

Bible Study Discussion Guide

Philippians

The church at Philippi had been founded on Paul's second missionary journey in around 52 AD. The letter to the Philippians is a warm letter of gratitude and joy from Paul, a weary prisoner for Christ who is grateful for the support he had received from the Philippian believers.

The Knowing God Bible study discussion guides are provided to facilitate small group Bible study. We encourage everyone in the group to read or listen to the Bible text about ten times over the course of the study. We recommend providing a copy of these notes to each member of the group and selecting an individual to lead each week's study.

The book of Philippians takes approximately 15 minutes to read.

This discussion guides provides questions for four sessions.

Principles for use:

1. Encourage everyone in the group to read the book of Philippians many times.
2. Trust God to help you understand and apply his Word.
3. Focus on what the book reveals about God/Jesus.
4. Focus on what it clearly reveals about how God wants us to live.
5. Don't get bogged down on minor, uncertain or controversial issues.

For further copies, visit the Bibleworld website and follow the link to Bible Study Resources. The notes can either be printed off or if you prefer to remain paperless, you can view the questions online.

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For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him.

Philippians 2:13 (NLT)

Introduction

The church at Philippi was founded during Paul's second missionary journey in about 52 AD (Acts 16:11-40). Early members of the church had included Lydia and her household, and the Philippi jailor and his household. While at Philippi, Paul had cast a demon out of a slave girl and had been thrown into prison for his efforts. Since that time he had, however, enjoyed a warm relationship with the Philippian church. They had supported him financially and had sent Epaphroditus to assist Paul in his work. Paul recognised the love the Philippians had for him and he expressed his gratitude for their help.

The letter to the Philippians was written while Paul was a prisoner, probably in Rome (c. 61-62 AD). Paul was sending Epaphroditus back to the Philippians after a period of ill health, and he took the opportunity to send them an encouraging, friendly letter. In the letter Paul described with joy his own situation and encouraged the Philippians in their faith. Paul had worked hard as a servant of Christ and he was unsure as to what the future would hold for him. It was possible that he would be put to death, but it was also possible that he would be freed from prison and able to return to visit the Philippians.

Session One: Partnering together for Christ

In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now' Philippians 1:4-5 (NIV).

In what ways does Paul describe this partnership with the Philippians throughout the book? What were some of the active ways in which Paul and the Philippians worked together?

Read together Philippians 2:19-30. What was it about Timothy that made him a valued partner for Paul? Who have you met that has displayed some of the same characteristics as Timothy? In what ways did Epaphroditus partner with Paul and the Philippians?

Can you describe a situation when others have partnered with you while you have been working to spread the good news about Christ?

In what ways can we partner with others in helping to spread the good news about Jesus Christ? Who do you know who could benefit from your support and encouragement this week?

Session Two: Becoming like Christ

Read together Philippians 2:1-15.

Paul encourages us to have the same attitude as Christ Jesus. What does this passage tell us about Jesus' attitude? How can we imitate Christ's humility? What characterises the actions and speech of a humble person?

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Philippians 2:3-4 (NIV).

What are some practical ways in which you can look out for the interests of others? Is there a particular person or situation that God is encouraging you to take a greater interest in?

'Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure' Philippians 2:14-15 (NIV).

What are the destructive effects of complaining and arguing? How can we guard against these temptations to sin?

'Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose'. Philippians 2:12-13 (NIV)

We are encouraged to become like Christ in our attitudes and actions. Why does this matter? How can this help to achieve God's purposes?

Session Three: Learning about Prayer from Paul

Read Philippians 4:6-9.

How do you understand the practice of giving thanks within the context of prayer? What can be the benefits of thanksgiving or expressing your gratitude to God?

How do you understand the relationship between prayer and anxiety? Can you recall a time when prayer helped to reduce or remove your anxiety?

Paul encourages the Philippians to think about all that is good (Philippians 4:8). What are the benefits of doing so? Do you have any personal examples of making deliberate choices regarding your thinking?

Read Philippians 1:9-11. How does Paul pray for the Philippians? Is there someone that you could pray for in a similar way?

You may like to pray this prayer together as a group, each of you inserting your friends' names:

I pray for . . . that their love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that . . . may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.

Session Four: Joy and Hope

'I will continue to rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance. I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body whether by life or by death.' Philippians 1:18-20 (NIV).

What enabled Paul to write about joy and rejoicing while he was in prison, potentially facing death? What did Paul believe that made it possible for him to rejoice regardless of his circumstances?

Have you ever found yourself in a difficult situation where you were able to rejoice in Lord? Did you have to choose to be joyful, or did it seem to be a God given joy? In what ways did you express that joy?

'Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again 'Rejoice.'" Philippians 4:4. (NIV) Paul doesn't provide a simplistic 'Don't worry, Be happy' message. He continually links hope and joy to God and his promises. What does it mean to 'Rejoice in the Lord'?

In this letter, Paul's hope and joy are linked to his hope for the day of Christ and citizenship in heaven. What is he eagerly anticipating (see Philippians 3:13-14; 3:20-21)? How does the assurance of citizenship in heaven affect your life now?

What has been the most significant encouragement for you from the book of Philippians?