

Philippians Overview

As Christians, we are able to have Joy in all circumstances, even in the face of struggles, challenges and suffering. Paul's life testified to the truthfulness of this claim, and he wrote Philippians to remind the church in Philippi that they, too, could find joy in suffering.

The church in Philippi was established during Paul's second missionary journey, in response to a vision from God instructing Paul to travel to Macedonia and proclaim the gospel. As the first church in Europe, the Philippian church represents a mixture of races, classes and cultures. Paul writes to remind the church of the Hope they have by virtue of Christ's work.

Throughout the letter, Paul spends time thanking the church for their partnership in the gospel. Clearly the church has been an encouragement to Paul - through prayers and financial support.

Paul reminds the church that suffering should not be seen as evidence of God's lack of care and concern for his church, in fact, suffering is a God-ordained means of spreading the message of salvation. As Christians suffer with joy and find contentment in all things, they have the privilege of modelling a hope that this world cannot provide.

Writing from a Roman prison, Paul reminds the church that he can find joy in all things. His hope and confidence is not based on his circumstance but is firmly rooted in the truth of Jesus' work.

All believers can look to this letter to find encouragement to face life with pervasive joy, especially in the minds of an ever changing world.

Philippians is not just a letter of thanks and updates, Paul also writes to encourage their faith and growth. More specifically:

- To spur them on to progress in their Faith Journey ([Phil. 2:12; 3:12-17](#))
- to warn of those who proclaim another gospel ([Phil. 3:2, 18-19](#))
- To reiterate the true gospel and encourage them to hold tightly to it ([Phil. 3:3-11](#))
- To encourage their unity and confront any lack of unity ([Phil. 2:1-4; 4:2-3](#))
- To call them to joy and thankfulness and peace ([Phil. 2:18; 3:1; 4:4-7](#))
- To plead with them to keep their eyes on Christ and the hope of heaven ([Phil. 3:2-21](#))

Philippians radiates with joy in the Lord and with love for these old friends and warm supporters. Paul's joy while in prison flows from his awareness of Jesus presence, his confidence that he is in Christ's hands, his pleasure over the advancement of the Gospel and his single-minded desire to know Jesus.

Philippians

Thankfulness and Prayer

Week: 1

Welcome (10 mins)

Can you list 5 things that you are thankful for right now?

Worship (10 mins)

WRITE - In the Psalms we find a wonderful model of worship. Many begin with a surprising expression of raw emotion, even dismay and anger at the situation being faced. Then there is often a shift to reflecting on the strength and goodness of God, of his activity in the past and his promises for the future. And finally there is a response on the part of the Psalmist, a commitment to praise and honour the Lord. Take a piece of paper and spend a few minutes creating a short 'Psalm' of your own, using the pattern described above.

SING - Man of Sorrows

Play the lyric video [here](#)

Download the chord chart [here](#) (original key) or [here](#) (lower key)

Word (30 mins)

Read Philippians 1:1-11

Paul begins Philippians much as he does his other letters: a quick salutation, an expression of thankfulness, and a prayer. Within Phil. 1:1-11 there are hints of what's to come in the rest of the epistle. That was a common structure for letter writing in Paul's time.

Paul celebrates God's genuine work of grace in the Philippians, warmly thanking them for their partnership in the gospel, and praying for their future growth in the faith.

1. Where is Paul writing from? Why? To whom he is writing too?
2. What are Paul's feelings for this church? what does that show about his leadership style?
3. How is God at work in the believers lives according to verse 6 and 9-11? How does this make you feel about uncertainties in your own life?
4. Who was the "Apostle Paul" in your spiritual life, who introduced you to Jesus and cared about your spiritual growth?

Wonder (5-10 mins)

Take time to reflect on the implications of [Philippians 1:1-11](#) for your own life today. Consider what you have learned that might lead you to praise God, repent of sin, and trust in his gracious promises.

Witness (5-10 mins)

1. Where or how do you experience God's grace? In what ways can your small group point you to God's grace?
2. Even though you may have only just met your small group members, what about their lives cause you to give thanks, rejoice over and have confidence for them? Tell them.

Philippians

Paul' chains offer the greater good.

Week: 2

Welcome (10 mins)

When you have had a bad day, what do you do? Are you the kind of person who sees the glass half-empty or half-full?

Worship (10 mins)

Colossians 2:3 says that in Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge from God. Close your eyes and imagine opening the treasure chest that God gives you in Christ: what do you see, what can you touch, what do you hear? If it helps, you can draw this treasure chest and what you see inside, or just in the silence say out loud what words come to mind as you worship Christ for the mystery of the Gospel - with all its wisdom and knowledge of who we truly are - now revealed to you.

Feel free to play City Alight's Gospel- rich melody in the background or sing along to the words: [Yet Not I but Through Christ in Me](#)

Word (30 mins)

Read Philippians 1: 12-29

After Paul's introductory words of greeting and thankfulness, he turns to one of his main purposes in writing this letter: to update the Philippian church on his welfare—"I want you to know . . . what has happened to me" (Phil. 1:12). They were concerned for Paul in these days of imprisonment. In [Philippians 1:12–26](#), Paul seeks to assure them, first with the news that the gospel is spreading (Phil. 1:12–18), then by modelling confidence in God's sovereignty over life and death (Phil. 1:19–26).

In [Philippians 1:12–18](#), Paul encourages the church with the news that the gospel is spreading, not despite his imprisonment but *through* it—and this is all that matters.

1. How does Paul decide if an event (like his jailing) is good or bad? How would this example encourage others?
2. What is Paul's overriding attitude towards his uncertain future (v21)? What does he mean? What reasoning helps him decide?
3. What conduct is worthy of the gospel? Why is it so important to Paul? How seriously do you take this?
4. What difference has your personal faith in Jesus made in your attitude towards death and dying? In your attitude toward suffering?

Wonder (5-10 mins)

"For me to live is..." given your priorities and schedule this week, how would you honestly fill in the blank? What would change if you wrote Christ?

Witness 5-10 mins)

1. How do your priorities in life affect those around you? Do others see the gospel as a priority in your life and become more confident in the Lord?

2. Think again about the situations God has “put” you in. Where do you find yourself afraid to speak the word? What does this reveal about your priorities in the situation?

Philippians

Christ's example of humility

Week: 3

Welcome (10 mins)

Who takes out the trash in your home? Cleans the toilet? What is your pet peeve at home?

Worship (10 mins)

LET GO - when we worship, we purposefully turn our attention away from ourselves and toward God. We 'set our minds on things above'. But it is quite easy to allow concerns and distractions to reduce our expression of worship, like trying to focus our eyes on two different places at once. Before singing this song, take note of what occupies your thoughts right now. Is there something to ask God's forgiveness for? Is there something to release into God's safekeeping and timing? What do you need to remember, know, or do to set your heart fully on Him today?

SING - Christ Is Enough

Play the lyric video [here](#)

Download the chord chart [here](#) (original key) or [here](#) (lower key)

Word (30 mins)

Read Philippians 2: 1-11

After almost a full chapter of thanking and comforting the Philippian church, Paul turned in [Philippians 1:27](#) to some direct exhortations or commands. As we noted in the last section, unity is central to the exhortations ending [Philippians 1](#). In [Philippians 2](#), Paul's exhortations continue, as does the major theme of unity in the church—now with a heightened appeal, with more specificity, and with motivation added to the general commands of [Philippians 1:27](#). Paul will return to the theme of unity again in [Philippians 4](#). Unity is clearly a major theme of this letter, but [Philippians 2:1–11](#) is the linchpin holding it all together.

On the basis of the rich realities of the gospel, Paul commands the church to be unified by being humble and caring, looking to Christ as the perfect example of humble servanthood in his incarnation, crucifixion, and exaltation.

1. Reading between the lines, what was wrong with the church in Phillippi?
2. What does it mean to consider someone “better than yourself” (v3) how does humility differ from being a doormat?
3. What do you think it was like for Jesus to leave heaven and become human? To take on himself all the sin of humankind?
4. What is closest you have come to being in fellowship that cared for one another like Paul describes here? - Maybe a group of friends? Family? A sports team?

Wonder (5-10 mins)

Spend a few minutes allowing the Holy Spirit to speak to you. You may want to share some of the ways the Holy Spirit is speaking to you with the group.

Witness (5-10 mins)

Who are the people in your life that God is calling you to have one mind with? How are you cultivating this? When you think of your Christian communities, do you view it as being for the sake of advancing the gospel? What would it look like for you to be part of creating communities of people living lives worthy of the gospel?

Philippians

Working out what God has worked in.

Week: 4

Welcome (10 mins)

Are you a morning person? Do you enjoy having people around you in the morning, or do you prefer waking up in silence?

Worship (10 mins)

CONSIDER - we worship the all-powerful Almighty God, Creator of the heavens and the earth, yet in Jesus we see the most extraordinary humility. When we exercise the spiritual gifts God has given us, we do so for His glory alone. Worship is the same - we bow down low and lift Him high, we decrease so that He will increase. Here's a beautiful song written by a fellow South African about our humble king Jesus. Commit yourself once again to following His example as you sing or listen.

SING - The Humble King

Play the lyric video [here](#)

Download the chord chart [here](#) (original key) or [here](#) (lower key)

Word (30 mins)

Read: Philippians 2: 12-18

Having exhorted the Philippians to pursue further unity (Phil. 1:27-2:4) by looking to Christ as the supreme model of selfless humility (Phil. 2:5-11), Paul now provides a series of exhortations related to perseverance, especially in light of the watching world (Phil. 2:12-18).

Paul encourages the Philippians to *work out* the salvation that God is *working in* them, demonstrating the genuineness of their faith to both Paul and the world.

Discussion Questions:

1. Who does Paul sound like in this passage? A parent? An Army Sargent? A Coach at half time?
2. What does it mean to "work out your salvation?"
3. What makes God's people "shine like stars?"
4. How brightly do you shine in your universe?

Wonder (5-10 mins)

Take a moment to pause and allow the Holy Spirit to highlight anything He might want to be saying to you today! How does He want you to be encouraging each other in the group today?

Witness (5-10 mins)

What work do you need to do to "shine as lights in the world" in your dorm, house, classes, or work?

Philippians

Rejoice in the Gospel!

Week: 5

Welcome (10 mins)

When have you been in a position where you had to trust another person for something important? What made it easy or difficult to trust them?

Worship (10 mins)

SPEAK - Read Psalm 27 aloud. Take it in turns to read one verse after the other, or have the leader read the odd verses with the rest of the group reading the even ones. However you do it, when you reach the last verse (14), repeat it together a few times. Consider the words. Speak them as a prayer over your time together. Let them sink in. Then sing this song of invitation to the Holy Spirit...

SING - Fullness by Elevation Worship

Play the lyric video [here](#)

Download the chord chart [here](#) (original key - C)

or [here](#) (lower key - G)

Word (30 mins)

Read: Philippians 3:1-11

Some have suggested that [Philippians 3:1-11](#) seems like a strangely abrupt transition. But there are repeated themes and words in these verses that prove to be an orderly flow of thought from [Philippians 2-3](#). Having called the Philippians to hold fast to the “word of life” and to “rejoice” in mutual sacrifice for the gospel ([Phil. 2:16-18](#)), and having shown Timothy and Epaphroditus to be Christlike models ([Phil. 2:19-30](#)), Paul now further expounds upon that “word of life,” contrasting false teaching with his own conversion and present confession ([Phil. 3:1-11](#)).

The Philippians are to follow Paul in rejoicing in the Lord by resisting false teachers who trust in the flesh, and glorying instead in Christ alone as their complete righteousness.

Discussion Questions:

5. Why is Paul so concerned about the ‘dogs’ on this christian community?
6. Paul lived a good life before he became a Christian. Was he trying to put down his religious background?
7. How would you compare your upbringing to Paul's? Your passion for Christ to Paul's?
8. Do you need to walk away from something in your past keeping you from becoming new in Christ?

Wonder (5-10 mins)

What is the Holy Spirit wanting to grow in you? Maybe it's boldness to take hold of the life Jesus has for you? Or maybe it's healing from

hurts and pains that holding you back from living in freedom. Let's ask the Holy Spirit to reveal that to us today.

Witness (5-10 mins)

How might your life and relationships with people look different if you were to believe by faith that Christ's righteousness was enough for you in each moment of life?

Philippians

Pressing forward in our pursuit of Christ

Week: 6

Welcome (10 mins)

In your dreams of the ideal life, are you more like the pioneer (always pressing on) or the settler (settling down)?

Worship (10 mins)

READ & LIGHT - This will work best if you begin in darkness, but that isn't essential. Divide these 6 lines from today's worship song about creation among your group (if you have less than 6 people, give each person more than one line). Take turns to slowly read a line, lighting your candle as you say "so will I". Once all the candles are lit, read the lines again together as a group.

- ***If the stars were made to worship so will I***
- ***If the mountains bow in rev'ence so will I***
- ***If the oceans roar Your greatness so will I***

- ***For if ev'rything exists to lift You high so will I***
- ***If the wind goes where You send it so will I***
- ***If the rocks cry out in silence so will I***

SING - So Will I (100 Billion X) by Hillsong Worship

Play the lyric video [here](#)

Download the chord chart [here](#) (original key - D) or [here](#) (lower key - C)

Word (30 mins)

Read Philippians 3: 12-21

Paul warned the Philippians about false teachers in [Philippians 3:2](#). Their distortion of the gospel led him to use his own life as illustrative of a wrong ([Phil. 3:4-6](#)) and a right ([Phil. 3:7-9](#)) understanding of the gospel. The true gospel looks to Christ alone for righteousness, but then pursues further intimacy and identification with him ([Phil. 3:10-11](#)). Now clarifying that the Christian life is imperfect and in process, Paul appeals to the Philippians to follow his example and not that of false teachers ([Phil. 3:18-19](#)).

The Christian life is neither one of perfection nor of passivity, but a progressive pursuit of Christ and his likeness as we await his return and the consummation of all things

1. Using the image of a track race, where does Paul picture himself in his spiritual life? What prize is he after? How is he going to reach it?
2. If you had to compare your life right now to a track race, where would you be; Sitting on the sidelines? Warming up? At the starting blocks? Giving it your all?
3. What are you passionate about? Are you more likely to strive for excellence in your secular life or spiritual life?

Wonder (5-10 mins)

Let's allow the Holy Spirit to help us complete this sentence from verse 13: "But one thing I do..."

Witness (5-10 mins)

Who is an example of standing firm that you can imitate? How should you begin imitating them?

Philippians

The Peace of God

Week: 7

Welcome (10 mins)

What is the best thing that happened to you this week?

Worship (10 mins)

PAUSE - In the next section, you'll have the chance to plan some time to rest in the week ahead. For now, let's practice one way to do that - stillness. Get comfortable, and spend two minutes in silence, concentrating God's presence. Rest in Him, draw strength and courage from Him. Let the peace of God guard your heart and mind (Philippians 4:7). Don't worry about odd thoughts or distractions - as they happen, notice them, let them go, and return to your focus.

Then sing this song, reminding us of the grace, strength, and security we find in God when we truly rest in Him.

SING - I Will Rest by Northpoint Worship

Play the lyric video [here](#)

Download the chord chart [here](#) (original key - E) or [here](#) (lower key - C)

Word (30 mins)

Read: Philippians 4: 1-9

By [Philippians 4:1](#), Paul begins to wrap up his letter to the Philippians. He confronts one specific case of disunity in the church, providing its members (and us) with concrete directives for dealing with conflict ([Phil. 4:2-3](#)). He then turns to a series of pithy commands ([Phil. 4:4-9](#)), which in many ways summarise and materialise several themes and ideals from earlier in the epistle.

The Philippians are to stand firm by pursuing peace, joy, gentleness, trust, prayer, and right thinking—matters that Paul has taught and modelled for them.

Discussion Questions:

1. What is Paul's prescription for stress? How does it compare to modern day psychology and new age religions?
2. What is Paul's solution to thought pollution? What would he say to the church today about leisure time?
3. On a scale of 1-10 what is the stress level in your life? What is your body saying to you?

Wonder (5-10 mins)

Let's pray for the Holy Spirit to provide us with peace in the areas of stress and trouble in our lives.

Witness (5-10 mins)

1. What sorts of things occupy your mind? How does your preoccupation with these things affect your relationships? How does it affect your joy in the Lord? How does it affect your peace or your relationship with the God of peace?
2. What are the concerns you need prayer for right now? Share them with the group and the Lord. What are the things which occupy your mind which you need to give up? What would replace them?