

PHILIPPIANS



LIVES WORTHY OF THE GOSPEL

Bible Studies for
Ashfield Presbyterian Church
ashfieldpresbyterian.org.au

INTRODUCTION:

These studies are designed to complement the sermons at Church. Most Home Groups use them in the week before the Bible Talk, and they find this helps prepare them to hear the talk. Hopefully, any unanswered questions from the study will be addressed on the Sunday.

The studies will work just as well for personal study. Perhaps you could find two or three short times during the week to work through each passage and questions.

BACKGROUND:

Paul wrote this letter from prison (1:13-14) probably in Rome around 61 (see Acts 28:14-31). The city of Philippi was named by Alexander the Great in 356 BC after his father, King Phillip II of Macedon. By the time of Paul it was a prosperous Roman colony. The people were proud of their Roman citizenship.

The Philippian church had been established by Paul on his second missionary journey (Acts 16:9-40). The vision at Troas caused him to cross over into Europe and to visit Philippi. There was apparently no synagogue in the city, and the church began by the riverside. Lydia, a seller of purple from Thyatira, was converted. As a result of Paul's experience with a demon-possessed slave girl, he was cast into prison, miraculously delivered, and saw others converted such as the Philippian jailor and his household. After this experience he had to leave the city, but Luke remained at Philippi.



The church was loyal to Paul and twice sent a contribution while he was at Thessalonica (Phil 4:15-16). The church also sent him a gift at Corinth (2 Cor 11:8-9; cf. Acts 18:5). To thank the Philippians and to send them instruction and comfort, Paul wrote the letter, since Epaphroditus was about to return to Philippi (Phil 2:28).

PHILIPPIANS 1:1-11: PARTNERS IN THE GOSPEL:

1. In Paul's time letter-writers put their name at the beginning rather than the end. Who was this letter from? How are they described?
2. Translators mostly whimp out and translate *doulos* as "servant" rather than "slave". What's the difference between the two words? How different would your life be if you considered yourself a slave of Christ rather than a servant of Christ?
3. How are the Christians at Philippi described? The Macquarie Dictionary defines a saint as "a person of exceptional holiness of life formally recognised by the Christian church as having obtained an exalted position in heaven and as being entitled to veneration on earth; a canonised person" Is this what Paul is talking about when he refers to the Philippians as saints? Why not?
4. The Bible defines a saint as a sinner who trusts Christ and as such is now separated from living for themselves. They are now to live for Jesus as their Lord – set apart from sin, and set apart for Christ! How would you have to change your way of thinking to call yourself a saint? What implications could it have?
5. Someone once said that the problem with being an atheist is that you have no-one to thank! Paul had someone to thank – God! What about the Philippians made Paul thankful (3-8)?
6. What was the nature of the Philippians' partnership with Paul?
1:7

1:19

1:29

2:16

4:18
7. Who are YOU a partner in the gospel with?
8. What two aspects of gospel ministry does Paul highlight in v7-8?

What does it mean to defend the gospel? What from?

What does the gospel need to be defended from today?

9. Paul's prayers can be a model for us. What does he pray for (9)?

What will it mean to have love that has knowledge and insight? What is its opposite?

10. What is Paul's purpose in praying this prayer (10-11)?

What is the ultimate goal Paul is directing them and us towards?

11. Pray Paul's prayer for your group.

Prayer Points:

PHILIPPIANS 1:12-26: SOMETHING WORTH DYING FOR

1. Read v12-18. How has being in chains served to advance the gospel?

V13

V14

2. What is so surprising about the consequences in v14? How might this work?

3. How do YOUR trials advance the gospel?

4. What was the nature of the false motive for preaching the gospel? What was its aim?

Nature –

Aim –

5. What was the nature of the true motive for preaching the gospel? What was its aim?

Nature –

Aim –

6. Whatever the motive, Paul's situation would not be made easier. What is Paul's breath-taking response to the prospect of his personal circumstance deteriorating (18)?

7. What is it that makes Paul able to rejoice despite bad personal prospects?

8. Read 19-26. At first sight, in v19 Paul seems to be saying the he expects to be released from prison. But according to v20, what will the deliverance be?

9. According to v20 what else might make Paul able to rejoice?

10. Paul has a hard time working out whether life or death was his preferred option in v21-25. What are his arguments on either side?

11. Most of us wouldn't find it a difficult choice. What's the difference? Paul had someone worth dying for. How can we have that?

Prayer Points:

Consider Christ:

7. Read v5-11. Gen 1:26-31; 3:1-7 are the background to these verses about Jesus. Complete the following table using the two references.

	Jesus	Adam
Nature		
Grasped at		
Obedient?		
Immediate result		
Ultimate result		

Shining Stars

8. How does considering Christ in these verses motivate us to love one another?
9. Read v12-18. The Philippians are to work out the implications of their salvation as a church. What do these implications look like? (12, 14-16)
10. Why can we be confident in these tasks? (13)

Gospel All Stars

11. Read v17-30. Look at the examples of Paul, Timothy and Epaphroditus. Outline where they display characteristics of Jesus that the Philippians can follow.

Paul:

Timothy:

Epaphroditus

12. What areas of your character and behaviour do you need to work on to be more Christ-like. Pray about them.

13. Spend some time praising Jesus from v5-11

Prayer Points:

PHILIPPIANS 3:1-11: OUR PROFIT & LOSS STATEMENT:

1. Read v1-11. What is Paul's first command? What does he mean? Come back to this phrase at the end of the study and see how it provides a summary for the rest of the passage.
2. Paul tells the Philippians to watch out for a certain type of person. What three phrases does he use in v2 to describe these people? By contrast Christians have the real things. What are they (v3)?

Verse 2

Verse 3

Paul is actually describing Judaizers – Jews who said that you had to become a Jew to be right with God, and observe food laws, be circumcised and obey the law. The three phrases he uses would actually be insults they would use against Gentiles (non-Jews).

3. Circumcision was God's Old Testament sign of the covenant between him and his people (Gen 17:11-14). What does it mean for Christians to be “the circumcision”? See Rom 2:28-29; Colossian 2:11-13.
4. On the outside, Christians and these Jews would both be moral and law-abiding. The difference lies in where they put their trust. What does v3 say is the difference?
5. Paul had more reason to put his trust in earthly things than anyone (v4). Break up the list in v4-6 into things God has provided and things Paul did.

Advantages that God provided

Paul's works

6. Give some examples about how people today think in the same way.
7. Who changed Paul's thinking? (v7) How do Paul's previous accomplishments measure up to gaining Christ? (v8)
8. Relying on self and relying on God are mutually exclusive - you can't do both. How does Paul say that in v8?

9. From v9, what is so valuable about gaining Christ?

10. What does the word “righteousness” mean? What are the two sorts of righteousness? Where do they come from?

11. From v10-11 what is the life of following Christ like? What will YOUR life look like if it bears BOTH of these characteristics?

12. Go back to qu 1. How does this “Rejoice in the Lord” summarise this section?

13. Spend some time in prayer, thanking God for the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus, and the wonderful treasure of righteousness by faith.

Prayer Points:

PHILIPPIANS 3:10-4:1: CHRISTIAN MATURITY

We all want to be mature Christians. We want life to be complete and fulfilled. At times we are tempted to “fake it” and to pretend that we have it all together. But we can only keep up the pretence for so long, and then we collapse with a sense of failure and disappointment.

The message of this passage is that we SHOULD feel incomplete. Life DOESN'T work, and nothing at this time will fix it up. Christian maturity is not about “faking it”, but living in the tension of wanting and not having, of wanting but waiting for it to come.

1. Read 3:10-4:1. What are the two crucial events on which the Christian bases life (10-11)? How do these give us a right perspective to live by no matter what our circumstance?

2. On a scale of 1 to 10, where does Paul see himself on the Christian journey? Where does he want to be?

The words “perfect” (v12) and “mature” (v15) are translations of the same word (which can also mean things like *full*, *complete*, *final*, and *goal*). Paul seems to be saying that mature Christians realise they're NOT mature – they still have a long way to go.

3. What does Paul want to take hold of? See v12-14

4. What two things will we have to do if we are going to make it to the end (v13)?

5. What does it mean to “forget what is behind”? Will that mean successes as well as failures?

6. What picture does v13 paint about the nature of the Christian life? Do your expectations of the Christian life measure up? How do they need to change?

7. The point of Paul's short autobiography is seen in v15-16. What are the readers to think, and to do?

In v16, “what we have already obtained” is probably the message of the gospel – righteousness by faith (3:9) as well as knowledge of the required lifestyle imitating both Christ (2:5-11) and Paul (3:12-14). It is possible that the Judaizers were leading people away from these truths, and so Paul calls them back to it – “Let your life MEASURE UP to what you already have!”

8. Paul goes a step further. In v12-14 he describes his own life as an illustration. In v17 he tells the readers specifically to follow his example. When is it helpful to follow the example of other Christians? When is it unhelpful? Who do YOU follow? Who follows YOU?

9. Whose example does Paul NOT want the Philippians to follow (v18-19)? How are they described? How does v19 explain the way in which they are enemies of the cross?

10. What difference should it make to your attitudes, behaviour, priorities and outlook that you are a citizen of heaven (v20)?

11. From v21, what is our hope?

12. 4:1 concludes this section. What is Paul's secret to standing firm? Summarise his lesson in your own words, and make it the basis of prayer for each other.

Prayer Points:

PHILIPPIANS 4:2-23: PEACEFUL LIVING

1. Read 4:2-9. Throughout the letter Paul has highlighted the need for unity. It may be that in 4:2 we come to the reason why this has been such theme. What has Paul already said about unity in these verses?

1:27:

2:1-2:

2:14:

2. What do we learn about Euodia and Syntyche from v2-4? What does Paul ask of them?
3. The argument was probably personal, but it was affecting the unity of the church, and therefore its effectiveness as a witness. Does agreeing “in the Lord” mean we must come to the same opinions? If so, why? If not, what does it mean?
4. Paul also asks a third person to act as peace-maker. Is this an easy job? Have you ever had experience with this task? How would you do it?
5. What would someone who embodies the qualities in v4-6 be like? How do these qualities relate to Paul’s peace objectives (v2-3; 7; 9)?
6. The only reason that not being anxious makes sense is because of who God is. Is anything too big, or too small, or outside of his control? When we pray to this God, what is our anxiety replaced with (v7)?
7. Does Paul promise that we will get what we ask for when we pray (v7; 12-13)?
8. What does it mean that God’s peace transcends all understanding (v7)? How can anxiety leave our hearts and minds open to attack?
9. How might thinking about these things help the situation in v2-3? How might it help the situation in v4-6?
10. Thinking rightly is important (v8). Still, what higher standard does Paul give for Christians?

Read 4:10-23. These are Paul's final words, and they mainly concern the matter of the Philippians' financial gifts to Paul.

11. Paul wants to thank the Philippians, but not because he is desperate! He has learned how to be content. In what circumstances has he learnt to be content? What do you think is the secret? Is there any hint in the rest of the letter?

12. If Paul is content, why is he joyful at the generosity of the Philippians (v17-19)?

13. Where has Paul been able to take the gospel (22)?

14. Paul exhorts us to put what we hear into practice (9). What is one thing you will put into practice this week.

Prayer Points: