had to say about how we should live our lives. *What makes these verses so counter cultural?*

It is not easy to put aside the things we want and the way we want things to be in order to provide for the best interests of others. Our world tells us that the only one who will really look after you is you. So do your best to do and get everything you want. Not so, says Paul. There is actually more blessing that comes from being a giving person than a taking person.

What is the difference between givers and takers?

Read Philippians 2:6-11

In order for us to live a Christ-like life we have to know how he lived. Paul gives a quick 6 verse summary of the life and ministry of Christ. In these 6 verses, Paul highlights the selflessness of Christ.

What phrases in these verses show how selfless Christ was?

But the very first thing Paul says is Christ is in the very nature, God. He is divine. He is supreme. He is Lord. Everything in the world says, if you can call the shots, call the shots. If you have authority, use it. Verse 6 tells us Christ let go of all those priveledges in order to make a difference for us. The word “grasped” in 2:6 can mean “a violent seizure of property” (BDAG, 133). In other words, Christ didn’t forcefully claim all the rights he was entitled to but he gave them up.

If you had all the attributes of God, how quickly would you give them up in order to become a mortal human being?

How can we exhibit these Christ-like actions and attitudes 2000 years later?

Read Philippians 2:12-18

God's people are up to something good. We are partnering with God. 2:12 says we are to "work out our salvation with fear and trembling" and 2:13 says God is the one working in us to "will and act according to his good purpose." We both do our part. We have a part to play and God has a part to play in accomplishing God's purposes in this world.

What part do you feel you have to play in carrying out God's purposes in your life?

How do you feel God has worked in your life toward those same purposes?

The result of all of this is our shining in the world for God (2:15). Part of letting that light shine is "holding out the word of life" *When you are living for God, how is your life like a light in the world?*

How do we "hold out the word of life" today?

- This includes sharing the Gospel with non-Christians
- It also includes living our life in such a way that God's word is seen clearly through our character.

Read Philippians 2:19-30

Last, Paul makes arrangements for sending Timothy and Epaphroditus to the Christians in Philippi. There is one main lesson we learn from Paul's perspective on sending these two men back. That is, Paul is putting into practice the need to have a Christ-like and selfless attitude.

If you were in prison, what would make it hard to send these two men away?

With Paul in prison, it would seem he would need these two men to help him more than the Philippians would. Paul says he has no one else like Timothy and he is sending him back. Paul says they sent Epaphroditus to him to take care of his needs. Paul still has needs in jail! Yet Paul sends him back because Paul realizes he isn't the only one who has needs.

Why is it difficult to think of others when our own situations in life are tough?

What can we learn from Paul in putting others above ourselves?

Application:

Who is someone you remember because of their concern for you? What did they do?

Who is in your life who would benefit from you putting their interests above your own?

What challenges to obedience to God do you face and how can this chapter help you face them so you too can shine like a star for God?

Lesson 3 – Philippians 3 & 4

Growing Closer to the Lord

Read 3:1-11

Paul starts this chapter with a call to rejoice. This is quite a bold statement written by someone in chains. It is important that we know how to find joy through our relationship with Christ. The world thinks that Christians are joyless and that we miss out on all the “good stuff” but that simply not the case.

How has your relationship with Christ brought you joy?

Why doesn't the world understand that being a Christian is something that brings us joy?

- Maybe they have known angry Christians or maybe their view of happiness and joy is really messed up.

In 3:2-11 Paul talks about one barrier that can rob us of the true joy of growing closer to Christ. That barrier is called self-righteousness. When Paul talks about “mutilators of the flesh” he is talking about Christian Jews who were going around teaching that faith in Christ was insufficient for salvation. Because the Old Testament said people were to be circumcised to be a part of the covenant people of God they were still teaching that without circumcision one could not be in relationship with God or Christ.

How does Paul point out the pointlessness of putting our confidence in works of self-righteousness?

- He uses himself as an example, that he had done all those things just right
- He considers anything credited to his own doing as loss for the sake of Christ (3:7)

Paul realized that righteousness could never come by obeying the law of Moses (3:9) but only through faith in Jesus Christ. Faith in Christ is what leads us toward the ultimate goal of the resurrection of our bodies to live with God forever (3:11)

Paul never met Christ in the flesh. Neither have we. Like Paul, we all should have a deep desire to know Christ more and to share in as much of Christ's life on earth as possible. That includes joys (3:1) and suffering (3:10).

How badly do you want to know Christ?

When was a time in your life that you felt the closest connected to Christ? Was it tied to a time of joy or suffering?

Read 3:12-21

Even though Paul sees that righteousness come through faith in Christ, he still says it is necessary that we press ahead. We can't just believe in God and sit around waiting for him to save us. God wants us to seek him out, to strain ahead by faith toward the goal.

What is the goal of our lives?

Our goal is to live with God forever in heaven where we are already citizens (3:20). *What does it mean to be a citizen of heaven even though we still live here?*

Last, Paul says this takes the transformation of our bodies. We aren't perfect yet but one day we will be!

What are you looking forward to the most about heaven?

What are you doing here and now to make your life more and more in line with God's kingdom?

Read Philippians 4:1-23

Three things jump out about this chapter as Paul closes this letter to the church in Philippi.

1 – He continues to call them to having a rejoicing spirit. In order to have this he calls on them to give over all their anxieties to God through prayer (4:6-7) which will result in peace.

Why is it hard to rejoice if you have anxiety and no peace?

How does prayer help relieve anxiety and bring you peace?

2 – Paul emphasizes the importance of thinking about positive things (4:8). If we are going to rejoice, we can't have our minds in the gutter. It is so difficult to control our minds. Paul tells us this is still important that we think about excellent things and don't let our minds wonder into thinking about wicked and evil things.

Have you ever struggled with evil thoughts? What did it take to overcome it?

3 – We are to be concerned enough about each other that we share in each other's sufferings (4:10, 14).

What does it mean to share in someone's troubles?

Have you ever been concerned for someone so much that you were able to share their troubles?

Paul says God will meet all their needs (4:19). *What needs do you have that your life group might be able to help with so that we can put into practice with one another Paul's principle of sharing these things with each other?*