

The Book of Philippians

A Study Guide

..But one thing I do:
Forgetting what is behind and
straining toward what is ahead,
I press on toward the goal to win the prize
for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

PHILIPPIANS 3 : 13,14 NIV



Introduction

Philippians was written to the church in Philippi between 60–62 AD by Paul while he was imprisoned. It is widely assumed that he wrote this letter to the Philippians while on house arrest in Rome (see Acts 28:14-31) as both the “palace guard” (1:13) and “Caesar’s household” (4:22) are mentioned in the letter. Philippi was one of the leading cities in central Macedonia (modern day Greece) that had been colonised by the Romans, and by Paul’s time was an important urban political centre. Paul founded the church in Philippi (see Acts 16:11-40) and they had continued to support Paul in his work which is referenced in Chapter 4 and through this letter he shows his immense gratitude to the church for their generous gifts.

The letter to the Philippians is one of the most personal that Paul wrote. It is joyful in nature and doesn’t harshly rebuke the congregation. It is not born of a crisis, but of concern for the well-being of dear friends. Paul calls the church in Philippi to stand firm, united in the gospel (1:27-28) because they face pressure both from outside the fellowship and from within. The pressure from outside was partly because they were living in a Roman colony and so lived amongst people whose citizenship was in Rome, and they looked to Caesar as their “Lord and Saviour”. Paul calls the Philippians to stand firm and hold on to the fact that their citizenship is in Heaven, and that it is from there that they await their Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ (3:20). Living for Him will inevitably lead to a struggle with a culture that is living for Caesar. The pressure from within seems to have come about because of some who were fighting for their own things. Paul sees that this will undermine the church and its witness, and so writes to call them back to the way of Christ, which will mean giving up their rights and serving one another (2:1-11).

Shine Like Stars

The answer Paul gives to this pressure? Jesus Christ. He is mentioned at least 60 times in this letter! There are three strands to the way Paul calls his friends back to Jesus – a Christ-centred life, a Christ-shaped life and a Christ-awaiting life.

A Christ-centred life. All of our confidence before God lies in Christ and what He has done, rather than in ourselves (3:3). So all that matters is knowing Jesus. Not knowing *about* Him, but knowing Him for ourselves, in a living relationship that starts now and lasts forever. (1:21-23, 3:1-21)

A Christ-shaped life. Quite simply, knowing Jesus means walking the way He walked (3:10). This is the antidote to the self-centeredness that has begun to creep in amongst the Philippians, and will take them away from humility, of giving up their rights, serving others, being generous and even suffering. The constant call from Paul is to have our whole outlook on life shaped by Jesus. The word used in 2:5 that has been translated as “your attitude should be” is the same word used in 1:7 for the Christ-shaped attitude Paul has to the Philippians; in 3:15 for the Christ-shaped view of things that we should take and in 4:4 for the Christ-shaped way that they are to agree with one another.

A Christ-awaiting life. Paul’s eye is always on God’s bigger plan and he wants the Philippians to be those who “eagerly await a Saviour” from heaven. It is by having on focus on the last day that we will be able to keep going in the Christian life today.

And the fruit of this sort of Christ-centred, Christ-shaped, Christ-awaiting life is the sort of joy and unity that means we “shine like stars” (2:15) and bring glory and praise to God.

Philippians 1:1-11 Every Time I Remember

The opening section of Paul's letter to the Philippians is a prayer of thanksgiving. It is a great prayer to pray for others. It is rooted in our partnership with one another and shaped by God's priorities (praying that they grow in love rather than get that promotion at work) and by a concern for God's glory. It is a great reminder that before we talk to people about God, we should talk to God about people!

Read Philippians 1:1-11 together as a group.

Discussion

- Why is it sometimes so hard to pray for our Christian friends?
- When Paul prays for the Philippians, what is his heart full of?
- Why, when he prays for them, does he always pray with joy? What is it about the Philippians, what is it about God that means Paul's prayers for them are full of joy?
- What do you think Paul means by "partnership in the gospel"? How would being in partnership in the gospel with fellow Christians fuel our prayer for them?
- V.6-8 speaks of Paul's love for the Philippians. What, from these verses, will help me to love my Christian friends as much as Paul does?

- Why do growing in love and growing in knowledge belong together? Why does Paul pray this for the Philippians?
- When praying for our friends, what do these verses tell me about God's priorities?

Group Exercise

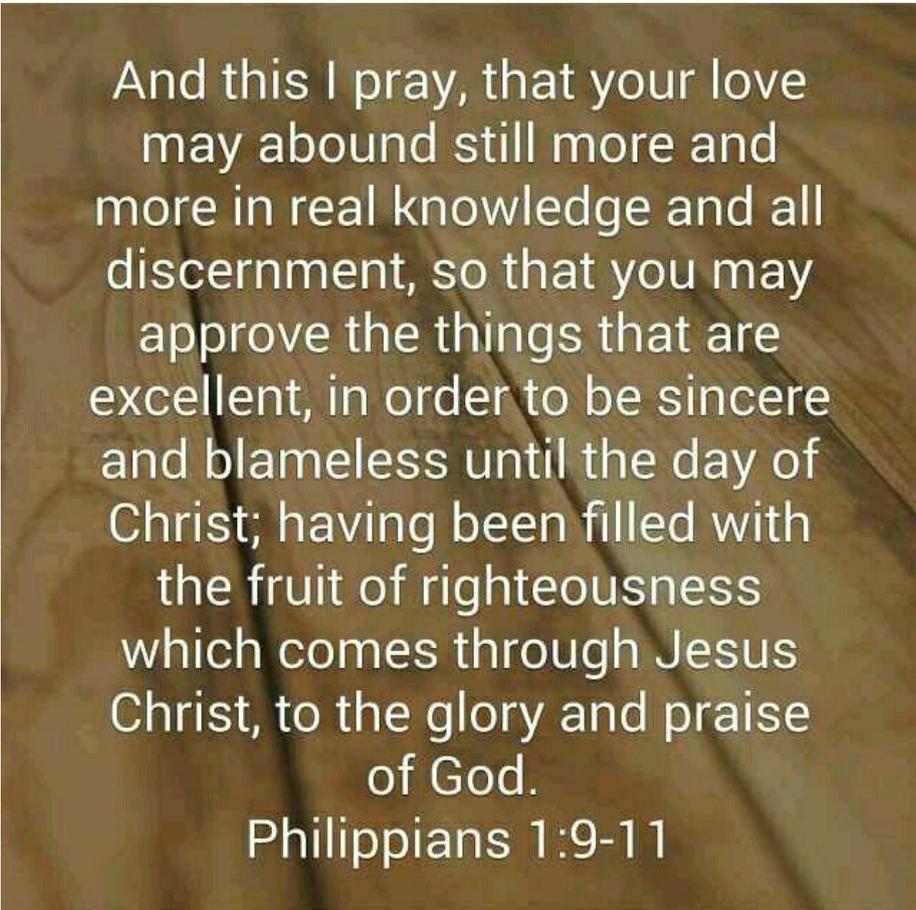
How could we be in partnership in the gospel with fellow Christians? How would this change the way we pray? What examples of partnership in the gospel do you know about or have seen?

Who could you get in partnership in the gospel with?

How could you show this partnership as a small group?

Prayer & Worship

Pray verses 9-11 for the people on our hearts.



And this I pray, that your love
may abound still more and
more in real knowledge and all
discernment, so that you may
approve the things that are
excellent, in order to be sincere
and blameless until the day of
Christ; having been filled with
the fruit of righteousness
which comes through Jesus
Christ, to the glory and praise
of God.

Philippians 1:9-11

Philippians 1:12–26 Rivalry and Rejoicing

Paul sums up what makes him tick when he says, “For me to live is Christ and to die is gain”. He is radically Christ-centred. So living for Christ, making Him known, is his great passion, and being with Jesus Christ is his great longing. In fact, he is so Christ-centred that his question in the face of tough circumstances is not “how is this working out for my good?” but “how is this working out for the glory of God?”. That is the sort of perspective that means we can rejoice in the face of the hardest situations. Not by pretending they are not hard, but by being genuinely thrilled that God is working out his purposes for His glory. For all of us, Paul’s Christ-centeredness comes as a great challenge.

Read Philippians 1:12-26 together as a group.

Group Exercise

If you stopped people in the street and asked them what they are living for, what sort of answers would you get? What would your answer be?

Discussion

- What has happened to Paul? What is the good that has come out of it?
- Why do you think Paul being put in prison has given others courage to “speak the work of God more courageously”? Can you think of similar ways in which the suffering of others for Christ has given you courage to speak out?
- From verses 12-14, as Paul faces up to the fact he is in prison, what is his overriding concern? How do his

concerns challenge our concerns and the ways we face tough situation?

- What is happening in the Philippian church in Paul's absence? What are the motives of each of the two groups of preachers?
- In verses 18-26, why is Paul able to "continue to rejoice"?
- How would you put verse 21 in your own words?
- Why is it a win-win situation for Paul, whatever happens?
- What does Paul want our great passion in life to be? What will this passion look like in practice?
- How will a "passion to live for Christ and a longing to be with Him" change the way we view hard circumstances?
- What is the secret to joy in the Christian life?

Prayer & Worship

Pray for those we know who are suffering for Christ. Pray that they would know the joy that Paul knows (even in prison). Pray that they would keep their focus on Christ and his purposes. Pray that their witness would give us boldness to preach the gospel.

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

Philippians 1:21

Pray that this verse would become more of a description of what makes us tick.

Philippians 1:27–2:11 The Gospel Way

If you asked your friends what a Christian was, there is a high chance that their answer would be along the lines of “it’s someone who is trying to be a better person to win God’s favour.” What we have in today’s verses is a great example of how Biblical Christianity is just the other way round. The Christian life is not our attempt to become God’s people. He has already made us his people through Jesus, and the Christian life is about living out what he has made us. Sometimes when people hear this, they worry that this means there is no motivation to care about how we live. But in Paul’s call to the Philippians to “live a life worthy of the gospel of Christ” we see what motivates him to care very much about how we live. He cares about how we live because he cares about the cause of the gospel and the glory of God.

Read Philippians 1:27-2:11 together as a group.

Discussion

- Why does it matter that the Philippians live lives worthy of the gospel?
- If we are facing persecution for following Jesus, how do verses 28-30 reassure us? If we are not facing any persecution, how do these verses challenge us?
- What is Paul reminding the Philippians of in 2:1? What do we learn from this about how to encourage one another in the Christian life?
- What will a church that is living out verses 3b-4 look like? Can you think of any practical examples?

- What is Paul saying about Jesus in verse 6? What sort of rights does Jesus have? What does he do with rights? What are the areas where we find it hard to give up our rights?
- How is Jesus' attitude in verse 6 very different from the sort of attitudes in verses 3-4? What did "making himself nothing" mean? How does verse 8 show Jesus' attitude in all its fullness?
- How do verses 6-8 help us walk in the way that Paul is calling us to in verses 3-4?
- How does Paul want us to live? Why does he want us to live like this?
- What have we seen about what Jesus is like?

Group Exercise

Consider the week you have just had. Consider how Paul wants us to live. Are there things that come to mind that you would do differently now? Are there situations you may react differently in if you were living how Paul wants us to live? Share one or two things with each other.

Prayer & Worship

Praise Jesus that he gave up his rights that we might be given the right to be called God's children.

Thank Him that we are not called to earn our way into God's favour, but that because of Jesus we have his favour, we do belong to him

Pray that as a small group and as a church our attitude would be "the same as that of Christ Jesus".

Philippians 2:12–30 His Good Purpose

In 2:6-11 Paul focused our attention onto the realities that lie at the very heart of the Christian message. Christ Jesus the one who was in very nature God, gave up all his divine rights, for our sakes, and came down to be born on earth. In Him we see the character of the God we worship: one who doesn't claim his own rights, but who in humility and love puts the interests of others before his own. And therefore God declares Jesus to be Lord of the whole universe and one day every knee will bow before him. Verse 12 begins, "Therefore..." and that is because the truth about Jesus Christ is *always* followed by a "therefore". The truth about Jesus is never just a point of interest, something to muse upon. It is the truth with arms and legs. It doesn't just sit there; it gets up and does things. It grabs hold of our lives and says, "Things can't be the same any more, if this is true everything will have to be different". In our verses today, Paul shows us what difference the truth of Jesus will make.

Read Philippians 2:12-30 together as a group.

Discussion

- What is being a Christian about? Beliefs or behaviour?
- Why is it important to Paul that the Philippians continue in obedience not only in his presence, but also in his absence? What does this show about on whom he wants their Christian lives to be founded?
- Why can we be sure for Philippians that Paul is not suddenly saying that you can save yourself by works?

- So what *does* “work out your salvation” mean?
- What does the fact that we are to work out our salvation with “fear and trembling” say about how Paul wants us to view his encouragement?
- Looking at verse 13, what is the work that God does in us as a church?
- What has not complaining or arguing got to do with working out your salvation? Does this mean we can never offer our opinions and critique things?
- Why does Paul rejoice to give himself in service to the Philippians? Why does Paul tell them to join with him rejoicing?
- How is Timothy an example of the sort of self-giving sacrificial love that Paul has been urging the Philippians to? How is Epaphroditus a good example of someone with the “attitude of Christ”?

Group Exercise

What difference will the truth of Jesus make to the way we treat one another? How will it make us different from the world around us? How will it keep us going even when shining for him is costly?

Prayer & Worship

Ask the Lord to show us the areas of our lives into which we will not let him shine the light of the gospel. Spend time praying for each other, that God would work powerfully in us “to will and act according to his good purpose”.

Philippians 3:1-21 Garbage or Gain?

In 1952 Florence Chadwick attempted the 21 mile stretch from Catalina Island to mainland California. After 15 hours of swimming, just 800 metres short of her goal, she gave up. She was totally exhausted and had to be pulled out. Why did she give up? There were just 800 more metres to go. The reason she gave up was because there was a thick fog. She couldn't see the shore, she had no idea she was so close. In a press conference afterwards she said that if she had known it was only another 800 metres, she reckons she could have done it. Two months later, on a clear day she made it all the way. In today's passage Paul is saying, that if you can see the goal of the Christian life, then you can keep going. If you lose sight of it, if you look back, look around, if it becomes lost behind a fog of a thousand different other goals, then it will be very hard to keep going. If we know the risen Jesus, and want to grow to know him better, and want to keep going, even when going his way is hard and costly, then we must have our eyes on the goal to which he is leading us.

Read Philippians 3:1-21 together as a group.

Discussion

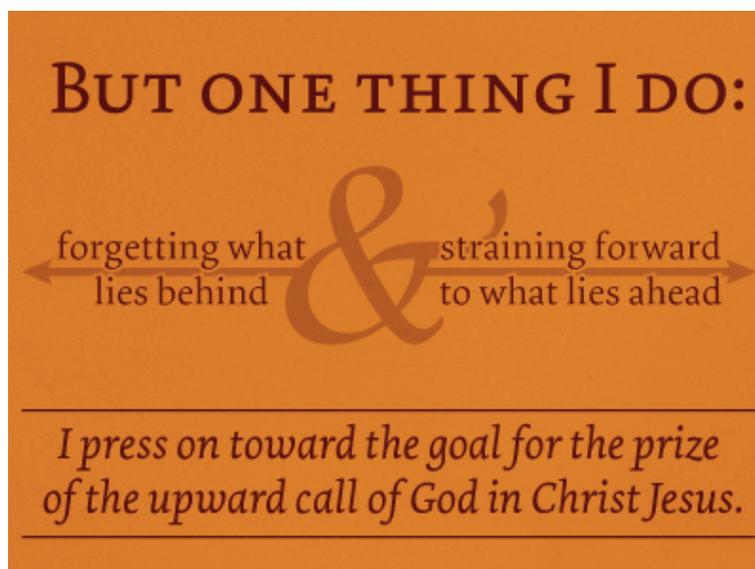
- What are the things that seem to rob you of the joy you once had in the Christian life?
- What are the true marks of the people of God?
- Why does a right understanding of what it means to belong to the people of God mean we "put not confidence in the flesh"?
- In what ways do we put our "confidence in the flesh"? What ways do we give the impression that our

background is more important than a work of God in our lives?

- What is the connection between considering the things of v.4-6 “rubbish” and “gaining” Christ?
- What does being “found in him” imply about what it means to be a Christian?
- What are the two ways of getting right with God that Paul outlines?
- In what sort of ways do we Christians slip into a legalistic approach to getting right with God? How does it rob us of joy? How can we restore joy?

Group Exercise

Spend some time reflecting on verses 13-14. How might you encourage each other in living this out?



Prayer & Worship

Praise Jesus that He is all that we need in order to be right with God. Pray that we would know the power of the risen Lord in our lives. Pray that we would be able to live out verses 13-14 especially.

Philippians 4:1-9 Stand Firm

Paul has just been saying that the way to stand firm in the Christian life, is to remember that our citizenship is in heaven. We are those who are eagerly waiting for Jesus to come back from heaven and make everything new. If the Church in the West has lost its cutting edge, it is largely because it has lost sight of that sort of ultimate reality. If we aren't convinced that there is a new world to come, and that we are citizens of a new world, then our lives will look a lot like the lives of the citizens of this world. We will not so much shine out in the midst of darkness as blend in. What Paul wants the Philippians to grasp is that Jesus isn't just an added on top of everything else in our lives. He is Lord over all that we do. The life Paul has been calling the Philippians to is a Jesus-centred life. And in our verses today he is showing us what it will mean to have Jesus at the centre of the way we handle our relationships, the way we face our circumstances, and the way we do all our thinking.

Read Philippians 4:1-9 together as a group.

Discussion

- What seems to have happened between Euodia & Syntyche? What does Paul urge them to do?
- Why is it urgent that the situation be sorted out? What is at stake?
- Why is squabbling incompatible with being "fellow workers"? Why is it incompatible with being those "whose names are in the book of life"?
- What does it mean to "rejoice in the Lord"?

- How can we be people marked by joy?
- How does gentleness follow on from rejoicing?
- How does the reminder that “the Lord is near” help us to keep rejoicing? How does it help us to be gentle? Why does it liberate us from anxiety?
- Why is thanksgiving such a key ingredient in prayer? How does it help us not to be anxious?
- Looking at verses 8 and 9, what are the sorts of things that are noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent or praiseworthy that he wants us to think about? Why does he want us to think about these things? What is the fruit of thinking about these things to be?
- What is the connection between putting these things into practice and God being with us?

Group Exercise

From looking at today’s passage, what is the key to a healthy Christian life when faced with difficult relationships? When faced with hard circumstances? When it comes to what shapes our thinking? Take a moment to think about what action you might need to take in light of these verses.

Prayer & Worship

Praise Jesus for all the reasons he gave us to rejoice. Pray for those difficult relationships that need patching up and for those who face hard circumstances, that they would come to experience the truth of verse 7. Pray that our thinking would be full of Jesus, so that our living would reflect Him, that people would see Him in us.

Philippians 4:10-23 The Secret

For many people happiness is not something they have got now, it's something they are dreaming of. But not for Paul. He is happy now. Which is odd, because on the face of it life is wretched: he is in prison facing a possible death penalty; and while he is helplessly inside, people are going round rubbishing his reputation. Yet he feels no bitterness and doesn't seem to be losing any sleep over what those preachers are saying about him. What he wants most it for the Philippians to share the sort of joy he has. The secret of his contentment all comes out in the way that he thanks the Philippians for the gifts they have sent him. Paul is the man who sold everything that he had to get the one great treasure, Jesus Christ. And he wants the Philippians to see that when you have that treasure it means you have to rethink everything, Even the way you think about being in a situation as grim as prison.

Read Philippians 4:10-23 together as a group.

Discussion

- What sorts of things make us discontented? To what sort of things do we look for contentment?
- What is the danger of tying your contentment to your circumstances? How has Paul learnt to avoid this?
- What does verse 13 promise us in the face of hard circumstances?
- Looking at verses 14-18, how have the Philippians shown their partnership with Paul? What is their gift to him a mark of?

- What do we learn about Christian friendships from these exchanges? What do Christians do for one another and long for one another?
- To those who have given sacrificially, what is the promise of verse 19? How does this verse teach us to think, when we feel that being a Christian has meant “going without”?
- How do verses 10-18 lead into giving glory to God?
- How is Paul’s giving glory to God for the Philippians an encouragement to them? How, in particular, is verse 22 an encouragement to them?

Group Exercise

What is the secret of contentment?

What is the most exciting thing about giving and about receiving?

In what sorts of ways could we show the sort of partnership with one another that so thrills Paul about his relationship with the Philippians

Prayer & Worship

Pray for those in the group who face hard circumstances, that they would know the reality of verse 13. Pray that we would show the sort of partnership with one another that Paul and the Philippians show. Praise Him for the riches that are ours in Jesus! Pray that he would show us more of just how rich we are in Him.

Notes

Notes



Missed A Service?

Why not catch up using our Podcast? We record the talk from each of our Friday and Sunday services.

You can access them through iTunes (search Christ Church W4), our website under 'Talks', and ChurchSuite under 'My Podcasts'.

Thank you to Revd. Mike Cain for the use of his notes which have helped to form this study guide.